

The Irish Museum of Modern Art is proud to present an exhibition by Carlos Garaicoa titled *Overlapping*. The exhibition concentrates on Garaicoa's use of sculpture and photography as an aesthetic approach to critique the failure of modernism and of 20th century ideologies as a catalyst for social change. Through a conceptual framework Garaicoa reflects on architectural models primarily in urban environments that denote a system of governance and through deconstructing these structures creates a complex analogy of the nature of architecture as a physical manifestation of current and past social models. His work draws from elements of anthropology, social and political science as well as social psychology.

Carlos Garaicoa was born in Havana, Cuba in 1967. His initial training was as a thermodynamics engineer and during his mandatory military service he worked as a draughtsman. Between 1989-94 he studied at the Institute of Fine Arts of Cuba. Through his experiences of growing up and being educated in Havana, Garaicoa has an inherent sense of the complexity of its history and how it has evolved politically. Havana is an important reference point in his work and from there he has expanded his practice to encompass megacities such as Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo and other major cities.

His practice is concerned with the interpretation of architecture, as an indicator of a cultural past, present and future. The series *Overlapping*, (2006) consists black and white photographs of historic buildings layered over with string drawings that replicate architectural outlines of absent buildings, the drawings add to the existing landscape and are informed by the notion of the ruin. Giovanni Battista Piranesi inverts this method, he famously etched monumental buildings in ruins; imitating the architects he often times completed the ruins as he imagined them. Similarly, Albert Speer's *Theory of Ruin Value (Die Ruinenwerttheorie)* informed his approach to designing architecture, he constructed his designs on how they would appear as ruins, the intention being to create an architectural legacy that would survive throughout history and immortalize the period of the Third Reich. This approach to creating monumental buildings as a means to mark a period of rule is evident throughout history buildings such as the Parthenon¹, the colosseum².

Garaicoa's architectural interventions such as *Acerca De esos incansables Atlantes que sostienen dia por dia nuestro/About these untiring Atlantes that sustain our present day by day*, (1993-1995) reference columns associated with classical architecture. The photographs of scaffolds poised to prop up buildings in Havana that are succumbing to the natural elements are reminiscent of these columns. In George Simmel's essay on *The Ruin* (1911) he writes about how "the fascination of ruins rests upon its capacity to show the work of Man almost like the work of nature". He viewed the natural decay of manmade architecture as nature's way to avenge itself on our domination of its domain.

Ruins are indicators of utopian histories, ideological successes and failures. It was Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who referred to the utopian socialists when referring to socialists who had a distant vision for society which were egalitarian, communalist and based on a perfect society. In the historical analyses of utopian socialism Marx and Engels 'denounced its Utopian competition as lacking any conception of agency or political strategy and characterized Utopianism as idealism deeply and structurally averse to the political as such'³. This utopian idealism is mirrored in the political history of Cuba. Cuba's revolution in 1959 was led from a socialist perspective, the policies put in place such as abolition of landlordism and pursuit of a system where healthcare, education and housing were accessible to all led to a utopian vision that ultimately was problematic.

¹ Ancient Greek Temple in Athenian Acropolis, Greece, completed in 431 BC

² Roman amphitheater built in AD 80

³ Jameson, Frederic, *Archaeologies of the future*, Verso, NY 2007

Garaicoa refers to the micro brigades, which were part of the urban reform Law put in place by the socialist state. Under this system groups of employees from given workplaces would form brigades to construct houses while the other workers would maintain a standard level of production. The housing was then allocated to the employees of the workplace. This approach tripled the amount of housing available but also led to sub-standard housing due to shortage of materials and unskilled labor. In a series of black and white photographs titled *Somebody's architecture*, (2002) Garaicoa has documented buildings that are incomplete or in disrepair.

Teoría y Práctica en el 18 Brumario de K. Marx /Theory and Practice in K. Marx's the Eighteenth Century Brumaire, (2009) is a sculptural work containing 30 copies of one of Marx's first publications the subject of which is the French revolution of 1851 where Napoleon made himself leader through a coup d'état. In it Hegel states 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves but under circumstances' directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.' This sentiment is echoed in Garaicoa's practice as he references pinnacle points in history through his titles, sculptures and photograph that have had an influence on our current point in history.

Garaicoa's work *La plus belle sculpture, c'est le pavé que l'on jette sur la gueule des flics /The most beautiful Sculpture is the Brick we throw at the Face of the Cops*, (2009) is a reference to the May, 1968 protests and the largest general strike in France that succeeded in destabilizing the de Gaulle government. The sculpture is a tiered structure of books on May, 1968 with a concrete brick placed within it, alluding to the concrete tower blocks that are associated with Le Corbusier. His vision was to create better living conditions for people living within cities ironically they have become symbols of poverty, crime and rioting in France. The global adoption of this method of housing has disenfranchised migrant populations and the impoverished, and has often being referred to as the modern ghetto's.

De como mi biblioteca brasileña se alimenta con fragmentos de una realidad concreta / On how my Brazilian library feeds itself with fragments of a concrete reality, (2008) refers to the highrise buildings synonymous with Rio de Janeiro. This sculpture represents an important political and expansionist period in Brazil. The surge of modern architecture gave rise to a new form of cultural expression that superimposed itself over indigenous architecture. The materials used in this sculpture concrete, Brazilian Architectural publications and 9mm bullets are emblematic of an era of urbanization that has been synonymous with globalization and the homogenization of the cityscape and the social problems that stem from this.

Garaicoa's interest in language and literature is evident through his use of books within his sculptures.

No Way Out, (2002) a sculptural installation of lighting rice paper lamps represents the fragile nature of cities and its flammable nature.....

The Stasi Building, the KGB headquarters and the Pentagon are buildings that are associated with state security and structures of power, Garaicoa in *Las joyas de la corona/The Crown Jewels*, (2009) created eight silver sculptures, each piece a miniature representation of these buildings. Both sides of the cold war, the East and the West are implicated in the use of subversive techniques in gathering information. The sculpture of the naval base in Guantánamo is indicative of Foucault's⁴ writing on prisons. He puts forward that Bentham's panopticon⁵ is an

⁴ Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punishment; The Birth of the Prison*, Gallimard, France, 1977.

architectural manifestation of systems of power and knowledge whereby its design one begins to self-police. These government institutions are a physical representation of how surveillance has become ever pervasive in contemporary society ultimately leading to a corrosion of civil liberties.

Garaicoa's observations on urban planning, architecture and government policies are not isolated to one location but are universal, making this exhibition quite poignant within an Irish context as the ruins of modern capitalism are visible in the ghost estates and empty high rises that currently mark our city and urban landscape.

⁵ The concept of the design is to allow an observer to observe all prisoners without the incarcerated being able to tell whether they are being watched, thereby conveying what one architect has called the "sentiment of an invisible omniscience."