

PRICE \$7.99

THE

AUG. 1, 2016

NEW YORKER



ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

BODY OF WORK

A legendary architect, a conceptual artist, a hidden archive, and a mysterious diamond.

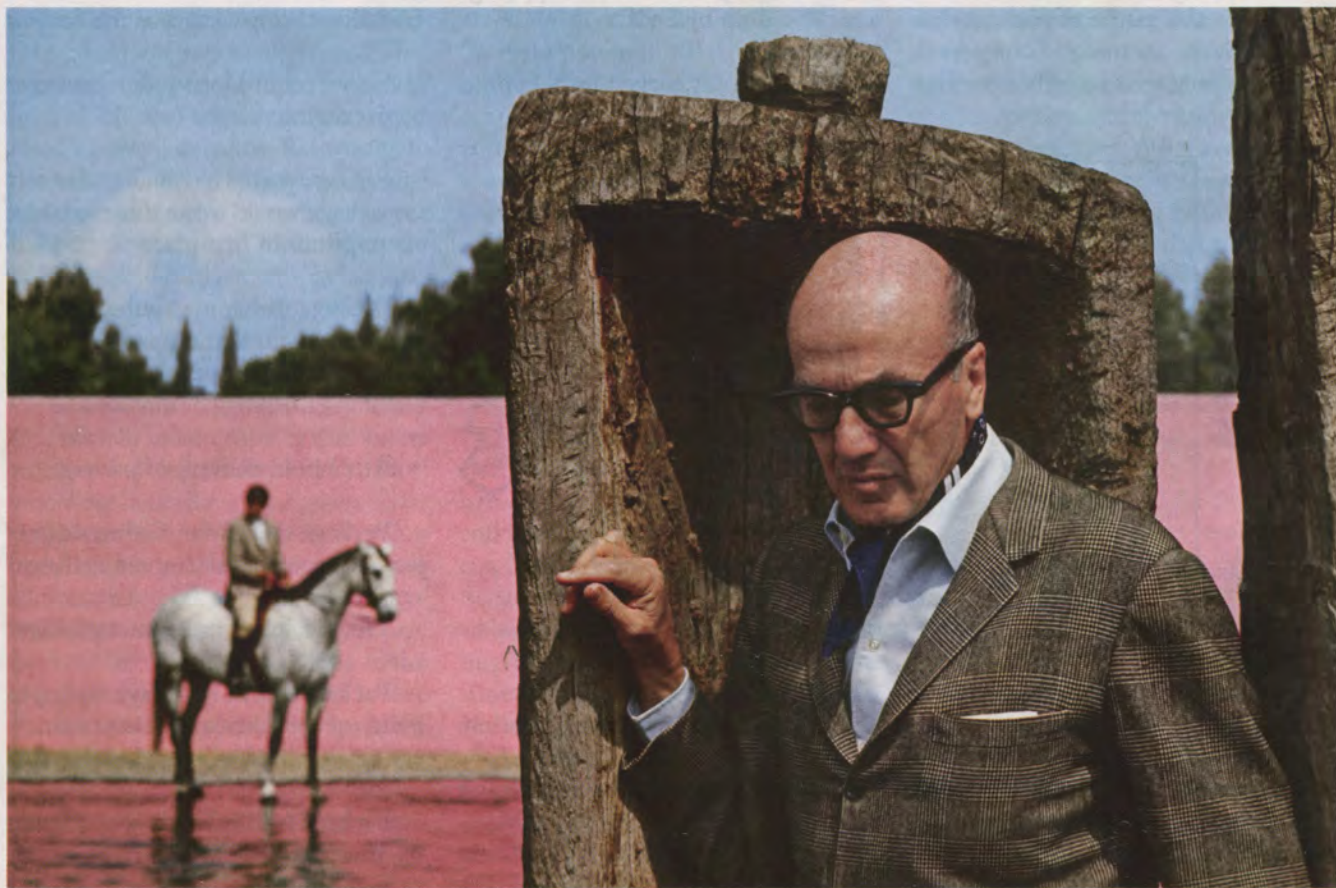
BY ALICE GREGORY

LAST SEPTEMBER, in Guadalajara, an American conceptual artist named Jill Magid and a pair of gravediggers convened at the Rotonda de los Jaliscienses Ilustres, a monument where the most celebrated citizens of the state of Jalisco are entombed. With them were two notaries and a handful of bureaucrats. It was just after eight in the morn-

ings, who died in 1988. They removed the urn from the cavity, brushing off dust and ants. Then they opened the vessel and presented it to Magid, who scooped out half a kilo of what looked like dirt and transferred it to a plastic bag, which she then put into a box. The next day, with the box in her carry-on, she flew home to New York.

open the small black box containing the jewel for hours, and, when she finally did, she cried. "It was way more emotional than I expected," she told me.

Mined diamonds are typically between one and three billion years old, but this one had been created in six months from Barragán's ashes by a company that specializes in compressing cremated human remains so that they can be worn as jewelry. The diamond sat in a fireproof safe in Magid's apartment for the next two weeks. At the end of the month, she flew with it to Guadalajara, Barragán's home town. She hadn't slept the night before she left, and she kept rummaging through her purse like a person convinced that she's lost her passport. She laughed at her-



Luis Barragán at the home he built for himself in Mexico City. The building is now a UNESCO World Heritage site.

ing, and the area was nearly silent. The quiet was disturbed by the sound of chisels striking stone. The gravediggers removed a metal plaque, then a cement wall, and, finally, a brick façade. More than an hour later, they hit what they were looking for: an oxidized copper urn, filled with the ashes of Luis Barragán, one of Mexico's greatest archi-

In April, a diamond—2.02 carats, rough-cut, with one polished facet—arrived in Manhattan. It was sent overnight from Switzerland, and Magid had been tracking its shipping status hourly online. The package was delivered to her husband's office, and after work he took it to Brooklyn, where they live with their two young sons. Magid did not

self as she did so. "I just need to make sure he's still in there," she said.

Barragán, who won the Pritzker Prize in 1980, is revered for his geometric, brightly colored buildings, all of them in Mexico, which blend vernacular hacienda elements with modernist influences from Europe and America. The architect Louis Kahn called him

“completely remarkable” and praised the home that Barragán designed for himself in Mexico City as “not merely a house but House itself.” But, since his death, Barragán has slipped from view, largely because of an odd arrangement concerning his archive and his copyrights. Since 1995, when both were purchased by a Swiss manufacturing family, the archive has been held in a bunker in Basel. Researchers have been denied access, and even the use of images of Barragán’s buildings is carefully controlled. Among those who study twentieth-century architecture, the inaccessibility of Barragán’s archive and the bizarre conditions of its custodianship have become almost as much of a preoccupation as his buildings.

Magid, whose art addresses issues of institutional power and the law, first heard about the archive four years ago. An elaborate plan began to form in her mind, an extended performance-art work in which all elements of the story—the architecture, the archive, those fighting over it, and Barragán himself—could be crystallized into a single gesture. “How,” Magid wondered, “does one insert oneself into a dead man’s life?”

IT WAS JACARANDA season in Guadalajara, and the streets were carpeted with purple blossoms. Magid headed to a grand, lemon-colored house in the city center, one of Barragán’s early buildings, which is now home to a Catholic university. It was late morning, and Magid had arranged to introduce Barragán’s family to their carbonized relative. A banquet table had been set up in the back garden. Fountains gurgled; parrots squawked; dogs barked on the other side of courtyard walls.

People began trickling into the garden. A man with a video camera circled. (A film unit, co-created by Laura Poitras, has commissioned Magid to make a documentary series about the Barragán project.) A little after noon, an elderly man with a Freud-style beard entered through a back gate. In one hand, he gripped a wooden cane carved to look like a horse; the other clasped the arm of his young granddaughter. It was Hugo Barragán, the architect’s nephew. Magid embraced him, and beckoned the group to the table. Hugo sat directly across from Magid, his head shaded by a mesh

baseball cap that was held aloft by a servant.

Magid took the box out of her purse and placed it on the table. She opened the lid and the sun hit the stone. Everyone gasped. Hugo peered at the diamond, as a nephew took a photograph on his phone. His granddaughter, tears in her eyes, took the diamond from the box and placed it in Hugo’s shrivelled hand. Magid explained that the diamond would be set in an engagement ring the next day.

Magid had contacted the family in 2014, inviting them to an extravagant dinner prepared by chefs who had once cooked for Barragán himself, in order to ask for their permission to exhume the ashes. Both the family and Magid were familiar with a widely circulated story—that the archive had been bought by a Swiss businessman as an engagement gift, in lieu of a ring, for his wife, Federica Zanco. Magid explained that her intention was to use the engagement ring with Barragán’s compressed remains to “propose” to Zanco, in the hope that she would, in exchange, agree to open the archive, perhaps even to return it to Mexico. The family members took a vote and agreed unanimously. “They became conceptual artists,” Magid recalled. “Here they were debating the tiny details of how the ring could go on tour, how long it could stay in Mexico, how I would propose. It was amazing.”

LUIS RAMIRO BARRAGÁN MORFÍN was born in 1902, into a wealthy, conservative family. He grew up between Guadalajara and a ranch thirty miles away. One of nine siblings, Barragán was an avid equestrian and a precocious aesthete. He once told a journalist that as a schoolboy, while out riding, he would notice “the play of shadows on the walls, how the afternoon sun gradually got weaker—although it was still light—and how the look of things changed, angles got smaller and straight lines stood out even more.” Photographs show Barragán as a boy, in tennis whites, posing in automobiles and airplanes.

He studied engineering and then travelled around Europe, admiring buildings and attending design fairs. After returning to Mexico, he got his first architectural commission and practiced in Guadalajara for almost a decade. In

1936, he moved to Mexico City, where he designed his most iconic works.

Barragán was a devout Catholic, and his work is characterized by a mixture of opulence and abnegation. “Where do you find more eroticism than in the cloister of a convent?” he once asked. His buildings are mostly residential, with anonymous perimeter walls that protect modestly sized but lavish interiors. Louis Kahn recalled that, in the sixties, he asked Barragán to help him design the courtyard garden at the Salk Institute and flew him out to San Diego to see the site. Barragán took one look at the expanse of concrete and said, “You are going to hate me, but there should be no tree here,” and went home, forsaking a commission from one of his most famous living colleagues.

Tall, blue-eyed, and bald from a young age, Barragán lived beautifully and tyrannically. He wore English sports jackets, silk shirts, and knitted ties; he had a Cadillac and employed a chauffeur. He enjoyed melon halves drizzled with sherry, and was known to have his maid prepare entirely pink meals. An architect friend recalled being disinvented to tea on several occasions because the light in the garden wasn’t right.

“You have no idea how much I hate small things, ugly things,” Barragán told the journalist Elena Poniatowska. “Yet the fragility of some women moves me.” Though he never married (and is thought by some to have been gay), his taste in women was particular: willowy, dark, with, as Poniatowska put it, “the big, hollow eyes of someone who has suffered.” Women recounted trying to lose weight in the weeks before visiting him. Barragán was generous with gifts, bringing small tokens of appreciation—silver boxes, flowers, packages of dates—even to casual lunches. He spoke gently and smiled often. He liked to read Proust, listen to classical music, and fantasize about the Russian gentry. Famously private, he despised his contemporaries’ infatuation with “uninhabitable” glass houses and thought that shadows were “a basic human need.” His work, likewise, was hidden: the residences were often within gated communities, the fountains protected by private courtyards. If there is a recurring criticism of Barragán, it is that he was undemocratic. He spent

Sundays at an equestrian club, and when someone accused him of “only designing homes for rich people,” he allegedly replied, “And horses.”

I met Andrés Casillas, an architect now in his eighties who was a protégé of Barragán's, at his home, an hour and a half from Mexico City. He had perfectly coiffed white hair and wore a fine cashmere sweater. His home had an austere, siesta-like feel that was unmistakably Barragánesque. He spoke slowly and with exaggerated gallantry. “This is stupid to say, but Barragán was a gentleman,” he told me. Casillas talked about meeting Barragán for the first time. He was eight years old, and had wandered around the “magical” garden of Barragán's house for half an hour, after which Barragán presented him with a small glass of *rom-pope*, an eggnog-like liquor prepared by nuns. “I left absolutely mesmerized,” he said.

The hypnosis was by design. Barragán believed that architects should make “houses into gardens, and gardens into houses.” He made blueprints premised on surprise and an almost perverse protraction of pleasure. Low, dark corridors open into blindingly bright rooms with church-high ceilings. Floor plans only gradually make themselves evident to the visitor. He called it “architectural striptease.”

Walking through Barragán's home, which was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2004, one feels a sense of coercion, and Barragán himself never completely disappears. Keith Eggner, an architectural historian who made a pilgrimage to Barragán's house soon after he died, recalled his impressions with the hesitant laughter of someone who's embarrassed to tell the truth. “Even when it was run-down, it was a ravishing house,” he said. “I remember having this feeling of really wanting to spend the night there—not just to sleep in the house but to sleep *with* the house.”

JILL MAGID WORKS in a light-flooded studio in a converted factory in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. The room is stuffed with her research—books on Barragán, a postcard from the mausoleum in Jalisco,

a black-and-white photograph of a young woman to whom Barragán once wrote love letters, pictures of a chair he designed.

Conceptual artists have a reputation for being cerebral and theory-laden, but Magid comes off as curious, self-deprecating, quick to laugh and pantomime. She has a disarming charisma, of which she is well aware and even a bit leery. “Listen,” she said after a few weeks of near-constant conversation. “I know how I come across. I make lots of jokes and seem to take things lightly, but that's just how I talk. I want you to know that I am very, very serious about my work.” Now forty-three, she has exhibited internationally at galleries and museums, including the Tate Modern and the Whitney.

Magid was born and grew up in Connecticut, and her artistic talent was recognized early. In first grade, she had a solo exhibit at her school with drawings of animals that she had copied from her father's *Encyclopædia Britannica*. She studied art at Cornell and, not long after graduation, worked as an assistant and a researcher for the poet Frederick Seidel. A year and a half later, she entered a master's program at M.I.T.

In 2002, as an artist in residence at the Rijksakademie, in Amsterdam, Magid began noticing the large number of surveillance cameras in the city—anonymous gray boxes, mounted on everything from the corners of buildings to coffee-shop awnings. One February morning, she went to the police headquarters and explained that she was an artist interested in decorating the municipal cameras with rhinestones. She was directed to the appropriate police administrators, who told her that they did not work with artists. She thanked them and left. A few weeks later, Magid returned, armed with business cards and a corporate-speak sales pitch, presenting herself as the Head Security Ornamentation Professional at System Azure, a company that she had made up. The police not only allowed her to bedazzle the cameras but even paid her a couple of thousand dollars. “I realized that they

could not hear me when I spoke as an artist,” Magid later said. “This had nothing to do with what I proposed but with who I was.”

The impish venture touched on a theme that Magid has returned to again and again, in increasingly ambitious ways. Her aim with most of her work is to humanize institutional power structures, subtly undermining them while adhering to the letter of their regulations: exploiting legal escape clauses and other red tape, and forging relationships with civil servants. She has ensconced herself in the Dutch secret service and been trained by a New York City cop. She once got members of a surveillance team from Liverpool's police force to direct her through a public square with her eyes closed. In 2008, she told me, a Dutch government official warned her that she was considered a national-security threat. Though she cares deeply about how her work looks, she has less in common with other artists than with people whose jobs are not typically thought of as artistic: spies, investigative journalists, forensic experts.

Magid's work can seem like a series of extended pranks, but when I suggested this to her she was aghast. “No!” she exclaimed. She laughed but seemed genuinely distressed. “I hate mean-spirited work,” she said. “It's about the engagement. A prank doesn't engage. A prank is: you throw something in and watch what happens. This is a commitment.” Still, people often ask Magid why anyone ever agrees to collaborate with her. She has said that she thinks it is “due to some combination of vanity, pride, and loneliness.”

BARRAGÁN HAD BEEN ill for several years by the time he succumbed to Parkinson's, at the age of eighty-six, on November 22, 1988. Even in his final illness, lying on a monastically narrow bed, he remained exquisitely attired, in a tweed jacket, a crisp white shirt, and an ascot. In his will, Barragán divided his architectural legacy between two people. He entrusted the task of choosing an appropriate architectural institution for his library to his friend the architect Ignacio Díaz Morales. To his business partner, Raul Ferrera, he bequeathed



"all author rights and documents, movies, drawings, designs, sketches, mock-ups, and originals of work."

Díaz Morales quickly fulfilled his duty, establishing a foundation that now manages Barragán's house—the museum Casa Luis Barragán—and oversees his library, personal correspondence, and art collection. The fate of the professional archive was more tortuous. Ferrera was, as one person put it to me, "strange—you saw him and you felt uneasy." As the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* reported, he spent five years suing, among others, the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, a Mexican television tycoon, and Francis Ford Coppola (over a delayed payment). Max Protetch, a New York City art dealer who specializes in architectural drawings, got wind of the archive and inquired about buying it. In April, 1993, Ferrera hanged himself across the street from Barragán's house. "He thought he would inherit not just the studio but the prestige and the talent," someone involved with the foundation told me. "Of course, we know it doesn't turn out that way."

The archive became the property of Ferrera's widow, who tried to sell it to various Mexican institutions, but none of them were willing to pay her asking price of more than a million dollars, so she ended up consigning the archive to Protetch. Boxes of papers arrived at his gallery in SoHo. They were so heavy that the first night after they arrived

Protetch panicked, fearing that his floor would give way. "I called everyone I could get hold of," he told me. "We scattered them around the gallery until I could call in an engineer."

At about the time that the archive arrived in New York, its eventual custodian arrived in Mexico. Federica Zanco, an Italian architectural historian in her early thirties, had become interested in Barragán's work and wanted to visit his house. She arrived in Mexico City with her fifty-two-year-old Swiss boyfriend, Rolf Fehlbaum, the head of Vitra, a furniture company founded by his parents. (Modern design has always been central to the firm's identity; it manufactures furniture by Charles and Ray Eames, Isamu Noguchi, and others, and its campus, near Basel, is dotted with buildings by star architects.)

Casa Barragán wasn't yet open, but the head of the foundation, Juan Palomar, got several phone calls saying that two "very important people from Switzerland" were in town to see Barragán's house. He invited them over and watched as they took in the house. "It was, as the French say, *coup de foudre*, instant love," he told me. In late 1994, the couple flew to New York, eventually buying the archive for a reported three million dollars, and shipped it to the Vitra headquarters, where it has remained ever since.

The archive is said to contain thir-

teen and a half thousand drawings, seventy-five hundred photographic prints, eighty-two photographic panels, seventy-eight hundred slides, two hundred and ninety publications concerning Barragán's work, fifty-four publications collected by Barragán, seven files of clippings, seven architectural models, several files of manuscripts, notes, lists, and correspondence, and also pieces of furniture and other objects. To administer the archive, Zanco founded a not-for-profit organization called the Barragan Foundation (sans accent). The foundation also acquired Barragán photographs taken by his official photographer, Armando Salas Portugal. The Barragan Foundation owns not only the physical materials in both archives but also, according to its Web site, the "complete rights to the name and oeuvre of Luis Barragán, and to all photographs by Armando Salas Portugal related to the oeuvre of Luis Barragán."

"At first, we thought, Marvellous," Palomar said. "Instead of having the archive sold by the piece, we have it with a responsible woman, a scholar, a friend." But since then architects, students, historians, and museum staff members have been refused access to the archive. Zanco's line has been that access is restricted while she prepares a catalogue raisonné of Barragán's work, but, twenty years later, the catalogue has yet to appear, and many doubt that it ever will. Artists and museums interested in exhibiting Barragán's work have been warned off, and negotiations over access can be surreal. One researcher was asked by Zanco for a list of exactly which documents he wished to study—an impossibility, since there is no public inventory.

Zanco is also quick to assert ownership of photographic rights. Although technically the foundation owns only Barragán images taken by his official photographer, in practice the situation is more fraught. Magnum, which represents another photographer who shot much of Barragán's work, advises people to also consult Zanco directly for full licensing. When Magid asked why, she was told that Zanco had sent the agency a letter maintaining that, because she owns the work, she also owns all the photographic representations of



"Other countries are laughing at us!"

it. "My American lawyer and my British lawyer both say that's bullying," Magid told me. "It's very hard to know with Federica what her rights really are and what she's manipulating the law to represent."

The story of Barragán's archive has both enraged and fascinated Mexico City's intelligentsia for years. A 1998 article in *La Jornada* compared Zanco's acquisition to the conquistadors' pillaging of Mexican soil for gold and silver. But even Barragán's most patriotic admirers admit, grudgingly, that the archive is technically in good hands—well organized, temperature-controlled. Palomar said the real blame lies with the Mexican government. "It was their obligation to acquire these documents," he told me. His sister Maria Palomar, however, said, "Federica is a nuisance, that's all." Most other people complained of her only off the record, saying that they feared their future work would be impeded. Some speculate on the psychological motivations behind Zanco's behavior. "It might be a problem of being too close," Patricio del Real, a curatorial assistant at MOMA, said. "When you're so close, you believe you're the only one who knows the correct way of understanding a person."

MAGID HEARD ABOUT the archive by coincidence: her gallery in Mexico City, Labor, is across the street from Casa Barragán. "It intrigued me as a gothic love story," she has said, "with a copyright-and-intellectual-property-rights subplot." In early 2013, Magid contacted Zanco through an intermediary, to introduce herself as an artist working on a project about Barragán, and asked if she might visit the archive. Zanco replied that she was "completely unable to allow access to the collection, nor be of any help to third parties." A few months later, Magid sent a handwritten request, explaining that she had an upcoming show on Barragán in New York. She invited Zanco to curate pieces from her archive for inclusion. She signed off, "With Warmth and Admiration." Zanco declined to collaborate, and warned, "I trust you would make yourself aware of the possible copyright implications of any sort of reproduction, and clear the related permissions,

procedure and mandatory credits."

That November, in Tribeca, Magid produced an exhibition about the impasse, "Woman with Sombrero," which later travelled to Guadalajara. The show was a multimedia installation, with images of Barragán's work, slide projections, and an iPad displaying the correspondence between Magid and Zanco. Objects were placed in teasing juxtaposition, in a way that suggested connections and narratives without insisting on them. Copies of books that Barragán had sent to various women lay on a bedside table that Magid had fabricated based on one of his designs. In what a press release described as "flirtation with the institutional structures involved," Magid went to extreme lengths to stay just the right side of copyright law. Rather than reproduce Barragán images from Zanco's book, for instance, Magid framed a copy of the book itself. The show was written up in the *Times*, and the article was not flattering to Zanco. Magid was quoted asking, "What's the difference between loving something and loving something so much that you smother it?"

After the *Times* took an interest, Magid and Zanco's correspondence became friendlier—either because Zanco now appreciated Magid's work or because she realized that anything she wrote could end up as material in future shows. "Thank you for your company," Zanco wrote at one point. "I feel definitely less lonely down in the archives." The tone of their letters became familiar but measured. At no point did Magid mention her plan to make a diadem out of Barragán.

Magid agrees with those who argue that the Barragán archive should be open to the public and returned to Mexico, but she insists that this is not her focus. "If that's what my intentions were, I don't think I'd make art," she told me. "I've always called the archive her lover. To marry one man, she negotiated owning another man, whom she's devoted her life to. It's a weird love triangle, and I'm the other woman."

AT 5 A.M. on May 31st, Magid woke up in St. Gallen, a small city in eastern Switzerland. She couldn't get back to sleep, and took a long walk through the dim, cobblestoned streets. Weeks

bon appétit

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earlier, she had told Zanco that she would be in Switzerland, and Zanco agreed to meet.

Magid had been in town for two days, preparing for a new exhibition that focussed on the diamond ring. The show, which opened in June and will travel to the San Francisco Art Institute in September, was spread across several rooms. In one, an impressionistically edited video of Barragán's exhumation played on a loop. In another, all the correspondence and legal contracts between Magid, the Barragán family, and the Mexican government were displayed in vitrines. Viewers could walk through a doorway of Barragán's exact height into a darkened space where the ring was displayed, along with a letter from Magid to Zanco explaining the proposal.

Midmorning, with the ring in her purse, Magid drove two hours west, over green hills and through glacier-carved valleys, toward Basel. The Vitra campus, a quarter of an hour's drive from the center of town, is a kind of theme park of modern design, with buildings by Zaha Hadid, Tadao Ando, Álvaro Siza, Frank Gehry, and others. Just before one o'clock, Magid sat down outside a Cubist-looking structure designed by Herzog & de Meuron, which houses a Vitra store and café. She heard a door swing behind her, and a voice: "Jill? We're already here. Come inside."

Magid was disconcerted; she'd expected Zanco to be alone. She followed Zanco in. Fehlbau was there, seated, his back to a glass wall, and greeted her warmly. Zanco sat down beside him and gestured for Magid to take a seat across from them.

"I brought you this," Magid said, taking a bottle of champagne from her bag. It was wrapped in an announcement of her St. Gallen show. Zanco removed the paper and thanked her. For the next hour, over lunch, the three of them talked—about architecture fairs, Art Basel, Magid's background. After the plates had been cleared, Magid said, "So, let's talk about why I came and what I want to show you."

She removed the ring box from her purse, opened it, and placed it in the center of the table, facing Zanco. "This

diamond was made from the cremated remains of Luis Barragán," she said. She explained that she had heard from many people that the archive had been a wedding present, and that Zanco had asked for it instead of an engagement ring. "I know how stories can start and change," she hedged. "But this is what I heard. I think the story is beautiful, and it's what got me started on this project."

Fehlbau and Zanco smiled, eyebrows raised in astonishment. "I don't remember the exact details," Fehlbau said eventually. "The funny thing with memory is you don't remember the event, you remember the story again and again, and it then becomes fact."

Magid wasn't sure whether to take this as confirmation or denial. She explained how the stone came into being—about Barragán's relatives, the exhumation, and the crystallization process. She said that she had written a letter, a proposal of sorts, for Zanco. She said she had planned to read it aloud, but the noise of the café and Fehlbau's presence made her think that it might be better if Zanco just read it to herself, later. Zanco laughed and said, "You are proposing to me with my husband right here!" Fehlbau joked that perhaps he should go to the rest room, and then asked, "So what, exactly, is the proposal?" Magid turned to Zanco. "If you accept this ring, you will return the archive to Mexico," she said. "I am offering you the body for the body of work."

Zanco responded by asking about the technicalities of turning ashes into a diamond, and about Magid's show. "And you are now going to show this?" she asked, pointing to the diamond.

"Yes," Magid said. "It will be on view."

Fehlbau smiled. "I have to say," he said, "I'm so impressed by this. The endurance—I feel the energy from you." Zanco nodded.

Magid put the ring back into her bag and handed Zanco the letter. It praised Zanco's single-minded guardianship of the archive and outlined the terms of the proposal: "The ring will always be available to you, and to you alone, whenever you are ready to open the archive to the

public in Mexico. You once confided to me that you have been lonely down in the archive. With this ring, I propose that you needn't feel alone anymore. Will you let me help you share it?"

TWO DAYS LATER, I went to Vitra's headquarters. I had a two o'clock appointment with Zanco and waited in the building's airy atrium, another Frank Gehry design. Smartly dressed professionals moved efficiently through the bright, twisting space, past gleaming white desks and espresso machines. I heard a cheerful "Hello!" and turned around to see a tall, slim woman with caramel-colored hair. Though I knew that Zanco was from Venice, I'd somehow thought of her as Swiss—with icicle-sharp features and a snowy complexion. But she greeted me with the exaggerated hand gestures and a syllable-punctuating laugh universally associated with Italians. She led me to a table, and someone brought very good coffee, whose quality Zanco disparaged and apologized for.

She told me her story. She met Fehlbau in 1989, at the opening of the Vitra Design Museum. She was living in Milan and working at an architecture magazine. She noticed a man get into a blue Alfa Romeo and took note of his good taste. She described seeing Casa Barragán for the first time as an epiphany, and said that, initially, she and Fehlbau had been thinking only of organizing a Barragán show at Vitra. But then she went to New York—"just to see what the stuff was"—and was amazed by the extent of the archive. She and Fehlbau arranged to purchase it in its entirety. It arrived in Switzerland in March, 1995.

Zanco began working on the archive with the help of a single assistant, a Finnish student. "The first seven years, I was really alone," she said. "Alone and thinking all day about a dead man. Well, there was the silent Finnish girl, too. And I do remember her with fondness, but she was completely silent." Zanco began travelling to Mexico to research Barragán, and started to realize the depth of resentment aroused by the sale of the archive. "Mexico is very personal," she said, "which can be a good thing and a bad thing." Her name and photograph



appeared in the newspapers. "It was hopeless," she said, laughing.

In 2000, Vitra's design museum and the Barragán Foundation mounted an exhibit of material from the archive, which travelled across Europe and to Japan and Mexico. Zanco produced a catalogue for the show, "Luis Barragán: The Quiet Revolution." There were various obstacles to further progress, however. Zanco had recently had a child, then her parents died. "I grossly underestimated the time line," she said. Zanco is now working with four other scholars to complete the catalogue—which has swelled to two volumes, each more than nine hundred pages, with four thousand reproductions.

Zanco firmly denied that the archive had been an engagement present. "This story is too good to be true," she said. When I mentioned that I'd heard it from many people, she laughed and said, "We are talking about Mexico here, the land of magical realism."

Zanco was careful to praise Magid's project. "I found it very touching," she said. "That it—he—was between us, there next to a cappuccino." She called Magid hardworking, intelligent, and charming. "Jill has done a beautiful telenovela," she said. "Everything started because I said no the first time Jill asked for access to the archive. How do you react to a no? I think it has to do with your relationship to authority. I would just say, 'All right, never mind,' but Jill makes art."

She pointed out that her goals were very different from Magid's. "I would like to ask Jill, With your work, will you be able to face the facts?" she said. "You say it should go back to Mexico. Back to whom? Under what circumstances?" She went on, "She's right. Institutional control is cold, unfriendly, and bureaucratic. But foundations are established to address problems." Zanco said she was worried that endless reproduction of the same sun-drenched Barragán images had cheapened the architect's work. "More and more, Barragán is becoming the Frida Kahlo of architecture," she said. "People ask for pictures, and they want them now! You agree, and then you see them in a spread in a fashion magazine for something about how pink is the new color for spring."



Zanco sighed but quickly recovered her brightness. "So," she said, "would you like to see the archive?"

ALTHOUGH SWITZERLAND hasn't been engaged in military conflict for more than a hundred and fifty years, a vast network of subterranean fallout shelters exist hidden beneath the country's surface. The one that houses the archive, directly under Vitra's headquarters, has a reinforced door, and it required the full force of Zanco's body to open it. Inside, it smelled almost like fresh snow.

The room was undecorated, with numbered blue file cabinets—Barragán's own—against a back wall and newer flat-file drawers on the opposite wall; floor-to-ceiling shelves filled with acid-free boxes stood on both sides, and there were two tables in the center of the room. Zanco led me to a small adjoining office, which, unlike the rest of the space, had a window. She pulled up blinds to reveal an inch-thick strip of light atop dirt and grass—a mole's-eye view of the world. "This was my view for seven years," she said. "I became very pale down here."

She motioned for me to follow her to a table, where she put on a pair of white gloves and carefully began opening a flat folder. Inside was a vibrant pastel sketch of Las Arboledas, a public fountain that Barragán built in Mexico City in 1962. It looked nothing like

any architectural plan I'd ever seen, with fluid gestures and dense lines. Under the first sketch was another and another, charting the evolution of the design. I asked Zanco if she ever felt bored by what appeared to be painstaking, lonely work. "Bored?" she said. "Never. But I was in despair often." She went on, "I'm a self-doubting person by nature. I'm not a genius. I am a working horse. I know that. And still, after all these years, I have so little to show. It's demoralizing to be confronted with such criticism and aggressions. Am I doing something wrong? I have asked myself that many times."

We walked around the room once more. Zanco complained that the hectic development of Mexico City means that many Barragán buildings are being torn down. "Every day down here I walk through Mexico City, and I see Barragán buildings destroyed. I see the silent, rapid destruction of his actual legacy, all while his biography and his colorful house get more popular." As she motioned toward the exit, she added, "I understand, though. If you conserve everything, there is no room for life." ♦

Raised Eyebrows Department

From the University of Rochester's graduate-student newsletter.

SHARE YOUR NATIVE TONGUE—AND GET A TASTE FOR OTHERS