

JUAN BARAJA AGAINST ALL THAT GLITTERS: TIME'S EFFECTS.

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Utopie Abitative: Scampia, 2021. © Juan Baraja

Against All That Glitters: Time's Effects is a journey through the major photographic series that Juan Baraja (Toledo, 1984) has carried out over the past ten years. This journey, which takes in personal projects of his own and assignments commissioned by institutions, also allows us to trace the continuing evolution of a creative artist whose work is tautened by his particular relationship with architecture and strengthened by a working method in which projects are deliberately kept open and under review for long periods, until the time comes to put them together. Norlandia, Experimento Banana, Hipódromo, Cerezales, Águas Livres-Parnaso, Utopie Abitative or Y Vasca / Euskal Y, the projects on display in these rooms are far removed from a merely linear temporal and geographical reading.

The Modern Movement constitutes one of the main axes of this period of work. Its inertial continuity, aimed at establishing a dominant ideological base, and the continuance of its heartbeat in the present can be clearly discerned in many of the gestures of urban planning, architecture and design. Between the initial seduction of specific details, precisely chosen by Juan Baraja in the earliest series, and the subsequent mature analysis, evident in projects such as *Utopie Abitative*, we track the different movements of the *dérive* in which architectural icons have come to embrace what authors such as Jill Stoner see today as the need to mobilise new minor architectures – more vulnerable, slippery, and contingent, unequivocal signs of resistance and life.

Juan Baraja sets before our eyes some of the protagonists. The images link people, materials, public places and walls imbued with strength: signs and spaces rewritten by time. At one moment they arrange themselves, fragment by fragment, kaleidoscopically; a moment later they are articulated with the intensity of a theatre of operations. These are images capable of stirring the embers of our own experience and reminding us that there is always a possibility of power changing hands; and that even what is most solid, self-sufficient and gleaming will shed its patina, operate in a different direction and renew its expressive power if it is constructed by other voices.

Alfredo Puente, curator



Experimento Banana, 2014. © Juan Baraja

EXPERIMENTO BANANA

2014

Geothermal is one of Iceland's main sources of energy. The island's incessant volcanic activity produces high temperatures just a few metres below the surface, and this renewable resource is used to provide thermal comfort, combat the cold and even experiment with new forms of plant cultivation.

Garðyrkjuskóli Ríkisins, a farm which is part of the Icelandic National Gardening School, introduced its first banana plant in 1941, just 285 kilometres from the Arctic Circle, and up until 1959 the experiment of growing bananas in Iceland enjoyed a fair degree of success, thanks to geothermal energy, greenhouses and the support of institutions such as the Icelandic Agricultural University. Ultimately, high production costs made it impossible to compete with imported bananas and the experiment was abandoned, but the venture took such deep root in the collective imaginary that there are still people who believe that Iceland has the largest banana plantation in Europe after the Canary Islands. Their ideal of self-sufficiency, extensible to other raw materials such as coffee or tobacco, was no match for the logic of the markets and the global circulation of capital.

In 2014, as part of the work he did during his Listhús residency, Juan Baraja visited the last vestiges of this agricultural activity's material presence and forms associated with the rationalist architecture of the nineteen fifties in the north of Europe.



Norlandia, 2014. © Juan Baraja

NORLANDIA

2014

The little town of Ólafsfjörður sits at the mouth of the Eyjafjörður, one of the longest fjords in Iceland. A considerable number of its eight hundred or so inhabitants work for Norlandia, a fishing and fish-drying company which supplies cod, hake, haddock and pollack to both the local and foreign markets.

Ólafsfjörður's small trawler fleet is the principal source of sustenance of the human occupants of the region and to a great extent determines their living conditions. The ruggedness of the landscape finds some equivalence in the people and in the context of their daily activity. During the month of July, the sun never sets on Ólafsfjörður, and the relationship between light and darkness is one of the main sources of the area's exuberant mythology.

As part of the Listhús artist's residency he was awarded in 2014, Juan Baraja explored a way of life profoundly conditioned by the biotope and by a light that is almost porous. Fruit of his stay on the fjord, alongside the project *Experimento Banana*, is the photographic series entitled *Norlandia*, in which the photographer for the first time moved away from the specific focus on architecture that had marked his work up until then to immerse himself in the portrait.



CEREZALES

2016-2017

This photographic series was born of an invitation from the Fundación Cerezales Antonino y Cinia (FCAYC), in 2015, to document the construction of a new cultural facility in its particular materiality. The photographer's numerous visits to take the successive shots continued until April 2017.

The building was designed by the AZPML studio (Alejandro Zaera-Polo and Mainer Llaguno) using advanced carbon-trap criteria and a very rigorous energy and climate programme. The principal construction material for both the structure and the skin is larch wood from trees in the vicinity. The energy plan also largely determined the position of the building on the site, the number of hours of sunshine over the year, and the synergy between passive air conditioning systems, based on the choice of materials, and other active features such as geothermal energy, biomass and PCM energy accumulators. During the period of research and construction, the idea that a private cultural facility in Spain could address its programme and its insertion in the territory and fund the whole undertaking on its own, in accordance with a profound awareness of climate change, was viewed with suspicion and even dismissed as utopian, as the media archives of those years can testify.

On successive visits over three years with a large-format camera, Juan Baraja photographed the evolution of the building, the impact of the extreme climate of the mountains of León on its materials, and the way the sun acclimatizes its spaces and its surroundings with the changing temperature of the light from season to season.

The new FCAYC facility has been in active operation since April 9, 2017.



Hipódromo, 2014. © Juan Baraja

HIPÓDROMO

2014

One of the constants in Juan Baraja's work has to do with the training he received in the analogue development lab as an art student and with his researches into light, which in his consideration of photography and architecture takes on the condition of a construction material. On this premise he created the Hipódromo series, in the earliest stage of his career as a professional photographer in 2014, like *Águas Livres*. His attention centres here on the rationalist scheme for the *Hipódromo de la Zarzuela* race track, on a hillside near Madrid, built in 1931 by the architects Carlos Arniches Moltó and Martín Domínguez in collaboration with the engineer Eduardo Torroja,

The complex is of exceptional architectural quality – especially its grandstands, which have been declared of cultural interest (Monumento Histórico Artístico in 1980 and Bien de Interés Cultural in 2009) – but has suffered from the ups and downs of its management and use. Following the expropriation of the older Hipódromo de la Castellana to provide a site for the Nuevos Ministerios government complex, in the end the regime of General Francisco Franco ceded the land and the building, commenced almost a decade before, to the Sociedad de Fomento y Cría Caballar de España by decree in 1940. The bankruptcy of this company in 1992 gave rise to a series of competitions, closures and new concessions until it reopened, in 2005, with the management and administration of the infrastructure now in the hands of the Patrimonio Nacional national heritage agency, Hipódromo de la Zarzuela, S.A. and SEPI.



Utopie Abitative Scampia, 2021. © Juan Baraja

UTOPIE ABITATIVE

CORVIALE · SCAMPRIA · MELARA

2018-2022

Juan Baraja started taking the photographs that make up the *Utopie Abitative* series in 2018. The series is part of his research project on residential estates and public housing in Italy, selected by the Real Academia de España en Roma. It is a long-term project and is currently in progress. The photographs were taken in four Italian housing developments: Corviale, in Rome, Il Serpentone, in Potenza, Le Vele di Scampia, in Naples, and Rozzol Melara, in Trieste.

In all of these schemes except Trieste there is a radical clash between the initial premise – the construction of a popular residential community according to the ideals of the Italy of the nineteen seventies – and the current marginal condition. This perspective, in the context of the country in the period from the late nineteen sixties to the early eighties, has come to be summed up by the expression ‘the years of lead’, coined by Margarethe von Trotta. During those years of conflict, radical left political movements such as Lotta Continua and Movimento Studentesco, and even armed factions such as Prima Linea and the Brigate Rosse, faced opposition on all fronts from neo-fascist groups such as the Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari and Ordine Nero. The clashes, often bloody, with a number of bomb attacks, saw the rise of far-right terrorism – *terrorismo nero* – and a phase of Italian politics, with Marxism-Leninism in the background, characterised by extreme tension and frequent changes of government.

In the case of Corviale, on the outskirts of Rome, designed between 1972 and 1974 by Mario Fiorentino for the Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari and completed in 1984, the urbanistic challenge centred on how to accommodate a community of eight and a half thousand people. In contrast to the mass of concrete, in the lee of the building areas of great vitality sprang up, with vegetable gardens and chicken coops, created by the residents over the years using recycled waste materials. The bankruptcy in 1982 of the scheme’s managers and promoters and its abandonment by the public authorities resulted in the degradation of the facilities, with many of the apartments being squatted by people at risk of social exclusion. Between 2004 and 2005, the urban laboratory Stalker/Osservatorio Nomade developed the *Immaginare Corviale* project, structured as a multi-platform community channel, to enable the residents to construct their own narratives and dismantle perceptions entirely based on deprivation and its stigmas.

Designed and built in 1971 by the architect Antonio Costabile and the engineers Maurizio Leggieri and Carlo Roccatelli, Il Serpentone, in Potenza, with a height of more than forty metres and a length of almost five hundred, is a kind of horizontal skyscraper and a manifesto of the neo-positivist utopia.

The Vele di Scampia development in Naples – designed by Franz Di Salvo on the basis of the 1962 Zona 167 housing legislation – is composed of three triangular concrete and steel ‘sails’ (*vele* in Italian, hence its name), built between 1962 and 1975, in line with the principles of Le Corbusier’s *unité d’habitation*. It was intended to house between forty thousand and seventy thousand people. In 2016, having declined into a ghetto plagued by social problems, the local authorities announced that the complex would be demolished – except for one of the ‘sails’, to be converted into a museum – and the eviction process began.

Rozzol Melara is a brutalist social housing building designed between 1968 and 1971, and finally completed in the eighties, promoted by Trieste’s IACP municipal public housing authority. The design team of twenty-nine experts and professionals coordinated by the architect Carlo Celli worked in line with the principles of the Modern Movement. In planning terms, the urban vocation of this building for two and a half thousand residents was to prevent the suburbanization of a peripheral area of the city some four kilometres long, with special attention being paid to the creation of landscaped areas for the whole community.

Although some of its communal areas now betray significant levels of degradation, Rozzol Melara has been the subject of international architecture competitions promoted by the local authorities and the University of Trieste to restore and update its spaces. In fact, the complex has fulfilled many of the objectives that prompted its construction and has given people on low incomes access to decent housing without becoming a ghetto.



ÁGUAS LIVRES / PARNASO

PARNASO · ÁGUAS LIVRES
2014-2021

In 2014, Juan Baraja began a study of the Águas Livres residential building, inspired by the programme of the Modern Movement and by Le Corbusier's *unité d'habitation*. Águas Livres, built in 1956, is a less dogmatic, more open variant on the strict formal precepts that characterise the Modern Movement. Baraja completed this project in 2022 with a study of a second building of the same period and language: the Parnaso building in Porto, designed and built by José Carlos Loureiro in 1952.

Le Corbusier, together with Amédée Ozenfant, started thinking about the machine for living in 1919, in the pages of *L'Esprit Nouveau*, when neither Nuno Teotónio Pereira nor Bartolomeu Costa Cabral, the Águas Livres architects, nor Loureiro had been born. The pilotis, the open floor plan, the free design of the façade, the ribbon window and the flat terraced roofs appeared in 1929. A little later, the residential typologies of the Villa Le Lac, the Villa Savoye and the *unité d'habitation* were to materialise as a result of the constructive strength of cement, concrete and glass. This quintessentially modern housing typology was developed by Le Corbusier with the collaboration of the Portuguese painter-architect Nadir Afonso.

These historical references, together with the meticulous work of artisans, designers and artists, gave rise to the Águas Livres block on the shore of the Portuguese Atlantic, in Lisbon.

There, Juan Baraja once again found the time to make a detailed subjective study with the camera not only of light, line and colour – as he has done in other projects: *Hipódromo*, *Sert-Miró* or *Cerezales* – but also of the way these spaces are lived in by their current occupants. The same intention has its continuity in *Parnaso*, where the interest in how the residents share the spaces is even more in evidence.

These two modern buildings compose a complete photographic series attentive to subtle passages, silent, some all but forgotten, and allude, by way of materials and forms, to what has in some cases disappeared – trades, architectural theses – and in others is not present.



Y Vasca / Euskal Y, 2022. © Juan Baraja

Y VASCA / EUSKAL Y

2021

In 2021 Juan Baraja received a commission from the Fundación ICO to undertake a specific project on the new railway infrastructure known as the *Basque Y*, which is to provide the three Basque capitals – Bilbao, San Sebastián and Vitoria – with a high-speed rail link – average journey time 35 minutes – and connections with France on one side and Madrid on the other.

The research by Juan Baraja, currently in progress, is being carried out in the context of the *20/XXI. Imágenes de España* project promoted by the Fundación ICO. A continuation of other similar initiatives that have emerged since the nineteen eighties in both the Spanish and European contexts, *20/XXI. Imágenes de España* seeks to represent the national territory and its transformations, including the social and environmental consequences of macro-infrastructure projects.

The *Basque Y* has been under construction for more than two decades now, with completion scheduled for 2028. A highly ambitious project, especially complex due to its scale, it has been affected by changes in European Union environmental and railway regulations. Opposition to this infrastructure has come from almost every section of Basque society and is voiced in a very diverse and heterogeneous range of arguments. Environmental groups such as *Ecologistas en Acción*, *Eguzki* and *AHT Gelditu! Elkarlana* have opposed not only its impact on Basque ecosystems but also the social model that such infrastructure brings in its wake. The engineering work has also been the object of a campaign of attacks and boycotts, begun in 2007 by ETA. Among the political parties opposed to the *Basque Y* are *Equo Euskadi*, *Bildu*, *Amaiur*, *Euskal Herria Bildu*, *Sortu*, *Alternatiba*, *Zutik* or *Aralar*. It has also been rejected by unions such as *ELA*, *LAB*, *ESK*, *EHNE*, *CNT*, *CGT*, *STEE-EILAS* or *HIRU*, and municipalities such as *Anoeta* or *Elorrio* have even held local referenda in which the majority voted against the new infrastructure.

The social and environmental cost can be seen in the imposition of a new landscape, the result of the materiality imposed on the forests by the concrete, the displacement of farms with the expropriation of their land, major earth movement and changes to the physiognomy of the provincial capitals. Weighed against this is the constant buzz of progress, embodied in more construction workers and in the promise of greater economic well-being in the future.

Juan Baraja addresses this project with a view to completing the photographic series in 2028.

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