

Domènec

Not Here, Not Anywhere

Exhibition from 19 April to 11 September 2018



Domènec, *Baladia Future City*, 2011–15. MACBA Collection. Government of Catalonia long-term loan. National Photography Collection © Domènec, VEGAP, Barcelona, 2018

Not anywhere is, in the rhetoric proper to modernity, the space of utopia (from the Greek ού, 'not' and τόπος, 'place', literally: 'no place'). Always sited beyond the horizon, in a perpetual, unrealisable future. 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 materialises 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.

The exhibition *Domènec. Not Here, Not Anywhere* opens with **Voyage en Icarie** (Journey to Icaria, 2012), a work attempting to recover and poetically 'enlighten' the historical memory of the Icarians, a movement that, at a time of rapid capitalist expansion during the nineteenth century, fought for better living conditions and even dared to imagine alternative societies and to put their ideas into practice. The piece was installed in the Rambla de Figueres, near the monument to the Icarian Narcís Monturiol. Consisting of a wooden structure with a pyrotechnic sign, when alight, it briefly illuminated the utopian idea: 'Voyage en Icarie'.

Some of the contradictions of modernity, modern thought and especially modern architecture arise from discrepancies between the ideological and aesthetic discourse. For Domènec, architecture is a 'political subconscious' that allows him to reconstruct the critical and poetic universe of authors such as Alvar Aalto, Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, and to reappraise them as the ideologues of the modern aesthetic project who, as architects, were able to shed new light on the role of the artist. Under the generic title of *Conversation Pieces*, a series of works by Domènec examines how some of the most paradigmatic buildings of modernity tried to regenerate social housing and collective living. The title alludes to fragments of conversation, as in the English portraiture genre of the eighteenth century with its informal group portraits, but also refers to objects of such exceptional quality that they become the subject of conversation. **Conversation Piece: Narkomfin** (2013) refers to a block of flats known as Dom Kommuna Narkomfin (Moscow, 1928–32), based on the phalanstery theory of the utopian socialist Charles Fourier (1772–1837) and designed by the architects Moisei Ginzburg and Ignatii Milinis. **Conversation Piece: Casa Bloc** (2016) reflects on the Casa Bloc project (1933–39), a building in Barcelona designed for the working class by Josep Lluís Sert, Josep Torres Clavé

and Joan Baptista Subirana. **Conversation Piece: Les Minguettes** (2017) examines the history of Les Minguettes, a housing estate in Vénissieux, a suburb in the industrial south of Lyon, built in the 1960s and partially demolished in the nineties.

In the course of the exhibition, a dialogue is established between the works in the different galleries. **24 Hours of Artificial Light** (1998) is a life-size recreation of a ward in Paimio, a tuberculosis sanatorium in Finland, designed by Alvar Aalto in the early 1930s and considered an architectural landmark for its open relationship with the natural environment. Domènec transforms the ward in Paimio, originally a comfortable and luminous space, into its exact opposite. **Rakentajan käsi** (The Worker's Hand, 2012) revives the forgotten history of Kulttuuritalo (House of Culture), designed by Alvar Aalto and built between 1952 and 1958 in the former working class neighbourhood of Kallio, Helsinki. The project focuses on the volunteer workers, trade unionists and left-wing sympathisers who responded to the SKP's call (*talkoot*) to build a 'house for all workers' by donating more than five-hundred-thousand hours of their lives to the realisation of the project.

Interruptions. 10 years, 1,340 metres (2010) refers to two Barcelona buildings: the house at Carrer de l'Argenteria where, in 1924, the Catalan poet and revolutionary Joan Salvat-Papasseit died of tuberculosis at the age of thirty; and the Tuberculosis Infirmary in the Raval, designed by the GATCPAC in 1934 as part of the social programme of hospital care against tuberculosis. Joan Salvat-Papasseit always defended culture and education as the fundamental tools of revolt and social emancipation. The ten-year interval between the death of the poet and the construction of the Infirmary becomes a tragic metaphor for the distance between desires and dreams and the remote possibility of putting them into practice.

The project **Arquitectura Española, 1939-1975** (Spanish Architecture, 2014/2018) amounts to a catalogue of some of the public works built by Republican prisoners during the Franco regime. With objectivity and rigour, this cold and uneasy catalogue reveals the architectural traces of a human and political crime. By contrast, **Souvenir Barcelona** (2017) is an edition of a collection of twenty-seven postcards offering alternative souvenirs of the stereotypical, rose-tinted and optimistic imaginary of the tourist propaganda, both private and public, of the city of Barcelona.

48_Nakba (2007) is a series of five interviews with Palestinians living in refugee camps in the occupied Palestinian territories and neighbouring Arab countries since 1948, the year when the United Nations agreed to partition Palestine to create the State of Israel. Zionists militias expelled nearly one million Palestinians from their own land, turning them into refugees. Israel demolished most of their villages and erased their names from maps. Israel celebrates their Independence Day on the same day that Palestine commemorates the *Nakba*, meaning 'the disaster'. The project **Real Estate** (2006–7) simulates an estate agent's office, showing a variety of materials (photographs, videos, interviews, a free publication...) as a visual register of the complex and problematic relationship between territory and habitat. The installation reveals how architecture and town planning are part of the war strategy of the State of Israel in the occupation of Palestine; they are, in fact, the most efficient mechanisms of domination. This work highlights the colonial relationship of the 'property' that Israel and many of its inhabitants have to that of the occupied Palestinian territories. **Baladia Future City** (2011–15) focuses on the Baladia City National Urban Training Center, popularly known as 'Chicago', a centre for military training located near the military base of Tze'elim, in the Negev desert in the south of Israel. It is a model of a city consisting of basic modules that can be reconfigured to represent specific Arab cities. The Israeli army uses it to plan wars in the urban zones of Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon and Syria. It was financed with military aid from the United States.

Another subject that regularly appears in Domènec's work is iconoclasm, the struggle for political control of the public space by attacking the systems of representation and destroying the images of power personified in monuments and the symbolic and ideological constructions that surround them. **L'Ascension et la chute de la colonne Vendôme** (The Rise and Fall of the Vendôme Column, 2013) refers to the revolt and instauration of the Paris Commune in 1871, following anarchist and socialist principles. One of the first actions of the revolutionary government was a highly symbolic act of political iconoclasm: the demolition of the Vendôme Column, erected by Napoleon Bonaparte to celebrate victory at the Battle of Austerlitz. After defeating the Commune, the government of the Republic, under the presidency of General MacMahon, reconstructed the column. **Demolished Monument** (2014) reflects on the problematic links between event, commemoration, monument and city. It proposes the 'restoration' of the demolition of the monument to General Prim in Barcelona by presenting the plinth without the sculpture, and puts forward political iconoclasm as a means of expropriation of the symbolic heritage of power and of collective and self-managed construction of the public space.

From 1919 to 1920, the Russian artist Vladimir Tatlin worked intensely on his most important project: his model for the *Monument to the Third International*, which became an icon of the avant-garde, a paradigm of utopia and a symbol of the forever inconclusive revolution.

Playground (Tatlin in Mexico) (2011) is a replica of Tatlin's tower made with the materials, measurements and colours regularly used in Mexican playgrounds. Here, the great unbuilt monument to the revolution becomes an urban prop, a game for children.

Existenzminimum (Minimum Existence, 2002) is a scale reproduction of the monument to the Spartacists Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, designed by Mies van der Rohe in 1926. The monument was built in the Friedrichsfelde cemetery in Berlin and destroyed by the Nazis in 1935. The replica gives new life to the demolished monument and establishes a relationship, on a human scale, between the utopian potential of modernity's emancipatory ideologies and their hypothetical critical re-adaptations. The monument became a meeting point for Germany's radical left. To reinforce its political nature, Mies van der Rohe added a steel five-pointed star with a hammer and sickle in the middle. The star was to be made in the Krupp foundry, but they refused to manufacture a communist symbol. The architect, therefore, commissioned five steel rhomboidal plates, five geometrical pieces devoid of any political meaning, and turned them into the five-pointed star that was to preside over the monument, until it was removed by the Nazis in 1933 and later exhibited in a museum of emblems and banners confiscated from the enemy. **Den toten Helden der Revolution** (To the Dead Heroes of the Revolution, 2018) recreates this previous moment of impasse in which five silent geometric forms unfold their capacity for political activation.

In May 1963, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil* was published. The book was a compilation of Hannah Arendt's articles on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, an SS lieutenant colonel and one of history's most notorious war criminals, in Jerusalem in 1961. In the Spanish edition of the book, the first chapter is entitled 'Audiencia pública' (Public Hearing). Domènec's project **Public Hearing** (2018) is a 1:1 recreation of the bullet-proof glass booth designed to protect Eichmann during the trial, and converted here into a 'mute', aseptic sculpture, devoid of any traces of the drama that took place in it, yet full of 'noise' through the resonance of the victims' voices.

The exhibition *Domènec. Not Here, Not Anywhere* is a reflection on the euphemisms of history, a critical view of the political strategies of historical memory and social empowerment; of modernity moving towards an authoritarian, colonialist discourse that acts as an agent for the implementation of global capitalism. And yet *Not Here, Not Anywhere* is not a mere historicist exercise. It scrutinises history from the point of view of the present and relocates projects in a contemporary context, following Walter Benjamin's advice 'to brush history against the grain'.¹

From 18 April to 6 May, you can visit at the Mies van der Rohe Pavilion the intervention by Domènec *The Stadium, the Pavilion and the Palace*, a collaboration between MACBA and the Fundació Mies van der Rohe as part of the exhibition *Domènec. Not Here, Not Anywhere*.

Entrance to either of the two institutions allows access to the other with a reduced rate between 18 April and 6 May.

¹ Walter Benjamin. *On the Concept of History*

Curator

Teresa Grandas

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Parlem de... Domènec

With Domènec and Alán Carrasco

Saturday 21 April, 6.30 pm

With Josep Bohigas

Saturday 2 June, 6.30 pm

Free admission

Guided visit to Walden 7 Building, with Domènec
Saturday 12 May, 10.30 am
4 € entrance fee

Friends of MACBA

Exclusive guided visit

With Teresa Grandas

Thursday 26 April, 6.30 pm

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Tuesday closed

Saturday, 10 am to 8 pm

Sunday and public holidays, 10 am to 3 pm

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