

**Mélnikov en París, 1925.** By GINÉS GARRIDO. Pp. 262. Barcelona: Fundación Caja de Arquitectos. 2011. €32.00. Paperback. ISBN: 9788493785765.

The excellence of Ginés Garrido's research on the work of Russian avant-garde architect Konstantin Melnikov earned him the Extraordinary Doctoral Award at the Superior Technical School of Architecture of Madrid. In 2011, *Melnikov in Paris, 1925* was published, combining precise analytical studies of architectural forms with in-depth critiques of cultural and symbolic meanings beyond planned structures. Garrido selected three years of Melnikov's career that were fundamental not only for Soviet artistic experiments in the first half of the twentieth century, but also for the international modernist movement. Focusing on two of Melnikov's works, the *Soviet Pavilion* at the International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts of 1925 and *Garages for 1000 Cars* in Paris, the book has become a mandatory reference for studying Soviet constructivism.

Soviet architecture has guided Garrido's interests since the early nineties, stimulating him to visit Moscow's architectural masterpieces several times. His motivation to study Melnikov emerged from the fact that, besides the abundance of publications in Russian, previous studies were merely descriptive. Therefore, his research is innovative for adding analytical criticism to the existing literature. The book reinforces Melnikov's deserved position among respected names of the Vkhutemas School, such as Rodchenko, Lissitzky, and Tatlin, as well as among international masters like Le Corbusier. As Garrido suggests, Melnikov's work had been ignored by critical studies due to his eventual intellectual inconsistency and cultural isolation, and due to the brevity of constructivism as a movement. Garrido's work fills this gap by connecting Melnikov to the history of international modernist architecture.

The book is arranged chronologically, according to Melnikov's journey between Moscow and Paris. Respectively entitled *Moscow 1924*, *Paris 1925*, and *Moscow 1926*, the chapters offer detailed reports of ideas and projects in the period. According to Garrido, before Melnikov's voyage to Paris to construct the *Soviet Pavilion* as a display of the achievements of socialist society, Soviet artists were searching for forms to represent the success of the regime. Although previously flirting with different artistic movements, Soviet architects found in Le Corbusier's abstract purism the ideal style for denying the Russian past and constructing a new socialist code. This was made possible by friendly exchanges between Melnikov and Le Corbusier in Paris. Garrido's outstanding analysis explains the paradox of the *Soviet Pavilion*, which intended to propose a functional architectural concept through the creation of a national exhibitionist archetype. The result was an innovative industrial pavilion, which, though filled with kitsch objects of Russian origin, received the Grand Prix.

While Garrido sees the Soviet Pavilion as something between 'an agit-prop installation' (p. 62) with decorative elements and an industrial artefact, the *Garages for 1000 Cars* requested by the municipality of Paris revealed Melnikov's candid spirit, free from political and stylistic restrictions. Garrido highlights that this freedom was made possible by Melnikov's vacation by the sea in Spain, where he explored central themes of modernism, such as three-dimensional constructions and

non-objective abstraction, without forgetting his Russian influences. Melnikov's creative summer working with one of the key symbols of modern times, the car, would be followed by a tough Russian winter. For Garrido, the clash of avant-garde ideas with nationalism would later make Melnikov's constructivism ephemeral, losing its prominence in Soviet architecture against the imminent Stalinist bias.

From Picasso to Malevich, the well-referenced book offers a synthesis of what it meant to be at the centre of modern times for Melnikov. The book didactically combines text and illustrations, including photographs, soviet placards, and drawings, that help to envision the author's examination of architectural forms and concepts. Garrido's eloquent descriptions of angles, curves, and colours, are complemented by pictures, making his analogies clearly comprehensible. Chapter 3 in particular shows how Garrido recognizes the influence of Russian artists such as Rodchenko, Popova, Lissitzky, and Eksterin Melnikov. Besides offering one of the most complete academic studies of Melnikov's work, the fully illustrated book turns the reader's experience into a pleasant lesson on modern art and architecture.

Garrido's research was based on bibliographic databases located in Moscow, New York, Paris, London, and Madrid. The value of this work lies in bringing together materials published worldwide to virtually reconstruct and analyse the work of Melnikov. Therefore, the book does not present much new data or primary sources. Given the difficulty the author encountered in accessing original documents and private archives, he decided to take for granted materials already published by researchers such as Starr and Gaza. However, there are original documents relating to Melnikov that have not been fully analysed and could provide new perspectives on the subject. The archives of the Melnikov family hosted by the Shchusev State Museum of Architecture in Moscow, for example, remain a frontier for further research. Despite this, the fact that Garrido did not access potentially enriching private archives does not prevent him from achieving his goal of visualizing structures designed by Melnikov as a matter of form, and proposing critical interpretations.

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