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domènec

## *y la tierra será el paraíso*

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"The suburb is the permanent *après-coup* of the inquiry led by the Western soul on the subject of community and inhabitable space-time."  
\_Jean-François Lyotard \_Postmodern Fables

Domènec's artistic trajectory, which began in the late nineties, provokes a continuous dialogue between past and present activated by the review of modern architecture and its present status. This journey through time allows the artist to highlight the utopias' failure by questioning openly to the ideological, political and economic resources presented, more or less explicitly, on great architectural and urban projects. Thus, Domènec's work carries out research about the past and its pitfalls, but also offers options to apply on the present to change the future.

*Y la tierra será el paraíso*, title of this solo show, is a verse of the most popular *L'Internationale* Spanish version, the working class anthem, adopted by most of socialist, communist and anarchist political groups worldwide. The phrasing perfectly sums up the utopian character of modernity, an era in which the society believed that all good things were at hand and everything could be achieved through effort. Domènec invests that statement in order to throw an ironic smile verifying the naivety of those who uncritically entrusted the promises of modernity now that we have seen the disastrous outcome.

However, not everything is about regretting the shipwreck of good intentions, or to reveal that never were so good indeed, the artist also leaves space for hope. This is what is evidenced by *Sostenere il Palazzo dell'Utopia* (2004), which analyses the Corviale's case; a huge residential complex on the outskirts of Rome, considered one of the last projects attuned with the universal model for collective housing advocated by Le Corbusier. The building remained unfinished after the bankruptcy of the construction company; a large architectural skeleton located in a suburb devoid of services that was quickly occupied. The illegal inhabitants were in charge of the interior construction developed in a self-managed way according to their own needs. The result is a labyrinthine and precarious space, seen by the inhabitants of Rome as a dangerous place, yet it has been achieved to internally function as an effective community that brings together people from diverse backgrounds, ethnic groups and religions.

As a result of this project, Domènec presents a photographic series with Corviale's dwellers pictured in their houses holding a model of *Unité d'Habitation*; the emblematic design by Le Corbusier. Facing these portraits, we find power representations of art history with men holding models of religious buildings or cities: a very widespread modality during the Middle Ages to portray leaders, promoters or patrons of the great constructions of that time. With this exercise of comparative pictures Domènec vindicates the inhabitants of Corviale as the true authors of their houses and their neighbourhood, which constitutes an example of empowerment and success of self-management in contrast to the failure of the dysfunctional and unfinished institutional project.

The observation of the suburban cities continues in the *Ville-Usine* project (2017) in which Domènec shows us its findings in the archive of the Ville Saint-Fons, a city located at south Lyon and an important centre of chemical-textile industry during the XIX century. These findings are four photos that show different portraits of worker groups in the factories of the city. Woman and male workers protests along with people from colonies in Africa, Indochina or Vietnam, showing how industrial development and capitalism motivated the first waves of migration long time before the Second World War.

With these pieces, related to the project *Conversation Piece: Les Minguettes* (2017), the artist goes back to the origin of Les Minguettes; a large polygon of social housing built in the sixties, inhabited by a large community of African immigrants, that was an important centre of anti-racist popular movements in France. Thus, Domènec points out how the colonized population began to emigrate in response to the needs of Western capitalists, those who got rich with the chemical industry without exposing themselves to the dangers of toxic pollution, thanks to a cheap labour force and the displacement of factories to the peripheries. The immigrants, then, were forced to leave their places of origin to be submitted to labour exploitation and deplorable living conditions into factory-cities in the outskirts of the urban centres where the rich settled and the power is concentrated.

Labour exploitation is also the main theme of *Arquitectura Española, 1939-1975* (2014-2018), a series of images outlined in white over black that shows plans of monumental buildings made in Spanish State during Franco's dictatorship. Buildings such as El valle de los caídos (The Valley of the Fallen), a commemorative mausoleum of Franco political power; the Cathedral of Vic; or institutions such Carabanchel prison. These constructions, led by the Franco's government to reconstruct the damages caused during the Civil War, used republican prisoners as workforce, the side of the vanquished, turned into slaves under forced labour sentences.

Thus, the fascist side, the victors, obtained various benefits. First the economic profit, because they saved a lot on workers' wages. Secondly the propaganda, because they used these constructions as a proof of their well-functioning government and the progress that supposed its exercise of power. And finally, there is also the question of emotional or symbolic benefit, since this condemnation not only punished the prisoners, but showing their former opponents turned into their slaves was for the Falangists the way to carry out their revenge.

About prisoners and prison conditions deals the video *Panoptic* (2011) created for an intervention at Mataró's prison, first of the Spanish state built according to the panoptic system in which a guard located in a central position can observe all the prisoners located in front of him in a circular way. Domènec, inspired by *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la Prison*, written by Michel Foucault in 1975, highlights how this system is a forerunner of certain current practices of self control, since thanks to the panopticon system prisoners who do not know whether they are monitored or not, ending up developing the so-called self-surveillance.

As colophon of the exhibition is presented for the first time *Y la tierra será el paraíso* (2018) the most recent project of Domènec, consisting of a photographic series and wooden models that, stacked on top of each other, make up a sort of tower with sculptural appearance. These models represent the gigantic social housing projects of La Mina, a neighbourhood located in the limits of Barcelona, constructed at the end of the sixties to relocate the population coming from different shanty towns. Two archival photographs are shown next to the sculpture; one, from 1970, shows the dictator Franco and the mayor of Barcelona posing next to the model of La Mina neighbourhood project. Another one, shows a couple of gypsy women, relocated in this same neighbourhood, holding the model of their shack at Camp de la Bota, built by themselves with cardboard. Once again, we see the image of power presenting itself as the leader of the population through large construction campaigns, in front of the image of the most disadvantaged classes of society, which take over the urban space making use of all the resources they find at their reach.

The project is completed with a photographic series showing polygons of large social housing buildings. Domènec, who has taken these snapshots in cities far from each other such as Barcelona, Warsaw, Bratislava, Marseille, Nantes, Empuriabrava and Mexico City, shows the images without indicating their origins. In this way, he highlights the way in the existence and aesthetics of these buildings, located all in big cities' peripheries, as a sign of harmful globalization and state control that relegates the marginalized of capitalism to the margins of the city, limiting their social mobility.

Once again, Domènec's work seems to reveal the hidden face of Modern architecture, whose results were contrary to the objectives that were promulgated. If modernity, with its characteristic tendency to formulate promises of progress, of a better tomorrow for all, projecting through architecture a universal model of welfare for the working class, these images show the clash of those ideals with reality: neighbourhoods where the poorest social classes are forced to live in precarious conditions, segregated from social, cultural and economic centres. Working class, immigrants coming largely from the former colonies, and gypsy groups, are no longer treated as individuals from the moment they joined a kind of hive-building, becoming a mass, in otherness, feared and ignored by the rest of population with better working and economic conditions.

\_Rosa A. Cruz

#### **/ Domènec (Mataró, Spain, 1962)**

As a visual artist he has made numerous exhibitions and projects in different countries such as Ireland, Mexico, Belgium, France, Italy, United States, Israel, Palestine, Argentina, Finland, Japan or Brazil. In 2018 MACBA showed his solo exhibition *Not Here, Not Enywhere*. His work have been showed among other places in the New Museum of Contemporary Art of New York, in the Hammer Museum of Los Angeles or in Storefront for Art and Architecture of New York. In addition, he is co-editor of the publication of art, architecture and public space *Roulotte* and member of the board of directors of Can Xalant, Centro de Creación y Pensamiento Contemporáneo de Mataró.