

# Colourful Suggestions Between Architecture and Art in the Buenos Aires Centro Cultural Recoleta by the Architect Clorindo Testa



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**Abstract** This contribution is part of an interdisciplinary research project that explores the influence of Italian architects on Argentina’s architectural heritage. Specifically, it analyzes the Centro Cultural Recoleta in Buenos Aires, designed by Clorindo Testa, an Italian-born architect. Located in the heart of the city, the Centro Cultural Recoleta is surrounded by three other architectural works by Italian authors. Testa’s design transformed a former convent into a dynamic space that preserves

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This contribution was written in close collaboration by all the authors, but more specifically Emanuela Chiavoni focused on the paragraph “Introduction”, Fabiana Carbonari on the paragraph “History” and “Clorindo Testa, the author”, Camila Martin on the paragraph “Project” and “The Cultural Centre today. Contemporary functions”, Maria Belen Trivi and Camila Martín on the paragraph “The surface as canvas: exploring the fusion of art and architecture” and Carlotta Masina on the paragraph “Playfulness and flexibility in user-centered design”. The “Conclusions” were made by Camila Martin, Carlotta Masina and Maria Belen Trivi. Fabiana Carbonari selected the numerous drawings and archival images. Camila Martin took photographs of the current interior and exterior of the building and produced the video of the sensorial experience of the space and the appropriation by the users in June 2023 and has made contact with the Registros del Centro de Documentación, Investigación y Publicaciones -CeDIP- Centro Cultural Recoleta -CCR-. Carlotta Masina took photographs of the interior and exterior of the building in September 2022, and reviewed and translated the text, while Emanuela Chiavoni made the drawings of Figs. 1, 4, 14 and 15.

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and repurposes the existing structures. The building incorporates a unique blend of shapes and colors, creating a playful and ornamental atmosphere. Testa's innovative approach includes an urban terrace added in 1990, connecting the Centro Cultural to a new shopping center. Today, the space serves as a vibrant hub for artistic expression, attracting a diverse range of artists and visitors. The artistic activities are disseminated as if it were a *faro-manifesto*: the main entrance to the historic building is dressed in ephemeral murals representing the current exhibition, generating a visual impact that stands out in the urban landscape. The integration of these languages, architectural and artistic, enhances the built and consolidated heritage through original ephemeral interventions. The historical memory of the site is retraced through the continuous formal and chromatic expression of contemporary art. In order to know and communicate the tangible and intangible value of the place, graphic-perceptual readings and critical spatial and volumetric interpretations, carried out through drawing and expeditious surveying constitute unique and fundamental methodologies.

**Keywords** Centro Cultural Recoleta · Drawing · Colour · Clorindo Testa · Inclusivity · Visual art

## 1 Introduction

In the context of the technical-scientific collaboration between the Dipartimento di Storia disegno e restauro dell'architettura. Sapienza. Università di Roma and the Laboratorio de Experimentación Gráfica Proyectual del Habitar. Facultad de Arquitectura y Urbanismo. Universidad Nacional de La Plata, a research group formed by professors from both universities has developed, since 1999, a consistent body of academic work regarding the Argentine architecture and urban fabric. The aim was to deepen the existing knowledge of the unique cultural and architectural heritage of Argentina and enrich the international debate on some of the Argentine most iconic architectural typologies [1, 2].

Over the years, the team explored a wide range of building typologies, including industrial buildings [3], stables, bodegas [4], silos, factories, warehouses, and power plants; entertainment buildings [5, 6], and housing types such as the 'Casas Chorizo' [7] and the 'Gesuitic Estancias' [8]. Italian workers who emigrated to Argentina contributed largely to this rich and diverse heritage, bringing their skills, expertise, and know-how, especially about construction techniques and building systems [9, 10].

The analysis and investigation of the existing built environment are fundamental to ensure its conservation, protection, and valorisation. Careful monitoring is essential to assess the extent of this heritage and its state of the art, as well as to better understand the vicissitudes and the history.

The study undertaken over the years aimed to identify the cultural links between Italy and Argentina, investigating the multiple overlaps between the elements of the Italian tradition and those of the Argentine culture. All the research projects aspired

to divulge the numerous experiences conducted in this field and make them more accessible to the international community.

The understanding of the cultural heritage derived from these studies made it possible to define appropriate procedures for ordinary maintenance and targeted recovery interventions on individual buildings and their specific site context. The work also informed an enhancement plan to drive general improvement and economic return benefits in specific areas.

Through the Italian-Argentine cooperation, the research also addressed the cognitive-documentary aspects needed to promote innovation in the field of databases for architectural documentation, and to offer a disciplinary consultation both in terms of alphanumeric data and in terms of iconographic and photographic material.

This wide Argentine architectural heritage is still little explored, and investigations, drawings, and surveys constitute a precious learning opportunity for both scholars and citizens, who experience these urban contexts daily.

The multidisciplinary of the professors involved in this research enriched the study with diverse contents and perspectives and offered the possibility to compare different methodologies and systems used in the fields of documentation, drawing, and on-site survey.

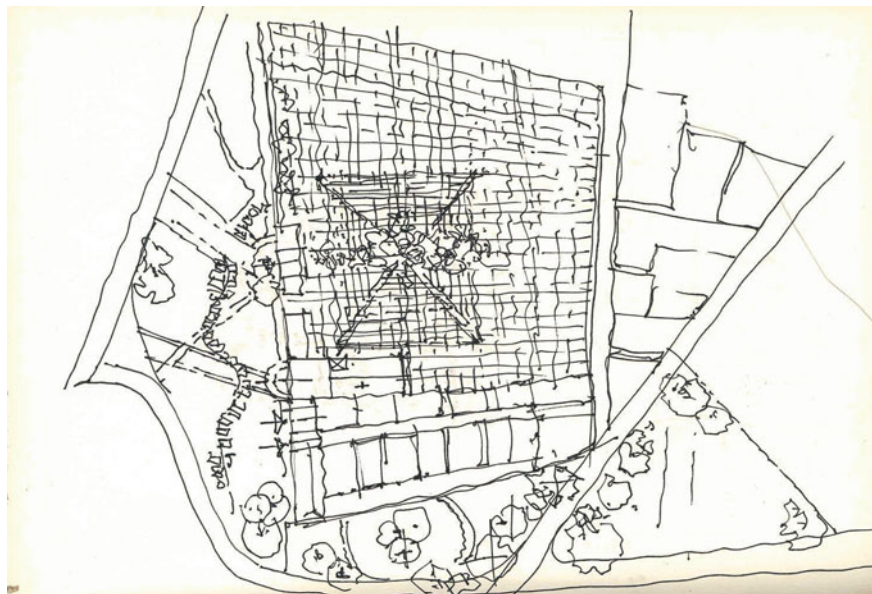
In this paper, we will study the Centro Cultural Recoleta, located in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, designed by the Italian architect Clorindo Testa. Its historical development is marked by different uses and currently, the Centre functions as a multi-purpose artistic community hub. Its architectural envelope supports pictorial representations related to the different activities that take place inside it.

## 2 History

The Centro Cultural Recoleta integrates a building complex of great historical value, located in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, the Capital of the Argentine Republic. The area was outside the founding layout of the city, but today this is fully inserted into the urban fabric (Fig. 1).

Its origin dates back to the foundation of the church of Nuestra Señora del Pilar, in 1732. The church's construction was initiated by the Italian Jesuit architect Giovanni Andrea Bianchi (Andrés Blanqui), born in 1675, in Campione (Lombardy), and one of the most significant architects of Buenos Aires during the eighteenth century. The church was later completed by the Jesuit architect Giovanni Battista Primoli, born in 1673, in Milan.

The lands were part of a farm emerging from the land distribution made by Juan de Garay in the sixteenth century. Afterward, they were donated in 1717 by the merchant Fernando de Valdés e Inclán and his spouse Gregoria de Herrera y Hurtado, and the building was erected to become the Convento de los Monjes Recoletos Descalzos. The work was completed in 1732, following the project by the German Jesuit monks Juan Krauss and Juan Wolf. The architect Giovanni Andrea Bianchi took part in the construction of the façade and the interior finishes.



**Fig. 1** Summary plan of the Recoleta complex with the cultural centre and cemetery. *Source* Own elaboration, 2023

Great changes affected the Congregation of the Recoletos during the nineteenth century. Location-wise, as a response to the Ecclesiastical Reform promoted during the presidency of Bernardino Rivadavia, the Order was evicted and relocated to the Convent of San Francisco in the distant Province of Catamarca.

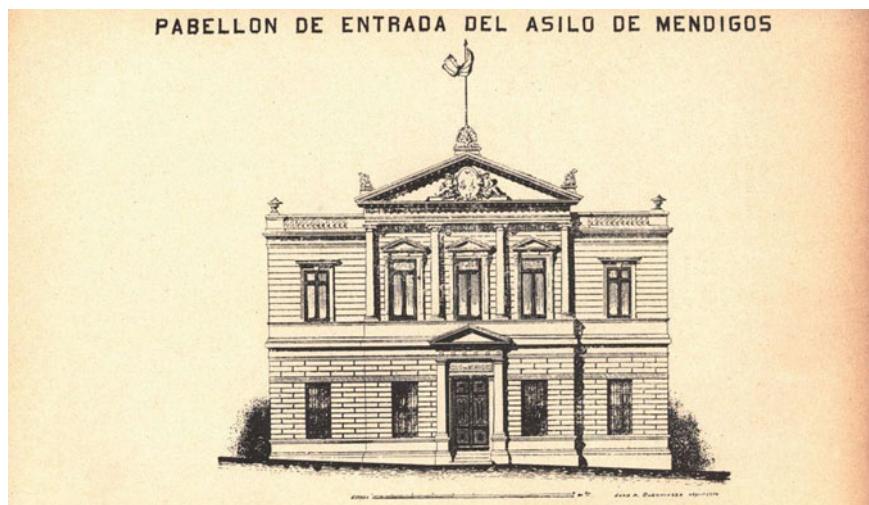
The building became part of the State's public property, which converted an area until then used as a vegetable garden, into the *Cementerio de la Recoleta* in 1822.

From that moment, the site went through multiple redefinitions and was subject to an additive growth which resulted across the years in a rapid succession of pavilions with very diverse functions—a blood hospital, an agricultural school, a botanical garden, a prison, a fire station, a hotel for immigrants, lodging for indigenous peoples and part of the *Hospital de Clínicas*.

On October 17, 1858, the *Asilo de Mendigos* was created, which later became the *Asilo de Inválidos* (Fig. 2). Due to the economic situation, after ten years, the municipal government transferred it to the Order of the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul, which kept it for over a century.

In this context, during the so-called 'Generación del '80' and under the leadership of the mayor Torcuato de Alvear, the geographic sector of the complex was renamed "La Recoleta" and became the subject of an extensive urban redevelopment program, which also involved the Asylum building.

The Italian architect Giovanni Antonio Buschiazzo (Juan Antonio Buschiazzo), born in Piedmont, was commissioned the remodeling, enhancement, and construction of the façade, and worked, together with his nephew Juan Carlos, to integrate the



**Fig. 2** Entrance pavilion of the pauper's asylum. Circa 1880. Courtesy of the *Registros del Centro de Documentación, Investigación y Publicaciones. CCR. Diseño firmado por Juan Buschiazzo. Archivo CeDIP. Centro Cultural Recoleta*

Asylum into the Cementerio Del Norte and the Iglesia del Pilar. To this end, they restored the original building from 1858, maintaining the cloister typology with the addition of single-level pavilions, and they built a small chapel in gothic neoclassical style [11].

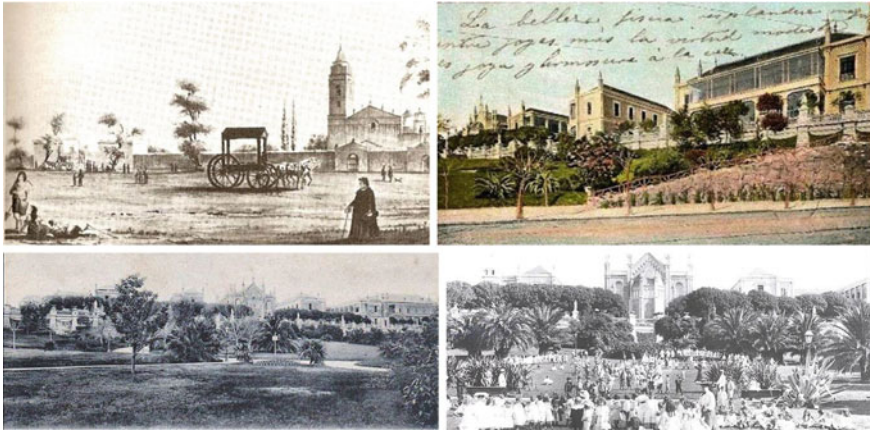
The latter stood out for the two entrances and the spatially articulated circulation on two levels, which was extended over time to link the different pavilions, and became the axis of the building complex. No less articulated was the proposed urban intervention that incorporated a lagoon and an artificial ruin demolished shortly after, the access portal to the Cementerio de la Recoleta, already mentioned, and the wall with sculptures.

In the 1890s, Buschiazzo proposed new extensions to respond to the increase in inmates, putting forward the hygienist theories in force at the time. These works carried out throughout the nineteenth century, were largely paid for by private donations, and transformed the enclave into one of the favorite places for Buenos Aires families to go for a walk (Fig. 3).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Asylum was transferred to the National Government. The following years represented a period of decline and progressive deterioration of the area. In 1944, it became the Asilo de Ancianos "General Viamonte". With a capacity for 800 people and 350 employees in its heyday, it worked until 1979 when it developed into its new use as a Cultural Centre.

The project was awarded to the studio led by the Italian architect Clorindo Testa, born in 1923 in Benevento, and the architects Luis Benedit and Jacques Bedel.

In 1993, the team formed by the architects Clorindo Testa, Juan Genoud, Giselle Graci, and Eduardo Bompadre designed the "Buenos Aires Design" shopping centre.



**Fig. 3** Vintage images of the Paseo la Recoleta and the Asilo de Ancianos. Above left: Lithograph made by Pellegrini in 1841. Above right: Asilo de Ancianos seen from Plaza Intendente Alvear (Plaza Francia). Below left: View of the Paseo de la Recoleta, circa 1900. Below right: 21st September, Spring Day. Paseo de la Recoleta and Asilo de Ancianos. Circa 1920. *Source* IAA image

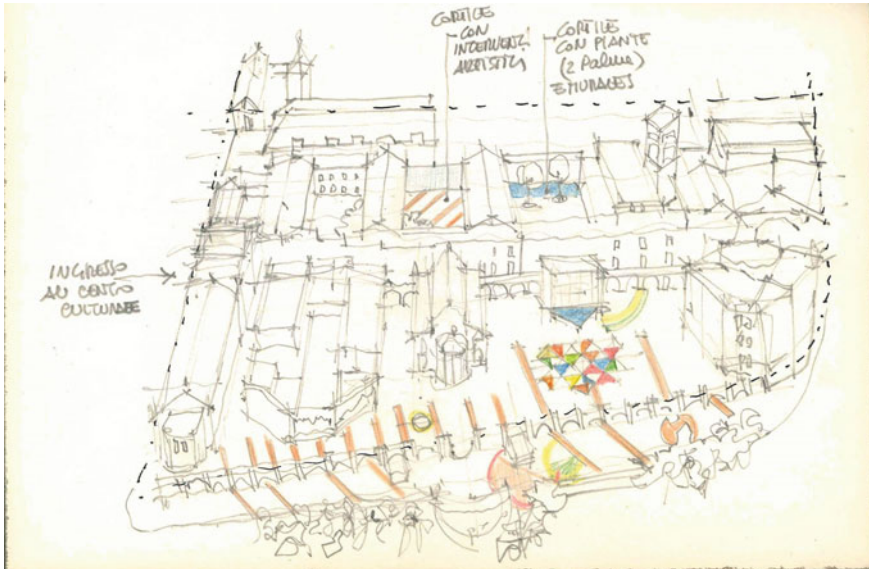
The intervention was part of a complex called “Terrazas del Pilar”, located just next to the Centro Cultural Recoleta, the Cementerio de Recoleta, and the Plaza Intendente Alvear (Plaza Francia). The three-story building was used as a food court and included commercial premises dedicated to design and construction equipment and a large gallery that reuses the wall of the Asilo Viamonte.

### 3 The Project

The proposal builds on three fundamental aspects. The privileged site context, an individual opportunity to draw residents and tourists, the ambition to make the centre a well-known tourist attraction, implementing artistic and cultural but also gastronomic activities, and the respect for the architectural pre-existence, of great historical value.

The complex has a very strategic location, being close to other important cultural centres, such as the National Museum of Fine Arts, the National Library (also designed by Clorindo Testa), and the Museum of Decorative Art, and generating with them a “cultural circuit” [12].

Testa’s project restores the five pre-existing patios, linking them through a range of circulations with different spatial qualities. The central street stands out among them as the true backbone of the building complex. The access from Plaza Intendente Alvear (Plaza Francia) is designed as a system of stairs and terraces (Fig. 4). It is a highly recognized intervention but at the same time it has had different criticisms [13–15].



**Fig. 4** Three-dimensional schematic representation showing colourful paving patterns in the external areas. *Source* Own elaboration, 2023

#### 4 Clorindo Testa, the Author

Clorindo Testa was born in Benevento, Italy, on December 10, 1923, during a family trip to Italy. He went back to Argentina three months later, where he lived the rest of his life until 2013. He studied engineering for a year at the National University of La Plata, and then architecture at the University of Buenos Aires, where he graduated as an architect in 1947. He developed his professional activity alongside prominent Argentine modern architects among which Kurchanm Bonet and Ferrari Ardoy. He was a fellow in Italy, France, and Spain. He exhibited his graphic work in Rome, and he worked for the Government of the City of Buenos Aires, in Argentina.

He was a multifaceted artist. Architect, painter, and sculptor, he received national and international awards, recognized his biographers [16, 17]. He designed houses, and buildings for different uses including banks, hospitals, cultural complexes, and administrative buildings, promoting a creative process without disciplinary limits and continuously exploring new individual solutions.

Although different artistic periods can be identified across his life, his architectural work is rich in formal constants, common concerns, and key concepts that persist and develop over the years.

## 5 The Cultural Centre Today. Contemporary Functions

Today, the centre is an attractive and dynamic nucleus, where a wide selection of artists can express their art and exhibit their creations in the 27 exhibition halls, the micro-cinema, the auditorium, and the amphitheater. These spaces provide the setting for several kinds of activities and host numerous cultural events.

“Las residencias” are thematic days led by national and international referents, “selected from open calls or special invitations” [18]. The “Residencia Cultura Rap Federal”, the “Residencia Hip Hop en Escena”, and the “Foro de Artistas Jóvenes”, are only a few examples among many others.

The objective of the “residencias” is to “create networks, exchange ideas and build creative bonds in a convivial format along with cultural and institutional makers of the country and the world” [18].

Artistic workshops, “los talleres”, are taught in person and online. They are open to the community and oriented to various age groups. They pursue the objective of “broadening horizons and approaching new ways of thinking, feeling and creating” [18]. As examples, the “Taller renová tu ropa” (Renew your clothes workshop), the “Taller de fotografía básica” (Basic photography workshop), the “Taller de composición de canciones” (Songwriting workshop), and the “Taller de historietas” (Comics workshop).

Calls are open and public “to invite cultural referents, collectives, institutions, and artists to propose and develop content” [18]—such as book launches, movie screenings, and art shows—“together with the Centre”.

The Espacio Clave 13/17 seeks to represent a unique space for “meeting and expression for teens from 13 to 17 years old, building on the co-creative work of the Recoleta team and the Clave Committee, and welcoming input from the local cultural community” [18]. The committee is encharged to organise activities and festivals and provide rehearsal rooms and stages to allow different forms of performance and artistic expression.

At the same time, flexible spaces are provided, open to the community, to be used by whoever requires them. These include study and reading areas, rooms with mirrors for dance practice, unfurnished spaces to allow free artistic expression, and drawing rooms.

The agenda of the Centro Cultural Recoleta includes art exhibitions, seminars, courses and workshops, music, theater, and film performances, as well as fairs, parties, presentations, and guided tours. This full program makes the centre an attractive meeting point for both citizens and tourists.



## 6 The Surface as Canvas: Exploring the Fusion of Art and Architecture

The historic building becomes the canvas where several artists express themselves, through a powerful creative act, which completely transforms the perception of the traditional elements of the built environment and the appearance of the urban context.

An example is the Megaro project, in London (United Kingdom), where Agents Change collective dressed the historic façade of a hotel with a bold, dynamic, and for some controversial, multi-story mural [19].

The mural, which sits resolute in the London urban scene, breaks the symmetry and the classical composition of the architectural building through a series of diagonal shapes, which create a visual effect that contradicts the logic of the architectural typology (Fig. 5).

The intervention, in addition, hides the chromatic palette of the pre-existing surface, where the visibility of materials such as brick and stone provided a univocal indication of the building's tectonic character. The original architecture took on the natural color of the construction materials to reveal its load-bearing structure and convey a sense of authenticity and soundness. The contemporary intervention, on the other hand, breaks this compositional approach dramatically, by proposing a new artificial chromaticism that provides a new interest and dynamism.



Fig. 5 Agents of change, The Megaro Project, London, 2012

The case of the Centro Cultural Recoleta is of particular interest, since the exterior murals constitute ephemeral interventions, with a limited duration in time, that constantly alter the visual perception of the architecture.

This proposal began in 2015, based on the search to bring modernity with urban-scale interventions that could be appreciated by the whole community, as a beacon-manifesto.

The guiding concept that drives each intervention emerges on the basis of different cycles and specific campaigns proposed by the Cultural Centre. With a variable duration, they focus on different themes such as for example Women’s Day (8M), through the programme “Mujeres. Here and Now” (2018), by the Argentinean artist Eugenia Mello, who created the exhibition “La Fuerza” (Fig. 6). Other examples are the various cycles of “Amor de Verano” that promoted works such as “Abrazos” (2018) by the Argentinean artist Sebastián Curri, the intervention of Julio César Battistelli (Yaia) (2019) and “La Rana y la Flor” (2021–2022) by the Venezuelan illustrator, director, and animator Igor Bastidas. Also noteworthy is the season “Imaginódromo” (2019) with the intervention of Gabriel Fermanelli (Fig. 7).

It should be noted that some campaigns did not involve the access façade but a wall on the terrace, like in the case of “NOSOTRAS!” (2021) by the graphic designer Fernanda Cozzi, on the occasion of Women’s Month. The same was for the campaigns “No va más” (2019) by Yanina Arabena, “Soy Yo” (2019) by Arabena and Vizzari for the Day of Respect for Cultural Diversity in Argentina, “Yo Creo” (2019) by



**Fig. 6** “Women. Here and Now” campaign. Exhibition “La Fuerza” by Eugenia Mello. Intervention on the façade. March and April 2018. Courtesy of the *Registros del Centro de Documentación, Investigación y Publicaciones. CCR. Crédito fotográfico. Fotografía CCR. Archivo CeDIP. Centro Cultural Recoleta*



**Fig. 7** “Amor de Verano” campaign. Above left: “Abrazos” by Sebastián Curri, January and February 2018. Above right: “Imaginódromo” campaign, intervention by Gabriel Fermanelli, 2019. Bottom left: “La Rana y la Flor” by Igor Bastidas, December 2021–January 2022. Bottom right: Yaia intervention, January 2019. Courtesy of the *Registros del Centro de Documentación, Investigación y Publicaciones. CCR. Crédito fotográfico. Fotografía CCR. Archivo CeDIP. Centro Cultural Recoleta*

Gastón Pacheco, “Fuerza Hermana” (2020) by the Brazilian designer Cyla Costa, and “Planeta Compartido” (2022), carried out by Fabrizio Lenci when the C40 in Buenos Aires was developed (Fig. 8).

These interventions also arise from editions of La Bienal, as in the case of the façade “TOUCH” (2017) by the Brazilian artist Regina Silveira, in the context of the Bienal Internacional de Arte Contemporáneo de América del Sur (BIENALSUR). Other examples are the case of “Re Mona” (2019) by the artist Edgardo Gimenez and the intervention of Renata Schussheim (2022), both on the occasion of La Bienal Arte Joven Buenos Aires (Fig. 9).

This artistic action leads to a constant change in the perception of the building, where even the windows become part of the murals, generating a continuity that makes it difficult to understand the full and empty spaces of the historic architecture.



**Fig. 8** Interventions on the terrace. Above left: “NOSOTRAS!” by Fernanda Cozzi, 2021. Top right: “Yo Creo” by Gastón Pacheco, 2019. Centre left: “Soy Yo” by Aravena and Vizzari, 2019. Center right: “Fuerza Hermana” by Cyla Acosta, 2020. Bottom left: “No va más” by Yanina Arabena, 2019. Bottom center: “Planeta Compartido” by Fabrizio Lenci, 2019. Bottom right: “Amor de Verano” by Elda Broglio, 2020. Courtesy of the *Registros del Centro de Documentación, Investigación y Publicaciones*. CCR. Crédito fotográfico. Fotografía CCR. Archivo CeDIP. Centro Cultural Recoleta

Shapes, colors, and painted strokes can unify, fragment, or emphasize the architectural components, giving life to multiple interpretations of the same architectural object, by intervening only on its “skin”. This demonstrates the transformative capacity of a two-dimensional chromatic composition, which can influence drastically the perception of the architectural volume.

It reaches the point the wall mass loses its weight and thickness, turning itself to a surface, and letting the art take the scene. The mutability thus becomes an attractive resource that invites society to rediscover the place, generating new images and perceptions.



**Fig. 9** Left: “Re Mona” by Edgardo Gimenez, October 2019. Right: Renata Schussheim intervention, April 2022. Courtesy of the *Registros del Centro de Documentación, Investigación y Publicaciones*. CCR. Crédito fotográfico. Fotografía CCR. Archivo CeDIP. Centro Cultural Recoleta

In the manner of the academic role of the stained glass windows of the Middle Ages, the interventions seek the mass dissemination of ideas in a way that is suitable for all audiences. Painting becomes a communicative expression that surpasses the barriers of the oral and written language, talking clearly to the whole community.

This provocative operation confers a certain permeability to the character of the historic façade, making it possible to see from the outside what is currently happening on the inside.

An example is the case of the campaign “Friendly Fire” (2018), where the Argentinean illustrator Juan Molinet not only worked on the façade intervention but also on an interior mural and six posters, that were used to make pins, t-shirts, chairs, and cushions (Fig. 10).

In the interiors, different atmospheres are generated by the colour interventions on the walls, ceilings, and floors, the artificial and natural light, the ambient sound, and the sound coming from loudspeakers in some sectors (Fig. 10).

Simple interventions that dialogue with the main geometries of the Cultural Centre, bring to life immersive spaces where the line between art and architecture gets thinner and begins to disappear. External and internal treatments coexist to work together and provide ever-changing new experiences, matching the playful spirit that characterises the genesis of Clorindo’s work.

The intention is to achieve a harmonious fusion between exterior and interior, conferring the structure a distinctive character, where visitors not only can benefit from an attractive visual experience but also an interesting interaction with the space.

The artistic interventions are thus intended as intrinsic components of the architecture, transcending their mere condition of coating or decoration [20]. The key factor, in this case, is the constant evolution, which introduces a variable dimension to the durable and immutable character of architecture, representing through the artistic work the expression of a society in persistent change (Fig. 11).



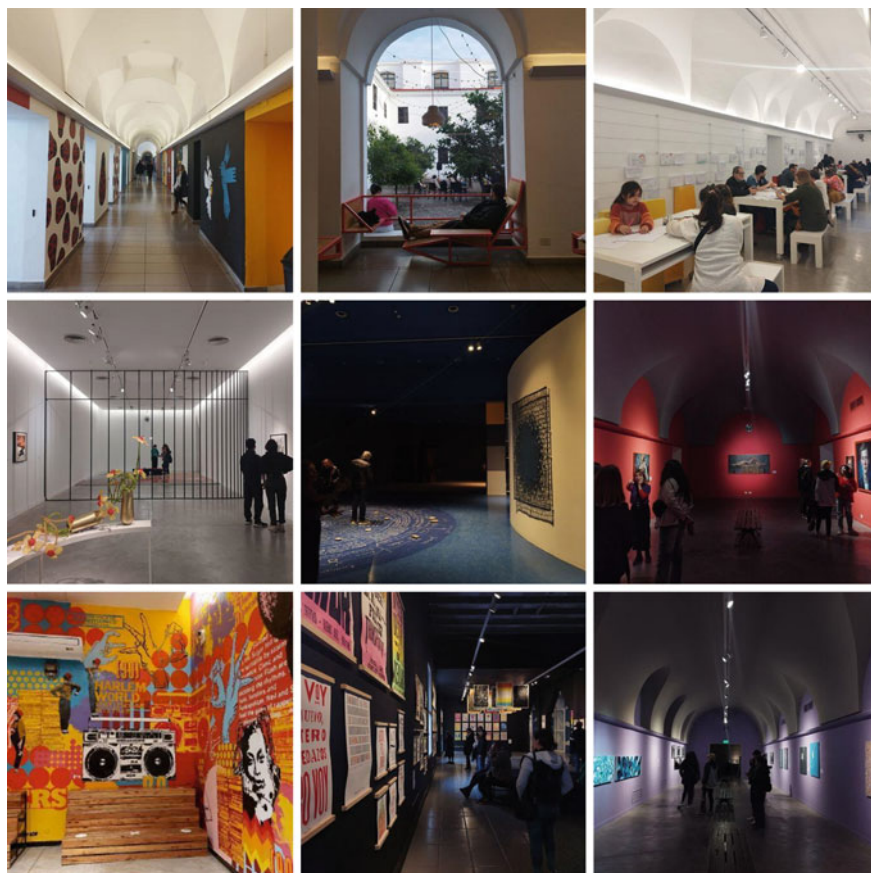
**Fig. 10** “Fuego Amigo” campaign. Exhibition by Juan Molinet, 2018. Courtesy of the *Registros del Centro de Documentación, Investigación y Publicaciones. CCR. Crédito fotográfico. Fotografía CCR. Archivo CeDIP. Centro Cultural Recoleta*

This perspective challenges the traditional approach to art exhibitions, where the architecture represented simply a passive container for artworks intended solely for contemplation.

Instead, a closer connection between architecture and art is proposed, in favour of a comprehensive experience that could last longer in the memory of the visitors. This theory suggests looking at the architectural heritage differently, recognising the new artistic interventions as an expression of the current culture and an addition to the value of the historical legacy.

To transmit the sensorial experience of the space and the appropriation by the users, a video was created, which can be accessed through the following QR code and/or link (Fig. 12).

The artwork on the exterior of the complex reaches a broader audience, which does not limit to direct visitors. The changing character of the façade inspires a sense of novelty and surprise, capturing the attention of the passerby. However, this impressive intervention also raises great controversy. The building is considered a national monument and the respect for the architectural heritage is questioned.



**Fig. 11** Interior spaces of the Centro Cultural Recoleta. Top: Los Tilos courtyard. Center: Courtyard of the cistern. Below: Patio of the tank. *Source* Own elaboration. September 2022. June 2023

**Fig. 12** QR code: <https://youtu.be/sFv89goWSC4>



Despite that, this provocative action makes the work a reference point and visual icon for the city of Buenos Aires, giving a distinctive and unique identity to the building and its surroundings.

## 7 Playfulness and Flexibility in User-Centered Design

Inside the Cultural Centre, playful furniture complements the lively character of the illustrations on the walls. The interior rooms, the outdoor patios, and the circulation spaces, such as halls and corridors, are populated with chairs, benches, and sun loungers, as well as drawing tables, table tennis, lighting elements, and planters.

All the elements are highly flexible. On one hand, they can be easily moved around, scattered across the different rooms, or grouped all in one place to allow different functions and support the daily program of the Centre. On the other, rather than serving a specific standard purpose, they enable a wide range of activities. The selection of simple furniture encourages diverse users to freely engage with the space, adapting it to their own needs, and giving it personal meaning.

The aim is to create a resilient and inclusive place, where everyone could feel welcomed, interested, and intrigued.

The Centre's complex architectural plan, made of a series of interlocking spaces, provides several spatial settings with different qualities: indoor and outdoor areas, exposed and sheltered patios, central social spaces which can be used for sport, dance, and music, but also more intimate corners for reading, resting and studying.

In the outdoor patios, systems of stairs and elevated walkways painted in bright colors, expand the available space horizontally and vertically. The adopted approach overturns the tradition, converting a typical "connecting structure" into the scene where the action takes place. Users can distance themselves from what happens on the ground, or experience it differently, from a lifted perspective.

In the 'Patio del Aljibe', stepped platforms of different heights play both functions of seating area and stage for the musical and dance performances, programmed by the Centre. Simultaneously, they are used on a daily basis for training, rehearsals, and social gatherings. In the courtyards, large planters with tags invite visitors to get familiar with native species and trees.

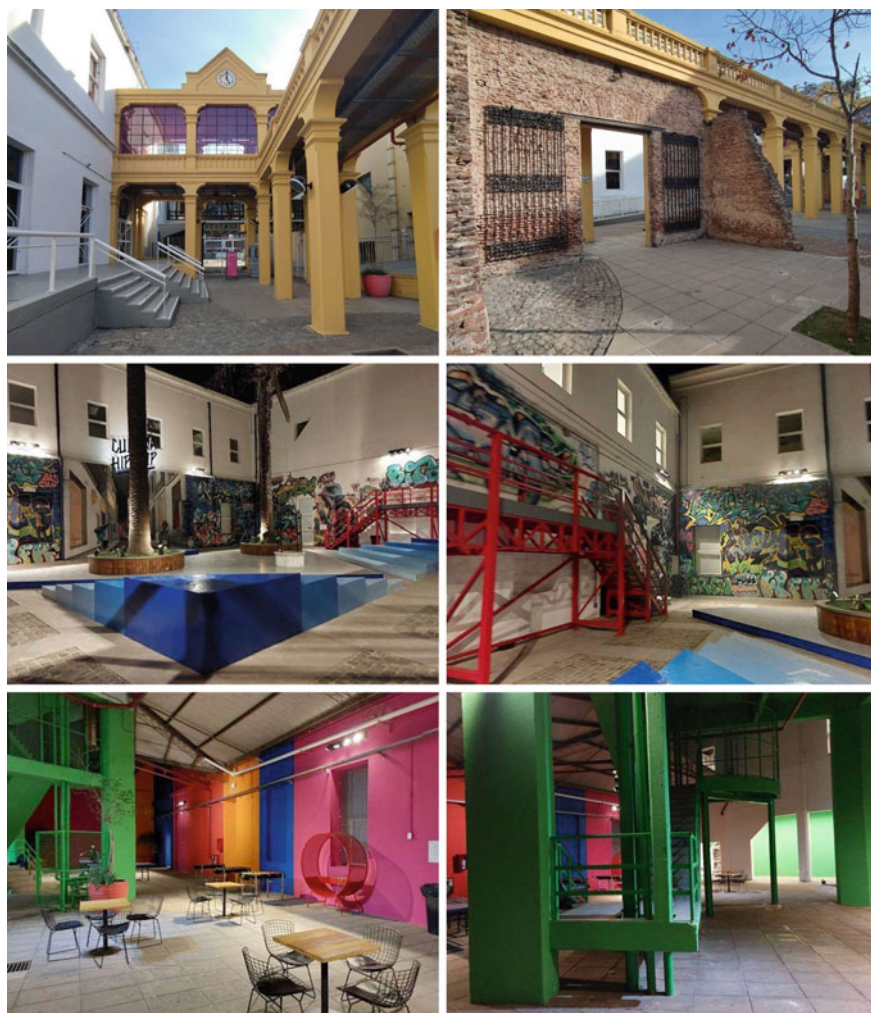
The façade's mural, the painted interiors, and the furniture are the expression of a 'tactical' design approach that proposes to rethink the historical architecture as meant for the public, through low-cost and temporary changes. Like in 'Tactical Urbanism' the aim is to achieve a place's hidden potential through ingenious and unconventional solutions and bring environmental and social benefits to targeted users, and often the community as a whole. In this logic, the flexible model and the experimental use of colours, textures, and shapes represent tools to give a new quality to an existing building, and to promote social exchange and community interaction.

In the context of the Centro Cultural Recoleta, this innovative approach sits within a rich architectural heritage marked by eventful historical evolution, generating a combination of heterogeneous elements. Users feel and are fascinated by the different



historical pre-existences, that manifest more or less explicitly, in the layout of the spaces, the architectural components, and the juxtaposition of materials (Fig. 13).

Like the exterior façade, the Centre's interiors are not exempt from criticism, but they represent a response to the contemporary urban society's challenge to think outside the box and experiment with new possibilities. They do not constitute a



**Fig. 13** Outdoor spaces inside the Centro Cultural Recoleta. Above: Patio de Los Tilos. Center: Patio del Aljibe with paintings on the walls, murals with perspective images, stone flooring, and red iron staircase. Steps painted in shades of blue and two central palm trees in brick planters. Below: Patio del Tanque. Walls painted in colourful bands with bright tones and green metal stairs. Colourful steel furniture and wooden tables. *Source* Own elaboration. September 2022. June 2023

'finished' design, but an evolving framework for people to experience within, and a catalyst for creativity and imagination.

## 8 Conclusion

The study of the pre-existences of great historical value, which start from the Convento de los Monjes Recoletos and reach a significant moment in the intervention of Clorindo Testa, permits us to acknowledge today the unity and continuity of the building complex, which, while providing support for artistic work, represents above all an artistic masterpiece in itself. Its spatial quality shapes the contemporary experience of the Centro Cultural Recoleta, and makes it a reference point in the Recoleta urban environment, in the city of Buenos Aires.

Besides the systematic study of the historical documentation, the data acquired on-site, both manually through surveys and hand drawings and with the help of technologies, represented a key research tool that characterized all phases of the study.

Analog and digital processing, faithful to the cultural identity of the Centro Cultural Recoleta, helped to reach a profound understanding not only of the entire architectural complex but also the urban context it sits within.

Approaching the beginning of the research work, using direct knowledge methods, like live drawing, constitutes a well-established methodology among scholars working in the field of management and enhancement of architectural heritage. The impressions and feelings from the first site inspections in fact play a fundamental part in the identification of design opportunities and the draft of future enhancement proposals.

Critical graphic interpretations, and photographic and video documentation, serve to appreciate the identity and the uniqueness of the place and bring into focus the present state of conservation. Quick perspective sketches and proportionate drawings in traditional representation methods (plan, elevation, and section) allow one to grasp the volumes and the spaces (Fig. 14) and comprehend the correlation between the different parts of the architecture and the links that bind them together.

The Centro Cultural Recoleta stands as a significant historical and architectural heritage, embodying the essence of Buenos Aires' rich and diversified urban context. Its presence within Recoleta is a testament to the cultural and historical significance of the area. As a key architectural landmark, it holds immense value, contributing to the overall identity and character of the neighborhood.

However, what truly sets the Centro Cultural Recoleta apart is its dynamic and ever-evolving nature. It is a complex work that continually transforms itself, defying traditional notions of permanence. Through its ephemeral cultural manifesto, the Centre showcases the power of artistic interventions to reshape and redefine the perception of architecture. These interventions breathe life into the building, infusing it with new meaning.



**Fig. 14** Analysis drawing. *Source* Own elaboration, 2023

Beyond its physical attributes, the Centro Cultural Recoleta also holds intangible heritage. It serves as an inclusive pole of social interaction and exchange, bringing together diverse communities and fostering connections. Colors become a means of rapid and economic urban transformation, instantly capturing attention and transforming the urban landscape. This opens up opportunities for artists and illustrators to showcase their talents and leave their mark on the built environment (Figs. 14 and 15).

The emphasis on color interventions within the Centro Cultural Recoleta is a product of the Argentine urban context, where color sensitivity plays a crucial role. The country's cultural affinity for vibrant colors is reflected in the Centre's artistic expressions, creating a visually captivating experience for all who visit. This



**Fig. 15** Analysis drawing. *Source* Own elaboration, 2023

phenomenon extends beyond Recoleta, with other vibrant neighborhoods like La Boca also showcasing the power of color in shaping the urban environment.

In conclusion, the Centro Cultural Recoleta stands as a unique and multifaceted landmark. It represents both significant historical and architectural heritage while welcoming constant change and artistic innovation. As an inclusive hub of social interaction and a pole of interest for locals and tourists, it fosters cultural exchange and engagement. The Centro Cultural Recoleta exemplifies the importance of preserving tangible and intangible heritage, while also embracing the transformative power of art, architecture, and color enriching the cultural fabric of Buenos Aires (Fig. 16).



**Fig. 16** Current situation of the intervention on the façade. June 2023. Courtesy of the *Registros del Centro de Documentación, Investigación y Publicaciones. CCR. Crédito fotográfico. Fotografía CCR. Archivo CeDIP. Centro Cultural Recoleta*

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