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Angel Marcos: China

19.05.07 - 02.09.07

MUSAC Leon

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Presstext:

MUSAC presents for the first time Ángel Marcos' latest photo project on China

MUSAC presents Ángel Marcos' latest photo project, captured during a trip to China in January 2007. This recent production ties in with two of the artist's most outstanding series: *Around the Dream* (New York, 2001) and *In Cuba* (Havana, 2004-06), and it closes a trilogy in which the artist establishes a conversation with the city through advertising and propaganda, in an attempt to project his personal vision of the links between the powers that be, and the realities and desires of the people who inhabit them.

Under the title *China*, Ángel Marcos (Medina del Campo, Valladolid, 1955) rounds off a trilogy he began six years earlier in New York and continued in Havana in 2004. Though the locations are entirely different, the images revolve around the same conceptual parameter: the conversation between the city's population and the powers that govern it through advertising and propaganda. Exploring both the city centres and the suburbs of Beijing, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, the artist captures the contrast between past and present, tradition and modernity through publicity, contrasting architectures and the clash of metropolitan landscapes. The result is a broad-reaching project that includes photography and video; a window onto Angel Marcos' personal take on today's China.

Ángel Marcos: his work

Ángel Marcos defines himself as a late-blooming, self-taught artist. Despite working as a professional photographer, he did not venture into the field of art until 1992. On occasion of a commission for the Calderon Theatre (Valladolid, Spain), *Viaje por el Teatro Calderón* (1992), he resolved to break out of the rigid limitations of formality to embrace subjective art photography.

At that moment, the artist began to consider his professional position within the art world, applying a new dynamic to his work. He focused on staging his photographs and cutting out the superfluous and anecdotal, in an attempt to portray the location's memory through the testimony of objects and the space itself. Works such as *Estampas personales* (1984) are clear precedents of the changes that his work was to undergo, moving towards setting the stage of reality, in detriment of a documentary approach.

From the outset, Ángel Marcos focused his artistic production on two key concepts: territory and its power to conjure up memory; and travel, not only as a movement through space, but as an intimate inquiry and awareness-raising. These two ideas evolve along separate tracks, not necessarily in synchronicity, but always contributing to expanding horizons. His starting point was his closest surroundings, the places and stories of his native Medina del Campo —the landscape—. He then entered an intermediate stage, focused on people and their situations —the human being—, to finally arrive to a new stage in which both elements meet in the City.

Paisajes (1997) and *Rastros* (2002-03) can be classed under the first group, rooted in the immediate surroundings, where the artist undertakes to get back in touch with the natural environment, intimate corners and habitat of his early years, establishing an honest conversation with the landscape and his past. In the first of them, it is therefore desolate landscapes, founded animal carcasses, empty nests or food leftovers that act as trails or traces, helping him recover his memory; while in *Rastros*, the artist

uses the scenery as a stage, introducing objects – tiles, neons or flowers – that contribute to the desired recovery of his history.

In *Los bienaventurados* (1997), *Obras póstumas* (1999) and *La Chute* (2000) the human figure bursts into his work. For the first time, people placed in specific locations reference the reality of yesterday and today. As a setting for *Los bienaventurados* (1997), Ángel Marcos chose two abandoned constructions as the stage, where he photographs prostitutes, children and estranged elderly people to speak about poverty, the grotesque, sadness, cruelty and exclusion, forcing the viewer to reflect upon what is there but remains shielded from human gaze.

In *Obras póstumas* (1999), in contrast, the artist replaces scene-setting with the insertion of photographs of people who, reflected on screens, are placed in real physical spaces linked to the narrative itself; while in *La Chute* (2000) it is people themselves and their relationship that take central stage. This way, location becomes a mere context.

After studying his closest environment —the landscape— and people —the human being—, and its capacity to recreate reality, Ángel Marcos founds in the city the ideal framework where both concepts blend in a way to reflect the same constants of his earlier work. And this way, with *Around the Dream* (2001), *In Cuba* (2004-06) and *China* (2007), the artist expands the field of his explorations through the camera lens.

Ángel Marcos: China

The new production, presented under the title of *China*, is the product of an extensive photographic project carried out in the cities of Beijing, Hong Kong, and Shanghai in January 2007, and it closes a trilogy he began six years earlier in New York and continued in Havana in 2004. Ángel Marcos sees *Around the Dream* (2001), *In Cuba* (2004-06) and *China* (2007) as a single project, in which the images, even of their entirely different location, revolve around the same conceptual parameter: the conversation between city's population and the powers that govern it through advertising and propaganda.

The first part of the trilogy, *Around the Dream*, was carried out in New York City in 2001. Here, he reflected for the first time on the desires and needs of the people who inhabit it and have to deal with publicity as the main instrument of power. The artist adopts an approach whereby the billboards and slogans in and around Manhattan symbolise the idea of desire embodied by the city. A desire of success and power that, in its polarity, faces piles of trash, homeless people and life stories of failure and frustration.

Three years later in 2004, having worked in the city that stands as an icon of Western capitalism, the artist travels to Havana, Cuba, the symbol of Socialist resistance, to embark on a new project. This series is both complementary and a conceptual confrontation of the previous. He worked again with slogans, but this time the logos and catchphrases designed for a world of consumerism were replaced by icons and slogans of the Revolution. Ángel Marcos captures spaces devoid of human presence, where the streets speak for themselves, opening up to a horizon of sea and sky, and the history of a country reflected in the slogans painted on their buildings.

In January 2007 Ángel Marcos embarked on a long journey to China, intending to plunge into a distant Eastern reality with the aim of closing his trilogy. He chose China as the final station in part due to the singularity of a Communist regime that has recently embraced capitalism and its relevance to his previous investigation. Ángel Marcos saved the distances and obstacles of language and culture, shed his preconceptions and reflected through his pictures on what was happening all around him.

For more than a month he travelled the city centres and suburbs of Beijing, Hong Kong, and Shanghai —cities that are the driving forces of Chinese development— shooting their streets and corners, where advertising slogans, contrasting architectures and the clash of metropolitan landscapes provide a personal take on today's China.

The result of this last trip is a broad-reaching project that includes photography and video, through which the artist attempts to present this singular reality, where past and future, tradition and modernity, blend and shape a vast range of contrasts. A large selection of this considerable production may be seen for the first time in halls 3.1 and 3.2 at MUSAC until 2 September 2007.

The publication: Ángel Marcos, *China*

On the occasion of this exhibition it will be presented a catalogue that compiles the extensive photographic project by Ángel Marcos in China.