

Panel

Time Capsules. Messages from tomorrow

Eduardo Abaroa— Moderator

Carlos Motta and Runo Lagomarsino— The Future Lasts Forever

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*This presentation is based on a conversation between Runo Lagomarsino and Carlos Motta, published in the book *Future Lasts Forever* (Gálve Konstcentrum/IASPIS, 2011), and expresses our relationship with diverse notions of the future.*

In November 2011, on an outer wall of the Contemporary Museum of Art in Athens, a graffiti appeared spelling out “Future lasts forever.” This was written the day after “The Politics of Art” exhibit was inaugurated. The graffiti was typical of protests during the Greek economic crisis, but in the context outside the museum, it could also be read as a skeptical gesture towards political art exhibited inside the institution. We had been thinking about what we could call our book on gathering Latin American artists’ and theorists’ hypotheses about Latin America’s future. The phrase was so closely related with our intentions that we decided to use it, since we are especially interested in the way future has been imagined from inside and outside the field of art in Latin America.

“Future lasts forever” is an open expression, pointing out the ambiguity and multiple ways to reach a subject as wide as the “future”. Generating ideas about the future is, by itself, a kind of paradox. If we think about imagining Latin America’s future, we find ourselves with as many representations of Latin America as ideas about the future itself. Formulating a hypothesis about Latin America’s future is impossible if not used as a critical lens for rethinking how, and from which perspectives, visions and histories have been written.

“Future lasts forever”, as Roberto Jacoby states in his interview for our book, means that: “In March 2004, when President Kirchner gave the order to take down dictators Videla’s and Bignone’s portraits, hanging on the walls of military institutions, at that moment, past, present and future were inflected. At that same moment, three temporal events were brought together.” “Future lasts forever” also reminds us of Chou En Lai, the Chinese prime minister who went to Geneva in 1953 to put an end to the Korean War and negotiate peace. A French journalist asked what he thought about the French Revolution. He answered, “It’s still too soon to know.” “Future lasts forever” is also illustrated by the story of a Bolivian man who, during a protest supporting the country’s new constitution, carried an American flag inside his shoe. He was protesting individually during a collective protest. There was a fight in his shoe. Future is there: between the shoe and the foot.

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The idea that the future is between the shoe and the foot suggests we are responsible for its forging. The future is in every step we take. It will be the product of the present and reflection upon the past. The difficulty of imaging the future—especially that of Latin America, a region so vastly characterized by social and economic inequity and stories of oppression—is very interesting. What makes the future impossible to imagine are the different conceptual frameworks we have culturally conceived to do so: science fiction, utopias, dystopias, etc. Imagining the future might call for remaining outside of those archetypes. How can one think about the future beyond the idea of what the future is supposed to be?

As critical thinkers, we harbor deep disbelief regarding the historical narratives referring to Latin America. These hegemonic visions, namely, the Conquest, colonialism, oppression, American intervention, etc., must be questioned. Not to deny those events happened but to define them as they really were, not how they've been recorded unilaterally in History. Maybe the future is a time and place for revision and assumption of our responsibility and our historical irresponsibility.

Historical narratives are being questioned on a daily basis in Latin America. For example, The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo have not only systematically questioned the status quo in Argentina for 30 years, but they have redefined resistance strategies for social movements in the region. Until the “leftward turn” in the last decade, political change in Latin America wished to consciously modify the official identity in many countries, battling against the forces of hegemonic power.

How a place is named, how it is articulated and who does it are crucial, but avoiding nationalistic traps and protectionism is equally important. There must be resistance strategies prepared to build a more integrated “us”, not only to build a discourse about the future but also to really change the present.

Czech filmmaker Jan Svankmajer, suggested that: “Imagination is subversive, because it confronts the possible with the real.” Hence, the real is confronted by the weight of and responsibility for past actions. The future offers potential relief of that weight through the rectification of our actions. Imagination by itself does not take us too far. It is necessary to put those dreams to work in order to influence and change reality.

The lesson derived from the large number of social movements in Latin America is that imagination and action are avenues of hope, not to make a *better* world, but to forge a *good* world. The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo organized to denounce and reject the forces of silence. They linked silence with the acceptance of their children's deaths. The Mothers act from an emotional place, pain, and transform that pain into organized political action. This class of political action *is* the future. The future *is* a rectification process through the use of strategy and imagination.

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How can one imagine a position regarding the idea of “action” from inside the art field? Can small resistance spaces be created in a field so clearly contaminated by neoliberal speech? How does one formulate the space between action and thought? Between imagination and movement?

Art works can operate precisely at the intersection between imagination and movement, and converge between reflection and action. An artistic action can contain social compromise and also question politics. It can resist and inflict, denounce and transform imagination. Latin American art history has an abundance of this combination, particularly through the 1970s and 80s. Think about the revealing actions of the CADA Group, the symbolic power of the Siluetazo in Argentina, the democratic opening of Parangoles of the Hélio Oiticica in the streets of Rio, or ASCO’s street performances in Los Angeles, just to name a few examples in which art and ideas were politics and action.

The intersection of action and imagination, or what we might call “the position of movements”, is a central concept in art. It is a continually closed circuit that changes course very imperceptibly, like a crack or a displacement. Nevertheless, in art the representation of *that* “movement” should not always be the ideal. Take for example, Francis Alÿs’ action, “When faith moves mountains”, in which 500 volunteers were given shovels and stood in a line at the bottom of a gigantic sand dune outside Lima. He asked them to move a certain amount of sand a certain distance, hence moving a sand dune 1600 feet long, four inches from its original position. This human chain could be interpreted as a metaphor for the impossible, of change’s slow pace, or for the importance of collective actions. But the work itself is also a paradoxical exposition of minimalism and “megalomania”. The work, however, is not a representation of any of these interpretations. The work is, in fact, *the happening*, the movement of the mountain. In this happening, politics and poetics converge through the implementation of the action: an event that has no precise meaning and therefore, can have multiple interpretations.

While working on this text during autumn 2010, New York became the headquarters of political protest and dissent. A great number of people, dissatisfied with capitalism and injustice, occupied Zuccoti Park under the name Occupy Wall Street. These protests had nothing to do with a specific claim or message. Occupation was the message and had to do with the radical reconstruction of a “good present”, looking towards the future. Protest as a message relates to knowing and expressing the system’s nuanced nature and its embodiment as a kind of hungry octopus devouring everything with its tentacles. Protest as a message relates to resistance as a way of dissent and of building new avenues for the future. During one of the protests, Brian Holmes spoke in the park, using the “human microphone” and said, “It will take a long time to build a better future, but through the way, we should keep this fire lit!” When

speaking those words, Holmes reminded us that the left's dreams are always beautiful. Besides, he reminded us that the future is, in fact, the way we compromise with the present. The future of capitalism lies in its rectification towards a more just order. The future of the system lies in identifying its multiple inequities and responsibly opposing them. The future is being written every day.

In a Latin American context, building the future is also an important matter. Globalization, the market's development of labor (slavery in the past) and the building of nation-states received strong support during the American colonial period. Walter Mignolo states, the colonization of "the Americas" is but another face of modernity. Latin America's future is the narrative and re-narrative of colonial and postcolonial discourse as a philosophical tool to understand the past and as a political weapon in contemporary life (to paraphrase Marx). These strategies give us a way to examine hegemonic structures imposed by the region's colonialism. In order to understand colonial history, we must recognize its nuanced presence throughout the continent. It is also necessary to look beyond conventional dichotomies and from different angles so that we can grasp what remains hidden in the cracks.

Let's take another example, a very relevant subject for us: narration, conceptualization and materialization of "political art in Latin America". How has this way of producing art been historicized since the 1960s? The story of Latin American art has been in great measure an ideological process—in terms of proportionality—like the Conquest or colonialism. The "official" history of Latin American art has been written according to European and American canon. This historization has been in the hands of art historians, critics and collectors with a western "taste". Recent efforts at re-contextualizing regional artistic production have shown local perspective's relevance, whether it answers or not to international aesthetic movements. In the last decade, Luis Camnitzer, Jennifer Flores Sernard and Red Conceptualismos del Sur (Southern Conceptualisms Network), just to name a few outstanding examples, have made intellectual efforts to build a conceptual counter narrative in opposition to the dominant modernist discourse.

Southern Conceptualisms Network does this in a very interesting way. They avoid and criticize the transformation of works containing political content during the period from 1960-1980, into fetishes. It then reactivates them by putting an emphasis on the date and specific localization of those works. At the same time, it inserts those works in a critical contemporary discourse. Its strategy is a postcolonial declaration of the political potential of hybridization. A hybridization matching perfectly with the paradoxical title of one of Francis Alÿs' works: "Sometimes doing something poetic can be transformed into something political and sometimes doing something political can be transformed into something poetic". The history of Latin American "political art"

demonstrates the relationship between “movement” and “action”. Latin American art has been deeply rooted in social, ethnic and economic realities, as well as regional politics. This creates *futures* of hope, poetry, politics and change through small-scale actions.

The future needs to be written, but the defying question of the time is: what do we want the future to be? We imagine a “good future” in political, ecological, social or cultural terms, but history continually shows that one’s dreams are another’s nightmares. In conclusion, we approach and propose this thesis: we must resist rigid concepts and maybe the category “future” is a fluid concept with room for many perspectives. There are as many futures as present realities. It’s up to us to identify ourselves collectively with a way of life we find worthy of living and to build our future based on these beliefs.

Theodor Ringborg—

On June 18, 2011, five time capsules, elaborated by Jason Dodge, Leif Elggren, Ellie Ga, Rosalind Nashashibi and Raqs Media Collective, were buried on the grounds of Alby Estate, in Moss, Norway, without revealing their contents. The exact location of the receptacles was recorded by the ITCS (International Time Capsule Society), and they should not be unearthed until 50 years have passed, on June 18 2061.

On every suitable occasion, I take the opportunity to reiterate that these time capsules remain on hold, since what is most perilous for anything of this sort is, paradoxically, time itself. Time capsules are often forgotten simply because they demand, intrinsically, the time it takes us to forget them. While they are pending, things, places and plans start attenuating in our minds until they are removed from the surface of recollection. Without intermittent reminders, these boxes would almost certainly linger past their designated duration and, thus, never be exhumed. A prolific archive of capsules scattered worldwide, most of which will forever remain in a tick-tocking state, serve as proof. I have said and written these exact words because then, perhaps, we might not forget what is awaiting us.

I say us, but it might very well not be us. We —all or some— may have passed. I can say, almost with certainty, that some of the artists involved in this project, somewhat morbidly, won’t be present. I just might make it, if I’m lucky enough to turn 78. Who will be the one to unearth these boxes, if by that time, we share his luck?

I don’t know, which is very aligned with this project as a whole. I know almost nothing about anything related to this exercise. I do not know what was buried; no one but the artists themselves do. Nor do I know exactly why we bury something, nor what will happen in a span of 50 years, which means, in extension, that I know nothing about the time when these vessels will be unearthed. I, and all of us related to the

exhibition, stand in a proverbial waiting room, confused about what exactly it is that we are waiting for and what it is exactly that we have done.

The time capsule—it should be said before I talk more about not knowing anything—is a widely understandable tool implemented in those situations where time, presence and contemporaneity are considered or meant to be challenged. There are thousands of capsules out there, and they have been used for thousands of years for the purpose of storing, for posterity, a selection of objects thought to be representative of life at a particular time. Such vessels have had the dual purpose of prompting participants to ponder on their own cultural era and consider those to come. Time capsules have occasionally been employed artistically, although they are typically used by communities in general, or specifically, by scientific communities, often drawn to them for fun, for the spectacle they bring with them or for research. But in almost all cases, the intention is to reflect their own time whilst encouraging perception of imaginable futures.

As for practical matters related to these boxes in particular, I simply sent the artists their respective containers—designed to stand the test of time—granting them the freedom to put whatever they wanted inside of them. A budget for the production of these things was of course provided, as well as an artist fee, as in any exhibition. Subsequently, the artists sealed the boxes and sent them back to me. Therefore, not anyone but the artists know what they have made. The boxes were unceremoniously buried at midnight in the protected grounds, outside Gallery F15, which was a venue of the Biennial in the Alby Estate in Moss, Norway.

Considering all of this, two things are integral to this exhibition. One is time, its existence and the experience of it. I believe that through the capsules' lingering presence, time becomes apparent as a result of its veiled existence and designated duration; touched upon briefly, the experience of it is emphasized, as condensed and inadequate as that might be. This means that the capsule animates time. To face the fact that something will occur in 50 years, that a time of 50 years 'forward' even exists, is a staggering notion if given some thought, and a further curious effect is that, after visiting the capsule's site, instead of retrieving a recollection, one will continue anticipating. And we all know that in places where nothing happens and there is nothing else but anticipation, time makes itself extraordinarily felt—like waiting for the bus, but for a very long time.

The other aspect that is important to mention in this case, talking about this exhibition in particular, is Gallery F15, outside of which the time capsules are buried. The F15 venue was built as we know it in 1868, although the history of Alby State dates back, through a myriad of formations, to 800 BC. Due to its history, the estate, as well as its grounds and surrounding areas, have been designated as a natural reserve, whereby no lasting alterations can be made. Therefore, the setting in which the capsules

lie is immutable, except for the natural growth of trees. Nothing will change there except the natural progression of time and anything that becomes visible as a result of that.

I run the risk of being seen as a broody, a Bergmanesque Swede who buries things out of his distrust in the present. But I must admit that my occupation as a curator pertains, for the most part, to objects in an immediate time and space, and that with this, I sought to create an exhibition in another time and space. I sought to make an exhibition more 'now' than others, but also more 'then' than usual—and this other realm became the future.

The display of objects in time and space is not necessarily an approach in need of being modified, but the time capsule, as a methodology, stimulates matters that other exhibitions that use more traditional presentations are often unable to articulate distinctly. To provoke considerations regarding notions of what contemporaneity is and what an exhibition intended to introduce it constitutes, besides encouraging spatial-temporal reflection on behalf of the viewer, one must perhaps transgress the display of things *here* and *now*, which is the distinctive quality of most exhibitions.

The time capsule is neither a critique nor a revolution against the more accustomed manner in which art is displayed, nor is it my intention to bury each exhibition I create. Rather, it is a corresponding and an auxiliary way to create an experience. It complements the objects in our time and space and offers the viewer a distinctly alternative form of participation and presence, besides involving him in it.

What I want to say is that there are certain curiosities, such as time capsules, that manifest an oblique alliance with time. They cloud the usual horology and demonstrate temporal heterogeneity by capturing circumstances and moments in which time articulates or evokes notions of what can be done within it, using time as material. Unconventional rhythms, dissimilar recurrences and reversed chronologies fracture the ordinary illusion of sequence, the usual representation of time, and conjure up passageways, tunnels and recesses that lead to an alternative understanding of how time passes.

However, 50 years, as in this case, is quite a brief period in time-capsule time, and accordingly, the relevant capsule is not so much a conduit leading toward a far-fetched future but a lingering presence within a periodically reoccurring event, the Biennial, encouraging continuously establishing and reestablishing inquiries about time, contemporaneity, future and art, over the years, within one generation.

It must be said here that no other circumstance is better suited to presenting a project such as this than a biennial. Any biennial is an already temporally determined exhibition. Every two years it will occur and then reoccur. It is an exhibition in which time already plays a significant part, and thus, the extension of time positions itself more naturally. Each Biennial subsequent to the one at the beginning of these

50 years will have to navigate the capsules' presence in some way, even if it chooses to ignore them.

Of course I understand the possibility of never seeing what the participating artists have created or that having to wait 50 years to do so might be uncomfortable, but, instead of offering transient visual encouragement that vanishes in time like so much else, this exhibition may create a place we do not turn to routinely or begin to exit immediately as we enter, but rather, inevitably move through and towards, continuously imagining what the artists have created, anticipating the unearthing date and renegotiating our temporal orientation. One must occasionally, at least partly, transgress the distinctive quality of most exhibitions: the display of *here* and *now* things, and instead look toward a *there* and *then* exhibition, even if, unfortunately, as a result, some of us never get to see the works of art.

As part of the 2011 Momentum Biennial, the capsule has no strict intentions of "preserving" culture for future generations and does not intend to "teach" future generations about art from the past, although that might be one of its consequences. Instead, the conception of what the participating artists have contributed provides a reasoning much more similar to that of predicting the future. We, who are here now, will attempt to conclude what the artists have made, based on their previous work, and will continue to anticipate the capsule until we are destined, when its time is up, to recover it. This way, it is the simplest form of guessing about the future based on the past.

For instance, what has Raqs Media Collective done? Its interest in time is clear, but could we postulate, even vaguely, what they have created here? Or Rosalind Nashashibi, a filmmaker, whose films are often concerned with the slow passing of time? What does a filmmaker do with a box?

The multitude of perspectives is, however, excessive to be able to address all distinctively. The issue of time and the philosophical discourse that encompasses it is significantly convoluted by conflicting opinions and conclusions. To give a brief rendition of the deliberation regarding experiences of the essence and presence of time, as well as the widely varied analogies to describe it, would end up largely insufficient.

Furthermore, much of the final "outcome" of this specific exhibition is rather dependent on the matter it primarily portrays, that of time. Time must pass, in whatever way it flows, if it flows, for the capsule to enter a realm from which one can envisage and experience the past, the present and the future. The relevance is, therefore, in waiting, essentially for an exhibition for which artists have created artworks known only by them, that won't be unearthed until June 18, 2061.

Cosmin Costinas—

Thank you, Shuddha, for inviting me to speak and for putting together this challenging proposition and for doing it in the spectral, doubtful and even melancholic way that I always admired in your work and persona. And thanks to the amazing SITAC team for their marvelous work in making this an impeccable event.

It is striking to arrive from the city of Hong Kong to a cultural event in Mexico City. One cannot but compare the efforts made by the former to build a cultural infrastructure fit for the new long count, with the grand institutions of culture produced by a century of Francophile aspiration and 90 years of pseudo-etatism in Mexico. One cannot possibly arrive at a satisfactory conclusion after this comparison.

I will briefly review an exhibition I curated last autumn, an exhibition that was meant to be a snapshot of gazes, ideas and forms and of representations of the geopolitical structure of the world at the dawn of the new long count and, from a very personal perspective, the last exhibition done in Europe, before leaving it. The exhibition, at BAK, basis Voor Actuele Kunst in Utrecht, the Netherlands was called *Spacecraft Icarus 13 — Narratives of Progress from Elsewhere*.

Icarus 13 is the name of the first space journey to the sun, led by an Angolan mission. Such a statement strikes us as absurd, perhaps even more so because of the improbable flag flown by the mission than by its inhospitable destination. It is, nonetheless, the subject of a work by artist Kiluanji Kia Henda, *Icarus 13* (2007), a photographic series that appears to document a successful space mission (one bearing the unpromising name of the Greek anti-hero who tried to fly and was punished for his hubris when his wax wings melted upon getting too close to the sun). But beyond irony, poetry and a mix of pure fiction and real historical landmarks, the work speaks volumes about a history of dreams of progress, disillusion, resilience and resistance that has characterized the post-independence decades in Angola.

This story is closely linked to the experience of being one of the countries that fell both outside and in the middle of the duelling US and Soviet blocs during the Cold War. In Henda's work, the set of the mission is not a set at all but rather comprises real places and venues throughout Angola; *Icarus 13* is in fact an unfinished mausoleum built by the Soviets during the Cold War era, when Angola was one of the battlefields in a proxy war between the two superpowers. The Astronomy Observatory is another unfinished structure, this time a cinema from the colonial era, and the setting of the launch scene is actually an image from celebrations that erupted when Angola's national football team qualified for the 2006 World Cup.

This playful amalgamation of different eras, historical intensities from tragedy to celebration and high- and lowbrow contexts is a powerful foray into key aspects of varied understandings of progress from the post-war era up to today, from diverse

past sources of articulation to different narratives that center around it, and from disbelief to an insistence on claiming its urgency. This was the work that formed the basis of the exhibition and lent its title.

But there is another image, a ghost from another era, that hovered over the exhibition, a skeleton in the exhibition's closet.

Image of Europe

It is an imposing bluestone figure, an allegory of Europe by Hendrik van den Eijnde made in 1924 as part of a series of sculptures representing the five inhabited continents that are placed along the columns in the main hall of Utrecht's Post Office. The representation stems from an era when Europe was confident about its historical march towards ever-greater progress and world domination (the figure of Europe is holding its hands firmly on the globe) but was at the same time in constant need of finding and representing a backward, uncivilized and ahistorical "other" in order for its own progress to appear evident by contrast. This mirroring game has survived in many discourses about culture and geopolitics, but what has changed dramatically is the position of the subjects and their placement around the mirrors. Tellingly, even as the exhibition was on view, the Post Office in Utrecht was closed down, due to a nationwide privatization program. This was only part of an even larger program of dismantling the welfare state model that has been the pride of Europe's self-representation as a beacon of prosperity during the second half of the 20th century. Europe's amnesia about the fact is only comparable to its historical blindness in embellishing this slow but steady process of decay as a sign of a new and different kind of progress, one that is animating neoliberal thinking.

Progress became a key drive and an ideologically charged instrument during the Cold War era, often being the main aim and declared purpose of politics and of thinking about society. It was however spelled out in very different terms depending on which side of the Cold War divide one was on: in the West, progress was articulated as the push for economic growth, reconstruction in Western Europe and the consolidation of American imperial power in the wake of World War II; in the East, one pointed to advancement toward a communist future across the Soviet bloc, and in the rest of the world, non-aligned or different theories of development could be found. Whatever the ideological formulation, this modern ethos of gazing towards a future that would necessarily have to be an improvement over the present had a particular impact on the world, and especially on that part of the globe that was not clearly integrated in one of the two competing blocs.

The last 20 years removed many of the certainties about the directions along which progress was imagined. The demise of communism as well as the marginalization

of politics in favor of an economy-centered discourse performed by ever-more-powerful neoliberal regimes fractured previously dominant articulations of progress into a kaleidoscope of narratives, visions, constructions and discourses, often ambivalent and ideologically hybrid. The Soviet bloc and its particular version of state socialism collapsed the most dramatically, of course, but the shock waves it sent reverberated in various ways not just in the former Eastern bloc, but also in the West and in the rest of the world. The Soviet-inspired models of progress adopted in many recently independent countries, with their centralized economies and import substitution industrial policies, were the first to crumble. Different so-called Third Ways were suspended by the dead-end of the Second Way and the emergence of the Only Way of neoliberal capitalism. And the perceived victory of this version of progress made neoliberalism, with its dubious ideas of trickle-down economics and the dismantling of the welfare state, the default choice for most of the world.

Image of Omar Meneses

This historical transition can be noted in the exhibition through two positions. Take, for example, Omar Meneses' striking 1994 documentary photograph of housekeeping staff taking over a lavish villa adorned with iconic Andy Warhol silk-screened prints in the Mexican state of Chiapas. The image clearly references the massive revolts in Mexico against the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a landmark treaty in the worldwide expansion of the neoliberal system. But it also speaks about the enormous class contradictions still marking our world, in spite of political attempts to label these conflicts as things of the past. The image also exposes the class-based character of the conflicts and contradictions of the massive popular celebration caused by the inauguration of the first president from a working class background against the backdrop of the capital Brasilia, the great failure of organized modernist progress seen from the perspective of its urban realization. The latter allows for a certain analysis of masses and individuals and their respective historical agencies with the backdrop of the Washington Monument.

Yet certain visions of progress do not become narratives and do not always succeed in crossing the barriers of language and representation, with all the power relations and hierarchies a communication act entails, even between agents mastering seemingly common codes. The discipline of postcolonial studies has extensively debated the question of speech and communication, describing different models of agency. However, these abstractions were more fitting for a world described solely through the narrow lens of the postcolonial narrative, which has a tendency to exclude other historical phenomena and ideological discourses. But in the rapidly changing configurations of the post-1989 world, strict hierarchies of subordination

have been replaced in a parallel process with the shift of the monolithic hegemony of the West by an entangled set of relations. In reality, of course, signs, codes, language and, ultimately, class, power and entitlement are distributed in a more complex manner across borders and historical divisions.

Image Europe – Utrecht

But let's go back, finally, to Van den Eijnde's allegory of Europe. In the age when the sculpture was created, Europe was representing itself and the rest of the world through narratives of progress that were meant to underline its own preeminence. Today, when the building that houses its representation has just lost its original public function, Europe as such has long ceased to be the world's hegemonic center, having dissolved in the post-war-era culture and reminds us of the imperfect tools we deal with in our games of representation and critique.

This leads us closer to the present, when after the end of the first post-1989 decade, in the face of rising questions about the viability of the neoliberal antistatus model as a tool for Western hegemony, a handful of different, oppositional models multiplied yet again. From the state-directed capitalist development of China to various attempts in a number of Latin American countries to re-imagine social justice in a more accommodating relationship with global capitalism, ideas of progress today are being put forward with a stronger drive and confidence than in the former West, in spite of their often problematic formulation.

Image Lin Yilin

For example Lin Yilin's work, *The Result of a Lot of Pieces* (1994), a heavy, rough wall with banknotes stuck in between bricks and the shape of a human body marking a hole in the wall, dwells on the ambiguity of progress understood as economic expansion, with particular attention to his native China. A sign of growth, of progress, of material presence and accomplishment, the heavy wall is also a symbol of opposition, divisions and of framing the human individual through economic measures. It destabilizes while also rendering immobile a paradoxical view of our dystopian present.

Image of Mauro Restiffe

Mauro Restiffe's striking photographic series, taken at two separate inaugurations (though in many ways related in their messianic and celebratory atmosphere) of the Brazilian president Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva in 2003 (*Empossamento*, 2003) and US president Barack Obama in 2008 (*Inauguration*, 2009). The former exposes into the West, an entity borrowing many aspects of Europe's former sense of entitlement but corresponding to a different geography, a specific ideology and a new epoch.

This West is now exhausting its last resources of legitimacy. But like Europe in 1924 or the West of the Cold War, today, the West still needs to represent itself in contrast to the rest of the world in order to convince itself and others that it remains at the forefront of progress. But unlike in 1924, today's neoliberal brand of progress is repackaging decay and confusion throughout the West. The exhibition tried to point this contradiction out by repeating the strategy of the builders of Utrecht's Post Office in placing the ghost of Europe in a mirroring game with images, energies, and representation from the rest of the world, those that have emerged from that vague elsewhere when viewed from the (still) condescending vantage point of Europe. Through such a constellation, the path of this long-suspect notion of progress becomes less clear, and the distribution of winners and losers across the globe even less so.