

Carlos Garaicoa

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Carlos Garaicoa works in installation, new media and photography. He uses architectural forms to illustrate the disintegration of political ideals both in a sociological sense and in its physical manifestation.



As a contemporary artist from Cuba, belonging to a generation that grew up under the regime of Fidel Castro, Garaicoa has developed a unique style defined by the irony in its ideas and the resourcefulness of its formal solutions. Unlike many of his contemporaries he does not live in exile. However he has had the opportunity to travel and develop work all over the world. This makes him one of the most well-known Cuban artists in the international sphere.

Born in Havana in 1967, Carlos Garaicoa's work has been concerned with the archaeology of the city. He understands architecture as one of the most influential disciplines on the development of society. He regards it as not only having a huge impact politically, ideologically and socially in the bigger scale, but also having a real impact in everyday life. His interests have always been close to architecture and public art, however his work is not monumental or grandiose; on the contrary his approach to the subject is through the subtle gesture. 'City viewed from the table of my house' (1998) is one of such works concerned with the city from a poetical perspective, where Garaicoa tries to address the issue of the public versus the private, using glass objects placed on a table in such a way that they echo the view of the city outside.

Although his work is often viewed under the shadow of the word utopia, his approach is rather a comment on the realities and possibilities of the territory. It responded initially to the local situation in Cuba after the fall of communism in the Soviet Union, talking about the decadence of architecture that ultimately evidences the fall of an ideal, and the consequences of living on an island not only in geographical but also political terms. The contradictions within Cuba have been

one of the points of departure for his projects especially since he declares to be working in the global sphere (global and local at the same time).

Garaicoa is interested in the encounter between cultures. This subject matter can be seen in works like 'Cualquier sitio es un buen sitio para vivir', a series of photographs of devastated areas all over the world, trying to show how some conditions are present everywhere, not only in Havana. According to him urban architectural abandonment is one of the characteristics of modernity shared by developed and underdeveloped countries alike. Although his point of departure is Cuba, in this particular work he is actually making a comment on modernity being an incomplete project and the frustration this entails, that is to say the imminence of social dreams ruined by time.

Garaicoa finds himself thinking of urban organization as an intrinsic condition of humanity, but also of the entropy of this condition as it materializes and destroys itself almost simultaneously seemingly without any interference from people or community. These contradictory impulses to create and to destroy are always present in his work. 'Ahora juguemos a desaparecer' (2002), for instance, is a city built with wax that melts gradually as the heat takes over.

In 'Continuidad de una arquitectura ajena', the work he presented at Documenta 11, Garaicoa attempted to make a reconstruction of places and landmarks, like the Twin Towers, by means of fiction; thus pointing out the possibility of challenging history and human nature through the imagination. It is a perfect example of how texts are very important in his pieces, in the titles or in the work itself. It is important for him to keep a certain degree of narrative, given the fact that there is always a story linked to his works. Thus, the media can change from drawing, to video, to sculpture and installation but the story is always present.

Always looking from the architectural point of view, another of Garaicoa's concerns is to challenge the way Cuba is seen from the outside and how to project another image. In his work he plays with the contrast between the classic romantic image of Havana's ruins and the plans and models for the city of the future. Although his work seems at times dramatically romantic, the images he uses of architecture in ruins are contrasted by his projects of new architecture that seem to be a proposal to see buildings as relational objects. Thus nostalgia and endeavor mix in his work. He makes a proposal for a city of the future as he looks at the ruins of the past.

Giving importance to the ruin as a monument of times past and the promise of times to come, Garaicoa reaches for a sort of identification with the territory, a search for another way to address identity outside the stereotypical Cuban cars, buildings, poverty etc. For the past few years Garaicoa has focused on the Cuban context, his aim with this is to make it known globally as it is and not as an exotic construction. The artist highlights how the utopia of the modern city conceived in Europe has come to Latin America and disappeared under the decay that bad administration and lack of understanding brought. As he says "we face a never consummated architecture ... proclaimed ruin before it ever existed". He calls them ruins of the future, a future that never came.