

The Finding

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The Finding is a photography project that arises from the collection of various waste and found objects, operation that follows the direction of the *objet trouvé*. Then, they are photographically manipulated taking multiple references from the artistic vanguards of the 20th century, seeking in this way, certain architectural similarities of a possible dystopian city. Which, uninhabited and mysterious, seeks to represent the unstable and uncertain character of many of our current cities, and which is projected threateningly into the future.

Like many visual artists, I am a collector looking out for the city. Like Diogenes, I patiently obtain from waste and junk that I relocate as potential elements for a fictional architecture. Empty perfume bottles, packaging elements, and boxes of the most diverse nature are then confronted by the camera to become a metropolitan allegory as if in the geometry of this debris, we found the panoramic print of its current face. It is the city itself, jaded in its entropy of weariness, which has been emptied and rescued by the artist's eye in its own future.

These objects are embedded in the field of art following the path of the *objet trouvé*, which already implies a magical game. They operate as a hinge between space and time since it meant that this finding happened in one place and precise moment, when I walked by a particular corner or street. These items would probably no longer be available if he had passed through that location more sooner or more later. In addition, manipulating these objects implies a significant plastic risk since it would be easy to fall into the temptation of 'DIY' that recycles and disassembles them. This operation often dilutes their natural form and turns them into mere material, trying to replicate a symbolic form that usually has no relation to the object itself. Such a process only seeks to satisfy the vanity of the artist or craftsman who executes them; to display their anxious artfulness and manual skills.

The idea here has been to manipulate these objects as little as possible. This operation aims to reveal the objects' sensitive qualities given by their own shape and materiality: brightness, opacity, transparency, texture, and light refractions. Without any alteration in their forms, they speak for themselves in such a way that it is the observer's eye and mind that puts together this architectural image almost as if by *pareidolia* or builds an imagined architecture; a *Déjà vu* that vaguely remembers some building we have seen, or what is more: To imagine a non-existing one.

It is relevant to mention that I have developed my artistic career self-taught, preferably by building models. From this practice, I

have tried to displace and critically dismantle Contemporary Art as an expanded field since the early 2000s. Therefore, this detailed visual exploration implies leaving momentarily the high levels of craftsmanship developed in my previous works behind. The option here has been to present the objects through minimal intervention. They have been organized many times due to their modular form in a playful way, like *Lego* blocks, which refer in a certain way to fractal geometry. This scale relates allegorically to an imagined city's volumetry, this time made with the same objects.

I gather these findings in the form of architectural still lifes in a precarious and small photographic studio, in an apparent reference to architectural photography from classic architecture magazines. From the 1920s to the present, these have continued unscathed. Other relevant precedents in plastic experimentation have been Malevich's *Arkhitektons* or the fantastic drawings by Antonio Sant'Elia. Thus, as retro-futurist icons, they take us into a speculative artistic and architectural project where the collective subject of modernity circulates; where plastic and cardboard emulate steel, shiny glass, and brutalist modernist concrete as metaphors for a country's social development.

Black and white photography also fades our referential closeness to these objects, making them more ambiguous and unrecognizable in terms of their origin and scale. They generate a polysemy of meanings with their projected shadows, a seductive ambivalence of the shadow oscillating between the ominous nightmare and the elegance of the desire. In the use of high chromatics' flat colors, I have derived contrast and saturation, recalling graphic design with psychedelic references of magazine covers from the 1960s, such as the Chilean AUCA (*Arquitectura, Urbanismo, Cultura y Arte*).

The first phase of this visual research was exhibited at the Palacio La Moneda Cultural Center, Santiago de Chile, under the title of *Ciudades (No) Blandas* and curated by the art theorist and historian Andrés Grillo. This exhibition takes its name from the book *Soft City* by Jonathan Raban. In this story, Raban defines a hybrid and heterogeneous postmodern city, where the lifestyles of its inhabitants configure a chaotic urban space subject to the market and its fashions. According to Raban, this was the opposite of the modern paradigm, where the city was planned from projects that pursued the common good, at the same time derived through progress, within unsuspected realities nurtured by the recent decades' instability.

The pictures represent an uninhabited nocturnal city. A

large, empty, dystopian site that reminds us of films like Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* or Ales Proyas's *Dark City*, as opposed to the dazzling globalizing daytime brilliance they promised us. This cinematographic quote is no less than the architectural project as such—as a building or a city. Undoubtedly, much of cinema history has served us to alphabetize our urban views in an intertwined relationship with architecture, which has served as a narrative allegory for their stories, a backdrop, and a symbol. Let me cite, for example, the 1973 dystopian film *Soylent Green*, starring Charlton Heston, based on the novel *Make Room! Make Room!* written by Harry Harrison and published in 1966. This work presents a future (our future, by the way) that succumbed to ecological disaster, with overpopulated cities transformed into hells where only a privileged few live in ultra-modern and gleaming skyscrapers (like ivory towers). Contemporary are films *Omega Man* and *Planet of the Apes* films, starring Heston in a kind of apocalyptic trilogy that presents, from the turbulent late 1960s and early 1970s, a tragic vision of our cities' prospects. This period also coincides with the questioning of modern architecture, both as a dogma imposed on citizens' everyday lives and as a failure in the search for happiness. It is therefore worth remembering these films' temporal alignment with July 15, 1972: The Pruitt-Igoe complex demolition, described by Charles Jencks as the the day Modern architecture died.

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Those instabilities and uncertainties, imagined almost fifty years ago, are still threatening us. We are today under different circumstances due to a pandemic and post-pandemic scenario. It is increasingly frequent to see how many downtown cities have gradually been transformed into a group of protected vertical ghettos surrounded by hostile streets and closed stores. In this urban landscape, solitary drivers deliver services and products, while many other homeless or drug addicts are practically the only passersby on its alleys and streets. *Blade Runner* dystopia is near.

As the author of these images, I take advantage of the malleable distance that architecture seen from art can grant. This distance allows me to stress the border between fiction and reality and speculate between desire and *the possible* in a current temporality, full of uncertainties and pessimistic omens. I close this text with an ambivalence of feelings that haunt these photographs: elegance and melancholy, nostalgia and fear, retrofuturism and loneliness, etc. The Finding is just that, find the city in its own entropy, through the geometry of its debris and found objects, devalued by the outcomes and toils to which they were impelled,

like bottles thrown into the sea with mysterious messages inside, which represent their instability and uncertainty, I look for them and find them like a flaneur or a chronicler, like a contemporary Edward Hopper.

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