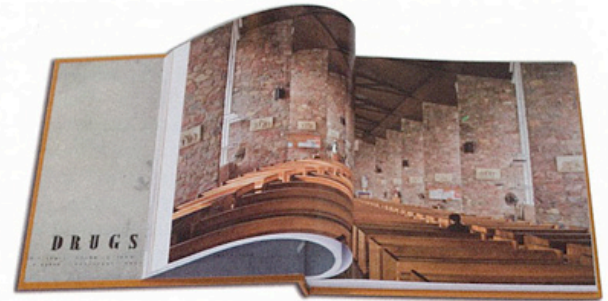


Manikin, The Art and Architecture of Anthony C. Lewis

Haciendo la arquitectura de un país

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Manikin, The Art and Architecture of Anthony C. Lewis

Making the architecture of a country

Architect Anthony C. Lewis lived in interesting times. He was born in San Fernando, Trinidad, in 1918, and lived through the transition from Colonial rule to Trinidad and Tobago's independence. The architect and artist's body of work developed much in the same way that the country was built. So tells the book *Manikin*—a title based on the family nickname by which Lewis was known. The book is constructed from notes left by Lewis himself, who died in 2008, and is complemented by text from Geoffrey Maclean and Gerry and Brian Lewis; the latter two, sons of the architect.

The book begins with Lewis' family history, emphasizing the early moments that led to his vocation as an architect—for example, his influential decision as a teenager to read *A History of Architecture* by Sir Bannister Fletcher and *Architecture* by Frank Lloyd Wright. Lewis eventually travelled to London and started his architectural studies, which were interrupted by World War II but later completed in Canada.

The end of the war signaled the decline of the British Empire but, by then, Anthony Lewis had started his promising career, boosted by the intense interrelation that existed amongst the Anglophone Caribbean islands. Lewis' practice covered urban design, prominent housing projects and the design and construction of some of the most important office buildings in Trinidad and Tobago. The book makes a possibly biased reference to Lewis as the first and most important architect of the Caribbean, clearly implied due to the strong regional culture of the English-speaking Caribbean. Nevertheless, the book does provide some insight into the thoughts of an architect who was able to theorize and put into practice through his works an architecture rooted in the physical contexts and culture of the Caribbean.

Within the limited regional market, Lewis was able to tackle a broad range of projects, and to produce housing that conformed to a modern style, while adapted to the tropics. He designed and built some of the first office buildings in Trinidad and Tobago, worked on tourism projects, and was an urban planner.

Two of Trinidad and Tobago's most prominent institutional buildings are his creations—the Twin Towers, headquarters of the Central Bank, and the Supreme Court Hall of Justice. Both buildings are reflections of two historical moments of the country. The first responds to an aesthetic in keeping with the developmental model countries implemented in the 1960s and 70s and the second, although being of a late-Modern aesthetic, has some Caribbean accents. The book explains in detail the design process of the latter from a conceptual, Brutalist style inverted pyramid, to the final building.

Also included are many of the architect's reflections on Trinidad and Tobago's architecture and his constant search for a proper climatic and cultural response that moved away from either the imposed Colonial model or the cultural conditioning that came from imported models during independence. Lewis' thoughts are translated through his works and, in his designs for homes as well as his flagship design for the Church of the Assumption in Maraval, there is an attitude of respect for tradition, climate and landscape that does not imply creating architecture identifiable with the period in which it was built. A famous anecdote tells of architect Oscar Niemeyer's emotion reaction to this beautiful church, which he visited during one of his trips to the Caribbean.

The book closes with a chapter devoted to the work of Lewis as a painter[artist]. Although he possessed a unique talent for drawing, Lewis used it only as a tool for his design work. But, during a somewhat forced retirement due to an economic downturn, the architect began a career as a watercolorist. Lewis spent his last years portraying landscapes in Europe and on his island, not merely as a weekend painter, but as the sensitive artist he was.

The book is authentic, warm, and obviously well documented. The result is excellent and filled with many emotional and even apologetic passages, given the familiarity of its authors with the architect himself. But, above all, it is a more than valid document for studying the formation of an architectural heritage built at the same time as a country.

For further reading, see issue **AAA027**, dedicated to Trinidad and Tobago's contemporary architecture (ed.).