Carlos Garaicoa

Ciudad Armero

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September 22 – November 28



Carlos Garaicoa, *Columna*, 2021

The practice of Carlos Garaicoa (Havana, 1967) has long been concerned with architecture and the urban space as forms through which memory, history, and social life are organized. In *Ciudad Armero*, this interest takes shape around a city that no longer exists. Armero disappeared in November 1985 following the eruption of the Nevado del Ruiz, leaving behind not only the memory of a catastrophe but also the question of how to think about a place whose material presence has been erased. Rather than approaching Armero as an event to be reconstructed, Garaicoa considers it as an absence that continues to operate through images, bodies, fragments, and memory.

The artist first encountered Armero during his residency at *Flora Ars Natura* in 2014. This encounter did not immediately become a body of work. Instead, it remained as a latent thought that gradually developed over more than a decade, eventually taking form in the series presented under the title *Ciudad Armero*, forty years after the tragedy. Garaicoa does not approach the disappearance of the city through documentary representation or direct testimony, but through a process of sedimentation in which memory is reassembled across different forms and materials.

The disappearance of Armero also complicates the very idea of representing a city. Unlike other cities marked by ruin, Armero offers no visible architecture through which its history can be reconstructed. What remains is a territory marked by absence, alongside the memories, images, maps, and stories that have accumulated around it. Garaicoa approaches this condition through fragments—architectural, cartographic, and anatomical—that suggest a larger whole without attempting to restore it. The works do not reconstruct the city; they articulate its traces.

At the center of this process is a dissolution of the boundary between body and city. Urban plans and cartographic forms no longer organize a functioning space but instead point toward its interruption. In parallel, anatomical fragments appear without the integrity of a complete body. Hands, torsos, and other partial forms become territories of their own, subjected to the same fragmentation as the city. Body becomes city, and city becomes territory; both persist through what remains after their destruction.

This concern with absence also extends to the images through which Armero has entered collective memory. The tragedy became an intensely visual event, circulated through television and international media. Garaicoa's work enters into tension with this visual memory. Rather than adding another representation of suffering to the archive, he shifts attention toward what remains outside the image: the invisible traces of the city, the relationships that were interrupted, and the forms of life that disappeared without leaving a record. The work does not reproduce the tragedy, but questions how it has been seen and remembered.

Armero also occupies a particular place within Colombia's recent history. Its destruction occurred only days after the seizure of the Palace of Justice by the M-19 and its subsequent military retaking. Although these events are not directly represented in Garaicoa's work, their proximity forms part of a broader atmosphere of instability in which violence, institutional fragility, and loss became layered within collective memory. The fragmentation of the body and interruption of architectural space can be understood as formal resonances of a history in which vulnerability has repeatedly shaped the experience of the nation.

The designation of Armero as a "natural disaster" is similarly complicated by the project. The catastrophe cannot be understood through the geological event alone. It also reveals the social and political conditions that determined vulnerability: institutional failures, insufficient risk management, and the uneven relationship between the center and its territories. Nature produces processes; disaster emerges through the ways those processes intersect with human lives and structures. Armero thus becomes more than an event. It becomes a condition, a manifestation of vulnerability that remains present.

Ciudad Armero creates a space in which fragments, memories, and forms remain in tension. The project does not attempt to resolve the absence of the city or provide a definitive image of its past. Instead, it introduces a pause: an invitation to look beyond what is immediately visible and consider what continues to exist after the image has disappeared. Armero is no longer a city, a map, or a ruin in the conventional sense, but a presence within absence—a place that persists through memory, the body, the image, and the work of art.

mor charpentier

List of works

ROOM 1

De la serie Ciudad de Armero: Flores (Yellow), 2026
Mixed media. Black and white photograph printed on Hahnemühle William. Turner paper, graphite, walnut wood, flower, water.
74 x 110 x 12 cm

De la serie Ciudad de Armero: Flores (Green), 2026
Mixed media. Black and white photograph printed on Hahnemühle William. Turner paper, graphite, walnut wood, flower, water.
74 x 110 x 12 cm

De la serie Ciudad de Armero: Flores (Red), 2026
Mixed media. Black and white photograph printed on Hahnemühle William. Turner paper, graphite, walnut wood, flower, water.
74 x 110 x 12 cm

ROOM 2

Intestino, 2021
Acrylic on birch, pigment print on bone covered with gelatin
123 x 103 x 9 cm

Estómago, 2021
Acrylic on birch, pigment print on bone covered with gelatin
123 x 103 x 9 cm

ROOM 3

Corazón, 2021
Acrylic on birch, pigment print on bone covered with gelatin
123 x 103 x 9 cm

De la serie Ciudad de Armero: Flores (Blue), 2026
Mixed media. Black and white photograph printed on Hahnemühle William. Turner paper, graphite, walnut wood, flower, water.
74 x 110 x 12 cm

De la serie Ciudad de Armero: Flores (Violet), 2026
Mixed media. Black and white photograph printed on Hahnemühle William. Turner paper, graphite, walnut wood, flower, water.
74 x 110 x 12 cm

De la serie Ciudad de Armero: Flores (Orange), 2026
Mixed media. Black and white photograph printed on Hahnemühle William. Turner paper, graphite, walnut wood, flower, water.
74 x 110 x 12 cm

ROOM 4

Cerebro, 2021
Acrylic on birch, pigment print on bone covered with gelatin
123 x 103 x 9 cm

Bronquios, 2021
Acrylic on birch, pigment print on bone covered with gelatin
123 x 103 x 9 cm

Aire, tierra, canna indica, 2021-2024
Acrylic on birch, pigment print on bone covered with gelatin
123 x 103 x 9 cm

Músculos/Venas, 2021-2024
Acrylic on birch, pigment print on bone covered with gelatin
123 x 103 x 9 cm

ROOM 5

Esquina Ucrania-Piernas, 2014
Pigment print on bone coated with gelatin
12,9 x 29,1 cm

Túnel de la Engaña - Rótulo / Tibia, 2014
Pigment print on bone coated with gelatin
12,9 x 29,1 cm

Calle Amaniel - Carpio/Metacarpio/Falange, 2014
Pigment print on bone coated with gelatin
12,9 x 29,1 cm

Santa María Loma – Flores / Isquion, 2014
Pigment print on bone coated with gelatin
29,1 x 12,9 cm

De la serie Diferentes maneras de cruzar un río, 2013
Fishhooks, cardboard, steel nails, pigment print on gelatin-coated bone.
Variable dimensions

VIDEO ROOM

Torso, 2026
Acrylic on birch, pigment print on bone covered with gelatin
123 x 103 x 9 cm

Iris, 2024
Acrylic on birch, pigment print on bone covered with gelatin
123 x 103 x 9 cm

El árbol de la vida, 2026
Acrylic on birch, pigment print on bone covered with gelatin
123 x 103 x 9 cm

