

## LA SECCIÓN ÁUREA

24.01.2025 – 19.03.2025

GALLERIA CONTINUA is pleased to present *La Sección áurea*, a new solo exhibition by **Carlos Garaicoa**, in its Parisian gallery in the heart of the Marais.

The exhibition revisits the recent production of Carlos Garaicoa's work, presenting a new series of paintings and sculptural installations that highlight the artist's enduring interest in architecture, mathematics, geometry, as also revealed by the displayed preparatory drawings. This show marks a return to color as a central strategy in many of his works, allowing Garaicoa to revisit his origins as a painter while reexamining the themes and obsessions that have shaped his career. These influences include the European avant-garde, Russian constructivism, the Bauhaus, abstraction, and Cuban and Latin American concretism, as well as the literary imagination of Jorge Luis Borges.

At the heart of the exhibition lies the series  $\pi=3.1416$ , a collection of relief paintings created using carpentry, painting, and mixed techniques reminiscent of assemblage. These works explore cities and formal inventions that verge on abstraction and sculptural artifacts. Overflowing with color and geometric concepts, this series represents an additional layer of meaning in Garaicoa's artistic trajectory, bridging formal concerns rooted in the history of 20th-century art with a forward-looking perspective on contemporary painting and sculpture.

The reliefs of the series, as curator Osbel Suárez described them, could be considered 'works in transit', establishing a musical overture for the exhibition: 'The very nature of the reliefs - halfway between two-dimensionality and the third dimension - blurs the boundaries between the pictorial and the sculptural, placing us in an ambiguous, hard-to-define territory. Just like overtures, they set the tone and atmosphere for the themes that are approaching, for what is to come, indispensable for inspiring anticipation and creating expectations.'

The other main core of the exhibition is the installation *Toda utopía pasa por la barriga II (Every Utopia Passes Through the Belly II)*, a project that Carlos Garaicoa has been developing for over fifteen years. This work reflects on the concept of utopian and idealized cities, influenced by metaphysical and paper architecture imagined by past architects. The installation consists of an extensive collection of glass jars, each containing wooden models of imaginary buildings, various types of stones, and food ingredients. The glass jars act as sealed capsules that prevent interaction with the external world, addressing themes of solitude and marginalization, particularly relevant within large metropolitan areas. The transparency of the jars exposes their contents, with the diverse food items evoking the food and ecological crises intensified by the increasing demands of human society, leading to environmental degradation, medical emergencies, and nutritional challenges. In light of these realities, *Toda utopía pasa por la barriga II* envisions dystopian cities that reflect these crises, standing as witnesses to the displacements and disruptions of our time.

The pieces invite the viewer to reflect on the garden - not only as a natural phenomenon but also as a human construct - and on the element of the tree, which becomes a poignant metaphor for the fragility of existence, the resilience of nature, and the precariousness of urban life. To this end, the sculptural installation *Entre espinas*, made of acacia thorns, Acacia, Oak, Linden, and Balsa wood, and metal elements, specifically addresses the danger inherent in the ever-growing dominance of architectural constructions over the natural environment.

Together, these artworks trace paths that highlight the tensions between culture and nature, the organic and the constructed, the rigidity of precise forms, and the freedom of natural growth. Developed through reflections on previous creations and experiences, the exhibition

features artworks that find their place within a rich interplay of contrasts and perspectives. Beyond these meditative reflections, the exhibition critically engages with the concept of beauty that has shaped Western thought, while addressing sociopolitical challenges and ethical questions that continue to influence the trajectory of contemporary society.

About the artist:

**Carlos Garaicoa**, born in Habana (Cuba) in 1967, studied thermodynamics and later painting at the Instituto Superior de Arte, Havana (1989 - 1994). He currently lives and works between Havana and Madrid.

Garaicoa has developed a dialogue between art and urban space through which investigates the social structure of our cities in terms of their architecture. He employs a multi-disciplinary approach to address issues of culture and politics, particularly Cuban, through the study of architecture, urbanism and history. His chief subject has always been the city of Havana. By playing with sculptures, drawings, videos and photographs centred around irony and hopelessness, Garaicoa has found in his installations, for which he often uses a wide variety of materials, a way to criticize modernist Utopian architecture and the collapse of the 20th century ideologies, by going deeper into the concept of the city as a symbolic space.

Among his most important solo shows we can highlight those at the Rocca Maggiore of Assisi (2024), Brownstone Foundation, Paris (2022), PEM Peabody Essex Museum, Salem (2021), SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah (2020); Lunds Konsthall and Skissernas Museum, Lund (2019); Parasol Unit Foundation, London (2018); Fondazione Merz, Torino (2017); MAAT, Lisbon (2017); Azkuna Zentroa, Bilbao (2017); Museum Villa Stuck, Munich (2016); Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo (2015); CA2M Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, Móstoles, Madrid (2014); Fundación Botín, Santander (2014); NC-Arte and FLORA ars + natura, Bogotá (2014); Kunsthaus Baselland Muttentz, Basel (2012); Kunstverein Braunschweig, Brunswick, Germany (2012); Contemporary Art Museum, Institute for Research in Art, Tampa (2007); H.F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York (2011); Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam (SMBA), Amsterdam (2010); Centre d'Art la Panera, Lérida (2011); Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Caja de Burgos (CAB), Burgos (2011); National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST), Athens (2011); Inhotim Instituto de Arte Contemporáneo, Brumadinho (2012); Caixa Cultural, Rio de Janeiro (2008); Museo ICO (2012) and Matadero (2010), Madrid; IMMA, Dublin (2010); Palau de la Virreina, Barcelona (2006); Museum of Contemporary Art (M.O.C.A), Los Angeles (2005); M.O.M.A, New York, US (2005); Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Bogotá (2000).

He has participated in prestigious international events such as: the Biennial of Cuenca (2023), the Biennials of Havana (1991, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2003, 2009, 2012, 2015), Shanghai (2010), São Paulo (1998, 2004), Venice (2009, 2005), Johannesburg (1995), Liverpool (2006) and Moscow

(2005), the Triennials of Auckland (2007), San Juan (2004), Yokohama (2001) and Echigo-Tsumari (2012); Documenta 11 (2003) and 14 (2017) and PhotoEspaña 12 (2012).

He received PEM Prize 2021 and in 2005 he received the XXXIX International Contemporary Art Prize - Foundation Prince Pierre de Monaco, and the Katherine S. Marmor Award in Los Angeles.

About the gallery:

Founded in 1990 in San Gimignano, Italy, GALLERIA CONTINUA has expanded its locations to Beijing, Les Moulins, Havana, São Paulo, Rome and Paris. GALLERIA CONTINUA represents a desire for continuity between times and a desire to write a current history. Thanks to its investment in forgotten and unconventional sites, the gallery has always chosen atypical locations, developing a strong identity and an original positioning in over thirty years of activity. In 2021, GALLERIA CONTINUA opened a new space in the heart of the French capital. This space is dedicated to experimentation and the encounter between art, society and culture, in a constantly evolving setting.

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### THE SPIRITUAL MATHEMATICS OF CARLOS GARAICOA

At the end of February 2024, Garaicoa presented his exhibition  $\pi=3.1416$  in Madrid, a title that initially seemed confusing, given that most of the works on display were abstract pieces with a distinctly geometric profile. "Another change of course", I thought, as Garaicoa has accustomed us to quickly embracing the expansion of his imagination, to the point where if we're not attentive to the new codes sheltering his work, we might not even recognize some of his creations as his own.

However, the approach to abstraction here functions more as a tool than as a proposal in itself. Carlos has not fully entered the abstract universe as a concrete proposition. In fact, if we take a look at his recent production, we find several examples that demonstrate his familiarity with abstraction—albeit not entirely. In 2018, he presented *The Geometry Lesson*, an installation tailored to the space at his Madrid gallery, made with threads, colored cords, and pins, vaguely reminiscent of the spirit of Lygia Pape's *Ttéias*, one of the major voices of the Brazilian neo-concrete movement, of which Garaicoa is a self-confessed admirer. The differences between the two installations are vast: *Pape*, faithful to Neo-Concrete principles, sought active viewer participation, with her gold or silver threads almost invisible to the point where one of the challenges of this series was to light them properly. She also frequently used a much larger scale. Nevertheless, the two works share a common goal beyond appearances—a profound truth related to the illusion of planes and forms: an order that is, in every sense, unfinished. And it is in this exercise of awareness that Carlos now pauses, seeking the relationship between the whole and its parts, a philosophy that employs tools like geometry to explore the proportion and interconnectedness of things, akin to a form of spiritual mathematics.

When viewed in perspective, the ten reliefs exhibited in Madrid could be classified as works in transit, functioning almost like an overture. In musical terms, they would begin playing with the curtains still closed. Allow me to explain: the very nature of the reliefs—halfway between two-dimensionality and the third dimension—blurs the boundaries between the pictorial and the sculptural, placing us in an ambiguous, hard-to-define territory. Just like overtures, they set the tone and atmosphere for the themes that are approaching, for what is to come, indispensable for inspiring anticipation and creating expectations.

These reliefs act as a kind of vanguard; without them, it would be challenging to understand the subsequential sculptural series, developed within the tridimensional convention of a new syntax, with hypertrophied bases and more organic aspirations. This new series, initiated in 2024, is unified by small cardboard models made in Austria around 1900 which the artist acquired from a German antiques dealer. Originally intended for pedagogical purposes, these models were once used to teach crystallography—the science of studying the external geometry, internal structure and chemical composition of crystals. The seamless insertion of the models into the sculptural body creates a kind of tension between the vegetal and the scientific world. Garaicoa's new sculptures are an example of the changing role of sculpture in artistic practice, incorporating unconventional materials into their creation and ultimately prompting us to continue questioning what sculpture is today, given the definitive absence of a precise definition.

Formally speaking, Garaicoa's abstractions could remind us of the irregular-framed coplanars developed in the 1940s by Uruguayan Carmelo Arden Quin or the rigid support reliefs with cut-out forms by Gregorio Vardanega. However, unlike these ones, the effect has more in common with the forms of Jean Arp, where the composition's outcome was more closely linked to the forms of chance. Garaicoa manages to unite two traditions, two moments and several meanings: from Western heritage, he draws formal aspects; his intentions and spirit owes more to Latin America. All of this being immersed in a game of essences and appearances that a keen viewer must be able to discern. In this domain, moving a circle just a few millimeters within a composition becomes definitive in achieving the order of things.

This abstraction becomes contradictory, sacrilegious and irreverent when he decides to draw a small cloud in the upper left corner of  $\delta$  (Delta), a piece created in 2023 that was part of the Madrid exhibition. The importance of  $\delta$  (Delta)—an acrylic painting on birch and pine—is fundamental: within a series initially conceived not to exceed the twenty-four characters of the classical Greek alphabet, the “contamination” is now deliberate within the sacred realm of abstraction—how else can we interpret the cloud?— as it provides the clue and measure of the field’s perversion. This breaking of categories, this violation of the norm, also signals the artist’s deliberate intention to reformulate the geometric canon. Carlos does not literally adopt the discourse of traditional geometrics; on the contrary, he is unconcerned with it. This heritage demands transformation to say something new.

There is another earlier example of his interest in the abstract medium, an apparently more imprecise example because it limits, in the same exercise, with interests of a more documentary nature and with a medium—photography—that practically defines him as an artist.

Between 2008 and 2012, he created a series of photographs laminated on plexiglas and aluminum titled *Drawing, Writing, Abstraction*, based on documentation conducted in Caracas in 1997. The final part of the title explicitly reveals his evident interest in abstraction, this time being of a lyrical nature. Photography, a medium we most closely associate with Garaicoa—perhaps his dearest one—is, in his own words, “an indispensable methodology in my work.” Photography is vital to understanding him, to the point that he became interested in architecture and its relationship with politics and history through this medium, which remains the one he has explored most extensively and understands best. This intimate knowledge brings to light the necessary complicity to manipulate it to the point of fragmentation.

*Drawing, Writing, Abstraction*, when properly understood, is a field of exploration and an exercise where the use of abstract language has had little critical fortune. Within the series, there are several moments where the abstract act itself takes center stage, such as in *Abstraction VI (Blood Wall)* or *Abstraction II (Red)*, two large-format color photographs. In both images, what is captured is essentially painting, but the remnants and ruins of the space that hosts them evoke the compositions of American Abstract Expressionism, a post-World War II informalist abstraction movement. In fact, both works can be read as all-overs, boundless, open fields where no area within the pictorial space is privileged. It is as if Carlos had found, in the urban landscape that obsesses him so much, a work by Franz Kline or Clyfford Still—as if, amidst a Havana ruin, chance placed before his eyes a work by Guido Llinás or Hugo Consuegra.

**Osbel Suárez**