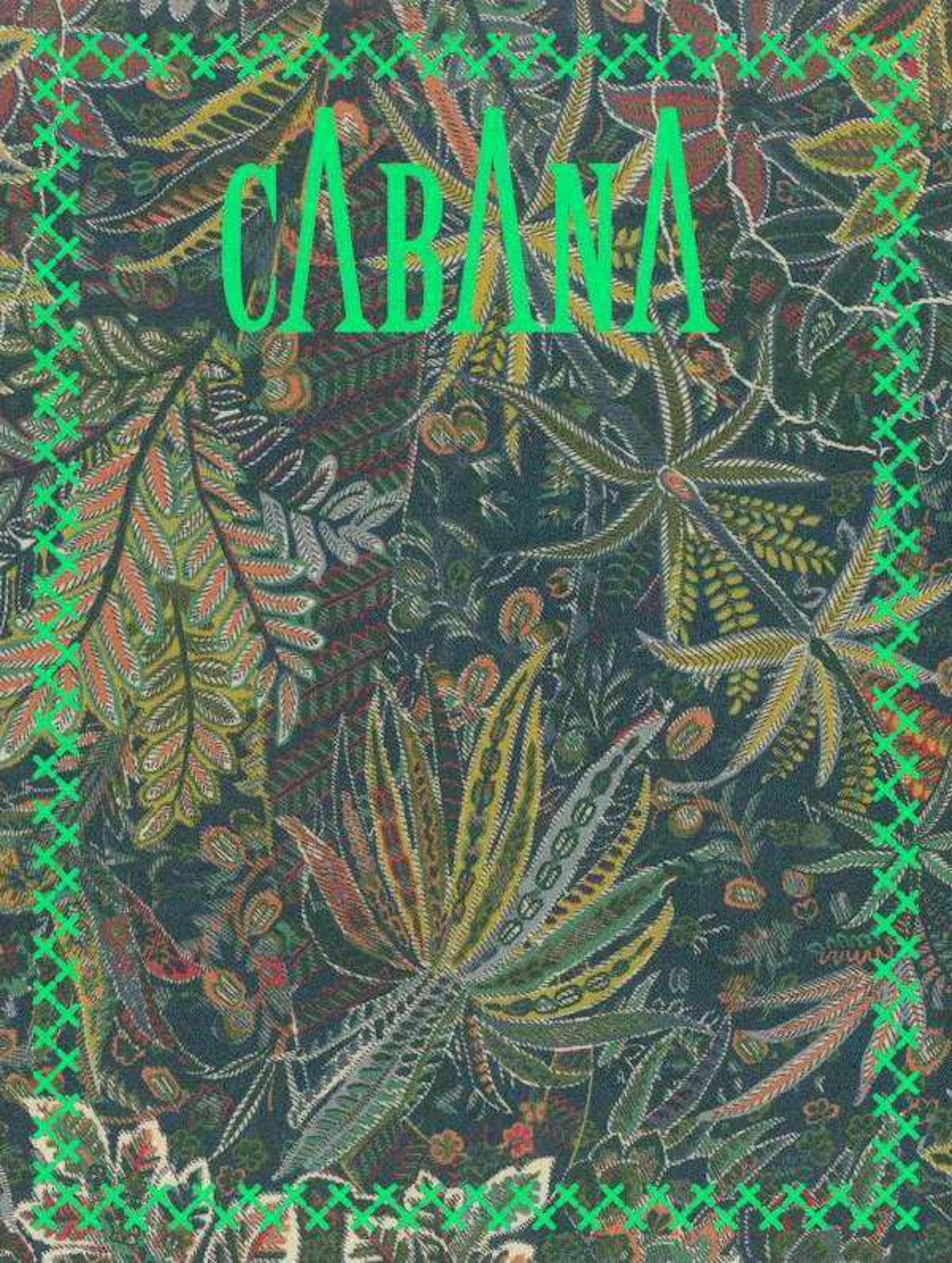


# CABANA





# *Stairway to Heaven*

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My attraction to Francisco Salomone's architecture started in my early days as an architecture student. I discovered his universe by chance through friends, the links were not architectural at first but via music and films. At that time, I was listening to Sinéad O'Connor, Massive Attack and Dead Can Dance or watching Peter Greenaway or Fritz Lang movies. Salomone was born in Leonforte in Sicily and, at the age of 4, his family, like many others, emigrated to Argentina. His father was a builder. Salomone studied Architecture and Engineering in Buenos Aires. We know very little of his residential projects, much of his work was public buildings like town halls, squares, boulevards and markets. He is, however, principally known for his cemeteries and slaughterhouses. When I encountered him in the pre-internet world, his works could only be seen in a few public libraries in Buenos Aires, so the architectural attention was always around the odd subject of death. I had never paid attention to the other projects until recently as I was quite fascinated by the expressionist side of his work. Salomone's universe is very rich and complex, his approach to architecture is unique and deserves attention.

Last year, I visited for the first time the cemetery of Azul, 300 kilometers away from Buenos Aires. After four hours of driving we came to a fairly narrow road, Ruta 3 which brought us to the still agricultural locality. We arrived at the end of the day, with cattle to the right and left of us. We were truly in the Pampas. After crossing the small town, we reached the cemetery's famous facade. The low buildings around allowed the sun to hit the concrete facade. All these memories from my youth rushed back to me. It was a strange feeling, meeting for the first time an old friend that I had seen only in books. In my mind, Salomone's architecture is very theatrical. The minute you arrive he puts you in your place. He sets the tone and, in this case, you are confronted with death, you feel small and vulnerable at the feet of this massive concrete building full of shadows created by the pleats of the Art Déco architecture. After all these years, the building remains intact, and the lack of new paint makes the drama of the subject that much more intense. The building feels futuristic today, I can't imagine what it must have been like when this was built in a rural part of the province of Buenos Aires.

All the fears one has about death are right there at the very entrance where one is confronted by the tall sculpture of the Archangel San Miguel with his sword. This could have been part of Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis*. Right behind, you have the Latin inscription RIP: *requiescat in pace* (rest in peace) built in an inverted perspective to reinforce the idea of the height and the scale that diminishes you. The unwelcoming mass feels like a strong punch to the chest. You feel fear and grief. Casting the movement of the flames and the angel's wings in concrete may seem contradictory —things that are thought of as light and fluttery are represented here in dense and unyielding concrete. In fact this is appropriate, these things are both light and heavy at the same time.

Salomone was commissioned to design the extension of the existing 19th century cemetery of the town. This shift in time becomes very apparent once you are inside and you see that the core of site is built in the Beaux Arts neo-classical manner of the time. It appears that Salomone's intervention heralded the coming of the modern age for the town, many other architects and builders followed his minimalist lead in the construction of the tombs. These funeral pavilions which recall Adolf Loos or even Carlo Scarpa frame the old cemetery.

Other interesting things abound. A middle-aged man who declared himself a regular visitor pointed out different signals on the facades of the miniature buildings. A sand clock on wings, an eye for Mason families, and crooked crosses for those converted to Catholicism... further along on the edges of the cemetery are the tombs of foreigners (mostly English) and some Jewish people. At times, the cemetery feels abandoned and vandalized—sadly there is a black market for bronze.

The simplicity and the lack of ornament on the back facade puts you at ease. It's a deep breath. It feels like Salomone giving you back that peace that he took away upon arrival.











All the images are video stills from the upcoming  
documentary *Salamone* by Felipe Sanguinetti  
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