

*the methods of design. Identify the order of values of the basic parts, not too small in order not to keep the advantages of prefabrication, and not too big in order not to compromise the freedom of creation, it will be the most useful and widespread research. The advent of the total industrialization of architecture will raise the search of creative fantasy to the level of urban and regional composition. Therefore a vast new chapter of the history of architecture will open up.*

## 7 questions to Juan Pedro Posani

José Javier Alayón González

*Juan Pedro Posani (Rome, 1931), emigrated to Venezuela when he was 17 years old and since then, began collaborating with Villanueva, 31 years older than him. His close relation made him participant in the architectural achievements of Villanueva and later on one of his best specialists. In his 80s, his critical vision has been collected in numerous writings, so these questions are addressed to inquire into the working and personal relationship that they maintained in the architectural and educational field.*

1. *In some published lists of works and projects of Villanueva, you appear as collaborator in the Church La Asunción (1957), the National Building of Maracaibo (1960), the Faculty of Economics (1963-67) and the Fina Gomez Foundation in Paris (1969). What other projects and what other collaborators shared the same stage?*

*My work with Master Villanueva was always performed in the field of the offices responsible for the projects for the University City of Caracas. Although tasks related to other projects of the Master were not infrequent. The ones you mention are examples. I should also note that for the strange inertias of life, I have never graduated as an architect, but I have been awarded a national prize (1992) and an honorary doctorate (UCV, 2000), both in architecture, which I owe to the colleagues of the Faculty in which I have taught for decades. I am, to put it in a way, one of the last specimens of that endangered species, that of the self-taught architects. The other collaborators that I can mention briefly (as in every work of architecture, there is always a team of collaborators, from specialist engineers to craftsmen) are the notable German engineer Rudolf Kaltenstadler and in particular the architect Gorka Dorronsoro, who has even personally designed some excellent buildings of the University City.*

2. *Could you explain to me what it was like to work alongside Villanueva?*

*How did he combine his teaching and profes-*

*sional work?*

*With time and intellectual proximity, I was becoming a translator of the ideas of Master Villanueva. I translated into specific terms, into documents drawn for construction, his beautiful sketches -pure energy of synthesis- so that they could be converted into works. The daily professional practice over years and years, created the possibility of a fruitful dialogue for both, which also added for me the most pleasant commission, certainly from his essential approach, of writing his ideas in the theoretical and critical. The work of the University City was the site of design work but it was also one of study and teaching.*

3. *In your book, Architectures of Villanueva, you briefly explain how he, from an academic base axis, began to "break the geometry." Studying the sketches that reconstruct the design process of some of his works this becomes evident, but I would like to know if he justified this new order in any way, or it was simply a formal search, that is to say, plastic and not reasoned.*

*The discovery of the theoretical and historical contributions of Bruno Zevi, who would also become my teacher later on, and his insistence on the need for a dynamic breakage with the families of shapes and with the stereotyped conceptions of the rationalist movement, gradually led Villanueva to what you recall as "breaking the geometry". There never was in his later work at the end of the 40s an exclusively plastic orientated search. The visual sequences programmed in dynamic sequence, almost like a film, were the reason for the distortions and the accommodations, volumes, courtyards, light and dark shadows, which apparently disarticulate the sets. In summary, Villanueva's architecture of that time is subject to an eye that moves slowly and awakens chained perspectives.*

4. *I would like to know your opinion on the scarce artistic production of Villanueva, his "assemblies". Those small manual buildings, framed within the informal art that emerged in the 60's after the exhaustion of the abstract research, based on inalterable elements such as colour, line, rhythm, harmony, etc., which seem to question the immutable aspects of art and architecture that Villanueva constantly claimed. This was the field that he kept most private (perhaps his only evasion*

from reality) so, at least I, do not know any written reflection on his own plastic work. However, it is logical to think that, as an intellectual production, it forms part of a global corpus, in which his architecture would be included. Do you think it has anything to do with his architecture of the 60s and later on, or were they intimate and autonomous exercises of his architectural discourse?

As you say, it was an absolutely private field of creative exercises that basically entertained him like a game. It was like a comment aside, very ironic, parallel to his admiration for the visual rigor of abstract kinetic art. In my opinion there is no apparent relationship between it and his architecture.

5. Towards the end of his career, Villanueva decidedly explores new forms of building, adapted to the technological capacity of each place. For example, the large prefabricated pieces of the last extension of the Museum of Fine Arts or the Jesús Soto Museum, or the metal structure of the Montreal Pavilion. However, the frustrated completion of the Fina Gomez Foundation in Paris, did not allow the verification of that evolution of space that Villanueva claimed from more industrialized and standardized constructive means. What do you remember of the creating process of this project? Could you establish any kind of relation with the Maison de Verre by Pierre Chareau, work that as you wrote, Villanueva admired?

La Maison de Verre was undoubtedly one of his greatest icons. By his indication I expressly went to visit it when I received a scholarship in Europe. Its ingenious reality, almost retro-futurism, has also been like an exemplary model for me. On behalf of Villanueva there was an absolute respect for the entire construction process, the material and work necessary to achieve such "realism of the form" of which that great architect who was Rogelio Salmona always talked about. He didn't believe in architecture of paper. The robust reality of building, in all its aspects, its weight, cost, duration, structural ingenuity and environmental techniques, were nearly religious principles for him. Quite different, that is to say, to the spectacular vacuum that the architecture of the star-system has led to.

6. Do you remember the inaugural seminar of the Faculty of Architecture in the Andes, in

Mérida, which you imparted with Villanueva in 1970, 5 years before he died? In it, Villanueva still appeared like a disciple ready to keep on learning, rather than as a Master. By some of the notes that are conserved from his interventions, Villanueva raised the issue of architectural composition again, to face a new era. Could you refresh the reflections of that seminar?

My memory does not accompany me for many of those aspects, I am sorry, but yes I can remember and feel the emotion with which the Master and the public participated in what appeared to be a rehearsal of a final summary of a great creative experience. More than a seminar it was a party, a shared celebration.

Therefore, I can assure you that more important than the critical reflections of that time, was the rediscovery of human quality, simplicity and modesty, never exempt from a cheerful sense of humour, of his personality. To always be willing to learn ... What a better description of an exceptional talent?

7. Finally, seeing the Venezuelan architecture that the generations after Villanueva have produced, it is difficult to trace his legacy and I do not refer to the literality of some of his resources. The title of "master" seems sufficient to understand a teaching which, however, few have understood. Do you agree with that appreciation?

Absolutely. Such an affirmation does not mean to disregard the obvious proven talent of so many young architects. It simply refers to a chronic and widespread reflexive lack; a painful deficit of what Professor Ernesto Grassi calls the "desire to deepen".

But this would take me on to another talk, critical and self-critical, that concerns our, to say that of the Venezuelans, way of seeing the world and of behaving in life. It may be on another occasion.