Carlos Garaicoa is known for his explorations of social and political issues in the context of urban architecture and the built environment. Inspired by his native Havana, Garaicoa adopts the city as a laboratory and imagination for transformative change. His drawings and installations engage on the existing environment, intervening on its landscape to offer searing and insightful commentary on issues such as architecture's role in the fabrication of modernity as a catalyst for social change, human rights, and the frustration and decay of 20th century utopias.

Working across artistic media, Garaicoa takes a multidisciplinary approach that delimits categorization. In several projects, his ideas evolve over series of black and white photographs altered and amended in various ways. Untitled (Sentences) (Sin título (frases)), 2009, documents the artist's penumbra through Havana's formerly bustling downtown commercial center. Departing from the fanciful names emblazoned on now deteriorated or abandoned storefronts, he composes poetic responses—part lamentation, part political critique—in pins and needles directly on the photographs.

In other works, Garaicoa engages architecture and the built environment through sculpture and installation. The Crown Jewels (Las joyas de la corona), 2009, consists of eight cast silver models of international sites of military authority, surveillance and repression, including Cuba's Villa Marista, the East German Stasi, Guantánamo Bay, the Pentagon, and the KGB. Intricate and intimately sized, they are displayed separately in glass vitrines. (Dean City, 2009), one of the artist's exquisite cut paper installations, depicts an entire city composed of imaginary forms. Driven by a belief in the artist's moral obligation towards society, Garaicoa creates new artistic vocabularies in which to discuss social and political issues that resonate in both local and global contexts.

Carlos Garaicoa was born in 1967, Havana, Cuba. Lives and works in Madrid, Spain, and Havana, where he studied thermodynamics at the Instituto Hermanes Gómez and visual art at the Instituto Superior de Arte. Since 1991, Garaicoa has exhibited extensively at international venues including the 53rd Venice Biennale and Documenta 11. His works belong to public and private collections including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Tate Modern (London), Museum of Modern Art (New York), and El Museo Nacional de Arte Centro de Arte Piensa Sofia (Madrid).

1. The Crown Jewels, 2009
2. Untitled (La casa de las planchas)
3. Untitled (Sin rival)
4. Untitled (La Polaca)
5. Untitled (La Isla)
6. Untitled (La Honradez)
7. Untitled (El Mundo)
8. Untitled (El Gallo)
9. Untitled (La palabra transformada, parte 2)
10. I Believe and Don't Believe (Creo y no creo)
11. Equal in the Eyes of God (Iguales ante los ojos de Dios)
12. Foundation of Democracy (Fundación de la democracia)
13. Negation in My Blood (Negación en mi sangre)
14. It Wasn't Possible (No ha sido posible)
15. la democracia
16. Abstraction II (Abstracción II)
17. It Wasn't Possible (No ha sido posible)
18. Building Cities (Construyendo ciudades)
19. Thumb Index (Uñero)
20. Iguales ante los ojos de Dios
21. Spider (Araña)
22. FUTURIST DRAWING (DIBUJO FUTURISTA)
23. en mí)
24. (Triunfo, duda y celebración)
25. Puzzle
26. Comic billboard (Comic valla)
27. Fernández (Triunfo, duda y celebración)
28. 27. Futurist Drawing (Dibujo futurista)
29. Intelligent Building (Edificio inteligente)
30. Treehouse (Casa en un árbol)

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

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For Life… 2009

Garaicoa’s gesture of setting a modest clock to backtrack towards viewers to imagine the possibilities of revisiting and rethinking social and political events.

4. Theory and Practice in the 18th Brumaire of K. Marx, 2009
3. Saving Time, 2009
2. For Life… 2009
1. Building Cities (Construyendo ciudades)

Through his invocation of Karl Marx’s landmark text, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Garaicoa’s sculptures invite viewers to consider critically the history of revolutionary politics in Cuba. How has the taken-over experience of the island measured up against political rhetoric?

5. From the Serve to Transform the Political World into Face, Priday, 9 April, 2009

Carrying on the spirit of Marx’s political critique, Garaicoa engages an imagined architecture into Havana’s existing landscape—at once a site of struggle and one more fully realized, at times driven by an absurdist intervention into a formalized landscape.

6. Untitled (Sentences) 2009

Writing with thread and amnesia atop black-and-white photographs, Garaicoa enacts “street history.” He brings to storytellers’ signs that once triumphed Havana’s commercial vitality.


Assimilating Havana’s empty billboards as a blank for expression, Garaicoa draws directly onto them to appropriate to storytellers’ signs that once triumphed Havana’s commercial vitality.

8. The Word Transformed, Part 2, 2009

Using cut adhesive tape to compose images on artist’s cutting mats, Garaicoa explores social, political and personal themes that resonate throughout his work.


Like Rorschach inkblots, the paper buildings of Bend City entice viewers to project meaning onto their forms. Silhouettes of imaginary structures cut into thin sheets of red cardboard, comprise a cityscape open to dreams of change and revolution.
The exhibition Carlos Garaicoa: La enmienda que hay en mí (Making Amends) first opened in March 2009 at the National Museum of Fine Arts during the 10th Havana Biennial in Havana, Cuba, and was curated by Corina Matamoros, Curator of Contemporary Cuban Art at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana. For its U.S. debut at USFCAM, the exhibition is co-curated by Matamoros and Noel Smith, Curator of Latin American and Caribbean Art, USF Institute for Research in Art.

La enmienda que hay en mí (Making Amends)
CARLOS GARAICOA

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