

# The School of Applied Arts, University of Chile (1928–1968)

Eduardo Castillo Espinoza

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Footnotes for this article begin on page 92.

## Introduction

*Any attempt to define an identity or direction for Chilean design should consider the debate originating in spaces such as the one we will discuss here, a debate that, far from settled, has acquired new relevance today, when the scenario advanced by new technologies and future international alliances for the country demand a redefinition of our professional and academic activity, defining with greater clarity the way in which, from its context, it is projected into the world.*

## School of Applied Arts

The activity of the School of Applied Arts (SAA), an offshoot of the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Chile, spanned the years 1928 to 1968, a period marked by local-level structural reforms of artistic university education. The foremost aim of the School, which garnered it permanent criticism from different sectors during its existence as an institution, was to channel artistic education towards practical ends. As a counterpart the SAA, perhaps without knowing it, laid the foundations for the later development of design in Chilean society, a role that came into focus during the University Reform of the late 1960s, when the curricular changes that put an end to the SAA also led to the validation of design as a professional career within the University of Chile.

The School of Applied Arts hosted a numerous and diverse group of teachers and students, distinguishing itself from traditional artistic education in that its main interest was the popular world, as much in terms of curricula as in the students who attended the School. This made it a space that, during four decades, combined a study plan based on European educational models with an emphasis on local culture, and artisanal and traditional crafts.

Both the administrative difficulties faced by the School of Applied Arts and the loss of valuable documentation after the University Reform and the military regime of Augusto Pinochet have hampered attempts to understand its true importance. Consequently, the School has been discussed up to now through partial or secondary references that have sparked, notwithstanding, an interest in design education over the last few years.

### Reforms to Artistic Education in the Early Twentieth Century

The idea of linking artistic education to practical ends, a zeal that sparked harsh opposition among proponents of “pure” art, has an important precedent in the period in which sculptor Virginio Arias served as Director of the School of Fine Arts (1900–1911).<sup>1</sup> In 1904, the debate over the importance of associating artistic endeavor to the productive area reached the National Congress. An article published in Santiago’s *El Mercurio* backed the government’s proposal to assign an item within the Public Instruction budget for the establishment of a “school of decorative art and of art applied to industry”:

... Seldom in the Public Instruction budget had an item of more direct interest to workers, to laborers, to those that have a right to ask the State that their education be rectified to meet the needs and conveniences of the productive activity of the country, been added....

Regarding the aim of this education, some of the specified objectives for the institution were:

... to give the young person the necessary knowledge so that his product is more and more perfect, so that he adapts to public tastes, so that it may follow the transformations of the spirit of the consumer, so that it may cease to be the routine and vulgar work that is easily vanquished in competition by foreign labor....

Elsewhere, the text dealt with the dichotomy between art and industry, and the reason behind directing artistic education to practical ends:

... The School of Arts applied to industry would then be not only a powerful tool to elevate the general level of culture, tending to define tastes, but also to constitute the most practical and immediate way of fostering the industrial production of the country, bettering its results and, in consequence, making their worth increase....<sup>2</sup>

That very year, Emilio Rodríguez Mendoza alluded to the discussion in the *Annals of the University of Chile*:

... It is just and prudent to search for practical utility in knowledge imparted by the State... exists in Paris a school we must not lose sight of in our search for the healthy assimilations of progress for our artistic education: we are referring to the School of Decorative Arts... it can be said, succinctly, that all the French artistic industry derives from the admirable School of Decorative Arts, institution in which Mr. Arias pursued his studies....<sup>3</sup>

We can deduce from the previous lines that the experience of Virginio Arias as a student of the School of Decorative Arts in Paris<sup>4</sup> may have influenced the orientation he proposed to undertake during his years as Director of the School of Fine Arts in Santiago.

The School of Decorative Arts opened its courses in June of 1907 with a student body composed of ninety-seven men and sixty-seven women.<sup>5</sup> The journalist and art critic Manuel Rodríguez Mendoza, who previously had acted as Secretary of the Chilean Embassy in France and General Council in Spain, was assigned as Director. The academic body of the institution was made up of Chilean sculptor Simón González and a group of Catalan teachers who had been hired in Europe by the Government: Antonio Campins, Antonio Coll y Pí, Juan Plá, and Baldomero Cabré. The courses offered were sculpture: ornamental, decorative, and applied to architecture including woodwork and modeling in stone or marble; ornamental drawing and decorative painting, which encompassed the study of historical and ornamental styles; and artistic foundry, which encompassed metalwork with casts and foundry.

Following years in which it managed to function in a separate building, the School of Decorative Arts moved, along with the School of Fine Arts, to a new building built in the Forestal Park with its back to the Museum of Fine Arts; a space that was inaugurated in 1910 in celebration of the Centenary of the Republic:

There existed, in the basement of the School of Fine Arts, a School of Applied Arts. It languished on the margins of the panorama of education. No importance whatsoever was assigned to it. It was the reign of Pure Art!... Its teaching, according to the aesthetic rhythm of the time, was limited to reproducing, invariably, the cold and insubstantial model of historical styles....<sup>6</sup>

In 1928, under the helm of painter and musician Carlos Isamitt, then Director of the School of Fine Arts, the School of Applied Arts—an entity that replaced a group of courses that constituted the School of Decorative Arts—was created, and this institution was relocated from the few rooms it occupied in Fine Arts to a large old house on Arturo Prat Street, in the southern sector of Santiago. This measure was contemplated as part of the reform of artistic education prompted by the Director, which set out: “To diffuse the aesthetic concepts that inspire the modern world; to contribute to the better understanding of archaic cultures and stimulate the formation of a national art based on its own elements.”<sup>7</sup> “To this end,” said Isamitt, “we have banished from the outset the servile copy of historical models that once constituted the fundamental basis of our teaching.”<sup>8</sup>

Among the objectives of the School of Applied Arts was to “be the cornerstone on which shall be cemented numerous industries which, lacking a proper technical and artistic basis, to this day hadn’t

managed to develop their potential.”<sup>9</sup> In 1961, Isamitt remarked, regarding the difficulties of the time:

There were many circumstances that smack to me of stinginess today, when I remember those years. The group of artists who constituted, shall we say, the conservative forces of art, were represented by the National Society of Fine Arts. They were the resistance to all innovation. In spite of this, I managed to create the section of evening courses of decorative arts, and it was the foundation of what later on Professor [José] Perotti was to turn into a separate school [Applied Arts]. It was my job to acquire it, and I preferred it in that neighborhood [Matta Avenue] because it was a popular quarter.<sup>10</sup>

### The Ibáñez Dictatorship: Initial Scenario of the School

Following the efforts undertaken by Director Isamitt since 1927 to reorient the School of Fine Arts—on which Applied Arts depended—it was, paradoxically, shut down at the end of 1928, after



Figure 1 (top)  
The founder of the School of Applied Arts, Carlos Isamitt, and to his left the sculptor José Perotti, first director of the school between 1933 and 1956, in the basement of the School of Fine Arts. The image corresponds to evening classes for workers' children, which were held in 1928 (Carlos Isamitt Archive).



Figure 2 (bottom)  
Ventura Galván, design for tapestry, 1928. This work reflects the combined influence of abstract art and local pre-Columbian motifs, an local example of the Isamitt reform era. Galván then studied architecture, becoming Director of the School of Applied Arts from 1957 to 1963 (Carlos Isamitt Archive).

the Official Salon that had taken place in the month of October, and declared to be undergoing restructuring. This decision was taken by Finance Minister Pablo Ramírez<sup>11</sup>—who, at the time, also took up the post of Public Instruction—who resolved the temporary closure of the institution to allocate the annual budget of 1929 to the voyage of a group of teachers and students of Fine Arts to a perfection course in Europe.

From its beginnings as a Republic in the first decades of the nineteenth century through the scenario which the School of Applied Arts was born into, Chile had alternated between two options for steering of the country: one was the figure of a strong leader (“Presidentialism”); the other was the weight acquired by the political class from the National Congress (“Parliamentarianism”). The 1920s saw the emergence of a military leader who attempted to restore Presidentialism through a nationalist authoritarian regime: the Dictatorship of Carlos Ibáñez (1927–1931). Besides restricting the action of the entire political class, one of the main objectives of his government was the modernizing of the State and the fomentation of national industry.

A pivotal moment regarding the direction of Applied Arts in the country is the late 1920s. The contemporary view holds that the recipients of Minister Ramírez’s scholarships had a parallel mission of perfecting their artistic careers, to absorb different applied arts techniques and ensure a practical knowledge they could apply upon their return.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the travel and return of these artists coincided with the rise and fall of the dictatorship, a time of great political, economic, and social upheaval. Following the Minister’s polemical intervention, the dictatorship met with an adverse factor: the Great Depression. After an energetic start, characterized by a vast renovation of state bureaucracy, the important development of public works, and promotion of industrialist and self-supplying ideals, the growth obtained on the basis of foreign debt (mainly to the United States) led the country to acute economic crisis, and consequently the motion of keeping the School of Fine Arts closed until 1931 didn’t prosper. The majority of scholarship recipients had to return before completing their allotted period of studies in Europe.<sup>13</sup>

The reform that Ramírez carried out had, by Supreme Decree, absorbed the School of Fine Arts of the University of Chile, creating in 1929 the Faculty of Fine Arts to which the National Conservatory of Music, the Academy of Fine Arts and the School of Applied Arts also belonged. The Academy of Fine Arts resumed its activities in 1930, in the words of artist and student Carlos Hermosilla, under “the sign of the most decrepit academicism.” In light of this situation, and in the twilight of the régime, “A group of artists supported by nonconformist students seized the window of opportunity at the fall of the régime (July 1931), took revolutionary control of the establishment, and forced the new authorities to make an important reform.<sup>14</sup> Thus, in 1932, the Faculty of Fine Arts was reorganized, and

to it belonged the National Conservatory, The Institute for Extension, and the School of Fine Arts; the latter composed of the Academy of Fine Arts and the School of Applied Arts.

Comparing the list of artists who left for Europe to those who, on their return, resumed their teaching posts at the School of Applied Arts<sup>15</sup> leads us to another set of questions. What was the real position of the scholarship recipients regarding Applied Arts? Had they shared Minister Ramírez's desire to give a utilitarian or practical sense to the presence of art in Chile?

### **Artisans, Artists, and Artificers**

Regarding the path Applied Arts had taken, a 1933 brochure pointed out that, after several years of reforms, the aim of the institution was to shape "in the domain of crafts and professions, the artisans, artificers, and teachers in the subject of applied arts who must undertake effective and direct participation in our nascent artistic industries."<sup>16</sup> School activity was divided among the following workshops: Fire Arts, which involved ceramics and enamel work on metal or glass; Metal Arts, dedicated to foundry, forging, and repoussage; Textile Arts, which involved textile work in its different processes and applications; and finally Graphic Arts, which involved engraving, print work, poster art, and artistic bookbinding. In 1934, the Wood Arts workshop, dedicated to cabinetmaking and carving, was added.

According to regulations approved in 1936, Applied Arts issued a university degree to those who completed studies of artificer or professor in applied arts, while a General Artisanat Certificate was awarded after two years of study to artisans who attended the day course basic cycle, in addition to a mention according to the specialization workshop they had completed. Another important option for artisans was night courses which, upon completion of their three-year duration, offered the option of an Artisanat Certificate in specializations such as ceramics, stained glass, metal enameling, engraving, bookbinding, textiles, poster art, and cabinetmaking.



Figure 3  
School of Applied Arts, Printmaking Workshop  
(Photo by Antonio Quintana, printed in a catalog of the School, 1933).

Fernando Marcos (1919), an artist and teacher who pursued studies at the institution during the 1930s, points out that Applied Arts was made up chiefly of students from popular urban quarters and from rural localities near Santiago. He also underlines the importance of the convergence that the School facilitated between workers or their offspring, and artists who frequented the establishment. This was outlined by a new brochure in 1934:

... the School of Applied Arts fulfills a high social goal in that its daily and nightly courses are attended not only by artists who endeavor to solve artistic problems, but also by laborers and workers who aspire to master a technique or a craft that forces them to create new forms, to break the routine of imitation, and to develop their aesthetic expression.<sup>17</sup>

### **The “Inwards” Development Model**

The great paradox that the development of the School represents for Chilean society could be that it was active during a period of national life known as the “inward” development model, which ranged from the early 1920s to the failure of democracy in 1973. This historical trajectory saw different governments representing a wide political spectrum, but sharing common objectives such as the strengthening of the State as articulator of national development, the fostering of local industry, and the promotion of technical training to incorporate productive activity to popular sectors.

Among the landmarks of the initial phase discussed above was the “Prefer Chilean products” promotional campaign, put in motion in the early 1930s by the Ibáñez Dictatorship to confront the Great Depression through production, installing slogans such as “Chilean Product,” and “Made in Chile” that are in use to this day. At the end of the decade, the Popular Front Government, headed by radical politician Pedro Aguirre Cerda, pushed for the institutionalization of the developmental model through the creation of the Chilean Economic Development Agency (CORFO).<sup>18</sup>

Although it may appear that these decades were the best scenario for the School of Applied Arts, it also was managed by artists who maintained a difficult relationship with the Fine Arts faculty (on which they depended), and both the teacher corps and graduates of the establishment aspired more to recognition from the Chilean artistic milieu—which was hard to come by—than to the establishment of collaborative links with the productive sector, all of which may have contributed to a “do it yourself” form of legitimacy, but also, as the twentieth century progressed, to paving the way towards design. In short, the artists who had links to the School wanted, in their majority, to occupy the country’s traditional art spaces (galleries, exhibitions, salons, and award shows) at a time when there was a vast space yet to be conquered in homes, public spaces, shop windows, and in the daily life of Chileans. The

opposing forces of an industrial mode of work or education, and the reluctance to lose the status of “unique work” in the institution’s production, was an unsolved dilemma for this establishment.

It appears that the Applied Arts community took too long (three decades) to understand that the School was marching to (and should have aspired to) a progressive autonomy from the domain of art by virtue of its belonging to the main teaching center in the country, the University of Chile. Had this separation happened, in turn it may have brought about an approximation to other sectors of the University, such as the Physical and Mathematical Sciences Faculty or the Social Sciences Faculty, an alliance that also signified projection towards domains such as industry and communications.

In the opinion of Paulina Brugnoli, a teacher at Applied Arts during its final years, the social diversity of the institution was its greatest asset but, at the same time, its greatest weakness in that it made it difficult to reach a critical consensus on collective projects, or on changes that needed to be undertaken.

The School was a refuge that assigned value and a leading role to popular culture, but always looked for recognition in “high culture” (Fine Arts). From today’s perspective, there is every indication that the future of the establishment was in mass culture rather than in high culture, or in the nexus between popular culture and mass culture; particularly in light of the period between the 1930s and 1960s, when Chilean society was transformed decisively into a mass culture, or a culture of mass consumption.

### **The Central Decades**

The greatest difficulty for any investigative effort relating to Applied Arts lies in that the wealth of printed matter is to be found in the first and fourth decades of activity (the 1930s and 1960s), while in the central decades (the 1940s and 1950s) there is a dearth of documentation, visual records, and other sources. Furthermore, the present option of having access to a considerable number of oral histories is pending work that needs to be undertaken.

Far from assuming that the period we refer to was one of stability for the School, much less for the country—the Popular Front (1938–1941), the outlawing of the Communist Party (1948), the Second Presidency of Carlos Ibáñez (1952–1958), the election by a small margin of the rightist candidate Jorge Alessandri (1958), and the Christian Democratic government of Eduardo Frei Montalva (1964–1970)—it is easy to understand why Applied Arts didn’t consolidate a long-term project if it existed during the period known as the “inwards” development model, where the desire for a national industry and slogans such as “Chilean Product” were part of the discourse of the political factions at the helm of the country for several decades.

We have referred to the problems that have afflicted this school, and from as early as the 1930s there are different testimonies



that corroborate this: "The state of the building in which the School operates is far from satisfactory....";<sup>19</sup> "... in spite of the austere material means with which the School operates, and that hinders its development....";<sup>20</sup> "... forged iron or foundry demand, with constant sacrifice on the part of the worker, tools, and elements the School almost entirely lacks...."<sup>21</sup> Adding to these difficulties was the dispute over the establishment's University status during the 1940s and 1950s. The late '60s ushered in the University Reform, a time in which the School "became a tangle of contrary positions. There were those that tackled student learning from a technical standpoint, and those that put emphasis on aesthetic elements. And, of course, there were also conflicts between renovators and conservatives."<sup>22</sup>

The true impact of this institution on the productive area between the early 1930s and late 1960s is the subject of a pending investigation, necessary for both history and studies in Chilean design. Precisely when the latter discipline began to have a more defined presence in the country, the School of Applied Arts was nearing the end of its life span. In a decade of great social upheaval—the 1960s—and under the influence of external factors such as the Cold War, the Cuban Revolution, and profound changes on a local level (industrial development, University Reform, Agrarian Reform, and the nationalization of copper and mining), the School seemed to be stranded in its founding ideas, ignoring the changes that had occurred in national and regional contexts. In a catalogue for a school exhibition, José Perotti, first director of the faculty between 1933 and 1956, dealt with the contradictions between Applied Arts teaching and an orientation towards industry:

Regarding the School of Applied Arts's collaboration with the country's industrial activities, we can say that, although its teaching isn't specifically industrial because it lacks the equipment for it, and furthermore that teaching of this nature would stray from its main objective, the technical and artistic preparation which it undertakes and its production together with its graduates is destined to have a favorable influence on industrial development in the country, whether it be guiding the public's sense of appreciation or supplying artificers and artisans equipped with a solid conceptual foundation....<sup>23</sup>

At the dawn of the School's last decade of activity, the production of the documentary *Creative Hands* (Fernando Balmaceda, 16 mm, 1961) and an exhibition held at the Central House of the University of Chile were intended as promotional platforms for an institution whose permanence was in question. On the other hand, the "inwards" development model, which was to foster training and closer ties of less-privileged sectors to the University, ran into the necessity of validating Applied Arts within the university structure, thus progressively alienating those sectors who had initially consti-

Figure 4  
School of Applied Arts, ceramics workshop,  
1948. (The image corresponds to another  
catalogue published that year.)



tuted the bulk of its alumni: "... little by little, workers and their sons disappeared from the workshops."<sup>24</sup> Director Perotti himself warned "that he is losing ground in his educational orientation: his school is flooding with upper-class girls with bachelor's degrees in search of fashionable careers. It is no longer possible to recruit students and teachers from the dispossessed strata of society."<sup>25</sup>

While between the 1930s and 1950s those who advocated an "artistic" direction for the School—associated with crafts, manual skills, direct contact with materials, and an interest in traditional handiwork—openly resisted increasing ties with industrial production, from the 1960s onwards, this link became a necessity for an important part of teachers and students. It is worth revising, then, the path taken by a few graduates who contributed to the professional recognition of design in the country during Applied Arts' last years.

### **The Graduates' Path**

Waldo González studied at the School between 1953 and 1957, the year in which he obtained the degree of Professor of Art, specializing in posters and propaganda. Upon completing his studies, he joined the faculty as a teacher, a post he held until the closure of the School following the University Reform.

This graphic artist would occupy an important place between the 1960s and the early 1970s thanks to his pedagogical work at the institution, and for his work in the local graphic milieu, which would achieve great visibility between 1971 and 1973. A main trait of his work was that, by virtue of its use of a mass communications media such as the poster, it managed to address the idea (stemming from Applied Arts) of linking propaganda and local graphic design to local culture. Although it is possible to recognize other influences of the period, such as Cuban graphic art, pop art, and some of the traits of hippie graphics, the images produced by González cited, for the most part, local expressions such as the mural, engraving, and traditional handicrafts.

There is a recognizable interest for the political mural—a considerable presence in Chilean streets at the time—in the campaign developed by Waldo González and the young designer Mario Quiroz for the Polla Chilena Charity Fund between 1971 and 1973. Given that the client for this project was a charity institution with a solid presence in the country, a strategy was devised to keep a distance from stereotypes of well-being as imposed through American advertisement, believing that “it was necessary to establish a dialogue between the ruling class and those they rule through an image that generated higher cordiality between the sender and the receivers of the message.” The project was geared towards the more modest social strata, and that intention was confirmed on reaching the streets: “The first Polla poster disappeared everywhere, people took it to their home, and it was even necessary to triple the printing run.”<sup>26</sup> The public repercussion of this campaign nevertheless had an unintended consequence after 1973. Although not necessarily close to the left or to political activity, González endowed these graphics with “the intention of meeting my people.” His work was so strongly associated with the cultural codes of the Popular Unity period (the government of Salvador Allende, 1970–1973) that this association brought upon him difficulties during the military regime of Augusto Pinochet, reducing once numerous commissions to a trickle, and forcing him to focus his attention on teaching.<sup>27</sup>



Figure 5  
Waldo Gonzalez and Mario Quiroz, poster for the Polla Chilena de Beneficencia, 1973. This work is a combination of the imagery of the time. On the one hand, exaggeration of extremities (hands and feet) evoking Mexican muralism, and on the other, irregular black lines, uniform color and handwritten texts evoking the street propaganda of the Allende era; and finally, the ascending perspective and masses escaping the format, evoking socialist realism (Waldo Gonzalez/Mario Quiroz Archive).

Vicente Larrea studied at Applied Arts between 1961 and 1965 and began his graphic work at the Department of Cultural Extension of the University of Chile in 1963. He greatly values the teachings of Professor Waldo González, along with what he has learned from the self-taught Rafael Vega-Querat, who had vast professional experience and maintained close ties to the international design and typography world.

After four years at the Department of Cultural Extension, he set up a small studio in the center of Santiago, wanting to continue his work at a time when posters were widely in demand. Carlos Quezada, a student in ceramics at Applied Arts and close to Larrea, told him of the creation of a folk group—Quilapayún—and asked him to design the cover of their first album, *Folk Songs of America*, which the group had created with singer-songwriter Víctor Jara in 1967 for the Odeón label.

The following year, Larrea received another commission from the group: the cover of the album *Por Vietnam* (X Vietnam). This work also was one of the first for DICAP (Popular Song Discotheque), a label created that same year by the Communist Youth's Culture Commission to give groups and soloists a place for production and diffusion, an alternative to the greatly restrictive recording market and radio programming.

The musical movement known as the “Nueva Canción Chilena” (“New Chilean Song”) represented a unique opportunity for the country's graphic designers, in which the close-knit relationship between musicians, producers, and designers facilitated the project's reach. On the heels of this album came Víctor Jara's record *I Place in Your Open Hands*, released in June 1969. Vicente Larrea points out that, at the time, there was full awareness of the outreach of mass communications and “the intention of doing well the task we had undertaken.” This last point demonstrates a different take on the profession as compared to that of most graphic artists trained in Applied Arts between the 1930s and 1950s, for whom graphic communication was merely a survival medium and a “transitory” activity on the path to an artistic recognition that, in most cases, never happened. “We are not artists,” said Larrea in a 1971 interview.<sup>28</sup>

The numerous record covers—approximately one-hundred and twenty—and nearly three-hundred posters on which he worked alongside a team of siblings including Maricruz and Antonio Larrea, Luis Albornoz, Ximena del Campo, Hernán Venegas, and Mario Román, would make this body of work an obligatory reference point of the transition from the '60s to the '70s. That period saw Vicente Larrea's studio pioneer another important area: logotype design—a testimony to the work carried out for the musical groups Inti-Illimani, Illapu, and Quilapayún.

The closed form, high contrast, uniform inks, irregular contours, and hand-tracing of characters were traits derived from

other production systems such as serigraphy and offset printing. Regarding external influences, Larrea points to referents such as hippie graphics, Cuban poster art, the animated film *Yellow Submarine* and, especially, the work of Jewish-Lithuanian illustrator Ben Shahn.

Like Waldo González, Vicente Larrea took up educational responsibilities on graduation, working as a teacher at the School of Applied Arts (1968–69) and at the School of Design of the University of Chile during its first years. Having witnessed firsthand the closing of the original faculty and the protracted debate during the time of the University Reform, he abandoned academic activity, disappointed by the individual and political machinations throughout the process.

Rodrigo Walker entered Applied Arts in 1967 with the intention of studying design. Nevertheless, shortly after entering, he faced—like many students—the uncertainty that his professional design title still existed. This situation led to widespread discontent in the student body, and the demand for a professional rank for design, which became one of the central motives behind the Reform which swept through Applied Arts, and led to the widely publicized occupation of the establishment in 1968.

That same year, within the context of the student movement, a group of dissident students took note of an academic event to be held in Argentina, the “Seminar of Industrial Design Education in Latin America,” which brought to the neighboring country the former director of the Ulm School of Design (HfG Ulm), Tomás Maldonado.

A fraction of the dissident group, made up of Alfonso Gómez, Guillermo Capdevila, Fernando Schultz, and Walker himself, managed to attend the seminar, where they contacted Maldonado. He informed them of the imminent arrival in Chile of the German designer Gui Bonsiepe, the former leading professor of the HfG Ulm which, in the meantime, had closed its doors as a consequence of the worldwide student movements.

This last paradox should be noted in order to understand the development of design in Chile: while the Reform was seen as an opportunity for change and of recognition for local design, it also had brought about the end of a point of reference for its field (HfG Ulm). And, in part, the arrival of Bonsiepe brought the country the rationalist focus and design methodology of HfG Ulm.

Gui Bonsiepe arrived in the country in October 1968, hired by the International Labour Organization (ILO) at the request of the government of Eduardo Frei Montalva (1964–1970), to work as an advisor within the context of the program for the development of small- and medium-sized industry.<sup>29</sup>

In 1969, following the Reform, the Faculty of Fine Arts split into different departments: Fine Arts, Design, Public and Ornamental Art, Handicrafts, and Theory. The School of Design of the University

of Chile was officially recognized in August of the following year. A degree certificate in Design was issued on completion of studies, with specializations in Interior Design and Furniture, Textile Design, Advertisement Graphics, Landscaping, Fashion, and Industrial Design.<sup>30</sup> The faculty was incorporated into Campus Los Cerrillos of the University of Chile, a vast complex located in the western sector of Santiago, on land donated by Jewish businessman Salomón Sack.

The administrative denominations, though novel, did little to facilitate the path towards a renovation of teaching. There had been successive attempts since 1966 to renew the Applied Arts study plan, incorporating workshops dedicated to “industrial design” from 1967 onwards, but they were met with negative response from the student body on the grounds that working methods still were predominantly artisanal (ceramics, woodcarving, etc.). The crisis brought on by the scarcity of teachers capable of giving a new direction to the School was such that students themselves became involved in the search for new teachers for the faculty.<sup>31</sup>

The situation reached a critical moment in March 1968, when experiments to give impulse to industrial design produced a new study plan called “Crafts Design,” which comprised subjects such as Form Studies, Composition, Drawing and Painting, Art History, and Drafting. The murky orientation of this new proposal and its similarity to the more traditional focus of the School gave way to a new crisis, and it was this very year that academic activities came to a halt as a result of the Reform.<sup>32</sup>

Although students had been actively involved in the search for new teachers for the School between 1967 and 1968, this failed to bring about a greater openness to incorporating new knowledge. This was confirmed again when the group of students who had contacted Maldonado tried to procure Bonsiepe for the new School of Design:

We petitioned the School of Design of the (University of) Chile that he become our teacher. But the teachers in charge didn't like Bonsiepe. Why? Because Bonsiepe knew, unlike the teachers then in place. He knew about design, and also knew that they didn't know....<sup>33</sup>

Vicente Larrea, who sympathized with the Reform at its beginning, agrees with this vision, pointing out that most of the professorate saw only the opportunity to revalidate their posts or functions, and that the process had, in the end, not brought about the profound educational changes that had been sought.

Besides incorporating the word “design” institutionally, the most significant change was the schism within Applied Arts between those sectors which favored the formation already imparted by the School, and those that proposed a radical distancing from traditional artisanal, crafts, and the “popular” character of the faculty, instead

looking for a more effective tie with industry and technology. In this scenario, and in line with the polarization of the country at the time—equivalent to the periphery-center/local-global dichotomy—those in search of professional recognition for design emigrated to the new premises that had been built in the sector of Cerrillos,<sup>34</sup> while those that continued to defend Applied Arts remained at the old house on Arturo Prat until the closure of the faculty following the Reform.<sup>35</sup> Yet in the midst of these circumstances, the academic body of the brand new School of Design didn't sympathize with Bonsiepe's presence in Chile, either.

As a result of the visibility acquired by the student demands, the students (Schultz, Gómez, Capdevila, and Walker), motivated by the presence of the German designer and academic, managed to reach an agreement with the authorities of the School of Design to pursue their studies with Bonsiepe outside of the School, but recognizing its validity. Thus, the group developed a parallel formation devised by Bonsiepe which contemplated studies in other departments of the University of Chile, acquiring knowledge in economics and engineering. This group of students collaborated in SERCOTEC<sup>36</sup> prior to the reign of the Popular Unity government. Following the election of Salvador Allende as President in September 1970, they formed, together with Bonsiepe, the Industrial Design Group of the Institute for Technological Investigation (INTEC), a department of the Chilean Economic Development Agency (CORFO)—a group whose activity spanned from early 1971 to September 1973.

Although the majority of the projects that the Industrial Design Group carried out between 1971 and 1973 never made it to production due to a military coup (September 1973), the work done established a reference for the pedagogy of design that differed from what had been done thus far in the country, proposing a technoscientific focus that distanced itself from an aesthetic and artisanal vision of everyday objects, instead proposing a programmatic vision of the relationships between industrial production and object usage, in line with the political framework that sustained this experience: the socialist government of Salvador Allende. After long years of scarce, vague, or biased recognition, today's perspective permits a broad view of this process which is, without a doubt, relevant to the development of local design.

Rodrigo Walker was a teacher at the School of Design of the University of Chile until 1980, when he was discharged from the faculty for political reasons. He then set up his own firm, Walker Design, that between the late 1970s and today has developed a large body of work in the field of industrial design, producing white goods and electrical appliances. At the dawn of the 1990s, he returned to academia as a professor and director of different schools. Currently, Walker is pursuing an independent teaching career, dedicated to promoting design management.

Like Walker, Alfonso Gómez was a teacher at the School of Design throughout the '70s, eventually leaving the faculty for political reasons. In 1980, following threats from military regime officials, he fled the country to establish himself in Paris, where he worked on educational schemes for the integration of the poor.<sup>37</sup> In 1997, upon returning to Chile, he combined business management with academic work in different schools.

Guillermo Capdevila was detained by the military in the days following the coup d'état. He fled the country in 1974 to pursue studies at the Royal College of Art (RCA) in London, obtaining a Master's degree in product design. He later established himself in Spain, where he set up his own studio and was recognized for his work as an industrial designer, as well as being one of the founders of the Design Center of Bilbao. He died in an automobile accident in 1999.

Fernando Schultz suffered a similar fate to Capdevila during the first days of the Chilean dictatorship, enduring a prolonged stay in detention and torture centers. After expulsion from the country, he also studied industrial design at the RCA in London. From then to the present, he has resided in Mexico, where he was invited to join the Azcapotzalco campus of the Metropolitan Autonomous University (UAM), working towards fostering small- and medium-sized industries, and developing ties between handicrafts and design.

It is precisely Schulz's activities from the second half of the 1970s on that reminds us of the evolution of design education in Latin America: "The only way to be global is to be local. In other words, to contribute personal knowledge..."<sup>38</sup> With regard to the rocky transition of Applied Arts to Design in the Chilean milieu, Germán Perotti, son of the first director of the School and former teacher at the faculty, says: "... handicrafts and design should be developed in parallel. Were this not to happen, we would be negating vital aspects of national culture, and hindering its economic development. This is a battle of epic proportions. But back then, the conditions to do it weren't in place."<sup>39</sup> Perhaps this is why the School of Applied Arts remains an active or latent testimony, in spite of its irregular memory. Of all the imported educational models that contributed to forging the teaching of art and design in the Chilean milieu, this was the space most permeable to local culture and to a wide social spectrum. The Ulm model, which so inconvenienced the professorate in the late 1960s, was just as foreign as the School of Decorative Arts of Paris, which had inspired the beginnings of the institution at the dawn of the twentieth century. Chilean design's pending challenges, whether or not it pleases local aficionados of terms such as "innovation" and "development," are to be found, at some point, in the school we have examined here.



### Final Observations

This project was a unique educational model in its context, and to this day there have been no other institutions dedicated to imparting an aesthetic-functional education open to the whole of Chilean society, marked by the integration of knowledge, content, and practices derived from diverse social sectors. The latter is important in that Chilean design has a pending task in consolidating a firm standing on its own terrain, to have a true impact on national life, or to become, at last, a cultural expression of the country—something it is far from in the eyes of Chilean society today.

Although the School of Applied Arts failed to become, or was late in becoming, conscious of its role in Chilean design, the paradox of its falling out with the “inwards” development model is more critical. The Popular Unity government could have been the ideal platform for the principles of this school, insofar as it was a socialist regime whose cultural and productive focus resolutely undertook the aspirations of previous decades.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, Salvador Allende reached the presidency in 1970, as Applied Arts was falling apart, and the military dictatorship dealt a final blow by permanently shutting down the School in the last months of 1973, due to its perceived association with the Allende era of the Study Center’s regionalist focus and interest in artisanal development. Additionally, the dictatorship also marked the end of the “inwards” development model; replacing the central role of the state with a neoliberal model (in place to this day) that gave protagonism to the private sector, promoted a free market and excessive imports and consumption, and eventually affected both large swathes of national industry and small producers and artisans.

In short, the challenges that propelled Applied Arts, such as the proper insertion of the local in the productive arena, the inclusion of popular sectors in the growth of the country, and the self-production of knowledge all are pending, and here Chilean design has a task to do. The study and profound understanding of this educational experience not only has testimonial or historical importance: it also may open new lines of work in the present.

When the School of Applied Arts disappeared from the educational landscape during the second half of the 1970s,<sup>41</sup> both the “popular-local” and the “technical” fell from favor within the new orientation adopted by design education in the country. The former was put into question given its connections with left-wing discourse, and was considered synonymous with underdevelopment, with which design was to sever ties in order to be in tune with the new internationalism advanced by the military regime that had removed the socialist President Salvador Allende. The latter was seen as a “doing” which didn’t fit in with the favored new format for professional design education. University schools became a minor offshoot of architectural education, as well as forum for those that didn’t manage to fit in that particular space or in the local art field.<sup>42</sup>

In conclusion, it is important to stress the popular character of the beginnings of design in Chile; as much in terms of the social strata to which the School of Applied Arts was geared, as in its contents and production. Although in its last years the School came under harsh criticism by the student body and some teachers for the its lack of definition in the face of the rise of design as a concept in the national arena, it also is true that a gradual transition between several decades of work and the professional recognition of design in Chile may have contributed to the rise of a discipline capable of making the transition between the local and the universal.<sup>43</sup>

- 1 An institution established in 1849, during the government of President Manuel Bulnes. In its beginnings, it was called "Academy of Fine Arts."
- 2 Uncredited; "Arte aplicado a la industria" ("Art Applied to Industry"), *El Mercurio* (Santiago: October 6, 1904): 3.
- 3 Emilio Rodríguez Mendoza, "La Escuela de Bellas Artes de Santiago" ("The School of Fine Arts of Santiago") *Anales de la Universidad de Chile* Tome CXIV, (Santiago: Imprenta Cervantes, 1904), 732.
- 4 Arias was a government envoy in Europe between 1882 and 1889.
- 5 Moisés Vargas, *Bosquejo de la Instrucción Pública en Chile (Outline of Public Teaching in Chile)* (Santiago: Imprenta Barcelona, 1908), 333.
- 6 José Perotti, "Las Artes Aplicadas en Chile" ("Applied Arts in Chile"), *Revista de Arte* 1:4 (Santiago: Facultad de Bellas Artes de la Universidad de Chile, December 1934–March 1935): 7.
- 7 Unsigned; "Orientación" ("Orientation"), *Revista de Arte* 1:1 (Santiago: September 1928): 1.
- 8 Uncredited; "La Reforma en la Escuela de Bellas Artes" ("Reform at the School of Fine Arts"), *Revista de Arte* 1:1 (Santiago: September 1928): 5.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 10 In Alfredo Aliaga, "Breve Historia de la Plástica Chilena, XV. Carlos Isamitt" ("Brief History of Chilean Fine Arts, XV. Carlos Isamitt"), *En Viaje* 335:XXVIII (Santiago: September 1961): 33. Sculptor José Perotti was assigned Night Section Chief of Decorative Arts in 1928, and later acted as the first Director of the School of Applied Arts from 1933–1956.
- 11 See Gonzalo Vial, *Historia de Chile (1891–1973)*, Vol. IV, *La Dictadura de Ibañez (1925–1931)* (*History of Chile [1891–1973]*, Vol. IV, *The Ibañez Dictatorship [1925–1931]*) (Santiago: Editorial Fundación, 1996).
- 12 See: Patricio Lizama, "El cierre de la Escuela de Bellas Artes en 1929: Propuestas, querellas y paradojas de la vanguardia chilena" ("The Closing of the School of Fine Arts in 1929: Proposals, Conflicts, and Paradoxes of the Chilean Avant-Garde"), *Aisthesis* 34 (Santiago: Instituto de Estética PUC, 2001): 134–152; Justo Pastor Mellado, "La política anti-oligárquica del Ministro Ramírez y sus efectos en la organización de la enseñanza de artes" ("The Anti-oligarchic Policy of Minister Ramírez and Its Effects on the Organization of Arts Education"). [www.justopastormellado.cl](http://www.justopastormellado.cl) (gabinete de trabajo [work cabinet], May 2003).
- 13 Patricio Lizama, "El cierre de la Escuela de Bellas Artes en 1929: Propuestas, querellas y paradojas de la vanguardia chilena"; 150.
- 14 In Antonio Romera, *Carlos Hermsilla* Colección artistas chilenos (Chilean Artists Collection) (Santiago: Instituto de Extensión de Artes Plásticas, Facultad de Bellas Artes Universidad de Chile, 1959), 17.
- 15 In 1934, out of twenty-six artists favored by Ramírez' measures, only five were teaching at the School of Applied Arts: Armando Lira (drawing), René Mesa-Campbell (ceramics, in charge of the Fire Arts Workshop), Héctor Banderas (ceramics), Oscar Millán (artistic bookbinding), and María Valencia (toymaking).
- 16 *Escuela de Artes Plásticas, Sección Artes Aplicadas* (School of Fine Arts, Applied Arts Section) (Santiago: Universidad de Chile, 1933), 7–8.
- 17 *Escuela de Artes Plásticas, Sección Artes Aplicadas* (School of Fine Arts, Applied Arts Section) (Santiago: Universidad de Chile, 1934), 6.
- 18 CORFO was a state institution dedicated to fostering and regulating the country's industrial development. It was created in the late-1930s under a mandate of President Aguirre Cerda, who was at the helm of the first center-left government in Chile's history: the Popular Front. This type of political coalition had come about worldwide during the inter-war period as a way of curbing the spread of fascism.
- 19 Ricardo Richón-Brunet, "La Escuela de Artes Aplicadas y su porvenir" ("The School of Applied Arts and Its Future"), *Revista de Arte* IV:19-20 (Santiago: Facultad de Bellas Artes Universidad de Chile, 1938): 20.

- 20 Jorge Letelier, "Artes Aplicadas" ("Applied Arts"), *Revista de Arte* III:14 (Santiago: Facultad de Bellas Artes Universidad de Chile, 1937): 19.
- 21 Jorge Letelier, "Exposición de la Escuela de Artes Aplicadas" ("Exhibition at the School of Applied Arts"), *Revista de Art* II:9 (Santiago: Facultad de Bellas Artes Universidad de Chile, 1936): 43.
- 22 Germán Perotti, "Perotti y la Escuela de Artes Aplicadas" ("Perotti and the School of Applied Arts") in *José Perotti*, catalogue of the exhibition at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Santiago, November 2003, 15.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 19.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 19.
- 26 Mauricio Vico, "Waldo González y los carteles para la Polla Chilena de Beneficencia" ("Waldo González and the Polla Chilena Charity Fund Posters") in *Chilean Poster 1963–1973* (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones B, 2004), 9.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 Silvia León, "Los Larrea" ("The Larreas"), *Ritmo* 314 (Santiago, September 7, 1971): 20.
- 29 Hugo Palmarola, "Productos y socialismo: diseño industrial estatal en Chile" ("Products and Socialism: State Industrial Design in Chile") in *1973, Daily Life in a Crucial Year*, Claudio Rolle, ed. (Santiago: Editorial Planeta, 2003), 243.
- 30 Decree No. 10032, Santiago, August 26, 1970, which approves curriculum and corresponding titles for Design studies at the Fine Arts Faculty. This information was provided by the architect Fernando Caracci, Director of the School of Applied Arts from 1963–1968, and the Department of Design from 1968–1973.
- 31 Fernando Shultz, *Para una historiografía (no más) del diseño industrial en Chile (Towards a Historiography (No More) of Industrial Design in Chile)*, Personal notes, unpublished.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 "Walker, Bonsiepe y la Guerra de las Galaxias" ("Walker, Bonsiepe and Star Wars"), Interview with designer Rodrigo Walker in *Revista Envidia* 1 (Santiago: Facultad de Arquitectura y Urbanismo, Universidad de Chile, 2000): 33.
- 34 Crucial to the origin of this space was the work of architect Ventura Galván, Director of Applied Arts between 1957 and 1963.
- 35 Strictly speaking, the School of Applied Arts ceased to exist in 1973.
- 36 The Technical Cooperation Service SERCOTEC, a department of the Chilean Economic Development Agency CORFO, was the first time Bonsiepe worked in Chile, between 1968 and 1970, as the result of an agreement between the International Labor Organization ILO, the Interamerican Bank of Development BID, the United Nations, and CORFO.
- 37 Hugo Palmarola, "Productos y socialismo: diseño industrial estatal en Chile"; 290.
- 38 Fernando Shultz, *Para una historiografía (no más) del diseño industrial en Chile (Towards a Historiography (No More) of Industrial Design in Chile)*.
- 39 Germán Perotti, "Perotti y la Escuela de Artes Aplicadas" ("Perotti and the School of Applied Arts") in *José Perotti*, catalogue of the exhibition at the National Museum of Fine Arts, 19.
- 40 One of the main tasks of the Allendist program was to "solve the immediate problems of the great majorities. To this end, the productive capacity of the country will be shifted from expensive and superfluous items destined to satisfy the high-income sectors, to the production of inexpensive high-quality items for mass consumption." *Basic Program of the Popular Unity* (Santiago, 1970): 23.
- 41 A minimal portion of the School's written and visual documentation was dispersed among the University of Chile's different libraries and archives, while the bulk of the information was "trashed" (destroyed or met an uncertain fate).
- 42 The "younger sibling" relationship that had existed between Fine Arts and Applied Arts was, from the second half of the Seventies, displaced to the connection between architecture and design.
- 43 In 1994, in the context of the Second Biennale hosted by the School of Design of the Catholic University, international guest Alessandro Mendini criticized the organizing party in harsh terms for its lack of interest in the artisanal and traditional crafts of Chile.