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Domènec
BKF. Cynegetics and Modernity

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30.06.2018—17.11.2018

Industrial Revolution was one of the greatest transformations in our history. The improvement of new technologies during the late 18th century in Europe and America would change the entire social system. From then on, the bulk of the population, dedicated until that moment to agriculture and set on rural areas, moved to cities in order to satisfy the needs of such a great mechanization. At the end of 19th century towns experienced a great population expansion due to the constant demand of manpower. A new social class appeared then, the proletariat. Workers, the most oppressed but also the largest social group became a key part on this new economic model that needed to adapt to such an important revolution. As a result, it was necessary to come up with new approaches in order to solve the precariousness of this sector and, therefore, to improve the whole society life standards.

Philosophers and politicians looked for a theoretical and practical proposal to satisfy the needs of this new social structure. Socialism appeared to be one possible solution as well as its ideals of working and living based on the collective. One of the consequences of this new system would be the Modern Project whose criteria would also affect the artistic development. In that context, while painting and sculpture aimed to be a continuous aesthetic and conceptual break with previous styles, architecture would follow a different path whose main priority would be to adapt to those social and human needs.

Architects decided then to set decoration aside in order to address the basis and purpose of their own discipline. Within the art world, Architecture had been, until that very moment, restricted to liturgical buildings, large palaces and villas. From that moment on, functionality would be the key element in all modern constructions. This new way of organic architecture, led by the American Frank Lloyd Wright and followed by other architects like Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier, aimed to adapt its buildings to their inhabitants in order to make their lives easier and more affordable. As a result simple forms and raw materials such as iron and concrete would predominate in these projects. Despite being based on a solid theory, this new and idealist architecture was soon subjected to the wills of an implacable neoliberalism that will appropriate its structures for its own benefit.

Domènec analyzes through his works these Modern productions - buildings, design objects and monuments - to understand their origins, functions (and dysfunctions) and evaluate their impact nowadays. Thus, the artist reveals some of the paradoxes and cracks of these Modern failed proposals. Domènec's projects - that are being exhibited these days at the solo show, *Neither here nor anywhere*, at MACBA (Barcelona) – present buildings such as *La Casa Bloc* (homes built between 1933 and 1939 in Sant Andreu, Barcelona) or *the Narkomfin* complex (set of edifications built in the central district of Moscow, prototype of this constructivist architecture designed to make communal life easier). All of them aimed to contribute to a self-sufficient community development. Nevertheless, *La Casa Bloc* became military barracks and the *Narkomfin* complex was used by government members as luxury apartments, functions that had nothing to do with the original purposes.

From a set of photographs, site-specific installations and structures / sculptures, Domènec reflects on the so-called crisis of Modernity through a critical review in order to give these utopian projects visibility and to discover what remains of their original proposals. With all this, the artist questions urgent topics such as the public and the social; memory management; and political mechanisms of our society.

For this exhibition in **ADN Platform**, Domènec presents another product of the so called Modern project. It is the iconic BKF chair, an aesthetic and functional proposal also known as "Butterfly chair" because of its morphological resemblance to the insect. The prototype consists of two symmetrical tubular pieces welded and covered by a piece of leather. A simple and soft design that also evokes the natural in its curved and sinuous forms. A morphological object that acquires an almost sculptural, even architectural, value while fulfilling its main function, that of the seat.

Created between 1938 and 1939, the BKF was designed by exiled Catalan architect Antoni Bonet Castellana and the Argentines Juan Kurchan and Jorge Ferrari-Hardoy. They met each other while working at le Corbusier's office in 1936. Two years later the three architects created the *Austral* group (1938 – 1941). In this particular case, the figure of Antoni Bonet stands out as the architectural rationalism of the GATPAC (Group of Catalan Architects and Technicians for the Progress of Contemporary architecture) together with the surrealist poetics of the ADLAN (Friends of New Art) conformed, within the framework of the II Republic in Spain, the perfect field for the development of the group. It was, in fact, in this context that they produced this peculiar chair.

The BKF became one of the most famous designs in history taking part in numerous exhibitions around the world (Paris, Tokyo, Munich, London, Chicago ...). In 1944, Edgar Kaufmann, MoMA's director of Industrial Design collection at that time, acquired one BKF for the museum's collections and two more for the the iconic "Waterfall House" (Frank Lloyd Wright), example par excellence of this rationalist Modern architecture. Since 2014, the BKF was also acquired by Design Museum Hub in Barcelona. *Austral* group's proposal turned out to be another perfect example of European avant-garde design and would soon become part of its history.

As usual in Domènec's processes, with this installation the artist examines the iconic design from a new point of view. The two BKF chairs appear without their coating, the piece of leather that covers them and making us possible to sit on them. Its original function is thus nullified and now the structures are ready for being used in different ways. One of these alternatives of use could be the one we see in the picture of the dictator Francisco Franco that appears near the chairs. The dictator uses the naked frames of the chairs to proudly display his hunting trophies: two deer heads whose baroque antlers oppose the soft and synthetic lines of the BKF's skeletons. Ortega y Gasset said once that hunting, (also called "cynegetics") consists of everything that is done before and after the death of the animal, being the death a key part in this process. We can find here a certain resemblance with the evolution of modernity, an idealistic project that suffered from constantly harassment until its very crisis. The entire installation causes in its viewers a strange confusion resulting from the clash between an object based on very specific social ideals (progress, improvement of quality life and the development of an equitable community) versus some conservative, even retrograde standards.

What was a product of a theoretical and political project that aimed to contribute to a more egalitarian society was appropriated once again by elites. Turned into an expensive product only affordable by a few and jeopardized in the same way that had been misused other building or design proposals. In essence, the transformation of an object that was the result of a progressive way of thinking into a mere consumer product. Through this revision of the BKF, and the analysis of other products of this significant period, Domènec recalls their original purpose and suggest us to get that idealistic spirit back in order to seek for more equal alternatives adapting them to the current and future times.

Domènec (Mataró, 1962)

The focus of Domènec's research and critical essay is precisely the crisis of modernity and an awareness of the failures of the modern movement, which he materializes in the form of sculptures, installations, photographs, videos and interventions in the public space. His work is fundamentally about issues such as the distance between utopia and social reality; speculation on the public dimension of architecture and the ideological precepts that determine it; socio-historical mechanisms and how they are interfered with; and about what conditions memory and oblivion.

He has participated in numerous exhibitions in countries such as Ireland, Mexico, Belgium, United States, Canada, Israel, Palestine, Brazil, Slovenia, Finland, Argentina and Japan. His video works have been shown in art centers such as the New Museum of Contemporary Art and the Srotenfront for Art and Architecture, New York; and the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. He is co-editor of Roulotte magazine, and was a member of the managing board of Can Xalant, Centre de Creació i Pensament Contemporani de Mataró (2005–2012). His recent solo exhibitions include those at MACBA and Mies van der Rohe Pavilion, Barcelona (both currently ongoing) and MUSAC, León, among others.

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