

Around the Dream 4. Madrid

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During the early days of 2001 Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger create Wikipedia¹, “the greatest free encyclopaedia that everyone can use”. A few months later the Taliban insurgency carries out the destruction of the stone Buddhas of Bamiyan² (Afghanistan), which had remained intact for over 1,500 years. On the 6th of June of the same year a Los Angeles (California, EEUU) jury condemns the Philip Morris company³ to pay three billion dollars to a 56 year-old smoker with irreversible lung cancer. On the 11th of September the attacks on the World Trade Center (New York City) and the Pentagon (Virginia)⁴ take place, provoking the invasion of Afghanistan by the United States and its allies on the 7th of October, with the operation “Enduring Freedom”⁵.

All of this forms a disordered, disconcerting and disturbing virtual map, the plane on which Ángel Marcos unwittingly undertakes the most important of his life projects, *Around the Dream*. The setting cannot be changed, one plays with the hand of cards one has, the events appear and are superimposed without control, but our attitude and action faced with reality belongs to us. One’s upbringing, past experiences, a fascination for the magic of photography in its faithful expression and an intention to show pain and affection in unison have been, and still are, perennial sources of inspiration in Ángel Marcos’s work.

Just as in previous series, such as *Los Bienaventurados* [The Blessed], *Obras póstumas* [Posthumous Works] or *La chute*, in *Around the Dream* there is also a space in which one deals with the state of the human being, marginalisation, desire, frustration or longing⁶, with the difference that on this occasion Ángel Marcos abandons the landscapes of Castile for the city, for the urban space lived out by its citizens, and he takes New York City as a starting point.

Yet if this is a matter of talking about the city, having come to this stage it is impossible to make this concrete because in saying the city there is the generating in our mind of an endless number of different images and ideas that make it impossible to see it as a simple territory that houses citizens, and thus it is necessary to take into account reasonings of a socio-cultural, economic, political and cultural nature.

There are many, correct statements about the qualities of the city: Le Corbusier says that “the big city becomes a centre of attraction that collects and returns the spiritual effects born out of such an intense concentration. Big cities are in fact command posts”⁷. Max Derruau points out that “the city is an important agglomeration, organised towards group life ... and in which a considerable part of the population lives off non-agricultural activities”⁸, and R. Abler, J. S. Adams and P. Gould⁹ state that “a city is a spatial organisation made up of specialised people and activities, designed to maximise interchange; on the local level, the city is the best manner of inter-relating social and economic activities for the maximum benefit of all involved...”.

But all of these definitions focus on the city from an economic, political or social point of view, putting aside more specific aspects, such as the cultural, aesthetic or artistic aspect, something which the sociologist Lewis Mumford stresses when he states: “Space, just like time, is artistically reorganized in cities, in the peripheral lines and in the silhouettes of the buildings. [...] Along with language, it is Man’s greatest work of art”¹⁰.

Ángel Marcos feels these artistic aspects and seeks them in order to carry out this project. Although this is still a matter of the city, it is separate from the city: the suburbs become his canvas, the creeks, the industrial constructions and the abandonment are the foodstuff of his creations. As is usual in previous works, he sets out his skill and ease in film references, presenting the final work as a splendid cinematographic montage. Street scenes, unknown passers-by, the advertising invasion of the streets and the American dream form the message of one of the most representative works of the first chapter of the long journey of *Around the Dream*¹¹ and which represents a major part of the finalizing of this exhibition.

Loneliness, abandonment, desolation and beauty appear incessantly in Ángel Marcos's works, producing a feeling of suffering in the spectator's mind, a strange disquiet because it does not provoke a precise affection, but simply disturbs one's spirit. It is a feeling similar to that which the author himself felt on arriving in New York, and which he explains in the following manner: "When I get to New York I feel the fascination of what is dreamt, of those other lights that make me think that this was my city. I had for some time felt the challenge of going to New York and devoting myself exclusively to my work there. In an unconscious manner I realised that I was always going round in this concept of the urban non-place, I realised that there were always places of prohibition or a barrier, albeit a decorative one; the way was barred, in some manner a toll was demanded, you had to show your identity"¹². The set of works that Ángel Marcos carries out in this city is made up of numerous pieces of differing sizes, finishes and materials, and includes a video entitled *New York*, in which we encounter a radicalisation in the imaginary of the peripheral, and which brings its creator to a view of the Babelian city as a scatological skyline¹³.

Ángel Marcos's title for the second episode in *In Cuba*. On this great island, the biggest one in the Caribbean Sea, it is not necessary to look hard to find the story-based and existential seed of this chapter of *Around the Dream*. Once again desolation, abandonment and the evoking of a lost beauty impregnates everything, the cities in the country fade away, and Havana in a particular manner, and it is here that Ángel Marcos discovers an inexhaustible deposit for expressing his Eden. Slowly, with no opposition, Havana may disappear, but without disappearing, being undone, crumbling yet still standing, it goes on, alien to the dejection, isolated, like something exclusive, generating something unrepeatable and unmistakable. As said by a Cuban saying that became popular in 1985 and was used again later in 1991 with the arrival of the so-called special period "La Habana no aguanta más" [Havana can't take it any more]¹⁴; fifty-five years of socialism contemplate this. But Ángel Marcos, with notary-like methods and formulas, has told the world this for ten years.

In 1933 the American journalist Carlton Beals commissions Walker Evans¹⁵ to illustrate the book *The Crime of Cuba*, and he unceremoniously, yet keeping his distance, goes through the streets of Havana with two cameras¹⁶ (one medium format 2 1/2 x 4 1/2 and another large format one 6 1/2 x 8 1/2 with its tripod) looking for a social and urban typology, mixing street portraits with architecture, in which advertising billboards and posters are a part of the terrain in which he works ceaselessly for a month. This same concern is that which Ángel Marcos follows sixty years later, in the same manner, with two cameras (a wooden large format analogical one, and another latest generation digital reflex camera), and with a contemporary photographic configuration

full of symbols and dual readings, as we can see in the work entitled *En Cuba 74* (2004)¹⁷ – present here in the exhibition – that shows us the innocent, clean and hopeful gaze of a little boy standing by the emblematic *Habana Libre Hotel*¹⁸, raised majestically in the neuralgic centre of the corner between the *Rampa* and *Vedado* neighbourhoods. And we find this in a more obvious manner in the work *En Cuba 18* (2005)¹⁹, where five Cubans sitting on the sidewalk seem to fix their gazes on a long-switched off neon sign, that with a thick and firm typeset announces “**America**”, while to its right the revolutionary symbology on a cracked wall alludes to the fighting vigilantes of the homeland, alongside a poster with “26th of July for the Homeland”²⁰. In these two works one can clearly see the creative memory of *Around the Dream*.

In twentieth century photography urban landscape has become one of the most overworked genres, on occasion being confused with signposting dedicated to tourist souvenirs. However, Ángel Marcos’s images, which stand out from their topics, do not show us documentary acts, given that in each of his images we can appreciate an undeniable attractive value, besides political evocations and ideological suggestions; they are not only cold, deserted images, but through his gaze he can isolate an exclusive part and generate something unrepeatable and unmistakable. This introspection leads us to the third pillar or episode of the showing: China.

Only a year had gone by since he finished his work in Cuba, and then without a break he continues his work on another continent with the same passions and obsessions, undertaking this new exploit in which his analysis of the brutal construction and the development of the new architecture of Hong Kong, Shanghai and Beijing form the skeleton system of the third phase of *Around the Dream*. If we calmly study the work *China*, one cannot tell whether we are constructing or destructing, whether there really is an advance or a regression, although the coldness of the Chinese political leaders leaves no room for doubt: forward and forward, although history, life and tradition might be lost on the way. Once again desolation, silence and abandonment added to general confusion and disorder form the breeding ground for Ángel Marcos’s new work. Adjectives like grandiose, uncontrollable, confused and boisterous are the perfect definitions for this photography, in which the human being again takes on protagonism, whether directly – with his presence – or indirectly, and the instruments he uses pile up without any order: motorbikes, cars, food, gas cylinders, rubbish... Everything is overwhelming, disconcerting, disquieting, as we can appreciate in *China 19* (2007)²¹, there cannot be so much in such a small space: bicycles, car, table, trunk, plants, chairs, posters, pots, meters, windows, stairs, wood... This is China seen by Ángel Marcos, in which at times one cannot be certain if it is day or night, because everything is impregnated with a uniform grey, like in the work *China 62* (2007)²² – present in this showing – a deserted spot where, although the hand of man is present and the reign of the grey is unavoidable, it inevitably leads us into noxious, dense, dark feelings, in short, into desolation.

The spaces are undefined, one does not know whether one is inside or outside, up or down, and the traditional houses try to struggle against the skyscrapers in a lost battle. Even so, Ángel Marcos moves like a chameleon in this world of continuous confusion, showing us an almost archaeological view of the city, masterfully using close ups²³ and including landscapes that occur in the small places where it seems that something of traditional life still persists. Madrid... fourth cycle. First stage in Europe. New York, Cuba, China and now Madrid, they all have one common denominator: the impossibility of thinking

about the city, because the city is only one point in a process of generalised urban development. Now added to these scenes, which are known to everyone, is the European dream that Marcos deals with as a proposed setting in Southern Europe: the city of Madrid. As has been reiterated in the previous chapters, the human being is faded out so it is possible for him to become engrossed in other universes. Madrid is not alien to the mercantile, political and social movements of the current century in which everything is absorbed into the common denominator of globalisation²⁴. The city, whether we like it or not, is cemented into a perfect union between financial capital and territory.

In a relationship of socio-economic construction and deconstruction typical of globalised capitalism, the spectacular nature of Ángel Marcos's works dedicated to Madrid, carried out specifically to be placed in the exceptional and surprising space of the first and second floors of the Sala Canal de Isabel II, involves us in the icons of the capital with the strength of the pure and the magnanimous: the Royal Palace seen from the Campo del Moro Gardens; the statue of Velázquez in the Prado Museum; the Bank of Spain, which, along with the Ministry of the Army building, America House and the Palace of Communications²⁵, guard Cibeles Square; the AZCA²⁶ block, the Four Towers Business Area²⁷ and the Concepción Neighbourhood²⁸ are some of the building complexes chosen by Ángel Marcos to narrate the city of Madrid. More specifically, on the first floor we sense the subliminal message in the huge images, the disquietudes that disturb the artist and his persevering allusions to the cultural, religious and political powers, using as a perfect example the National Library, the Madrid de los Austrias (the old centre), the monument to Philip IV, the Puerta del Sol square and the Almudena Cathedral, among many others. On the second floor we find the Madrid of today, a universal, collective and multi-social Madrid, where economic power has particular visibility, again reflected in the large scale images with the presence of the Four Towers, of the resplendent BBVA city or AZCA block. Also, it includes a previously unseen work made up of numerous cardboard boxes similar to fridge packaging in which, with the installation of a simple light and a photograph, Ángel Marcos tries to make one feel the visual perception that a person has when they are inside a space.

Since its beginnings, although sometimes in an unconscious manner, photography has had a responsibility that goes beyond the strict reproducing of reality, even beyond representation as a conscious act by the author. It generates discussions, debates and analysis among the spectators; the image itself becomes a document to discuss, and the clearly defined focus provided by its creator is needed²⁹. In this case the artist shows us a Madrid that is immobile and at the same time changing. The position for his gaze is deeply charged with messages, such as the bringing together of the political, economic and military powers before the goddess Cibeles, which on a first reading provokes the view of a serene and pleasant panorama, or the contrasting of the industrial complexes that exist alongside the peripheral neighbourhoods of Caño Roto³⁰, Pan Bendito and San Fermín.

The twentieth century city, a concept that has been defined a thousand and one times, the paradigm of history in which such different conceptions as commerce, aesthetics, urban development, power, freedom and the "public space" should live side by side. And here, precisely in the "public space", is where Ángel Marcos starts his *Around the Dream 4*. Madrid, trying to cohabit in the coherence. The city as a whole should always be seen as a public space, but also a social space, a framework for the expression of collective wills; definitively

a territory of representation but also of confrontation. While public space exists we will have the hope of possessing freedom. the work that Ángel Marcos offers us in the entrance hall invites us to enjoy that thought³¹: twenty-four black chairs, ten signs with images of a delicate nature (wild flowers, broom shrubs, green meadows, etc.), a sound archive and a floor of artificial grass form the representation entitled Rabo de lagartija 1232 [Lizard's Tail], which converts his proposition into an incitement to visual contemplation on undefined levels.

As a contrast and entering into spatial conflict, in the central area of the building we can see a hanging work made up of about two hundred images of universal Madrid, including the outskirts, where the frontiers between city and community are not defined, covering “a whole”, the Madrid of the XXI century. These images come together only in their finishing, the selenium toning³³, which gives them a patina of homogeneity and adds exquisiteness and charm. And it is not surprising to see that the visitor who faces this work for the first time might ask “What do we see in this work?” To which they will receive the answer “Everything...”, the whole of Madrid, the Madrid that Ángel Marcos feels, suffers and loves. In it we can see its creator's particular view, the concern over power, which he has shown throughout all of his work with a critical gaze through which he deals with each of the parts he decides to handle, whether these are arguments taken from his biography or from its chimeras³⁴: the Congress of Deputies, the Plaza Mayor Square, Sol Square, Calle Alcalá, Gran Vía, AZCA, the Prado Museum, La Castellana Avenue, the Carabanchel neighbourhood, the River Manzanares, the Almudena Cathedral, Plaza de Castilla square, the Villaverde area, the Caño Roto neighbourhood, the Cobo Calleja complex, the Concepción neighbourhood, Madrid City Council, Cibeles Square, the Alcalá Gate, the Canal de Isabel II exhibition hall itself...³⁵, and thus, with neither a defined beginning nor end, is the Madrid where everything can be found, the whirlpool, the accumulation, the regeneration, the future, the oblivion, the culture, the tradition. Using all of this he composes a volume of something over fifteen square metres and through which he tries to generate the atmosphere of a hanging woods or jungle breaking out in the heart of the hall. In this surprising proposal Ángel Marcos tries to bring together past, present and future, with a clear legacy of hope, because in the same way that there is no community without a memory, neither is there a city without a project for the future³⁶.

Almost three periods of five years, thousands of kilometres and discordant cultures come together on the third floor of the Sala Canal de Isabel II in the same space, living side by side, as a conclusion and synthesis. For the first time the four chapters of Around the Dream are brought together in series of medium-size photographs of New York³⁷, China and Madrid, as well as iconographic illuminated signs from Cuba³⁸, and a table with many books, the common denominator of which is “the city”, the study of the city from different aspects - the philosophical, psychological and anthropological. These books, which invite the spectator to take them and delve into their insides, are related by something strange, and act as a graphic mark of the exhibition like a branding iron that can be found on the first page of each one of them. None of them still has a cover, which have been removed in order to lay bare their content to us and to provoke the visitors into reading them.

Inside the emblematic and symbolic Sala Canal de Isabel II building Marcos has been capable of transforming and constructing a unique gaze, full of scales, exploring such different subjects as survival, territorial deterioration, memory, power, capitalism and globalisation.

Indeed, with this superb reading of a new landscape and of a dreamt city, with all of the range provided by the post-industrial period, leading us to a new setting in which the international crisis that has set in over the last ten years has carried out incipient techno-economic and socio-political changes, Ángel Marcos cements the new and previously unseen chapter four of the series he began fifteen years ago with the hopeful heading of *Around the Dream*.

1 Its creators, Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger, began this project in 2001, and it basically consists of the fact that anyone can provide information about a subject that, in theory, they know. Wikipedia is the biggest consultation site on the Internet, today having 17 million users, a number that is still rising.

2 On the 12th of March 2001 at a press conference after his meeting with the head of the UN, the Taliban Foreign Minister stresses that his government recognises that the relics were of cultural importance, but “their presence in the Islamic Emirate (of Afghanistan) goes against the principles of Islam”.

3 Makers of Marlboro cigarettes. This is the most costly case in a court ruling over cigarettes, and possibly the biggest one ever against a United States company.

4 Supposedly perpetrated by Islamic extremists belonging to the Al-Qaeda network, whose leader, Osama bin Laden, was attributed with ordering the attacks.

5 The declared aim of the invasion was to find Osama bin Laden and other Al-Qaeda leaders and bring them to trial, and defeat the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, governed by the Emir Mullah Omar, who, in the judgment of the western powers, supported and gave refuge and shelter to members of Al-Qaeda.

6 Hernando Carrasco, Javier. “Escenografías de la aflicción”. Ángel Marcos. *Alrededor del sueño*. Fundación Municipal de Cultura. Ayuntamiento de Valladolid.

7 Le Corbusier. “Le parcellement du sol des villes”, in *Rationelle Bebauungsweisen*. Frankfurt, 1929, p. 49.

8 Derreau, Max. *Tratado de geografía humana*. Ed. Vicens Vives, Barcelona, 1964, pp. 463-465.

9 Abler, Ronald; Adams, John S., and Gould, Peter. *Spatial organization. The Geographer’s view of the World*. Londron and Englewoods Cliffs, Prentice Hall International Inc., 1972, p. 354.

10 Mumford, Lewis. *La cultura de las ciudades* (1938). Harcourt, New York.

11 *Alrededor del sueño* 26 (2001). Six works 70 x 140 cm and six works 70 x 70 cm. Dimensions variable. Fujitrans, polycarbonate, methacrylate, iron, stainless steel and electrical equipment.

12 Marcos, Ángel and Castro Flórez, Fernando. *Matoikesis*. Ed. Fernando Castro Flórez. Castilla y León Borough Council. *Siglo para las Artes de Castilla y León Foundation*, 2005, p. 49.

13 Marcos, Ángel and Castro Flórez, Fernando. *Matoikesis*. Ed. Fernando Castro Flórez. Castilla y León Borough Council. *Siglo para las Artes de Castilla y León Foundation*, 2005.

14 “La Habana no aguanta más”. Song written by Juan Formell (Havana, 1942-2014) for the Cuban band Los Van Van.

15 Walker Evans (St. Louis, 1903 - Connecticut, 1975) worked between 1935 and 1936 for the Farm Security Administration, a programme that dealt with documenting the difficult situation

of the rural communities in the United States during the depression. In 1933 he illustrates *The Crime of Cuba*, by Carlton Beals, a denouncing of the dictatorial regime of Gerardo Machado, for which he made a series of photographs in which he mixes portraits with architectural details and street scenes. He was the master for a whole generation of photographers, such as Robert Frank, who collaborated with him to make the article "Beauties of the Common Tool" for the magazine *Fortune*.

16 Evans, Walker. *La Habana*. Ed. IVAM. Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, 1989, p. 5.

17 *En Cuba* 74 (2004). Silicon treated photograph on methacrylate. 200 x 300 cm.

18 The *Habana Libre Hotel*, the most emblematic hotel in Havana, was built as the *Havana Hilton Hotel* under the personal auspices of President Fulgencio Batista and inaugurated on the 19th of March 1958. A few months later there was the triumph of the Revolution.

19 *En Cuba* 18 (2005). Silicon treated photograph on methacrylate. 150 x 300 cm.

20 On the 26th of July 1953 a group of 135 antibatista guerrilla fighters (opponents of the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship) divided into three columns commanded by Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro and Abel Santamaría stormed the *Moncada Barracks* (Santiago de Cuba). This act, which ended in failure, was the beginning of the struggle that would end on the 1st of January 1959 with a triumphant entry into the city of Havana, the beginning of the Cuban Revolution.

21 *China* 19 (2007). Siliconed laserchrome on plexiglas. 180 x 300 cm.

22 *China* 62 (2007). Laserchrome on duraclear, mounted on a light box. 180 x 242 cm.

23 *De Gouvion Saint-Cyr*, Agnès. Ángel Marcos, cronista político. MUSAC. Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León. Junta de Castilla y León. Consejería de Cultura y Turismo. Fundación Siglo para las Artes de Castilla and León, 2007.

24 *La ciudad, su espacio y sus políticas*. Geography and Social Sciences electronic magazine. University of Barcelona, vol. IX, 2005.

25 In 2011 it was renamed *Cibeles Palace*.

26 Initials of the *Asociación Mixta de Compensación de la Manzana A de la Zona Comercial del Paseo de la Castellana de Madrid* (Association for Compensation of the A Block of the Commercial Area of the Avenue of the Paseo de la Castellana). AZCA is one of the most important business and office centres in Madrid. Its original conception and name was approved in the Madrid General Urban Development Plan in 1946.

27 The *Four Towers* are the most modern and futuristic part of Madrid. Their construction began in 2004 and they were inaugurated between the end of 2008 and early 2009. They are named the *Caja Madrid Tower*, *PwC Tower*, *Glass Tower* and *Space Tower*.

28 The *Concepción Neighbourhood* began to be built in 1953 by José Banús Masdeu. Three thousand residential dwellings built over the now lost *Arroyo Abroñigal* stream where the M-30 highway was built, currently called the *Calle 30*. It became famous because it was the setting for the Pedro Almodóvar film *What have I done to deserve this?*

29 Maggia, Filippo. "Interceptando la ciudad". *EXIT* magazine, nº 17. *Ciudades / Cities*, p. 30.

30 The industrial development of Madrid in the nineteen fifties brought an intense flux of immigrants who settled in different areas around the city. The *Cármenes* neighbourhood, better known as *Caño Roto*, grew up precisely to receive the incessant wave of immigrants who lived in the slums or shanties distributed throughout different areas of the outskirts of Madrid. *Los Chorbos* was one of the Spanish music groups which in the mid-seventies fused Flamenco and rock to give way to a new urban Pop music. Its members were from *Caño Roto* and titled their first record *El sonido Caño Roto* [The Sound of Caño Roto] (1975).

31 Borja, Jordi. "Renacimiento de las ciudades". EXIT Magazine, nº 17. Ciudades / Cities, p. 124.

32 Rabo de lagartija 12 (2011). Ten pieces of white-painted steel with back-lit Duratrans, twentyfour chairs and a sound archive.

33 Toning in photography consists of adding an extra bath in the process of printing. In concrete terms, the selenium toning is used for the copy to last for many years without alterations; it is in fact a protective bath but its consequence is a change in the tone of the photograph, which takes on a toasted colour that is very pleasant to look at; this tone is visible in solutions higher than 1/10. It is currently used in digital processes but only as an aesthetic solution.

34 Doctor Roncero, Rafael. Ángel Marcos. Rabo de lagartija. Ed. ARTIUM. ARTIUM Foundation, Álava, p. 773.

35 The Canal de Isabel II exhibition hall is a unique exhibition space located in a former water deposit tank. It was built between 1907 and 1911 by the engineer Diego Martín Montalvo and the architect Ramón de Aguinaga. It is eclectic in style, and is a monumental work of industrial nature that stands out due to its beautiful brickwork outer structure, its circular floor plan, its flying buttresses and its lowered metal roof. In 1986 the building was restored and conditioned as an exhibition hall by the architects Javier Alau and Antonio Lopera. (Information from the Community of Madrid).

36 Borja, Jordi. "Renacimiento de las ciudades". EXIT Magazine, nº 17. Ciudades / Cities, p. 124.

37 Work entitled Rabo de lagartija 7 (2011). Photographs printed on methacrylate with a frame.

38 Inkjet on backlit methacrylate and iron. 215 x 47 x 32 cm.