

Tetouan Modern Challenge 1912–2012

Alfonso de Sierra Ochoa and the Housing Question

Exhibition

Spanish colonial architecture in Africa constitutes an expanding field of research. With a variety of cultural activities devoted to disseminating its knowledge to the general public in the last few years, those taking place in former Spanish colonies remain scarce. Among the initiatives to reverse this situation, was the official opening, on Friday, December 12th 2014, of the exhibition *Tetouan Modern Challenge 1912–2012. Alfonso de Sierra Ochoa and the Housing Question*, in Larache (Morocco).

Organized by the Tetouan branch of the Spanish *Instituto Cervantes*, together with the initiative

Tetouan Modern Challenge 1912–1956, the research group GAMUC (African Modern Urban Challenge in Former Spanish Colonies) and with the cooperation of the Ministry of Culture of Morocco, this exhibition showcases an overview of the architecture of Tetouan, the capital of Northern Morocco from 1912 to 1956, through the documentary sources of the architect Alfonso de Sierra Ochoa.

As exhibition curators Alejandro Muchada (Ph.D. Architect and main researcher of

Tetouan Modern Challenge) and Almudena Quintana (Chief Librarian of the *Instituto Cervantes* in Tetouan) explain, this exhibition is the outcome of an extensive digitization project, aiming for the enhancement of historical documentation of Spanish colonial architecture and urbanism in northern Morocco. Among a variety of architects from this period, the exceptional character of Alfonso de Sierra Ochoa is brought to the public for the first time, providing an alternative storyline of the modernization of Morocco.

After having devoted a great part of his career discussing and implementing a theory of the city and the matter of housing in Morocco, De Sierra Ochoa's designs and ideas developed a great respect and deep understanding of the local values and ways of living, with a special commitment to the city of Tetouan, where he lived from 1944 to 1959. Especially significant was his reflection on the impact of modernization in the Moroccan habitat, which was translated into his designs for social housing for indigenous inhabitants, such as the *Moulay Hassan neighborhood* (1955–1956). Built right at the

end of Spanish colonial administration, this constitutes an example of advanced modern housing design, sharing the formal and typological achievements of the famous *Carrières Centrales* neighborhood designed by ATBAT Afrique in Casablanca.

Seen from a post-colonial approach, the exhibition introduces a variety of housing projects, with diverse locations and specific typologies. These also include designs for the urban periphery of Tetouan, where the developers shared both Spanish and Moroccan origin, coming from middle and modest social classes. Complementing the exhibition opening, additional activities examined modern architecture in the city of Larache, where the exhibition was held: a lecture on the matter of housing in the city during the 20th century, as well as an urban walk through the city and its suburbs, casting light on housing projects from the colonial period. ■

Alejandro Muchada
PhD Architect, researcher-consultant

Notes

Funder Institute Cervantes of Tetouan — Official International Spanish Cultural Institute.
Collaborators Ministry of Culture of Morocco.
Organizers Initiative Tetouanmodernchallenge.com and research group Gamuc.org
Research group website <http://gamuc.org>
Exhibition website <http://tetuandesafiomoderno.blogspot.com.es>
Catalogue website (in spanish and arabic) http://tetuan.cervantes.es/imagenes/tetuan_desafio_moderno.pdf



01 Alfonso De Sierra Ochoa, *Moulay Hassan*, Tetouan, Morocco. © FASO Fondo Alfonso De Sierra Ochoa. Biblioteca Vicente Aleixandre, Instituto Cervantes de Tetuán, 1956.



02 General view during the installation of the Exhibition. © Alejandro Muchada, 2014.