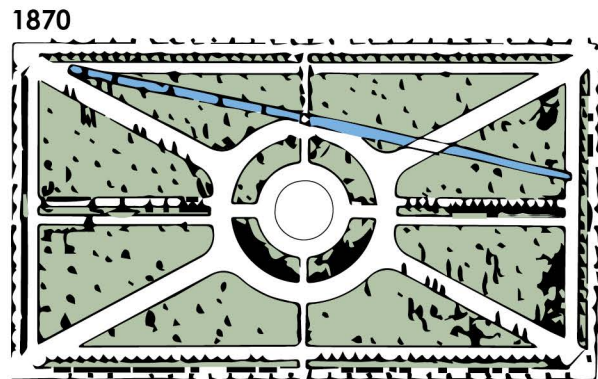


Pershing Square is L.A.'s oldest park, and probably the one that has been renovated the most times. This constant evolution has become part of its history and of its identity, and it's a process that's still ongoing today.

Everything began in 1849, when surveyor E.O. Ord divided what we now call Downtown Los Angeles into a grid of blocks. Pershing Square was defined as a rectangle named Block 15.

Much of the land was unmarked and undeveloped, and for decades Ord's streets were ignored by the people who lived in the area.



Block 15 was not an attractive site; it was interrupted by the presence of a stream and a road with heavy wagon traffic.

1866 - The square was declared a Spanish plaza and receives the name of La Plaza Abaja.

1870 - The park was renamed "Los Angeles Park".

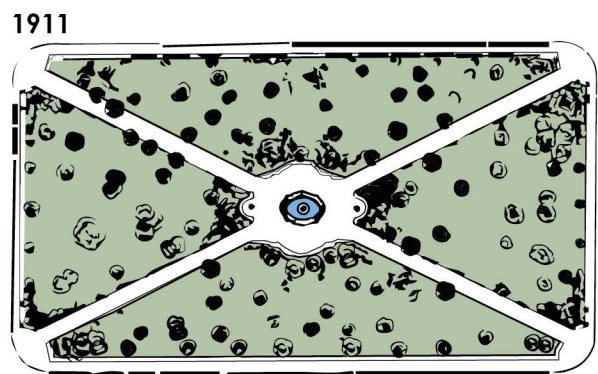
A low picket fence was installed around the park, and surrounded by short trees. More trees and bushes were also added to the park.



1886 - First official park plan.

City engineer Fred Eaton sketched a plan that included graveled pathways, ornamental vegetation, flower beds, and a bandstand.

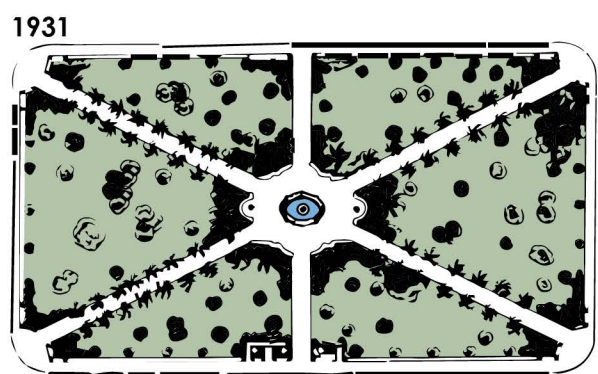
The park was renamed 6th Street Park.



1911 - Architect John Parkinson redesigned the park in a formal and symmetrical Beaux Arts style.

Parkinson's design kept a path around the perimeter of the square while diagonal walkways led to a circular plaza in the center, where the bandstand was replaced by a formal fountain.

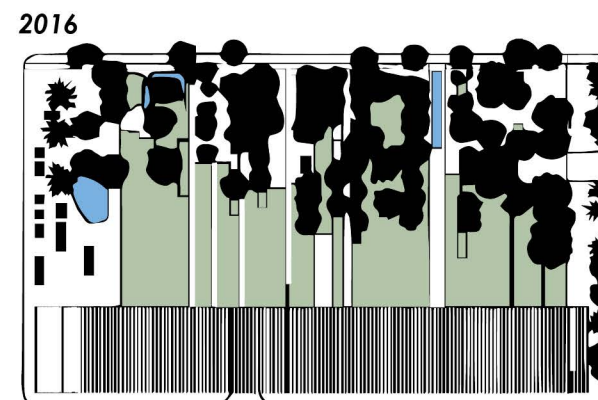
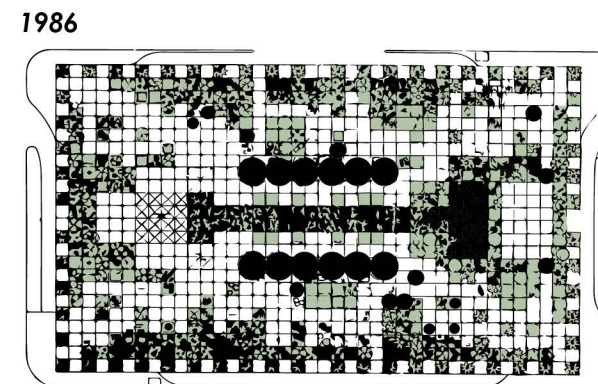
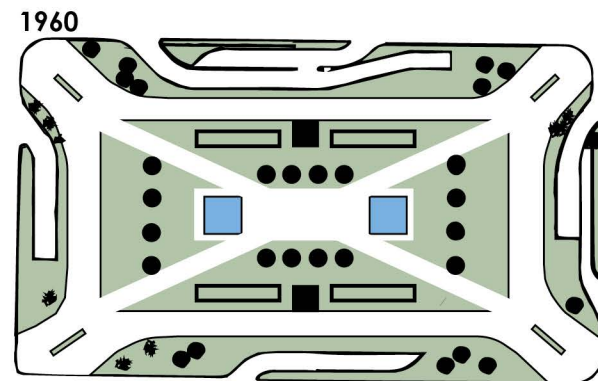
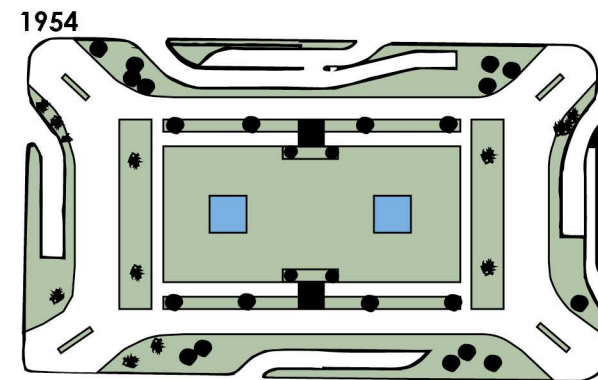
1918 - The park was named Pershing Square in honor of the World War I general.



1920s - Tropical plants were added to the park.

1924 - a statue of a World War I doughboy, sculpted by Humberton Pedretti, was added to the park.

1932 - a statue of Ludwig van Beethoven was added to honor the founder of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, William Andrews Clark, Jr.



1951 - the park was raised from the street, and an 1800-car underground parking garage was built below it.

The lush landscaping that was characteristic of the park for decades was removed. Palm trees that were removed were sent to be used in Disneyland's Jungle Cruise.

1954 - two fountains designed by architect Stiles O. Clements were added to the park.

1960s - Decline of the park

The parking additions of the 1950s made it difficult for pedestrians to move through the park freely, and over time it fell into disuse. It became dirty and associated with crime.

Minor improvements were made by adding planters and flower beds, but they didn't succeed in changing public opinion.

1986 - A redesign competition attracted 242 entries from 17 countries.

The winning design was produced by SITE, a New York architectural firm headed by James Wines.

The "magic Carpet" design featured an undulating concrete canopy that covered the underground garage, shaped in a regular grid inspired by the pattern of Los Angeles as seen from the air.

1988 - Construction was supposed to begin but it was abandoned due to financial and political problems.

1994 - Pershing Square was given its current design by architect Ricardo Legorreta, landscape architect Laurie Olin, and artist Barbara McCarrren.

The postmodern design is characterized by a purple bell tower, abstract geometry, and compartmentalized spaces.

The design includes a number of works of public art that allude to the city's history.

Despite these extreme makeovers, the park has again fallen into disuse. Overcoming the presence of the underground garage has proved to be a continuing challenge to achieving a successful public space.

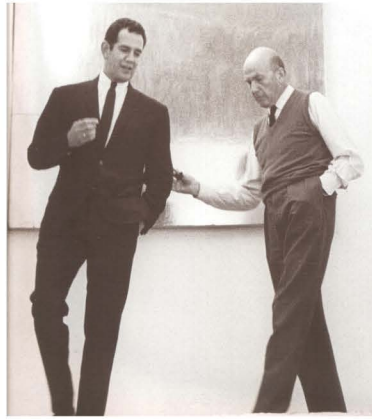
2016 - New design competition to remake the park.

Won by landscape architecture firm Agence Ter, the base principle of the design is to put the square back again on the same level as its surroundings: "radical flatness".

A redesign of the roof of the parking structure will allow the creation of a continuous surface and a return the historic flatness to the park, to be continuous with the city sidewalks, and accessible without any stairs or walls.

PERSHING SQUARE - THE 1994 DESIGN

TERESITA LARRAIN



Ricardo Legorreta and Luis Barragan



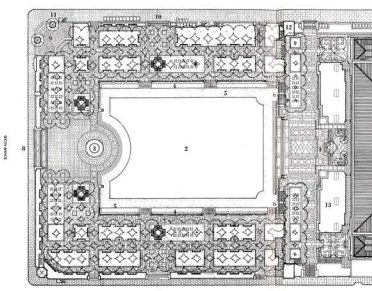
Camino Real Hotel, Mexico City, Ricardo Legorreta, 1968.



Casa Barragan, Mexico, Luis Barragan, 1948.



16th Street Mall, Denver, Laurie Olin, 1985



Bryant Park, Laurie Olin, 1992

The current design of Pershing Square was built in 1994. It's a collaboration between architect Ricardo Legorreta, landscape architect Laurie Olin, and artist Barbara McCarren.

Trying to overcome past failures to revive the park, they believed that a radical redesign would erase the bad image the square had gained over the years.

The team was selected with the aim of fulfilling one of the main goals for the new square: to have a park that represented both the Latino and Anglo populations of the city.

Ricardo Legorreta was a Mexican architect and a follower of the legacy that Luis Barragan had left behind, with beliefs on national identity and contextual architecture. His design strategy was emotional rather than rational, and evocative and figurative instead of abstract. Like Barragan, he didn't favor the modern glass curtain wall, but instead preferred a thick wall construction, with a sense of enclosure and stability common in traditional Mexican adobe buildings.

Legorreta loved using color in his work and he thought white buildings were essentially aggressive. He also had the ability to combine vernacular Mexican colors and textures with the highly geometric shapes of modernism. His designs allude to theatricality and a sense of procession, ideas that are strongly represented in his design for Pershing Square.

Laurie Olin is an American landscape architect based in Philadelphia who was already well known for major urban interventions such as Denver's 16th Street Mall in 1985 and the renovation of Bryant Park in New York in 1992.

Barbara McCarren is an artist from Los Angeles who, in 1994, had recently graduated and was chosen to function as the local contact of the design team. Pershing Square was her first public artwork intervention.

The architects considered the square too big to function as a single space, so they strategically divided it into two rectangular areas linked by an east-west walkway and a central crossing dominated by a low building painted yellow. The change in level from North to South is achieved along this center line by means of a wide ramp and steps.

Six entrances, one at each corner, and two others on Olive and Hill, lead into the square, generating a more controlled access than before - a flaw from the previous design they were trying to improve - and entry into the square feels more like an event.

The garage ramps leading to the underground parking have been reduced in width and are screened by vegetation, and the square is now completely surrounded by walkable sidewalks.

The overall design aesthetic of the square is Postmodern, a style that was born when, at the end of the 20th century, designers started to move away from modern functionalism which they considered boring and unwelcoming. Instead, they turned towards the past, quoting past aspects of historic and traditional buildings and blending them with fresh ideas to create a new language of design.

"Postmodernism values complexity over simplicity, decoration over minimalism, color over the monochrome,"
Owen Hopkins, author of Postmodern Architecture: Less Is a Bore.

Pershing Square is made of hardscapes and grass areas that can support concerts, gatherings and public activities. The design is full of bright colors, a recurrent resource of Ricardo Legorreta's architecture, rich in contrast and intense hue.

The square is decorated with a fountain, monuments and statues, a large seating area, and an elevated mayan-style amphitheater. Throughout the park, there are symbols of California, and many of its features allude to historical aspects of Los Angeles.

On the east edge, a 10-story tall purple tower serves as a focal point and main attraction.

Although the character of the park was totally transformed from its previous condition, the designers still had to live with the obstructive presence of the parking garage. Today, this limitation is one of most criticized aspects of the park, but at the time the property owners in charge of the renovation process saw it as a beneficial security feature.

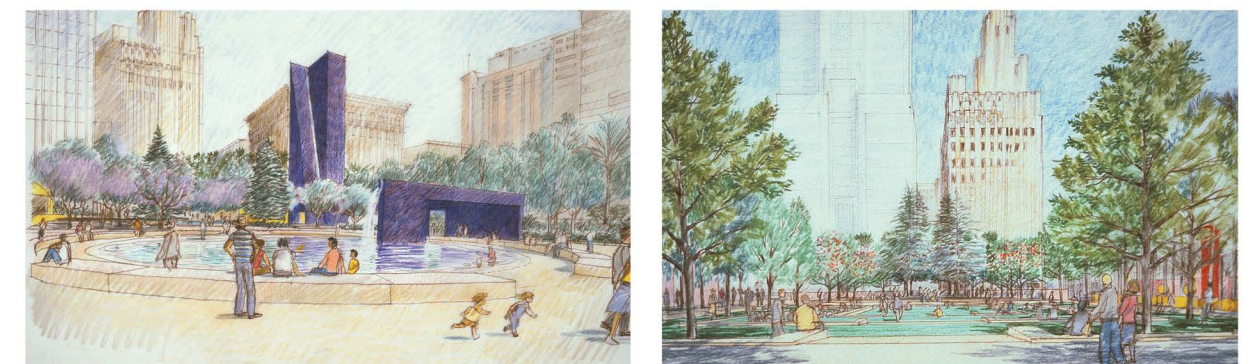
The park has also been derided as having a dated design aesthetic. It seems that for many people, the Postmodern style has not aged well.



Pershing Square dedication, September 1994



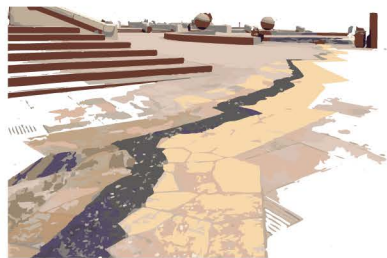
Location plan based on square layout from 1991 design plan drawing of Pershing Square by Ricardo Legorreta



1991 perspective drawings of Pershing Square design by Ricardo Legorreta

PERSHING SQUARE: DESIGN ELEMENTS AND SYMBOLISM

TERESITA LARRAIN



A hardscape installation designed by artist Barbara McCarren evokes an earthquake fault.



The bright yellow cafe building overlooks the park and evokes European squares.



Three telescopes located outside the cafe show views of three eras: 1888, 1943 and the present.

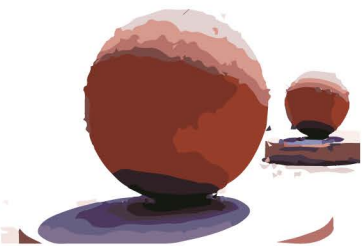


Terrazzo versions of constellations visible in Southern California's night skies mimic the stars on Hollywood's 'Walk of Fame'.

To the north, bordering 5th Street, there is a raised section intended to function as an outdoor stage for public performances. It is planted with Canary Island palms and is the highest point of the square.

Facing the raised section is an informal amphitheater of low concrete benches designed to accommodate an audience of up to 2,000 people. The benches are laid out in an abstract, indigenous-inspired pattern over a green lawn.

Both playgrounds were built in 2015 in paved areas that were originally planted with trees on a grid. The design was the result of a public competition.



Large orange spheres around the fountain are a nod to the orange groves found throughout the region prior to urbanization.



A quote describing Pershing Square as a microcosm of Los Angeles by writer Carey McWilliams is inscribed on the back of the bench near the fountain.



Another reminder of the city's past is found in the porcelain postcards of historic Los Angeles embedded in the square's benches.

A line of tall pink stucco cylinders on the northeastern edge of the park defines the boundary of a sculpture garden that includes historic statues previously located in the square.

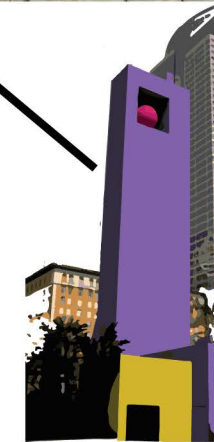


A water feature fed by an aqueduct extending from the base of the tower falls into a big round pool.



A small orange grove is planted in recognition of the historically significant Wolfskill grove planted in Los Angeles in 1841.

Collage layout of Pershing Square based on Google Earth and 1991 design plan by Ricardo Legorreta.



The 10-story purple bell tower is meant to contrast with the traditional Biltmore Hotel building and the tall glass office buildings nearby.

At the top of the tower, a square cutout houses a pink sphere, an abstraction of the traditional bell.



PERSHING SQUARE: THE TOWER AND FOUNTAIN

TERESITA LARRAIN

The square's most emblematic design features are the 10-story purple bell tower and geometric fountain, both designed as interpretations of the city's history and culture. For Legorreta purple is an emotional color, a color that encourages happiness and positivity.

"It's one of those things that you cannot explain. That has no function. It's just purely aesthetic. But it becomes the symbol of the place." Ricardo Legorreta

The tower is made up of a tall right-angle triangle attached to an equally tall rectangle with a square cut-out at the top, containing a pink sphere

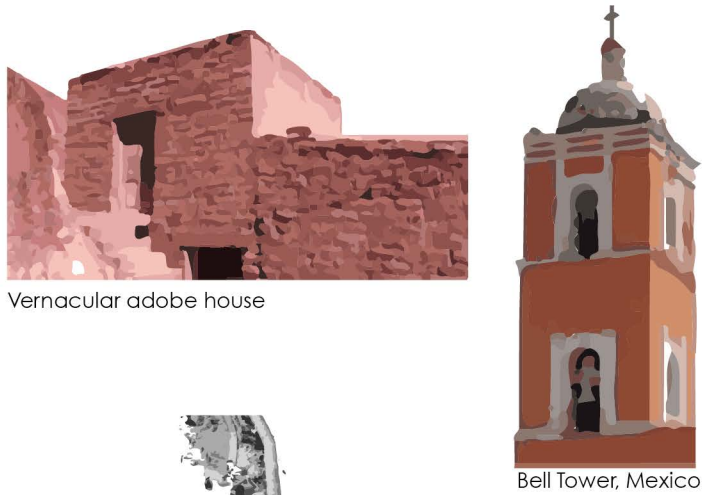
reminiscent of the traditional bell tower found in the squares of Mexico. The bell tower plays music automatically from a CD player at the top, from classical to pop, but all recorded in carillon bells.

The wall that connects the tower and the fountain is perforated by square and rectangular holes to create "windows" that frame views of the street inspired by the thick walls and perforations of traditional Mexican adobe architecture.

This is the area of Pershing Square where Legorreta fully shows his affection for the work of Luis Barragán, who pioneered the use of flat, bright colors,

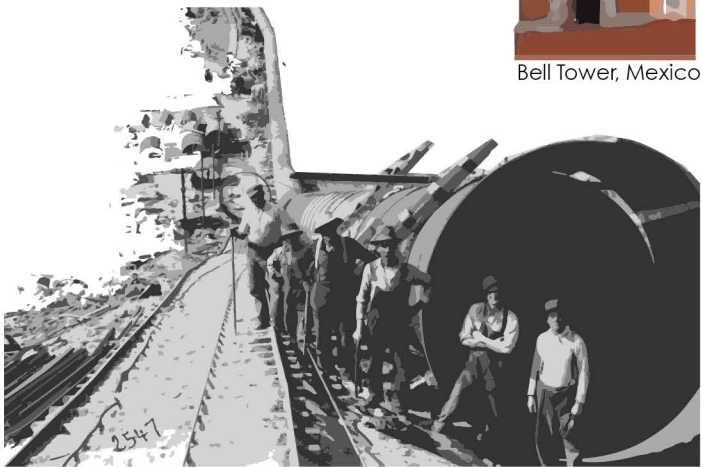
and geometric forms with cut-outs to capture light and shadow since the 1940s.

The fountain, clearly inspired by Barragan's work, also attempts to recall the pipes of the aqueducts of L.A. It is built like an aqueduct running on top of the perforated wall with a stream of water falling off the end corner into a pool whose basin is made of river rocks. It features a time-released water flow creating a tidal action every 8 minutes. In the words of Laurie Olin, *"the intention was to create a dynamic pool, alive, that moves in a cycle like life on Earth"*.



Vernacular adobe house

Bell Tower, Mexico



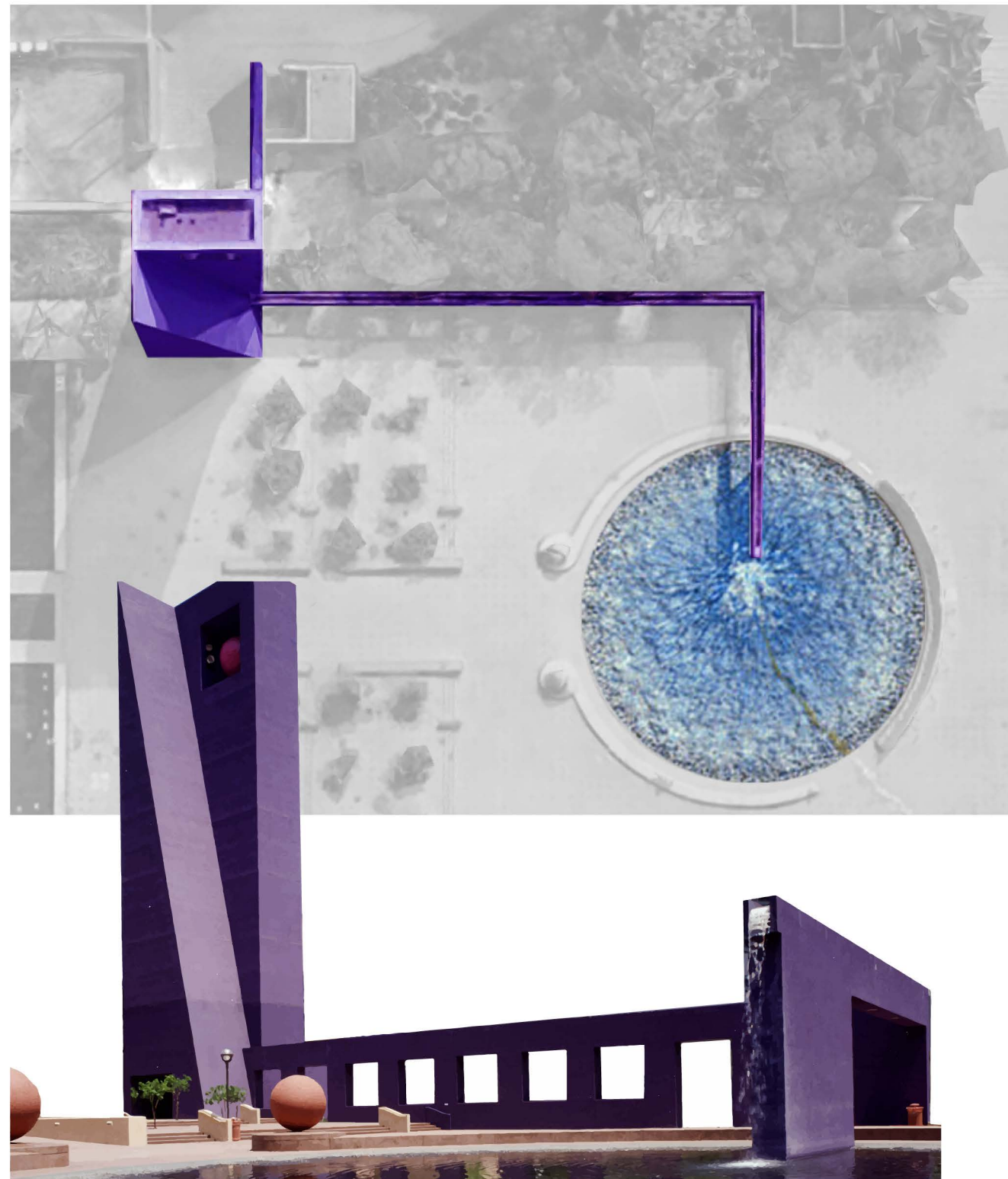
Los Angeles Aqueduct, 1912



Fuente de los Amantes, Luis Barragán, 1968.



Cuadra San Cristóbal, Mexico, Luis Barragán, 1966.



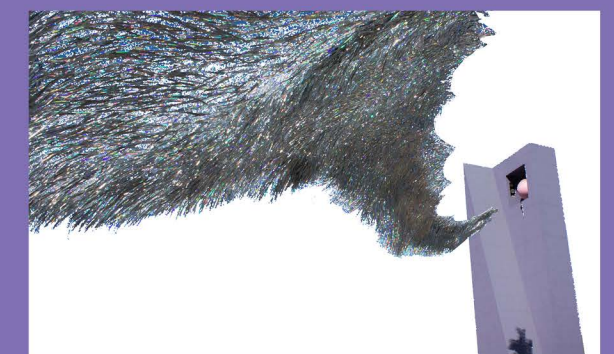
Besides being considered a strong art statement for the modern City of L.A. in the 1990's, the purple tower and fountain still inspire artists today and are the host of regular art exhibits and installations.



Green water, 2006



Six artists exhibition, 2011



Liquid Shard by Patrick Shearn of Poetic Kinetics, 2016



Caroline Geys solo exhibition, 2019