Architecture of Color: The Legacy of Luis Barragán  
September 23 — November 19

Beginning 23 September 2016, Timothy Taylor 16 x 34 is pleased to present Architecture of Color: The Legacy of Luis Barragán.

This exhibition aims to go beyond the color and surface of his popular image, the Barragán of legend. Architecture of color: the legacy of Luis Barragán attempts to marry the modernist, acutely “contemporary” Barragán, who syncs with international artists, with the other man—one wholly Mexican, a lover of the forgotten qualities and past traditions and of the very sentimentalism that modernism, more broadly, tried to do away with. It is this duality that makes him so interesting.

Barragan’s structures invite meditation and have an emotional resonance that is a powerful amalgam of their composite parts. Josef Albers said that art was the “discrepancy between physical fact and psychic effect.” Barragan’s masterpieces—built between the 1940s and the 1970s—succeed in a comparable discrepancy. His “emotional architecture” hums at the same pitch as the emotional abstraction of which Josef Albers, Agnes Martin, and Sean Scully and Chucho Reyes are masters, at their varied intensities. In his Pritzker price acceptance speech, Barragán singles out his friend Chucho Reyes, for praise acknowledging his “wise teachings.” Barragán’s palette especially owes something to Reyes’s interpretation of hues embedded in pre-Columbian and colonial art, architecture, and craft. Manuel Álvarez Bravo’s untitled (red graffiti: skull and heart) reminds us that some of the colors we associate with Barragán were pre-existing, visible in Mexico City and elsewhere.

The artist Mathias Goeritz, on the other hand, was more aligned to Barragán’s modernist and progressive persona. A German émigré, he settled in Mexico in 1949, and in 1953 published his manifiesto de la arquitectura emocional, articulating and giving voice to the sentiments present in Barragán’s buildings. It may well have been Goeritz who introduced Josef Albers to Luis Barragán in Mexico City in the mid-1950s. In Albers’s Adobe screen print variant ix (1967) it is easy to see the synergy between Barragán and Albers, both in terms of form and the elastic properties of color. Sheila Hicks, who studied with Josef and Anni Albers at Yale in the 1950s, is perhaps the most significant artist working today in textiles. Composed of a bleached linen that has no place in the traditional Mexican craft practices Hicks first encountered in the late 1950s, Quatre Temps’ (2014) use of linen from Northern France chimes with a divergent yet comparative local textile history. This sameness and difference underlie the fundamental truth and universality of what Barragán and the aforementioned artists did so sublimely.

Dan Flavin’s neons, for all their reduction of form, have the gravitas and energy of stained-glass church windows, the same ability to lift up the viewer, combining pure light with pure color, producing a spiritual effect that is both architecture and art. Agnes Martin painted “with her back to the world” and much of her practice was deeply private. Barragán’s high walls create a similar privacy. Sean Scully’s 1970s practice had the same rigidity as Martin’s, though with greater dynamism and taped off impasto. Though Donald Judd’s work doesn’t directly connect to Barragán’s, his simple furniture—all color, polished metal, or wood—is Barragán-esque. At his studio and home in SoHo there is an atmosphere that one also finds at the Casa Barragán, one consistent with the tenets laid out in Barragán’s Pritzker speech.

Lastly, the butaque chairs are emblematic of Barragán, Porset, and others’ reinterpretation of a famous archetype with a long Mexican history. Indeed, Josef Albers made his own version of the butaque chair, calling it “Mexican Chair B”

Barragán’s journey as an architect mirrors that of these artists. He first had to learn to create structures in a traditional, then a modern, style. Finally, he had to
“unlearn” those same rules and constraints, coming ultimately to his own true stylistic and spiritual apex.

By combining drawings and furniture by Barragán with works by other artists we can examine this duality, looking at both his “rose period” and its magnetism, as well drawing attention to his uncanny modernity and his love of the past, its templates and nuances.

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