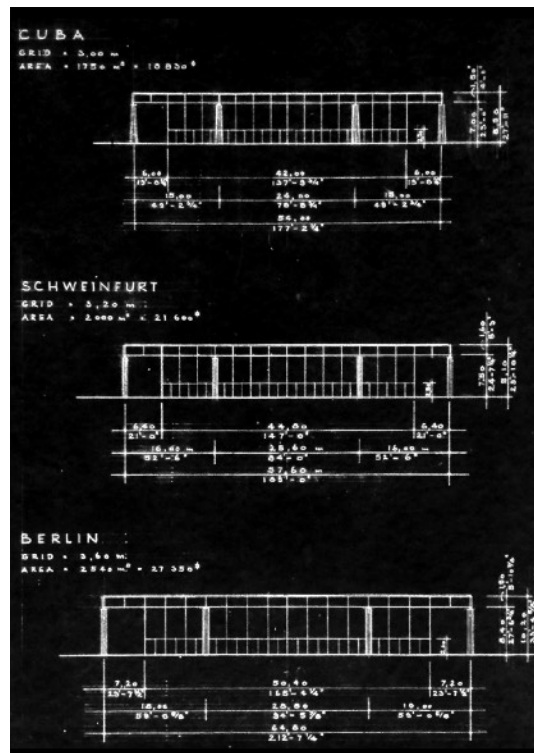


Reflection Paper P4

TITLE: THE EXILE RETURNS - BACARDI'S HAVANA HEADQUARTERS
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INTRODUCTION

A couple of years ago during a visit to the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, tucked behind the wardrobe in the souterrain of the premises, a drawing depicted three almost identical elevation drawings of the Neue Nationalgalerie. Titled: Cuba, Schweinfurt, Berlin; the drawings depicted the three times Mies used a copy of his own design for a commission. In the end only the latter was built. The design was originally intended as the headquarters of the originally Cuban company Bacardi, but fate struck and the original project was never initiated. When discovering the possibility of graduating with Cuba as a thesis topic, the choice was made quickly as Mies' Neue Nationalgalerie forms the very foundation of my interest in architecture.



Drawing of the three commissions of Mies' temple for Bacardi

Cuba stands on the brink of significant political and economic change. As the economic system is crumbling under international pressure on Cuba to engage with global markets, and recent political developments, like Fidel Castro's death and the softening of political doctrine under the reign of Raul Castro, Cuba might find its economy growing vastly soon due to its potential and the interest of global investors. The country already engages with global markets by creating joint venture operations with foreign companies. Herein the Cuban government acts as the owner on Cuba's behalf, as private ownership of enterprises is still prohibited. Once these obligations change, and foreign investments will be able to engage freely with local potential, cashflows into Cuba will grow, bringing along a great architectural and aesthetic change.

Research Question:

How can Cuba benefit both architecturally and aesthetically from foreign investments in their gradual transformation towards a free market economy?

Ambition:

The Bacardi brand will once again be a patron of Cuban pride and culture, thus the connection will be made between the local citizen and the global market.

ASPECT 1 - THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND DESIGN

As explained, the Cuba-Mies connection formed the initial interest in the studio and thus led to the research topic of Cuba's economy.

Economic change is imminent in Cuba. Their crumbling international ties with Venezuela (trading oil for doctors) and other countries, and the domestically closed off socialist market, makes staying up to date with global developments difficult. As a growing access to international communication and media gives Cuban's the possibility of getting a glimpse of the freedom and possibilities in the democratic world, the younger generations are longing for change. Currently domestic entrepreneurship is prohibited, but a change in Cuba's political system will trigger a change in Cuba's economic system too, and thus might Cuba after all bow before the capitalistic system of the West.

Just before the revolution Cuba was under heavy influence from the United States as they were exploiting Cuba's potentials for profit. But it wasn't for long before many Cuban's felt unsatisfied, and under the leadership of Fidel Castro, started revolts against the temporary reign of Battista who was appointed by the US government to maintain Cuba and strengthen economic ties with the U.S. On the contrary, during this time many young entrepreneurs also flourished within the growing domestic affinity with the capitalistic system of the U.S.; One of these companies was Bacardi. A company founded in 1862 by Cuban patriot Falcundo Bacardi. The brand was already selling their famous rum on an international market, but still they were seeking the global acknowledgment of being a sophisticated corporate venue. They hired Mies van der Rohe to design their new headquarters and he designed a temple to express the corporate rigidity that Bacardi was trying to convey to the world. However, once the revolution happened and Fidel nationalised all domestic and foreign assets, also the Bacardi brand lost all their belongings, which led to Bacardi's exile. The plans for the new headquarters thus were never executed, but Bacardi flourished nonetheless under the wings of U.S.' free market economy.

Now 60 years later, as Cuba stands on the brink of opening up its controlled domestic market for foreign investments, the Bacardi company has stated its return in order for them to reclaim their lost heritage and return to their longed for origins. Being a brand affiliated with sponsorship, if the company would in fact return, their connection with Cuba would be one of patronage by investing in Cuban pride and culture. The question arises whether to build the original Mies design as originally intended.

ASPECT 2 - RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEME AND GRADUATION LAB COMPLEX PROJECTS

Complex Projects is about creating a methodology to address complex issues that emerge when architects engage with projects that are formed by a larger political and socio-economic framework. The idea is to become both architect and project developer to create a better understanding of the process and how projects are formed in order to engage with all aspects of the design instead of just design itself. In doing so, the intention is that we as aspiring architects engage the field as both project developer and client and both architect and urban planner.

In the context of Cuba the complex issue is the changing political and economic system. As Fidel's socialist regime is crumbling and the younger generations long for the chance to acquire wealth, Cuba might find itself in a changing context once again due to emerging foreign investments. Taking the China model as an example we learn that even within a 'socialist' system foreign investments can lead to large scale redevelopments and architectural explorations. Foreign

investments undeniably bring along architectural and aesthetic change. The question is how the refined international style of western investments will affect Cuba's identity, and in reverse how the Cuban identity will be expressed and sought after in foreign investments that will trigger urban (re)developments.

ASPECT 3 - RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDIO AND METHOD CHOSEN

In order to engage with these previously explained complex issues, an archetypal methodology is important as within the research often times new architectural typologies emerge. In order to understand the wider context of the issue and engage with it purposefully, identifying the typology that is at stake can form a solid reference as it is often times buildup out of sub-typologies that can be explored within a wider reference frame. The idea is that to be 'new' is not to re-develop architecture entirely, as in the past this has often times led to failure. Instead, by using typologies that have proven to work in the past as a reference, a more solid platform for potential succes is created.

Within the Bacardi project, the research of the brand's identity uncovered a change in mentality; Whilst in the 50's the brand was trying to express corporate sophistication and seeking global acknowledgement for it, the brand is now known for its party extravaganza mentality due to the large scale festivals the brand organizes. This mentality has been part of the brand identity before, during the U.S. prohibition in the 30's, which led to many American tourists visiting Cuba for alcohol tourism. During these times Bacardi built their initial Havana headquarters, the tropical art deco palace. Finding similarities between the brands mentality of the 30's and their mentality of today lead away from the typology of the capitalistic Miesian temple and towards the typology of the contemporary 'extravagant' palace. Thus in the design the characteristics of palaces and villa's are abstracted and implemented. Simultaneously all the sub-typologies, like the offices and nightclub for example, that form the program of the building were researched individually in their most ideal form in order to form a solid frame of reference.

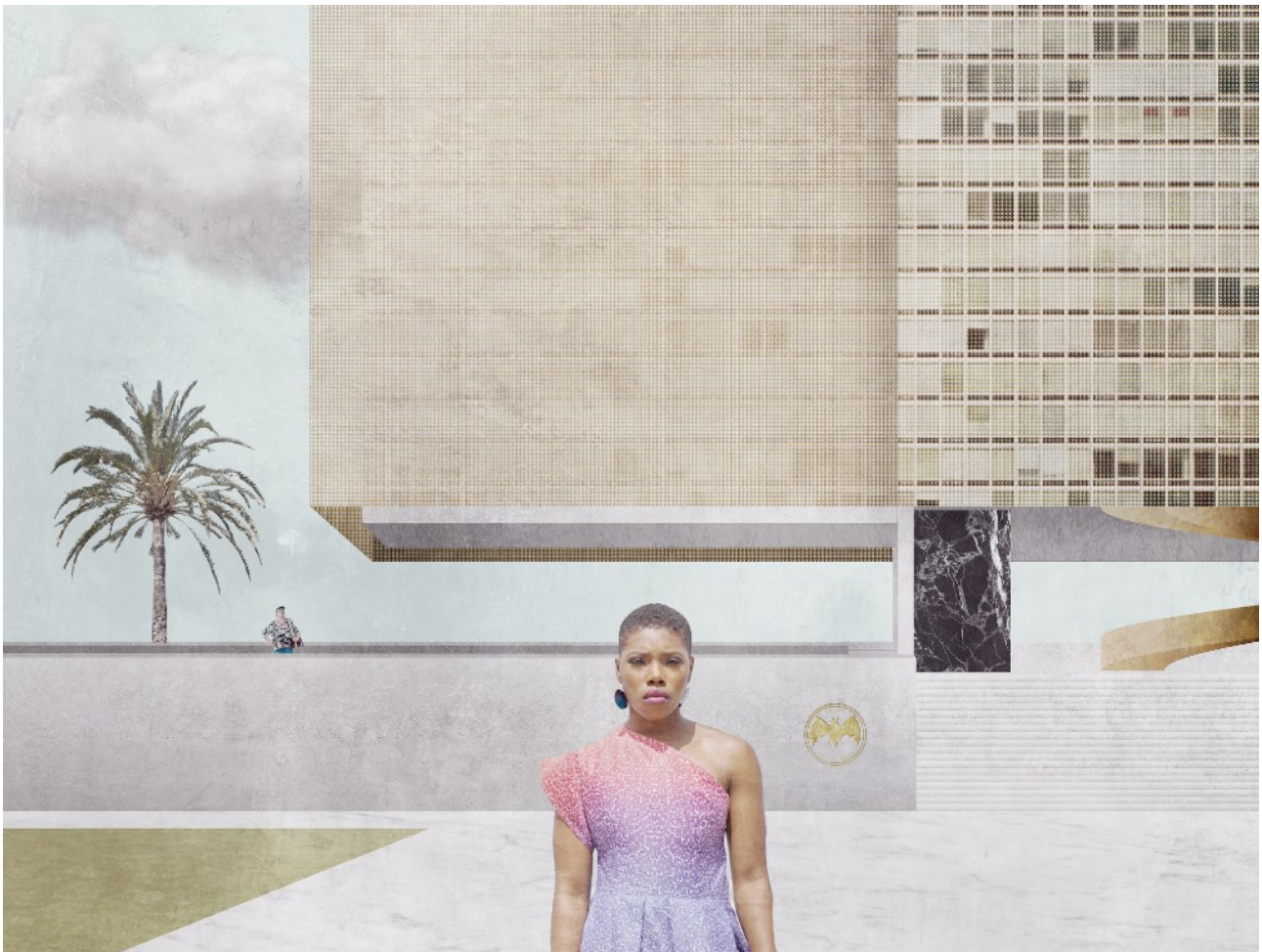


Bacardi's Havana Headquarters; a 30's tropical art deco castle

ASPECT 4 - THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PROJECT AND THE WIDER SOCIAL CONTEXT

As stated before, any foreign investments into nations with a changing political and socio-economic context trigger vast architectural and aesthetic changes in the urban fabric. In the context of Cuba, a large longing for this change in order to abandon the socialist system of equality and acquire wealth might bear the danger of large scale 'disaster developments' in order to acquire capital too quickly. Thus change in the context of Cuba has to come gradually in steps. As a group we developed a strategy consisting of our individual projects which together form the incubators of a larger development that will happen over time and gradually. Within this proposal we suggest to not implement any form of master plan, but to let the city grow naturally instead.

Within the framework of the new Bacardi headquarters, the relationship with the wider social context is done through patronage. The Bacardi company has a long past in sponsoring art, sports and other forms of culture. Even before their exile from Cuba they sponsored the Santiago de Cuba baseball team, a sport that is close to any Cuban heart, and invested in a variety of forms of education. Apart from that the Bacardi family was heavily engaged politically, leading the front together with José Martí in the war for independence from the Spanish. This shows that a return to Cuba by Bacardi will trigger significant investments in Cuba's culture of today. Imagine large scale Cuban festivals entirely sponsored by Bacardi for both the local community as well as tourists looking for the extravaganza touristic experience. Apart from that Cuban's need education in entrepreneurship, as this skill is mostly acquired through practical experience. The new headquarters will create new jobs that will form a breeding ground for domestic entrepreneurial potential. Apart from that the brand is also known for organizing so called 'no-commission' parties, which on a peer-to-peer basis support local artists. These organized events might as well find their way to Cuba's art world.



Extravaganza Cubano - A New Bacardi Headquarters

CONCLUSION - THE EXILE RETURNS

Looking at the history of the brand, their current identity and the circumstances under which the company would return to their origin, a Miesian temple would not fit their current ideals and programmatic needs. Although the simplicity and rigidity of the refined international style certainly fits, especially given Cuba's urban fabric which hasn't changed since the 50's, the step forward for Cuba needs to be expressed with contemporary styles. An eclectic project would in the end lead to false realities, blocking the possibility of shaping a new identity. However, eclecticism applied in modesty very well fits, as the nostalgia for the pre-revolution past prevails. Thus elements of ornamentation in almost 'kitsch-like' combinations define the new Headquarters for Bacardi and express the extravagant party atmosphere that celebrates Cuba's prosperous future but simultaneously remember the past by implementing references to Cuba's standstill in time.