

# JOHANNES VOGT

## ARTFORUM

SÃO PAULO

### Ricardo Alcaide

BARÓ GALERIA

On entering Ricardo Alcaide's solo show "Settlements," I was struck by a sense of déjà vu. As my eyes scanned the large industrial warehouse where it was installed, I saw bare walls and a floor dotted with dozens of groupings of discarded materials—cloth, cardboard boxes, plastic bags, pieces of wood, and so on. In downtown São Paulo, it's not unusual to come across similar objects piled on the sidewalk. Here, some were also placed on freestanding steel shelves used to bisect the



space and hold some of the smaller artworks; the shelves were installed diagonally across from the entrance in the middle of the room.

The Venezuelan-born Alcaide lives and works in São Paulo, creating art that is inspired by urban architecture, its inhabitants, and social issues. In the past, working primarily as a photographer, he made series such as "The Sitters," 2002–2007, for which he invited London's homeless to pose in a studio, and "Passersby," 2005–2009, in which people on the streets of São Paulo were asked to don animal masks. By the time of his first exhibition at Baró in 2011, "A Place to Hide," Alcaide was photographing provisional abodes made by the homeless—structures built from discarded materials—as well as making installations, sculptures, and objects.

"Settlements" marks a shift in a career built on a quasi-anthropological investigation of urban life from the perspective of the rejected, the disposable, the temporary, and the forgotten. Hence the floor pieces resembling piles of refuse from the street: a mound of wood and plastic bags (*Uneven* and *If We Knew Then*; all works cited, 2014); planks of wood balanced on a large cushion from a discarded sofa (*Soft Settlement*); bricks, foam, plywood, and other materials placed next to one another (*Group*); a white rectangular volume made of MDF with a Formica finish supported by pieces of wood and corrugated cardboard used for making doors and paneling (*Setting*). Others, such as *Settlement*

*nº6* and *Settle Down*, were cast in bronze to maintain their dejected sculptural shapes. Another group that includes *Settlements nº7* (three levels of long planks supported by bricks, cardboard, and other materials) and *Settlements nº5* (a set of steel shelves smaller than those in the center of the room, with an assortment of found objects and one bronze piece) was formed of vertical groupings of industrial materials. Then there were objects made with monochromatically painted canvases, some united by hinges and others placed inside boxes or on shelves (*A New State* and *Encounter nº4*).

Difficult to see upon entering the exhibition, blocked by the long stretch of freestanding shelves that divided the space diagonally in half, were tables displaying some twenty black-and-white photographs of modernist buildings, all with added materials—thus their designation as *Untitled with Elements* with different reference numbers, from the series "Interiors," 2013-. For instance, *Untitled with Elements nº24* depicts Palácio do Planalto, the president's office in Brasília, with an abstract petroleum-blue plastic shape glued over part of it (referencing the shapes of the homeless constructions in the 2011 show); *nº32* shows a corner of architect Lina Bo Bardi's former residence in São Paulo with a piece of corrugated cardboard covering its bottom half.

Architecture lies at the formal core of all the artworks, from floor pieces that resemble building models, photos that depict them, and shelves that echo their modular nature, to boxes and planks that function as abstract units. Conceptually, "Settlements" was an exercise in observation and commentary on the complex poetics of the ever-changing urban landscape—in which space is occupied not only by buildings and bodies but by residue of all sorts, and spatial meaning can always be reassigned.

—Camila Belchior

Art Forum International, September 2014

# JOHANNES VOGT

INTRUSIONES: RICARDO ALCAIDE EN GALERÍA TAJAMAR

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*"Los caminantes son practicantes de la ciudad, la ciudad se hizo para poder caminar. Una ciudad es un lenguaje, un repositorio de posibilidades, y caminar es el acto de hablar ese lenguaje, de seleccionar esas posibilidades. Así como el lenguaje limita lo que se puede decir, la arquitectura pone los límites de donde se puede caminar, pero el caminante inventa otras maneras de ir."*

Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*

Para Ricardo Alcaide caminar por la ciudad es el comienzo de muchos encuentros inesperados con aquellos desechos que interrumpen el paisaje urbano y traducen la geometría de su discurso. Las ciudades se presentan hoy planificadas y legibles para el paseante que busca encontrar en ellas algunos desórdenes que le permitan crear nuevos lenguajes.

Durante su estadía en Santiago de Chile la mirada de este artista deambuló desde los mercadillos, fachadas de edificios de departamentos modernistas, y hasta las viviendas ligeras hechas por los indigentes. Para Alcaide se vuelve imposible hablar de algo sino es teniendo una experiencia con ello. Desde esa premisa y desde la ética que se crea en relación al paisaje y su contexto comienza la conceptualización de una obra que remite primero a una arquitectura modernista y vernácula, segundo se acerca formalmente a la historia del arte -a una escena de abstracción y geometría tremadamente influyente en su formación artística-, y tercero a una realidad social latinoamericana.



Instalación *Intrusões*, Ricardo Alcaide en Galería Tajamar 2013



Vista de la instalación *Intrusões*, Ricardo Alcaide, Galería Tajamar 2013.

En su caminar la recolección es instintiva, va juntando aquellas cosas que la sociedad desecha porque ve en ellas un potencial escultórico, pictórico y arquitectónico. Muchas de las cosas que va juntando parecen inservibles o no poseen una función particular, sin embargo pueden volverse piezas fundamentales en la construcción de sus obras. Una madera con un borde pintado de azul encontrada en los desechos de un antiguo colegio, un plano geométrico de color amarillo comprado a un vendedor ambulante, unos cartones agujereados recogidos de la calle, un cajón de madera sacado de entre las basuras del reciclaje, y muchos hallazgos más fueron utilizados para el montaje de la presente instalación[1]; seleccionados para ser intervenidos por la mano del artista -pintados, envueltos, plegados-, o simplemente fueron reubicados y montados minuciosamente sobre estanterías de metal.

El emplazamiento urbano de la galería –un hexágono de cristal en medio de la plaza de unas torres modernistas- es el escenario perfecto para Intrusões. Esta instalación nos invita primero a observarla desde el exterior y luego recorrerla, como si siguiéramos los pasos que el mismo artista ha dado por la ciudad. Ricardo Alcaide a dispuesto unas estanterías metálicas que hacen las veces de edificios como metáfora a la arquitectura vertical de las Torres de Tajamar[2]. De diferentes alturas y espesores estos muebles de color gris concreto, contienen en sus estanterías objetos cargados de geometría que crean una composición sobre el paisaje urbano.



Detalle de la instalación *Intrusões*, 2013.



Detalle de la instalación *Intrusões*, 2013.



Detalle de la instalación *Intrusões*, 2013.

Las intenciones de Alcaide actúan como bisagra entre lo político y lo poético por el modo en que se posiciona ante una problemática social –la del desecho y la vivienda- y la traslada a cuestiones estéticas. En Intrusões la yuxtaposición de objetos y pinturas se mueve de lo formal a lo conceptual, o más significativamente desde lo lúdico hasta lo brutal. Esta instalación es la expansión de una pintura que existe solo en sus bordes ya que la interrupción –pictórica y simbólica- de estos objetos en el espacio arquitectónico de la galería viene a criticar abiertamente la función tanto del arte como de los espacios que habitamos.

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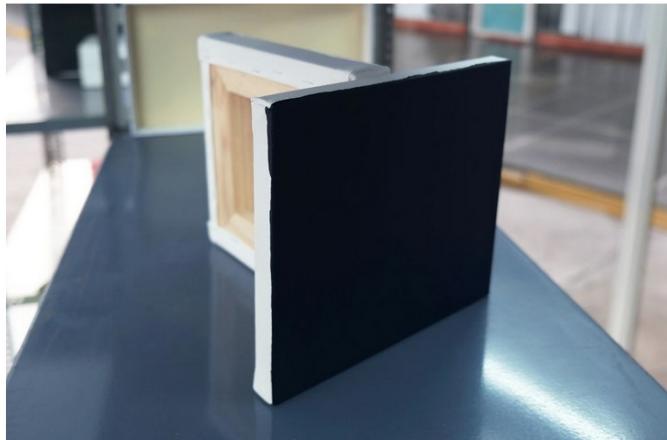
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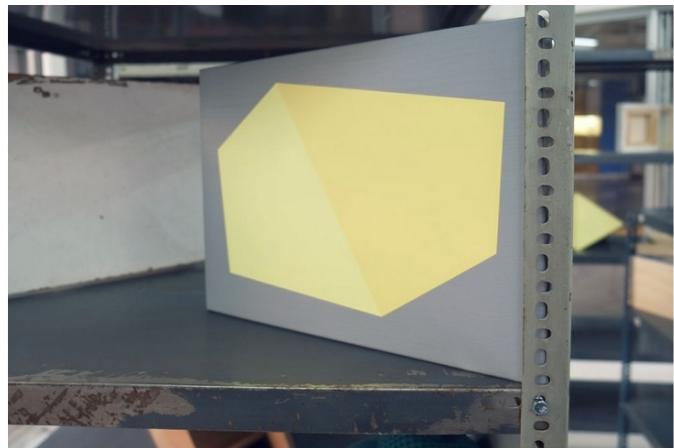
Cuando el espectador recorre Intrusiones va descubriendo un mundo de tradiciones y afectos – implicados en el acto creativo y en la observación- ya que puede reconocer algunos de los desechos de su propia ciudad transformados en pequeñas obras de arte. La sensibilidad de Alcaide ha llevado la realidad al límite de su abstracción. Las pinturas sobre tela hechas por la mano del artista se confunden con las piezas hechas a partir de desechos, todas dispuestas en las mismas estanterías, apoyadas unas sobre otras, reposando horizontalmente sobre sus repisas. Estas -como la arquitectura en la ciudad- ponen los límites del caminar, sin embargo ofrecen nuevas perspectivas, otro modo de mirar y convivir con las geometrías del espacio. Estas prácticas de la ciudad remiten de forma específica a “otra espacialidad” (Merleau-Ponty, 1976) –una experiencia antropológica, poética y mítica del espacio-, y también a esa esfera de influencia opaca y ciega de la ciudad habitada. Lo que Ricardo Alcaide crea es una ciudad trashumante y metafórica, insinuando así su vitalidad.



Detalle de la instalación *Intrusiones*, 2013.



Detalle de la instalación *Intrusiones*, 2013.



Detalle de la instalación *Intrusiones*, 2013.

Hay que decir, como señala G. Bachelard en *La Poética del Espacio*, que en la medida que habitamos nuestro espacio vital, de acuerdo con todas las dialécticas de la vida, nos enraizamos, de día en día, en un rincón del mundo. Del mismo modo los gestos que construyen la obra de este artista van sembrando nuevos conceptos éticos y posiblemente nuevos signos de identidad, en una sociedad que desecha tanto su basura cotidiana como su historia en pro del consumo de una estética que excluye todo aquello que aparenta ser precario, viejo, obsoleto, desubicado o olvidado; *Intrusiones* propone mediante su formalidad artística –sobre todo la pictórica- hacer conscientes las preocupaciones cotidianas de los habitantes –caminantes- de la ciudad contemporánea.

Visioner TV / *Intrusiones* @ Galería Tajamar , SCL



[1]Como curadora de la exposición quisiera decir que el presente texto es el resultado de la observación, cooperación e investigación de un trabajo conjunto entre artista y curadora que demuestra que la práctica curatorial y la labor artística están estrechamente ligadas y pueden fusionarse como equipo.

[2] Las Torres de Tajamar es un conjunto arquitectónico de la comuna de Providencia, Santiago de Chile, característico del estilo moderno de mitad del siglo XX. El complejo de las Torres de Tajamar posee cuatro edificios (todos de diferentes proporciones y tamaños). Fernando Castillo Velasco señala: “[Las Torres de Tajamar] se pensaron con la convicción de que estábamos haciendo una obra trascendente para el desarrollo de la ciudad. El Parque Forestal, que continuaba en el Parque Providencia, culmina en este lugar que era una gran fachada de cielo y tantos metros mirando el parque, o sea era el remate del parque. Nosotros nos planteamos que esos edificios debían ser esculturas dentro del parque y por tanto, tener transparencias hacia la cordillera y juegos de altura para que apareceran como objetos escultóricos. Eran una especie de puertas hacia el barrio alto y el remate de la Avenida Providencia. Creo que la obra ha perdurado bien en el tiempo. Se incorporó al paisaje de Santiago con entera armonía.” Diario The Clinic, 2008.

# JOHANNES VOGT

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RICARDO ALCAIDE

The Space between Two Worlds  
by Jacopo Crivelli Visconti, São Paulo

As of at least 2002, when he began his series of street dwellers in London city, collectively titled *Sitters*, the work of Ricardo Alcaide (Caracas, 1967) explores the borderline character of the skin; it penetrates into the metaphorical richness of membranes (whether they be walls, blankets, plastic sheets, fences, or the skin itself) that separate the interior from the exterior, that divide one world from another world that is its obverse, its opposite.

During the course of these almost ten years, there have been diversions and mainly formal changes, gradual but substantial, which may even seem to indicate a radical rupture between the earliest and the most recent production, but the same series of subjects remains quite clearly at the center of his concerns. In *Sitters* (2002-2005) Alcaide contrasted, although implicitly, two universes: on the one hand, the street dwellers, and on the other, the world of those "inserted" in the system (included in the latter the artist himself and his public). But the careful construction of the scene and the way in which the subjects were portrayed evinced their intense beauty, suggesting relationships with Caravaggio's characters, as has already been pointed out, or with the prolonged close-ups of Renée Falconetti playing Joan of Arc in Carl Theodor Dreyer's film *La Passion de Jean D'Arc* (1928). That is to say, at the same time that he emphasized their condition as marginalized from society, the artist integrated his models in the sphere of an iconographic tradition which was central to the constitution of the aesthetic culture, more specifically, a religious or mystic aesthetics of the Western imaginary.

The importance of *Sitters* in the development of Alcaide's poetics is demonstrated by some works produced in the years immediately following this series, which constitute splittings of the initial series, both from a formal and a conceptual point of view. Such is the case of *Words* (2006), an ensemble of prints on formica in which the different details of the skin of each model are used as backgrounds and to write words on them (GOD, HOME, CHANGE, SPARE, BLESS), which, excerpted from the beggar's classical phrase, "Homeless, please can you spare some change to give me, if possible, Thank you, God bless you," emphasize once again, besides the social dimension, the closeness with the mystical-religious question. In the series *Houses* (2007) and *Outdoors* (2006-2007), the skin is superimposed, whether physically or only through digital interventions on photographs of the city of São Paulo, on models of houses, and on the huge advertising billboards that characterized the city before the recent campaign against visual pollution. While in *Sitters* the representatives of marginality became surprisingly attractive, ennobled by a classic aesthetics, here the perspective reversal is found in the way in which "our" houses and "our" city suddenly reveal they belong to "them", to the point of being made from the same substance "they" are made of.

The change in scale in these works, at least in what concerns the urban or architectonic dimension with which they are faced, marks a turn in relation to the silent ambit of the photographic studio that sheltered the models for Sitters, and it can be considered, in retrospect, the prelude to a new way of approaching analogous or borderline issues. If the most radical and fertile change takes place in the series *A Place to Hide*, another decisive pivotal moment seems to be the one marked by the photographic series, also produced in São Paulo, *Transeuntes (Passers-by)* (2005-2009). In this case, in fact, the presence of the city, in addition to its being a backdrop, is already a determinant element in the construction of the atmosphere of the scene, and it reveals the artist's interest in the capacity of modernist architecture to contribute to create settings outside of time, strongly antiquated on the one hand, and extremely contemporaneous on the other. The most outstanding characteristic in *Transeuntes* is not the urban setting or the extraordinary timelessness of the characters' clothes, but the animal masks that the passers-by posing for the artist agree to wear. The artist and writer Becky Beasley, who is the author of interesting essays on the work of Ricardo Alcaide, lays the stress on how the act of posing for an unknown photographer, particularly if this is done wearing a mask, constitutes a hiatus in the monotony of the daily routine. Beasley speaks of "dropping out", almost a falling apart of the rigid line of predictable events, but the same verb also defines the choice of the street dwellers and beggars, who opt for not entering into the logic of a society into which, in many cases consciously and programmatically, they do not manage or they do not want to integrate. That is to say that, in spite of the adoption of a significantly different iconographic rendition, Alcaide's work ends up dealing also on this occasion with the subtle distinction between integration and marginalization, between being inside and being outside (with regard to society, to time...).

*A Place to Hide* (2010-) a series of works in various formats and techniques, and also the title of two exhibitions presented by the artist in the past few months in Madrid and São Paulo, introduces even more radical splittings by comparison with the works analyzed in the first place in the present article. Based on some photographs of street dwellers wrapped up in blankets, for example, Alcaide has created quite a large series of small oil paintings and drawings, in which the folds in the fabrics that protect the characters (from the weather, from the gaze of passers-by...) become rigid, in such a way that they take on the appearance of mere formal studios, occasionally establishing relationships with modernist architecture itself, or even with the visual language of Concretism, which was decisive for the development of the visual arts of the second half of the 20th century in Brazil. In the mounting of the exhibitions, however, these paintings and drawings do not have a privileged place, and they may be presented side by side with the photographs that originated them, the videos based on the drawings, or even the pictures of containers or trailers used as improvised shelters. In addition to the works themselves, the artist also produces the walls that support them: makeshift constructions which are reminiscent of the fences surrounding building sites, on the one hand, while on the other they are often associated to the modern and concrete tradition on account of the precision of their forms. Hence, even in a sublimated way, or furthermore, in a more mature way, Alcaide continues to explore the fragile frontier dividing precariousness from solidity, poverty from richness, that which protects us from that which threatens us.