

Photography & Modern Architecture in Spain, 1925–1965

Research Project

The study of architecture, and particularly of the great legacy of modern architecture, has substantially been achieved from its irrefutable documentary sources: the photographs. Since the advent of photography in the mid-19th Century we are witnessing a blissful basis for its pairing with architecture. Once buildings were depicted, they could start to be studied, classified and dated. Later on, the revolutionary character that brought the modernists to the fore found in photography the opportune instrument to undertake its propaganda in mass media that valued these architectural objects as paradigmatic icons that should be emulated. At the same time, and apart from customer's satisfaction, committed architects understood that the photographs of their buildings were the final crystallization of their work and what really remained beyond their personal satisfaction. In these reciprocal needs, the figure of the architectural photographer was consecrated as the technical — and even artistic — specialist in shaping this particular visual story. While at international and national levels this issue is still the subject of general study

and of specific approaches in the analysis of certain photographers and architects, this research project (FAME, 2013–2016) funded by the Government of Spain is intended to establish — within the Spanish case — an irrefutable documentary framework and theoretical background with which to strengthen the specific study of this singular duality. To begin with, a period of study was established: those decades in which the historiography of Spanish architecture links it to the so-called Modern Movement in architecture: from the emergence of *avant-garde* movements until the crisis of the International Style. During these four decades, broken by the Spanish Civil War and carried on by successive generations of architects, there is a significant evolution in Spanish architecture that has been rigorously analyzed, recorded and valued. Yet, this project — conducted by twenty researchers from universities all over Spain — has undertaken an ambitious analysis of this singular stage looking exclusively at the role and significance of photography in its evolution.

The research comprises a comprehensive literature review of the period — books, journals and periodicals — and particularly of original sources, photographic archives and collections, with the aim of generating, at its conclusion, a public online database containing information of many of these photographic sources. This task is determining who were the photographers responsible for this singular commitment and is permitting an inquiry into their careers, legacy and unique contribution to this documentary and visual endeavor, as well as in the relationship between them, the architects, and the architectural media. A major exhibition held in Madrid in the summer 2014 has been a significant preliminary output of FAME's ambition. The diffusion of this aspiring but bounded documentary work — that is also open to the inclusion of the influences within an international context — is enabling a broad, suggestive, paradigmatic and necessary theoretical and multi-disciplinary discourse which reinforces the increasing role of photography within the architectural realm. ■

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Notes

Research project website <https://blogfame.wordpress.com>



01 José Manuel Aizpúrua, Royal Yacht Club, San Sebastián, Spain, 1930.
© José Manuel Aizpúrua, Joaquín Labayen, AGUN / 203.

02 Fernando Higueras, Board of military housing, Madrid, 1967.
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