

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

Sabatini Building
Santa Isabel, 52

Nouvel Building
Ronda de Atocha s/n
28012 Madrid

Tel: (34) 91 774 10 00

Opening hours

Monday to Saturday
and public holidays
from 10 am to 9 pm

Sundays

from 10 am to 2.15 pm
the entire Museum is open
from 2.15 pm to 7 pm
are open Collection 1
and one temporary exhibition
(check website)

Closed on Tuesdays

Exhibition rooms in all venues
will be cleared 15 minutes
before closing time.



www.museoreinasofia.es

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Palacio de Cristal
Parque del Retiro, Madrid

Opening Hours
From October to March
Every day from 10 am to 6 pm

From April to September
Every day from 10 am to 10 pm

Related activity

Encounter

Damián Ortega, in conversation
with Peio Aguirre. *Alias and
independent publishing*

Nouvel Building, Auditorium 200
May 6 at 7 pm

Exhibition May 5 – October 2, 2016

Parque del Retiro, Palacio de Cristal

Damián Ortega

The Rocket and the Abyss



Torre Latinoamericana, 2016

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**MUSEO NACIONAL
CENTRO DE ARTE
REINA SOFIA**



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Y DEPORTE

Damián Ortega (b. 1967, Mexico City) often quotes the words of John Cage: “The motive, then, of reality, is process not goal.” Ortega’s works, which are the result of questioning that process, transform the materiality and signs of an object, a building, or an image, generating intriguing metamorphoses.

Constructing and deconstructing, drawing parallels, and transferring images and concepts to other contexts in order to critically challenge their foundations are some of the operations that Ortega materializes in his projects. The spaces that host his installations, performances, sculptures, and videos become dynamic situations—activated by practices of accumulation, concentration, and dispersion—that often incorporate kinetic movement and suspended elements. Ortega retains a subtle irony from his early days as a caricaturist that comes through in many of his works, in which he draws on reality to generate critical commentary.

Inspired by Vicente Huidobro’s 1919 poem *Altazor o el viaje en paracaídas* (Altazor, or a Voyage in a Parachute), Ortega chose the title *El cohete y el abismo* (The Rocket and the Abyss) for this exhibition, which reflects that contradictory tension between the rise and fall, and functions as an allegory of the models that the works in the show are based on: references to the history of modern architecture and engineering that are expressions of the symbolic and monumental self-representation of the society of capitalist accumulation. *Torre Latinoamericana* (Latin America Tower) takes its name from one of the tallest buildings in Mexico City; the Titanic is the protagonist of *Monumento* (Monument); and the huge Pruitt-Igoe housing project (St. Louis) is the point of departure for *Los*

pensamientos de Yamasaki (The Thoughts of Yamasaki).

In *Torre Latinoamericana*, Ortega “revisits” a classic example of modern Mexican architecture, which had already been the subject of his 2007 series *Torre Latino* (Latin Tower). Built between 1949 and 1956 to a design by Augusto H. Álvarez inspired by the Empire State Building (New York, 1930–31), the Torre Latinoamericana was for many years the tallest building in Mexico City and one of the tallest skyscrapers in a high seismic risk zone. Here, Damián Ortega turns it into a pendulum, inverting and hanging it upside down from a steel cable at the highest point of the Palacio de Cristal. The structure is made of printed leather, a ductile, flexible material that contrasts with the inherent solidity of architectural structures. The *Torre* is actually a huge hourglass, in which the sand creates a drawing on the ground as it swings to and fro. The process of gathering up the sand and refilling the receptacle forms part of the project, evoking Sisyphus, whose punishment was to roll a huge boulder up a hill, repeating the action for eternity.

In *Monumento*, the Titanic is created in the form of a thirteen-meter soft canvas sculpture suspended from the ceiling like a puppet. Ortega has drawn the famous ocean liner onto the canvas with wax crayons and ink. The ship plunges vertically over the floor, in a frozen gesture, its prow buried in a mound of sand that caricatures its sinking. It



Mockup of *Monumento*, 2016

thus calls into question its status as symbol and monument, and echoes the critical irony by which Claes Oldenburg’s sculptures redefined the possibilities of the monument in our own time.

Los pensamientos de Yamasaki is an installation consisting of numerous elements as screen-printed images and texts that the artist found during his research into the Pruitt-Igoe development project, prints on foam board, and used objects that evoke the memory of the people who inhabited the building complex designed by the architect Minoru Yamasaki, who also designed the World Trade Center towers in New York. Built at a time of economic optimism, the Pruitt-Igoe was hailed as one of the most

significant urban public housing projects in postwar America, but it nonetheless turned out to be a great disappointment due to its rapid decay: in the 1970s, the thirty-three buildings that made up the complex were demolished by order of the United States government, thus becoming the paradigm of the failure of modern architecture.

Damián Ortega’s project is a fictional piece based on this event. Using fragments of texts from historical sources, creates a narrative that imagines Minoru Yamasaki’s response to the destruction of his buildings. The piece is an experiment in the dialogue that arises between texts, where some expressions from Gilles Lipovetsky’s *The Era of Emptiness* (1983) are recognizable, and objects that had been bought at the second-hand markets. Ortega uses recycled materials to try to recreate the glamour of the advertisements of the time, contrasting the seduction of consumer culture with the obsolescence of the objects due to the inexorable passing of time.

The work of Damián Ortega has been shown in solo exhibitions in museums and art centers around the world, including HangarBicocca in Milan (2015), Museo Jumex in Mexico City (2014), the Museum of Contemporary Art of Los Angeles (2005), the Tate Modern in London (2005), the Kunsthalle Basel (2004), and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia (2002). His work was also included in the 50th Venice Biennale (20013) and the 27th Bienal de São Paulo (2006).

In parallel, Ortega has undertaken substantial editorial work as coeditor and contributor to *Casper Magazine* between 1998 and 1999, and as editor of the Alias project, which disseminates the work and ideas of key contemporary art writers who have not previously published in Spanish.