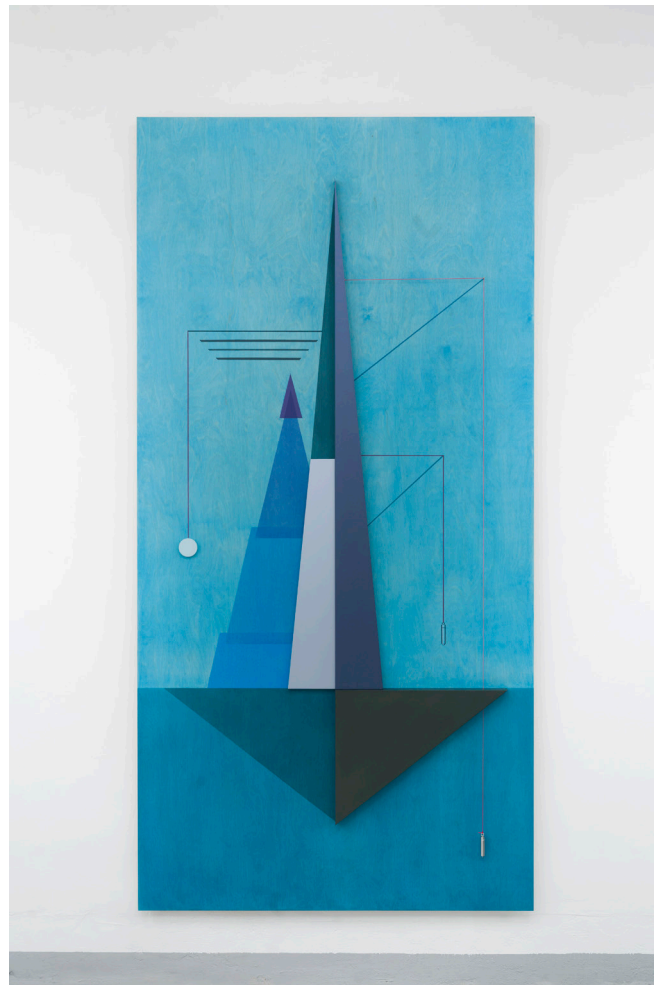


Galería Elba Benítez



CARLOS GARAICOA

$\pi=3.1416$

24.02 – 06.04.2024

Put simply, potential energy is energy that is stored, its potency lying latent within a given object at a given moment, pending possible release: a bow drawn taut or a boulder at the crest of a slope, to cite classical examples. But there is also potential energy in a seed, as there is in the fruits of that seed, i.e. our food. Or in a missile about to be launched across a border. Or in constrained rage, or chokingly frustrated revenge. Or in hope or even, at times, in silence. Energy is always energy, that which can neither be created or destroyed. What places it into the category of potential is that it is contained, which by definition entails the presence of some type of container.

The interrelated concepts of containers and contained energy run throughout Carlos Garaicoa's exhibition $\pi=3.1416$ at the Galería Elba Benítez. They are most immediately evident in the exhibition's table-top installation titled *Toda utopía pasa por la barriga* (All Utopias Cross Through the Belly). The installation is composed of a collection of transparent glass jars containing a diverse array of objects and materials: legumes, leaves, minerals, oils, fresh fruit, grains, herbs. These might be the contents of a country kitchen; they might also belong to a survivalist bunker. Yet, and somewhat jarringly, among the stuffs of this pantry one also finds architectural maquettes enclosed within their own glass capsules, miniature projections of potential real-world buildings of an aesthetic that seems futuristic and yet also somehow nostalgic for a time when the future appeared different from how it does today.

Maquettes, by their dual nature as representations and proposals, always straddle verb tenses: past, present, future. But in *Toda utopía pasa por la barriga*, this aspect is extended and intensified, as Garaicoa uses his characteristic mastery of shifts of scale in order to fashion a hauntingly oblique yet critical metaphor of today's uncertain world of global conflict and individual isolation. Do these containers hold materia prima or preserved specimens? Are these enclosed environments controlled or controlling? In which temporal direction might all this potential energy flow?

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Similar concepts but expressed in a different format are found in the series of Garaicoa's fascinating new paintings-sculptures, also included in the exhibition $\pi=3.1416$. As always in Garaicoa's work, the meticulousness of the works' aesthetic is paramount –the neatness of the execution, the care given and taken with finishes, the delicate precision of the fine-lined draftsmanship. In some ways, these colorful and visually striking objects seem to break new ground within the artist's practice in their suggestion of a dialogue with the tradition of geometrical abstract painting, an historical form with its own distinct conventions, as circumscribed as an alphabet and yet as vast as language (although in fact Garaicoa, not incidentally, was trained as a painter.) Yet in other ways, these wooden bas-relief wall-works resemble nothing so much as folded maquettes, currently in a flattened state but containing, like a compressed coil, the potential of springing into full unfolded object-hood. Thus, in these remarkable new wall-works, as throughout the exhibition $\pi=3.1416$, it is this sense of pending transfer of contained potential energy that lends the exhibited objects –the entailed containers themselves– their actuality as works of art.

George Stolz

The work of Carlos Garaicoa (Havana, 1967) is characterized by an informed engagement with the *genius loci* of contemporary cities (and in particular of his native Havana) as manifested in their architecture and infrastructure, to which Garaicoa brings a sharply critical yet restlessly inventive artistic vision. Garaicoa works in and across various mediums and disciplines –sculpture, photography, drawing, installation, architecture, urbanism and text-based work – yet always maintains an exquisite execution and a meticulous aesthetic in his finished works. While his Cuban heritage serves as a point of departure, the full scope of Garaicoa's artistic practice extends to a broader range of subject matter, including 20th-century utopianism, classic modernist forms and ideals, the infrastructures of centralized state planning, the vestiges of colonial architecture and urbanism, and the current-day shifting political and economic terrain of post-colonial globalism.

Garaicoa has had solo exhibitions at the Fondation Brownstone (Paris, 2022); the Fondazione del Monte di Bologna e Ravenna (Bologna, 2022); the Peabody Essex Museum (Salem, 2020); the Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea (CGAC) (Santiago de Compostela, 2018); the Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art (London, 2018); the Fondazione Merz (Turin, 2017); and the MAAT Museu de Arte, Arquitetura e Tecnologia (Lisbon, 2017) and elsewhere. He has been invited to participate in numerous international exhibitions such as the 12th Gwangju Biennale (2018), documenta 14 (2017), 18th Biennial of Sydney (2012), the 29th São Paulo Biennial (2010), and the 53rd Venice Biennial (2009). He is currently featured in the XVI Cuenca Biennial, where he is presenting the work *Familia* (2023). In 2021 Garaicoa received the PEM 2021 Award (Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, USA).

$\pi=3.1416$ is Carlos Garaicoa's fifth solo exhibition at the Galería Elba Benítez.

Image: Carlos Garaicoa, ξ (*Ksi*), 2023 | Oak Taylor-Smith

To receive further information about the exhibition, please send an e-mail to diana.delacruz@elbabenitez.com