

Drawings, Diagrams and Communication in Collective and Action Architectures. Three Manuals as Graphic References

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Abstract

Three selected manuals, publications of the Iconoclasistas, Lacol and Recetas Urbanas collectives, leave us evidence of the fundamental and intentional role of graphic strategies in their works and actions. Iconoclasistas, Lacol and Recetas Urbanas, in representation of the wide and heterogeneous scope of the collective and the action, record the suitability of the format of the manual to project, materialize, socialize and disseminate their alternative forms of work, around architecture, urban planning and social action.

Keywords: collectives, communication, diagrams, drawings.

Introduction

The graphic components have a fundamental presence projects and materializations of the architecture generated within the areas of the 'collective', the 'social' or 'activism'. The different ideas and purposes of the groups of architects around the 'collective' derive in very diverse architectures and other productions, the important attention to the graphic will be a common component among this heterogeneity. The dissemination of his architecture and his processes are, in general, essential objectives in the approaches around the "collectives"... plans, drawings and models will be an ideal material to spread his work and ideas in publications and on the networks.

A very extensive and diversified inventory of active spanish and international groups such as: PKMN,

Enorme, Eeestudio, Zira 02, Leon11, Zoohaus, Basurama, Zuloark, Assemble, Elii, LAB.PRO.FAB, Recetas Urbanas... among others, make up a panorama really wide graph (fig. 1). The 'collectives' of architects supposed a kind of 'boom' with the arrival of the 2008 crisis and the real estate bubble, relieving in these times of scarcity some previous architectural movements –such as Superstudio, Cooperativa Amereida, Comunidad Tierra... among others–, pioneers in different ways of exercising the trade, "a tabula rasa architecture, an autarkic and community option, which departs from the dominant social system, creating an alternative and disaggregated, foundational and epic, mystical and poetic" [Montaner 2002, p. 144]. These



Fig. 1. Logos of various collectives, extracted from <https://arquitecturascolectivas.net/>

groups, which are usually assigned by default the status of alternatives or anti-system, have become the object of interest of the system, as established: "In the search for alternatives, the architect groups are taking more and more prominence. These are proposals by creative groups and activists who are looking for the possibility of making their proposals and those of the social environment, and which is advancing in the shaping of what would be a city of new subjectivity and alternative urban planning; the objective that characterizes these groups is to project and do useful and significant things with few means and economy of resources in close relation to their context [...] It is also true that these groups are of disparate quality and can be ephemeral: there are more radical ones and committed and others are only concerned with finding a professional niche for financing and promotion" [Montaner 2014, p. 151].

Indeed, one must be aware of the unequal valuation that these architectures have, we will find favorable texts and opinions compared to others that expose a critical and opposite vision before some of these manifestations within the collective and architecture [Masad 2013; 2015]. But going deeper into it is not the object of this communication, which is concerned with observing the role of the graphic.

When making a first approximation, it could be affirmed that the care in the "graphic" is generalized

when approaching their project strategies and dissemination of their work. In a joint view of the complex panorama of the 'collective', the 'social' or 'activism' spheres, in the face of such diversity of cases and components, this property could be seen as a shared invariant. This first invariant in the production of these studies would be in tune with the definition of advanced architecture from the *Metápolis* dictionary. The need for a more communicative architecture was already considered, one that works with the individual and plural and establishes new connections with society: "A menu of opportunities for an architecture capable of producing menus of results. An architecture destined to combine individual and heterogeneous situations in new plural scenarios [...] An architecture that would work with the individual and plural at the same time. [...] A more communicative architecture" [VV.AA. 2001, p. 74].

Communicative, plural, diverse and interactive, among others, will be common properties. By fixing the view on the graphic, being very different cases, they coincide in a widespread and intentional dedication to graphic expression that makes it possible to materialize the required plurality, diversity, interaction and communication. With drawings, diagrams, plans and models, a high level of communicability and a clear didactic desire are sought, reinforced with an undeniable visual appeal.

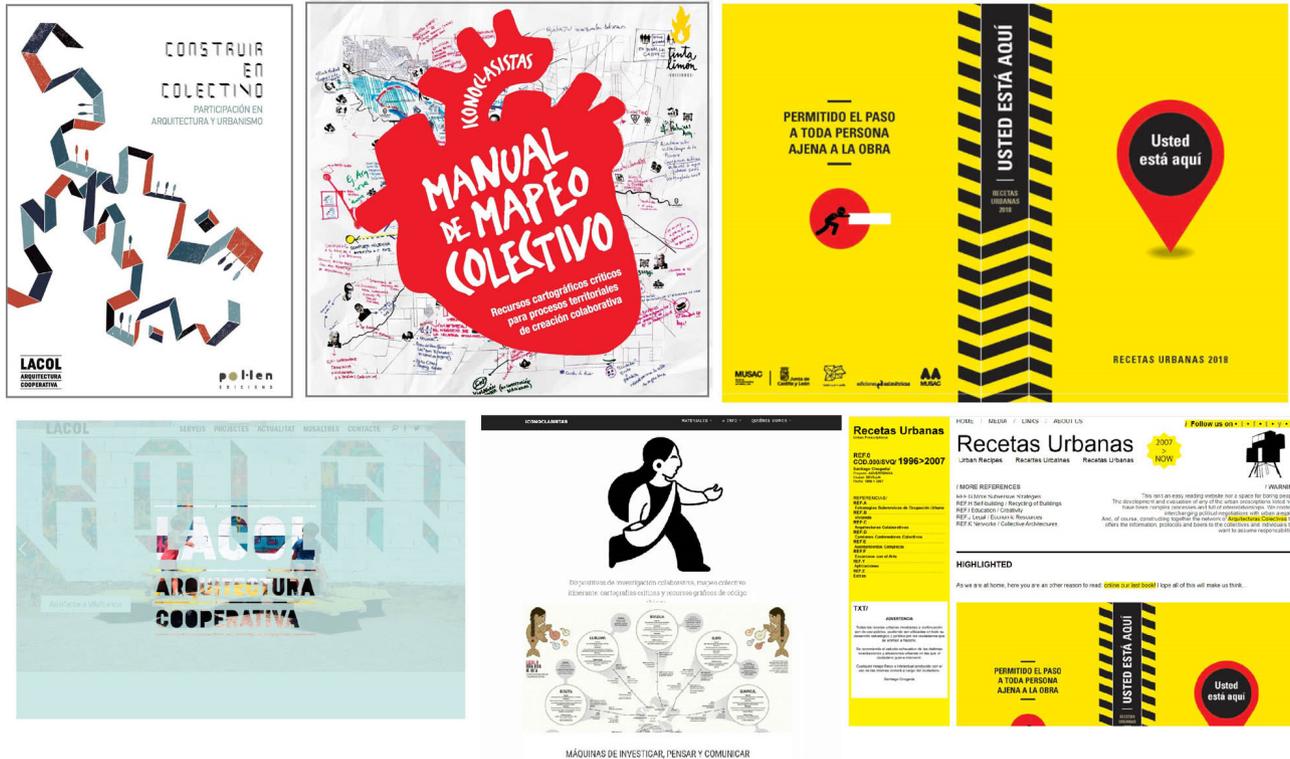


Fig. 2. Covers of the manuals and web pages of Lacol [Lacol Arquitectura Cooperativa 2018], Iconoclastas [Risler, Ares 2013] and Recetas Urbanas [Guzmán 2018].

About the three publications

From the extensive inventory of cases that can be studied, three are extracted as significant in the use and prominence of the graphic components. Three different groups are selected, Iconoclastas, Lacol and Recetas Urbanas, and of them, three publications (fig. 2), they will bring together various graphic approaches that we could estimate as recurring and representative of the graphic strategies of the groups around to the 'collective'. In these publications we can see some ideal "catalogs" of graphic strategies, both books bring together a large inventory of components that we can find in different doses in these collective, activist, action, social or community architectures. Hence his interest in this article.

The publications of these cases are presented as manuals, with a didactic purpose, which shows and gives instructions on how to proceed with architecture and other actions, incorporating collective participation. The main interest will be in observing how flat drawings, photographs, models, diagrams or pictograms contribute to it. This priority given to the dissemination of action strategies will also imply an intense and constant presence of their own graphic strategies. The authors or persons in charge of these different publications, have distant origins from each other and a different professional approach, but they share approaches in their social interventions. Lacol, a collective of architects, works on architecture and urban planning on different scales and supports. Iconoclastas

stas, a group led by a graphic designer and a sociologist, works on territorial transformations that affect social changes, fundamentally through collective mapping, the collective elaboration of plans in common with various social agents. Urban Recipes, led by the architect Santiago Cirugeda is a group concerned with social action and the intervention of architecture through participatory strategies that involve its users. The focus of this article is directed towards 'the graphic', without in any way impairing or not recognizing in these publications other architectural, urban or social values, which could be explored in other analyzes. When selecting Iconoclasistas, LaCol and Recetas Urbanas as objects of study, there is no intention of placing them as representatives of the ways of working of collectives or activists in the field of architecture or urban study, given the diversity of existing approaches, in any case we could stick to unitary interpretations about them.

In line with the exploratory condition of the article, we start from the joint view of the selected cases, opting for a mosaic view of the images extracted from the publications, which implies their presence in small size, which will imply a non-detailed perception. Consciously, the images are collected to form a subjective selection, which shows the diversity of strategies. The chosen images seek to be a reflection and representation of the wide and varied field from which they are extracted as references. The interpretation of the images is structured in sections derived from an observation focused on the graphic. Two texts, two referent publications that have provided numerous guidelines for ordering this approach have influenced the selection of cases, the article "Well into the 21st century, the architectures of post-capitalism?" [Zaera-Polo 2016] and From diagram to experiences, towards an architecture of action [Montaner 2014].

Diagrams and pictograms

The ability to communicate will be a priority factor. López Manuera makes an interesting reflection on the graphic representation in the collectives, raises the need for other ways of representing in this architecture. Its alternative character and different from what is established, should be reflected in the graphic: "A

way of understanding architecture that also requires a different way of approaching representation (...) the architecture of these groups also requires an unknown approach to representation. Images that are based on pop functional considerations –because they look for other representative systems outside of architecture and because they respond to a specific need– that can range from appointments inserted in architectural culture to more distant ones, such as graffiti. In fact, many of his actions are limited to the illustration itself as an element that generates architecture" [López Manuera 2010, p. 18].

LaCol, Iconoclasistas and Recetas Urbanas, come together in this "different way of approaching representation", they are clear users of different ways of representing their productions (fig. 3). The ability to communicate will be a common determining factor, which will imply an intensive use of the diagram, a graphic resource generally linked, although not exclusively, to the collective architecture. In From diagram to experiences, towards an architecture of action, Montaner dedicates a section to this direct relationship between diagrams and these architectural proposals: "Collectives of architects: activism and networks" [Montaner 2014, pp.150-154]. Montaner will define the diagram as "a graphic tool that visualizes phenomena or flows, both of reality and of the project", it will be, therefore, an ideal tool to develop projects that "prioritize facilitating action and the creativity of its users" [Montaner 2014, p. 23].

In the extensive bibliography around the diagram, there are various definitions, Paredes describes it as a "graphic organization device, which uses visual means to compress information in the form of consolidated situations, techniques, tactics or functions" [Paredes Maldonado 2015, p. 169], for Marcos it will be a resource that allows us to "analyze, narrate, record the project process, map the context and prefigure the architectural form" [Marcos 2011, p. 105] for Solana and Gutiérrez "geometric drawing used to demonstrate propositions, solve problems, or graphically represent the configuring law of a phenomenon; in another formulation: it consists of a drawing to show the relationships between the parts of sets or systems" [Solana Suárez, Gutiérrez Labory 2017, p. 49]. The relationship between diagram and groups will be a constant, terms and actions such as organization, information, analyze, record, narrate, solve, relate, conceptual load, drawn



Fig. 3. Diagrams and pictograms, graphic resources in the manuals of Lacol [Lacol Arquitectura Cooperativa 2018], Iconoclásticas [Risler, Ares 2013] and Recetas Urbanas [Guzmán 2018].

from the previous definitions, confirm the effective co-existence of this resource.

Diagrams and pictograms are going to characterize the representation in the collective, an ideal medium due to its informative condition. Lacol writes about the diagram "Diagrams are graphic representations that help us make concepts that can be very complex understandable. They are very effective tools to collect, share and discuss information" [Risler, Ares 2013, p. 94] in coincidence with the role assigned to Lacol pictograms "Clear and schematic images that inform, signal and allow complex readings on various topics (...) They make it possible to establish links, identify key figures, review practices, and make visible articulated forms of organization and territorial transformation" [Risler, Ares 2013, p. 54].

Collage, comic, graphic action and fragmented aesthetics

Different trends are distinguished in the use of graphic components in these architectures. Zaera [Zaera-Polo 2016] enunciates an extensive inventory of ways of tackling the graphic, they would highlight: the imaginary of the comic and certain architectures that are resolved within a fragmented aesthetic, represented by collages, and that is formed by bringing together forms of diverse origins such as pop and postmodernity or easily recognizable prefigurations for a general observer (for example: gabled roof, cabins, towers, industrial or factory spaces...).

In these manuals these graphic practices and strategies are present (fig. 4), with a main purpose, the need to make their approaches understandable and disseminate to the social groups to which they are directed. As Zaera points out: "Architectural drawings have gained unusual relevance as objects of worship, and it is common for emerging professionals to enjoy producing elaborate drawings, not to make buildings, but to polish their image and publish their work in magazines, or post them in the vast flourishing field of the Internet" [Zaera-Polo 2016, p. 12].

The collectives, with implicit emergent status, incorporate drawing into their actions in different ways. The drawing and narrative structure of the comic will be some dissemination resources that will make your

messages more accessible and friendly. The presence of traditional or recognizable architectural forms will also allow a better understanding of their proposals by the general audiences to which they are directed. From there, as Zaera also points out: "The coupling between the populist and neo-naïve aesthetics and the politically conscious practices is one of the most distinctive features of the new activism, establishing a radical contrast with the harsh, contrasted and resolute aesthetics of the traditional practices of the modern avant-garde" [Zaera-Polo 2016, p. 12].

In the *Iconoclastas* manual, "The use of visual resources and illustrations in the mappings collaborates in the intervention of the participants, stimulating participation through the use of simple, metaphorical or symbolic images with a lot of information" [Risler, Ares 2013, p. 46]. In the Lacol manual, the same is emphasized, it is stated that it will be essential to "propose a good communication strategy and dedicate a proportionate effort" [Risler, Ares 2013, p. 60], and for this "we must make the most of all the possibilities of the visual environment". In reality, the entire work of *Recetas Urbanas* is an extensive manual, in fact, the name of the studio itself reflects this: "From the beginning of his career, Santiago Cirugeda has conceived his actions and proposals as realistic, empirical and informative essays that, regardless of his achievements, can provide usable knowledge for all. That is why it has been organizing them in the form of the pleasant compendium of "urban recipes" that gives its architecture studio its name. An archive whose *raison d'être* is not so much to document its work as to make available to anyone an open source architectures manual that shows the protocols necessary to carry them out" [Álvarez Benítez 2018, p. 24].

In *Recetas Urbanas* the communication strategy is essential, combining technical and legal resources will enable your architectural and social proposals to materialize. The manual, and the graphic resources inserted in it, is the fundamental medium for the dissemination of these recipes, open to public use. Simplified assembly techniques using sequential comic strips and simple pictograms, all these elements combined in the manuals' recipes make its architecture possible. In the selected publications, it will be agreed that "ablrquitectura has to be fundamentally readable [...] emerging practices are dedicated to the re-circulation

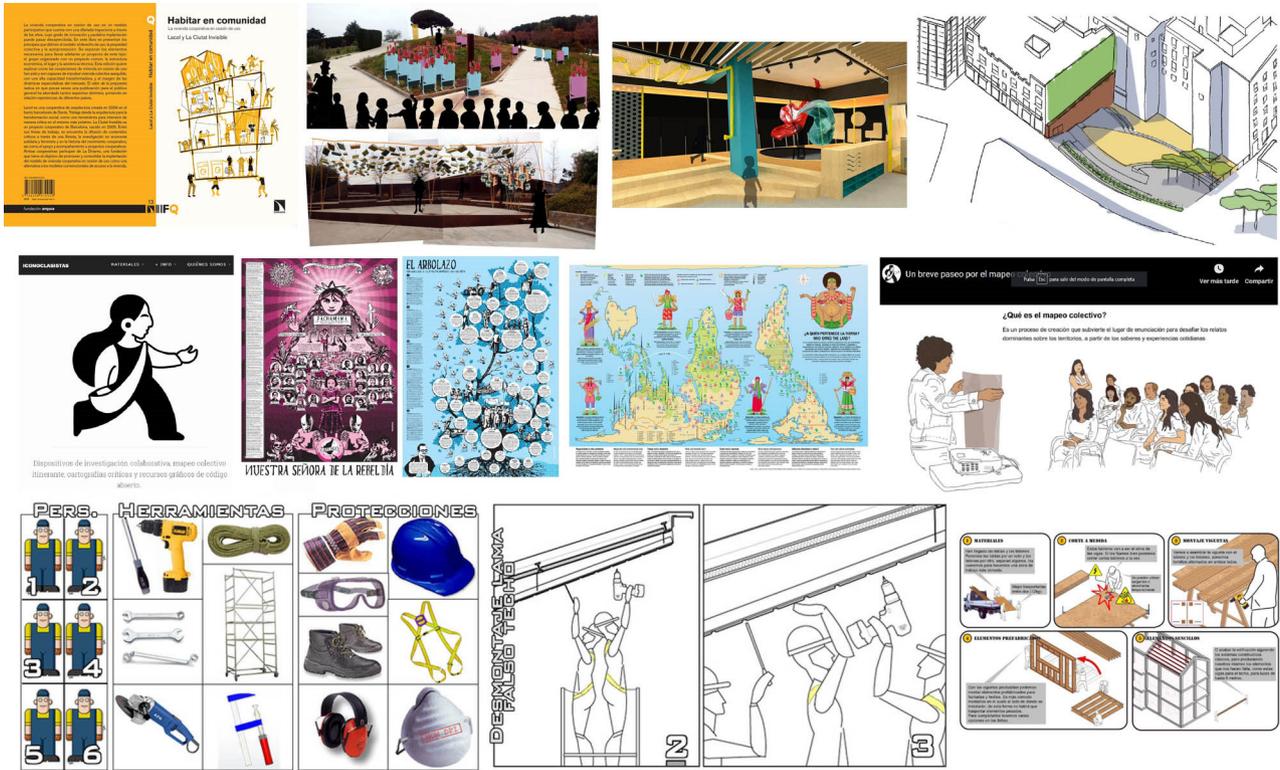


Fig. 4. Graphic trends: comic, fragmented aesthetics for graphic action in the manuals of Iconoclastas [Risler, Ares 2013], Lacol [Lacol Arquitectura Cooperativa 2018] and Recetas Urbanas [Guzmán 2018].

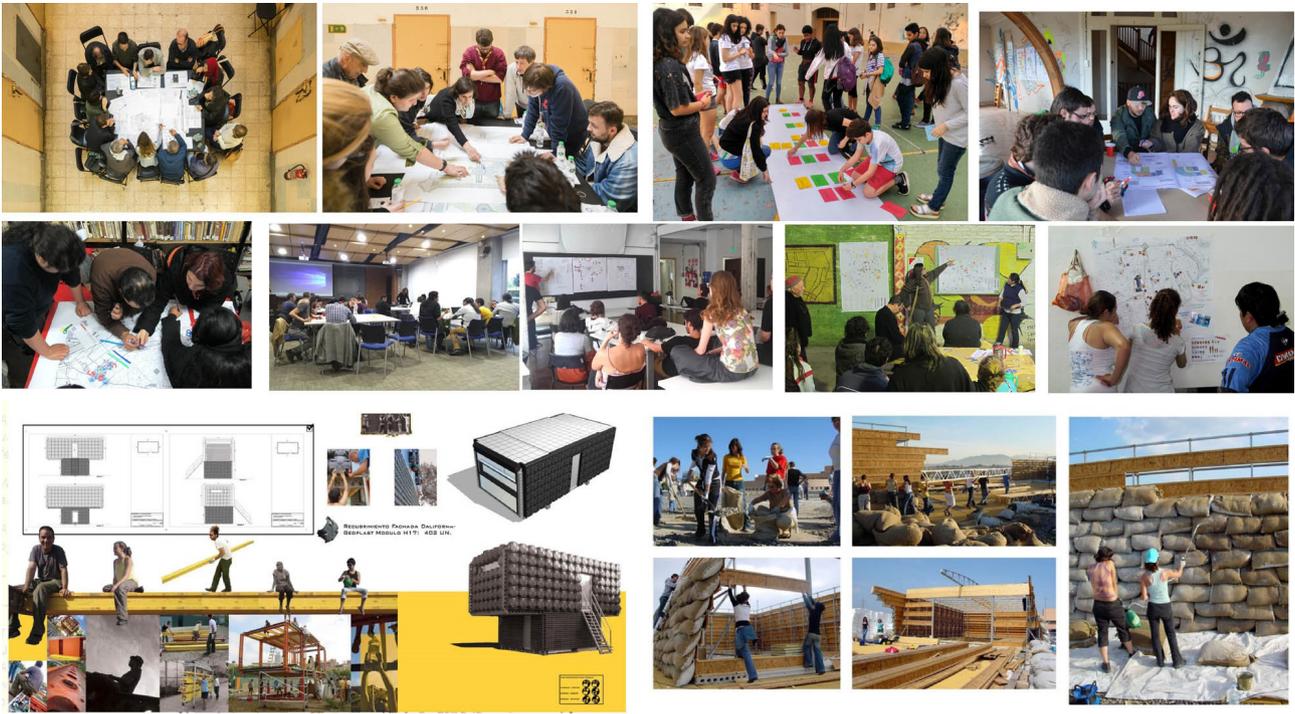


Fig. 5. The graphic action, scenes of participation from the graphic in the manuals of Lacol [Lacol Arquitectura Cooperativa 2018], Iconoclastas [Risler, Ares 2013] and Recetas Urbanas [Guzmán 2018].

of archetypes and languages” [Zaera-Polo 2016, pp. 7-8], both in architecture and in proposals for action on the territory. With these combined resources the essential task is guaranteed, connecting with the user and the general public.

Conclusions

In the productions of Lacol, Iconoclasistas and Recetas Urbanas the graphic aspects will be conditioned by the need for transmission and communication to society of their productions. A common goal is to involve society even in its graphic strategies (fig. 5). In the Lacol manual constant declarations of intention are made about it: “In order to ensure informed and inclusive participation, it is essential to establish clear methods that make decision-making processes readable. The repertoire of existing methodologies is very wide and largely depends on the field in which they are applied” [Lacol Arquitectura Cooperativa 2018, p. 46].

In the same way, in the Iconoclasistas manual this need is highlighted: “The construction of new territorial stories and narratives requires tools that promote participation and that encourage reflection based on dialogical views. In this sense, the design and activation of an arsenal of visual resources (iconographies, pictograms, graphic and cartographic devices) establish a work platform that encourages the remembrance, exchange and signaling of the themes” [Risler, Ares 2013, p. 14]. In the work of Recetas Urbanas, the user’s need for participation and involvement is implicitly linked to his ideas, it is a structural part of his work, his work has no place without them: “For Urban Recipes, architecture is an incentive for people to come together. They have made this collaborative approach their lifestyle, their hallmark of work. More than the finished building, it is the relationships and networks fostered through collaborative practice and the social functions that their projects serve that have the greatest value [...] Urban Recipes believes that their work is pure social action and cannot be marketed in the market. In fact, there is

a lot of technical documentation of their projects that can be downloaded for free from their website” [Guzmán 2018, p. 323].

The objectives are clearly stated, the role of the graphic in this is evident in the resources used. Diagrams, pictograms, collages, comics, collective graphic actions and a fragmented aesthetic, with recognizable forms drawn from pop, postmodernism or the vernacular, are, among others, an active part of his graphic strategies. These manuals serve as references, bringing together a whole repertoire of forms of representation for very diverse architectural proposals. The collectives in general expose and explain their working methods, drawing on extensive graphic documentation associated with the projects and alternative projects they propose. From a panoramic and general vision, some generic conclusions can be drawn, the simultaneous presence of the large number of graphic options indicated in this article becomes evident. If we ask ourselves if the collectives or the action architecture have their own graphic representation, it is concluded that it is not possible to answer in a simple, general or schematic way, before the vast and complex panorama that unfolds in a common interpretation. As a sample of the large inventory of groups, through these manuals we can affirm that, in general, the use of a graphic expression involved with their works and actions, in different degrees and tasks, is stated. The graphic will play an active and determining role in your activity.

In Lacol, Iconoclasistas and Recetas Urbanas manuals, a high level of communicability is sought, with an evident didactic desire and a sought-after visual appeal. Drawings, diagrams, plans and models are carefully and strategically planned for this purpose. Extracted between the diversity in “the collective”, it could be affirmed that in Lacol, Iconoclasistas and Recetas Urbanas the general protagonism that graphic expression has is reflected. “The graphic” will be a fundamental means of communication, with which to disseminate and make known their ideas, their works and actions, which will prioritize involving a society they seek to transform. The use of the manual will be an ideal channel for this.

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