

Customary Beauty

|

**Alexander Apóstol, Milena Bonilla, José Dávila, Laura Gannon,
Terence Gower, Pablo León de la Barra and Mateo López**

September 10 – October 29, 2011



Alexander Apóstol, *Plaza Venezuela*, 2003

The title of this exhibition refers to a distinction made by 18th century, English architect Sir Christopher Wren, between two types of beauty: “There are two causes of beauty – natural and customary. Natural is from geometry, consisting in uniformity, that is equality, and proportion. Customary beauty is begotten by the use, as familiarity breeds a love to things not in themselves lovely”.

The notions of proportion, uniformity and purity of the modernist architectural forms have been gradually affected by natural and political shifts brought by the passage of time. The curatorial aim of this exhibition is to interpret this transformation not as a failure, rather as a form of beauty generated by routine. The artists in

the show allude with diverse languages to key agents of unpredictability, uncalculated by modernism, thus revindicating the specific potentials of the multiple spaces - geographic as well as mental - by which the application of those doctrines has been inhabited.

Mutations in utopia are made evident in pieces that point to the filtrations of hazard and imagination into the original physical places of modernism and its historical revision. One can understand this shifting utopian thinking and its current ghostly presence by assimilating it to the notion of “the mind as a territory undergoing constant change”, as proposed by Robert Smithson: “One’s mind and the earth are in a constant state of erosion, mental rivers wear away abstract

banks, brain waves undermine cliffs of thought, ideas decompose into stones of unknowing, and conceptual crystallizations break apart into deposits of gritty reason. Vast moving faculties occur in this geological miasma, and they move in the most physical way”.

Combining archival images of the Instituto Politécnico building in Mexico City in the 60s, **Terence Gower's** film stages a fictitious legitimization of the universalist intentions of modernism, with no references to the specific sociopolitical context of the building.

Laura Gannon's video is a dreamy exploration of E-IO27 - a house designed by Eileen Gray in the south of France- and the historical misunderstandings surrounding it, namely an aesthetical invasion performed by a famous architect in the house.

In **Alexander Apóstol's** altered archival images of emblematic plazas in the city of Caracas in the 40s and 50s we see the newly built modernist projects overshadowed by surrealist water streams sprouting from the fountains, as dislocated memories of past promises.

Employing the actual physical débris of the city Guadalajara, **José Dávila** builds a maquette of an emblematic modernist building of the city, alluding to informal architecture and to the peripheral aesthetic processing of information.

Pablo León de la Barra's *Novo Museu Tropical* sums up the history of modernism in the tropics in a new diagram, freely inspired by Ad Reinhardt and Alfred Barr, a historical reconfiguration in the form of a banana.

Milena Bonilla's photographs act as an overall instruction for the exhibition, as they evidence in the simplest way the natural and mental cracks that pervade the notion of utopia.

Mateo López produces a nostalgic poster for the exhibition, in the hopes of inscribing it in an improbable past.

Curator: Natalia Valencia