

Project Essay: SuperPuesto

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The *SuperPuesto* is the latest in a series of pavilions that compare the roles of function and display in architecture. Each of my pavilions is erected as a “built thesis” on the history of temporary structures and modern architecture, while the pavilion’s day-to-day function engages with the social economics of the site. The *Bicycle Pavilion*, commissioned by the Jumex Collection in Mexico City in 2002, was built using the standardized utilitarian building technology of the adjacent Jumex factory. This homage to Mexican *funcionalismo* serves as both a pleasure pavilion and bicycle storage shed for factory workers. The *Workshop Pavilion*, commissioned by the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo in León, Spain, is a scaled-down version of Alvaro Aalto’s 1937 *Finish Pavilion*, but made from materials recycled from previous exhibitions, and serves as a facility for children’s workshops.

The *SuperPuesto* continues this practice of historical citation, this time taking Marcel Breuer’s *House in the Museum Garden* (commissioned by, and temporarily installed in the Museum of Modern Art courtyard in 1949) as a model. This new pavilion was commissioned by the Bronx Museum of the Arts as part of *Beyond the SuperSquare*, an exhibition of artists who work on Latin American modern architecture. It has been built in the garden of the Andrew Freedman Home, a former old age home on the Bronx’s Grand Concourse.

Puesto is the name given to the collapsible market stalls that can be found throughout Latin America. This humble building typology has evolved to serve the informal trade that frequently prevails in these economies. The International Labour Organization’s most recent study of Latin America found that the non-agricultural informal sector made up 51% of the continental economy, with women making up 60% of this workforce. These workers provide a huge range of services, from shoe shining, to garment work, to recycling, but the workers that make the largest impact on contemporary Latin American cities are the vendors, selling everything from lunches to plumbing supplies.

Traditional covered markets are surrounded, street after street, by temporary stands that are often set up and taken down daily. In Mexico, a designated street market is a *tianguis* and guerilla-style market stalls (and their proprietors) that take over and often clog streets in the city centre are

known as *ambulantes*. These are the face of an informal economic system where trade is off the books and no duties, rent, or taxes are paid (except perhaps to a local mafia who might “control” the street). The architecture is eminently transportable, from a simple *lona* (tarpaulin) stretched between lamp posts to provide shelter from the sun and rain, to stalls made with metal frames roofed with tarpaulins, all designed to be assembled or disassembled in a few minutes. This tarp-and-frame combination constitutes the standard building form of the informal economy, but can also be regarded as an example of a distinct building technology. It is based on the ancient form of the tent, but employs the fruits of technological mass-production: square-profile steel tubing and vinyl or plastic sheeting. It is a humble echo of the steel-frame and curtain wall system developed by the early twentieth century architectural avant-garde in Europe and imported to Latin America soon after.

Marcel Breuer was an important agent in this migration of modern architecture from Europe to the Americas, having taught at the Bauhaus before moving to the US to teach at Harvard. The model for this structure—Breuer’s exhibition house—was chosen for its iconic modern form. Its reversal of the standard two-pitch peaked roof demonstrated a clear break with traditional building forms. This “butterfly” roof became a classic of domestic post-war architecture all over the Americas, though an important earlier example existed in architect Emilio Duhart’s own house in Santiago, Chile, built in 1946.