

UNFINISHED SPACES

PRODUCTION AND SALES

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SYNOPSIS

Cuba will count as having the most beautiful academy of arts in the world.
– Fidel Castro (1961)

Cuba's ambitious National Art Schools project, designed by three young artists in the wake of Castro's Revolution, is neglected, nearly forgotten, then ultimately rediscovered as a visionary architectural masterpiece.

In 1961, three young, visionary architects were commissioned by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara to create Cuba's National Art Schools on the grounds of a former golf course in Havana, Cuba. Construction of their radical designs began immediately and the school's first classes soon followed. Dancers, musicians and artists from all over the country reveled in the beauty of the schools, but as the dream of the Revolution quickly became a reality, construction was abruptly halted and the architects and their designs were deemed irrelevant in the prevailing political climate. Forty years later the schools are in use, but remain unfinished and decaying. Castro has invited the exiled architects back to finish their unrealized dream.

Unfinished Spaces features intimate footage of Fidel Castro, showing his devotion to creating a worldwide showcase for art, and it also documents the struggle and passion of three revolutionary artists whose inspiration and ideals could ultimately destroy them.



ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

In Spring 2001 in Havana, we first had the opportunity to visit the National Art Schools – organic, modern, brick buildings, now in ruins, but still home to Cuba’s best and brightest art students. After touring the campus, we met architect Roberto Gottardi. Roberto brought with him an old file full of photographs and press clippings, weathered documents that illustrated the story of his most monumental architectural project, the first and most impressive construction of the Cuban Revolution.

Gottardi’s story of the National Art Schools was also the story of his personal experience as an architect in Cuba who believed in the possibility of utopia, began to construct it, but never completed it. Now, 45 years later, he has a chance to complete that work and we couldn’t pass up the opportunity to follow him on the final leg of this long journey.

Over the ten years we spent making *Unfinished Spaces*, we came to know Gottardi, and the other two architects Ricardo Porro and Vittorio Garatti, quite well. We were attracted to telling the story of the National Art Schools in Cuba because of their rich historical and emotional textures, but also because of the architects, who we deeply care about.

This story has never been told on screen. The National Art Schools and the recollections of the architects, their peers, and adversaries opens up a compelling world rarely glimpsed outside of Cuba. The on-location photography reflects our unprecedented access at the National Arts Schools campus. It took years for us to cultivate a relationship with the Cuban authorities that would allow us to film on the heavily guarded site of this national architectural treasure.

The faces and voices are fresh and emotional, and the beauty of the subject captures audiences’ attention. Leaving out narration, we instead opted to let the subjects’ interviews and the dramatic visuals of the buildings — both in their construction and decay - speak for themselves.

Unfinished Spaces does not look or feel like a heavy political doc; the film contributes to a balanced portrayal of the optimistic and tragic aspects of the Cuban Revolution. The story of the three architects and their unrealized vision provides a prism to tell the complicated story of the Revolution. Beyond the stereotypical imagery of Old Havana and classic cars and the often black-and-white commentary around Cuban politics, *Unfinished Spaces* promotes open-minded dialogue about Cuban culture and US-Cuba relations at a critical time when the policies of both countries toward each other are changing rapidly.

It is important to document the National Art Schools for the history of architecture, for the posterity of Cuba, and for the benefit of the world. The film’s preservation of the history of these endangered buildings will prompt awareness of the need for their preservation and provide recognition for the architects.

Current Status of the Art Schools

At the time of the film’s completion, only two of the five art schools have been restored, those by Ricardo Porro. Popular support continues to grow within Cuba for the National Art Schools. However, in 2009, the Cuban government cut funding for the restoration of the art schools. The official reasons cited were the world economic crisis and a series of devastating hurricanes that hit the island, straining the Cuban economy. By exposing these buildings and their stories to a wider international audience, *Unfinished Spaces* will play a critical role in the shaping of the future of the story it tells.

PRODUCTION DETAILS

Format and Style

HD | Color | 86 min | English and Spanish with subtitles

Production

Production of *Unfinished Spaces* occurred between 2001 and 2009. The first shoots took place outside of Cuba, in Venice, Milan, and Paris at a symposium at the Instituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia and at two of the architects' current residences. At this point, without even traveling to Cuba, we had shot over 18 hours of footage.

In November 2007, we traveled for the first time to Havana in order to document the return of Porro and Garatti to Cuba to join Gottardi in reviewing the work being done on the Art Schools. Filming there for three weeks, we accompanied Porro interviews with the architects.

Filming in Cuba did present challenges, but we found that most Cubans were excited that someone was telling the story of the National Arts Schools. Cuban authorities who were aware of our project were at first protective of the art schools because of their importance as monuments and as symbols of Cuban culture, but they eventually encouraged and welcomed the project.

We returned in August 2008 to Havana to follow the progress of the restoration of the Schools and conduct interviews with all three architects, Mario Coyula (Cuban architect and architectural historian), Selma Diaz (Cuban diplomat; initiated the art schools project), Mirtha Ibarra (actress who attended the schools), Ever Fonseca (painter who attended the schools), other students and draftsmen who worked on the project in the 60s.

In March 2009, the final production in Havana followed Vittorio Garatti as he mounted an exhibition of his drawings inside his decaying School of Ballet for the Havana Art Biennial.

Post-Production

September 2009 - May 2011 in New York.

Distribution and Outreach

Unfinished Spaces had its World Premiere at the Los Angeles Film Festival (documentary competition) in June 2011.

Unfinished Spaces has also been selected by Latino Public Broadcasting for screening on public television (PBS stations) in the United States in 2012.

The following outreach activities are underway:

- Screenings and panel discussions/Q&A's at selected architecture schools, museums and theaters with the co-directors, architects and experts in the film to create a dialogue on the fate and importance of the National Art Schools in Cuba as world class works of architecture.
- Extensive web site with extra footage from interviews, interactive plans of the Schools, related print and web resources, a talkback forum to discuss issues raised in the film and ways to support the World Monument Fund's efforts to restore and preserve the Schools.
- An educational DVD with a shortened version of the film for classroom use of the film by colleges and universities, high schools, and libraries. Additional materials will include a discussion guide for teachers and students and extra sections of interviews with experts and architects.

Film Festivals

WORLD PREMIERE:

Los Angeles Film Festival - Documentary Competition (June 2011)

DOCUWEEKS

Official Selection (August 2011, IFC Center NY & Laemmle Sunset 5 L.A.)

INTERNATIONAL PREMIERE

Valladolid International Film Festival - Docu Competition (October 2011)

DOMESTIC FESTIVALS

Camden International Film Festival
Hawaii International Film Festival
Denver Starz Film Festival
New York Architecture and Design Film Festival
Houston Cinema Arts Film Festival
Tucson Loft Film Festival

KEY PRODUCTION BIOS

ALYSA NAHMIAS, Co-Director + Producer

Alysa Nahmias is founder and executive director of Ajna Films. *Unfinished Spaces* is her feature directing debut. Her producing credits include *The Listening Archive*, and *Outside the Giardino*. Nahmias has received numerous grants and awards from government agencies and private foundations, including the New York State Council on the Arts, the Jerome Foundation, and the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts. She holds a Masters degree in architecture (M.Arch) from Princeton University and a B.A. from New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study. Nahmias is a member of the American Institute of Architects, the International Documentary Association, the Independent Feature Project, and Women Make Movies.

BENJAMIN MURRAY, Co-Director, Co-Producer + Director of Photography

Benjamin Murray started his post production company, The Room, in 2010 and currently partners with Technicolor through two Flame Premium suites. His regular clients include major networks and numerous independent production companies. Murray's recent projects include: *No Direction Home*, directed by Martin Scorsese; *Capitalism: A Love Story*, directed by Michael Moore; *The Promise: The Making of Darkness on the Edge of Town*, directed by Thom Zimny; *Client 9*, directed by Alex Gibney; *Reagan*, directed by Eugene Jarecki; *Fog of War*, directed by Errol Morris; *My Architect*, directed by Nathaniel Kahn; *Born Into Brothels*, directed by Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman; and *Once In a Lifetime*, directed by Paul Crowder. Murray holds a BFA in Film and Television Production from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts.

KRISTEN NUTILE, Editor

Kristen Nutile is an accomplished editor of documentary films. Her editing credits include the feature length documentaries *Invitation to Dance* by Simi Linton and Christian von Tippelskirch, *Every Day is a Holiday* an ITVS(Lincs) production by Theresa Loong, and *From Prison to Home* by Adam Blank. Her work has shown all over the world including the Sundance Film Festival and the Tribeca Film Festival, and has broadcast on PBS, Showtime and Ovation. Kristen is the recipient of the Albert Maysles Award for Excellence in Documentary Film-making and she has collaborated with legendary filmmaker, Albert Maysles and producer, Tanja Meding on *Sally Gross - The Pleasure of Stillness*. She holds Master's degrees in both Documentary Film and Video from Stanford University and Biology from San Francisco State University.

ALEX MINNICK, Editor

Alex Minnick previously co-directed and edited the short film *Handgun* which was shown at Rooftop Film's Summer Series and aired on IFC.com. Alex Minnick currently works as an editor in New York, most recently on Comedy Central's *Onion Sportsdome* and the Emmy winning series *30 Rock*. He has worked on: *The Bedford Diaries* and *The Jury*, produced by Barry Levinson and Tom Fontana; and the Emmy winning series *Chappelle's Show*, produced by Dave Chappelle. Minnick holds a B.A. in Film Studies from the University of Iowa and earned The Laurence R. Fairal Scholarship for Creative Writing.

GIANCARLO VULCANO, Composer

Giancarlo Vulcano's film and television credits include working with Howard Shore (*Lord of the Rings*) and Angelo Badalamenti (*Blue Velvet*, *Twin Peaks*). He produced the score for *Baby Mama*, coordinated the score for *The Departed*, and has composed for many independent films, including *Under the Cover of Darkness: The Work of Michael Flomen*; *Love and Roadkill*; *Lola*; and *Exact Fare*. Vulcano currently works with composer Jeff Richmond on the music for *30 Rock* on NBC.

CHARACTERS

Roberto Gottardi

Is one of Cuba's most well-respected architects. He has lived in Havana since 1959 when he was invited to collaborate with Porro and Garatti on the design of the school of Theater at the National Art Schools complex. His attention to detail and interest in "surprising spaces" can be traced to his great teacher, Venetian architect Carlo Scarpa. Unfortunately, because Cuba has not been able to construct many buildings, Gottardi has only been able to complete small works, such as a tourist pizzeria in the Capitolio district of Havana. After teaching architecture to generations of Cuban youth, he has recently retired and his daily life is part of "la lucha," or "the battle" fought by Cubans on a daily basis against hardships such as food shortage, blackouts, and dangerous lack of medical supplies. Gottardi has re-drawn his plans for the completion of the Theater school over 10 times since the announcement of the restoration of the buildings in 1999. Lamentably, the restoration of the Theater School has not begun in spite of his efforts and enthusiasm.



Ricardo Porro

Is the architect of the schools of Plastic Arts and Modern Dance at the National Art Schools complex. A native Cuban, he participated in the early stages of the Cuban Revolution as a student during the 1950s in Havana. Porro was so central to the student movement that he was forced to flee Cuba for two years prior to Castro's coup, working from Venezuela to protect his life. In Venezuela he met Gottardi and Garatti - the Italian architects who he later invited to join him in Cuba after the triumph of the Revolution. Porro's interdisciplinary, poetic approach to architecture stems from his early encounters with masters of modern art and architecture such as Picasso and Le Corbusier. Porro was a close friend of legendary painter Wilfredo Lam and a painting by Lam was the only possession Porro was permitted to take with him to Paris when he left for exile in 1967.

Vittorio Garratti

Designed the schools of Ballet and Music at the National Art Schools complex. After working in the office of Milanese architect Ernesto Rogers during the 1950s, Garatti left Italy and joined the Banco Obrero urbanist project in Venezuela. In Caracas, Garatti met Porro and Gottardi, his future collaborators and lifelong friends. In 1974, Garatti was arrested, imprisoned for twenty-one days, and expelled from Cuba. Since then, Garatti has maintained a successful architectural practice in Milan and distinguished teaching career at the Milan Politecnico. He remains dedicated to the original ideals of the Cuban Revolution and when he visits the art schools buildings in ruins, as they are today, he sees metaphors of the Revolution itself, a mixture of nostalgia and imperfect beauty.

Additional Characters + Interviews

Selma Diaz, *Architect, brokered the schools commission*
Roberto Segre, *Cuban architecture critic, attacked the schools*
Augusto Rivero, *Architect, worked on the schools as a student*
Jose Mosquera, *Architect, worked on the schools as a student*
Manuel Lopez Olivia, *Artist who attended the schools, 1960s*
Ever Fonseca, *Painter who attended the schools, 1960s*
Mirtha Ibarra, *Actress who attended the schools, 1960s*
Mario Coyula, *Cuban Architect and Architectural Historian*
Dafnis Prieto, *Musician, attended the schools (MacArthur Fellow)*
Felipe Dulzaides, *Artist who attended the schools, 1980s*
John A. Loomis, *Author of Revolution of Forms*
Norma Barbacci, *Program Director for Latin America, Spain, and Portugal at the World Monuments Fund*
Victor Marin, *Architect at UNESCO in Havana*
Kcho, *Sculptor who attended the schools, 1980s*

THE CUBAN NATIONAL ART SCHOOLS (LA ESCUELAS NACIONALES DE ARTE)

Cuba's National Art Schools (Escuelas Nacionales de Arte, now known as the Instituto Superior de Arte) are considered by historians to be one of the most outstanding architectural achievements of the Cuban Revolution. Built on the site of a former country club in the far western suburbs of Havana, these innovative, organic Catalan-vaulted brick and terracotta structures were conceived and initiated by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara in 1961, and the schools reflect the utopian optimism and revolutionary exuberance of the early years of the Cuban Revolution. Over their years of active use, the schools served as the primary incubator for Cuba's artists, musicians, actors and dancers.

By 1965, however, the art schools and their architects fell out of favor as Soviet-inspired functionalist forms became standard in Cuba. Additionally, the schools were subjected to accusations of design that was incompatible with the Cuban Revolution. These factors resulted in the schools' near-complete decommissioning and departure of two of their three architects. Never fully completed, the complex of buildings lay in various stages of use and abandonment, some parts literally overgrown by the jungle until preservation efforts began in the first decade of the 21st century. The schools' legacy was eventually brought to light by regional and international architectural journals in the 1980s, piquing the curiosity of observers both internationally and within Cuba through the 1990s. The schools attracted even greater international attention and in 2000 they were nominated for the World Monuments Fund Watch List. In November 2010, the National Art Schools were officially recognized as national monuments by the Cuban Government, and are currently being considered for inclusion on the World Heritage list of sites which have "outstanding universal value" to the world.

The architects located their design studio at the site at the former country club. They decided that there would be three guiding principles for the design of the art schools. The first principle was that the architecture for the schools would be integrated with the widely varied, unusual landscape of the golf course. The second and third principles were derived from material necessity - The US embargo against Cuba, begun in 1960, had made the importation of rebar and Portland cement very costly. The architects therefore decided to use locally produced brick and terracotta tile, and for the constructive system they would use the Catalan vault with its potential for organic form. When Fidel Castro viewed the plans for the art schools he praised their design, saying that the complex would be "the most beautiful academy of arts in the whole world". There were five art schools within the academy: the School of Modern Dance, the School of Plastic Arts, the School of Dramatic Arts, the School of Music, and the School of Ballet.

School of Modern Dance, Ricardo Porro



Porro conceived the modern dance school's plan as a sheet of glass that had been violently smashed and fragmented into shifting shards, symbolic of the revolution's violent overthrow of the old order.[9] The fragments gather around an entry plaza - the locus of the "impact" - and develop into an urban scheme of linear, though non-rectilinear, shifting streets and courtyards. The entry arches form a hinge around which the library and administrative bar rotate away from the rest of the school. The south side of the fragmented plaza is defined by rotating dance pavilions, paired around shared dressing rooms. The north edge, facing a sharp drop in terrain, is made by two linear bars, containing classrooms, that form an obtuse angle. At the culmination of the angular procession, farthest from the entry, where the plaza once again compresses is the celebrated form of the performance theater.

School of Plastic Arts, Ricardo Porro



The concept for this school is intended to evoke an archetypal African village, creating an organic urban complex of streets, buildings and open spaces. The studios, oval in plan, are the basic cell of the complex. Each one was conceived as a small arena theater with a central skylight to serve students working from a live model. The studios are organized along two arcs, both of which are curving colonnaded paths. Lecture rooms and offices

are accommodated in a contrasting blocklike plan that is partially wrapped by and engaged with the colonnaded path. Ideas of gender and ethnicity converge in the curvilinear forms and spaces of Plastic Arts. Most notable is how the organic spatial experience of the curvilinear paseo arquitectonico delightfully disorients the user not being able to fully see the extent of the magic realist journey being taken.

School of Dramatic Arts, Roberto Gottardi



The School of Dramatic Arts is urban in concept, as are Porro's two schools. Dramatic Arts is organized as a very compact, axial, cellular plan around a central plaza amphitheater. Its inward-looking nature creates a closed fortress-like exterior. The amphitheater, fronting the unbuilt theater at what now is the entrance, is the focal point of all the subsidiary functions, which are grouped around it. Circulation takes place in the narrow leftover interstices, open to the sky like streets, between the positive volumes of the masonry cells. Winding more or less concentrically through the complex, circulation negates the axiality and generalized symmetry that organize the plan. This presents an interesting contradiction between the formal and the experiential. While quite ordered in plan, the experience of walking through the complex is random and episodic.

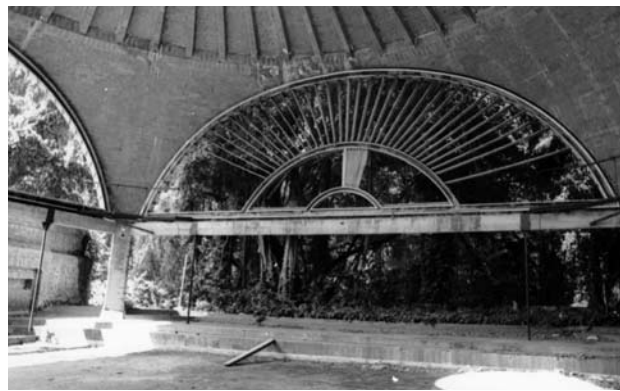
School of Music, Vittorio Garatti



The School of Music is constructed as a serpentine ribbon 330 meters long, embedded in and traversing the contours of

the landscape approaching the river. The scheme and its paseo arquitectonico begin where a group of curved brick planters step up from the river. This path submerges below ground as the band is joined by another layer containing group practice rooms and another exterior passage, shifted up in section from the original band. Displacements are read in the roofs as a series of stepped, or terraced, planters for flowers. This 15m wide tube, broken into two levels, is covered by undulating, layered Catalan vaults that emerge organically from the landscape, traversing the contours of the ground plane. Garatti's meandering paseo arquitectonico presents an ever-changing contrast of light and shadow, of dark subterranean and brilliant tropical environments.

School of Ballet, Vittorio Garatti



From the top of the golf course's ravine, one looks down upon the ballet school complex, nestled into the descending gorge. The plan of the school is articulated by a cluster of domed volumes, connected by an organic layering of Catalan vaults that follow a winding path. There are at least five ways to enter the complex. The most dramatic entrance starts at the top of the ravine with a simple path bisected by a notch to carry rainwater. As one proceeds, the terra cotta cupolas, articulating the major programmatic spaces, emerge floating over lush growth. The path then descends down into the winding subterranean passage that links the classrooms and showers, three dance pavilions, administration pavilions, library and the Pantheon-like space of the performance theater. The path also leads up onto its roofs which are an integral part of Garatti's paseo arquitectonico. The essence of the design is not found in the plan but in the spatial experience of the school's choreographed volumes that move with the descending ravine.