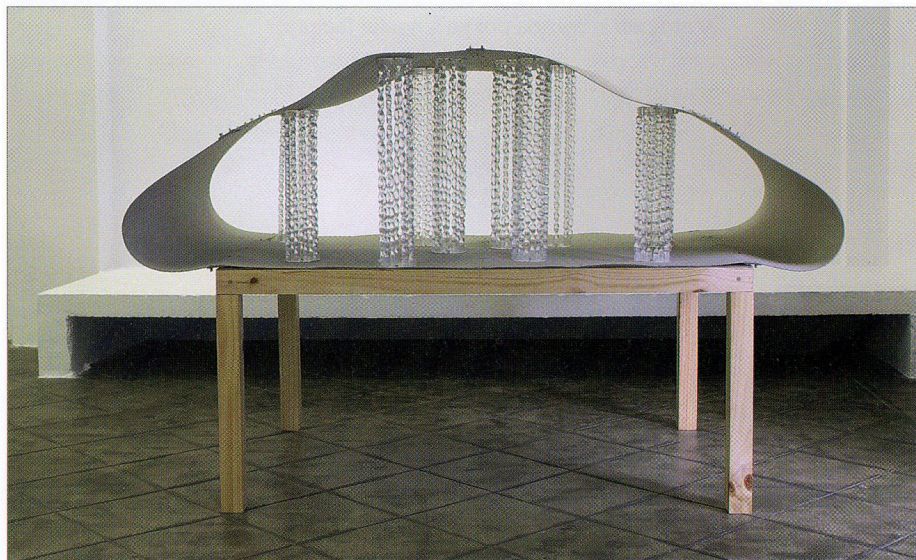


RAIMOND CHAVES AND GILDA MANTILLA: Observations on the City of Dust

BARCELONA
PROYECTE SD.



Nube, 2009. Courtesy of the artists and Galeria Projecte SD.

Forecasts and Suspension

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The exhibition is gray. This summarises the show, not only in terms of its colour spectrum, but also in terms of the hermetic location from which Raimond Chaves and Gilda Mantilla have decided to speak in their second exhibition in Barcelona. This greyness not only describes the environmental conditions in Lima –the place where both artists work–, but also the landscape of possibilities in that city's political stage. If the exhibition describes itself as a “(meteorological) observatory”, contradictorily, everything that we can “see” there is clouded in advance. Two of the first pieces reveal this: *Cielo sin cielo* [Sky Without Sky] (2009), a large sheet of gray cardboard which covers almost an entire wall, to fall like sad curtain with no horizon, and *Calendario Octubre 2008-Septiembre 2009* [October 2008-September 2009 Calendar] (2009), a series of small pieces of cardboard which represent the different months, whose opacity and roughness convey their functionality, as well as the sense of randomness and unpredictability we usually link to the almanac of “another” upcoming time.

The selection of the material for this project –which includes other pieces simultaneously on display in Lima–, has been judicious: cardboard as a recycling element and a space for survival; its existence as re-used material whose improvised appearances (on shoes, mattresses, boxes, doors...) inundate the city. However, cardboard is also a fiction, a physical thermometer of a damp, threadbare, darkened and circular reality. It is symptomatic that, when deciding to think from the perspective of meteorology, they have preferred for the exhibition to function more as the confirmation of an immediate past than as a forecast. Or was the fateful gray also a dark omen? Weather conditions and their banal and day-to-day dimension, or even their impersonal and scientific facets, returns to the space with another character, in order to pronounce a gravity which exceeds what can be easily conveyed. The collapse of the visual is also its aperture.

This exhibition is demanding, especially because its organisers have opted for an appropriation of apparatuses and discourses which combine scientific observation, literature, political analysis and science fiction in order to observe the social predicaments of a city like of Lima. It offers an exercise in transverse interpretation which succeeds in challenging the usual tools used to politically perceive the present. However, beyond the layers of dust which have settled on a city where it never rains, and which are the colour of the sky and of cardboard, the question regarding its Utopian dimension seems to remain unresolved. The misty atmosphere which surrounds the exhibition sometimes makes it hard to distinguish fractured areas which further reveal the conflicts and contradictions of a cloudy public space. Subtly, the small cardboard box, with countless accumulated letters, entitled *Discurso* [Discourse] (2009), presents an ironic view of the matter. Perhaps, however, it might be in *Atrapaniebla* [Fog-Catcher] (2009) where we find the best expression of that two-fold, imaginary and open condition, allowing the prophecy to fade in order to transform it into the engine of a different cartography: two wooden sticks hold assembled cardboard pieces which evoke the meshes and nets used on the mountain ranges to capture the moisture from the fog, in drought-hit areas, whose shape are reminiscent –with the colours of loss– to the protest placards which have been used in the last year during social emergencies in Peru, as a result of the harassment suffered by indigenous communities. This sign of ecological recycling is followed by a reflection on affected political activities, by someone who refuses to submit to the police logic of the State which, even today, wants to impose the idea that some bodies are more valuable than others.