

I- Arte Concreto – Ira exposición en Chile, 1952

I imagine: Claudio Girola packs a small suitcase with clothes and another larger suitcase with materials he needs for the exhibition in Valparaiso. His friends and colleges - Maldonado, Iommi, and Hlito - will pick him up the next day at 7 am, so the drive to Valparaiso would start as early as possible. It is supposed to take a full 24 hrs, yet with regular stops to eat, sleep and the occasional driver switch it could take up to 36 hrs. A long journey awaited him, the reason why he goes to bed early. To be honest, they could also have taken an airplane, but a road trip from Buenos Aires to Santiago, crossing the Andes mountains, in the early '50s, sounds much more adventurous.

His uncle, Godofredo, had written to him a month or so ago an enthusiastic letter describing how beautiful was the reflection of the sun setting on the Pacific Ocean, how intense and strong were its currents, its waves, how brave were the fishermen, how fresh was its catch, how simple and organic was the city of Valparaiso. The exhibition, the first ever of Argentinean Concrete artists to take place in Chile, was going to happen in a newly constructed and still unoccupied *Hotel Miramar*, built on top of rocks next to the ocean. The Pacific was going to be the backdrop and stage of the show, that was the proposition of the *Instituto de Arquitectura* of the *Universidad Católica de Valparaiso*, host and organizer. Claudio considers it to be a surreal and perfect setting. I imagine him imagining if he could use a room for some days, as a studio mostly, with a great view. He falls asleep with these ideas crossing his mind.

The journey was exhausting but the group kept busy and in good spirits with occasional poetry readings, political discussions, and speculations about Valparaiso and its people. They stopped twice to eat and sleep and the rest of the journey they snacked fruit, had sandwiches. The first stop was in Mendoza, with a relative of Maldonado, before crossing the Andes. The second stop was in Santiago, where they rented a couple of rooms in a hostel recommended by someone who worked at the Instituto. That morning they could not resist stopping at the *Mercado Central* for some seafood empanadas and *Mariscal* soup, also recommended. They ate, walked along the fish stands and took photos. Never in their lives, they had seen so much seafood, except Claudio who was lucky enough to visit the main fish market in Milan a year or two before. Sadly, Claudio thought, the Atlantic Ocean is not as rich as the Pacific, the journey looked promising. The last part of the trip to Valparaiso was easy and short compared to the rest. Before arriving the highway crossed a forest and all the sudden, just reaching the last top of a series of hills, it appeared, grandiose and sparkling, there it was, the Pacific Ocean.

The installation of the show was smooth. Everyone was helpful and receptive to the needs of the group. The organizers proposed the design and construction of modular wall panels as a way to better organize and distribute the works in space, the artists agreed. There was a discussion about the relationship between the paintings and the sculptures within the space. Everybody wondered how the work would be received. The artists wondered how the exhibition would relate to the city and its context, especially due to being set in such an unusual space. All together – artists and the representatives of the *Instituto* – decided how works will be distributed and especially which works were installed close to the large windows.

The reception of the exhibition was good, students, teachers, press, and the general public enjoyed the exhibition intensely as it only lasted one week. The show ends with a conference about Concrete Art by Italian architect Ernesto Rogers, in a packed space, a dynamic event. Years later someone makes a collage that goes into a report prepared by the *Instituto*, it is basically a diagram: A drawing of the hotel exhibition space on the left, a photo of a sculpture with a news-clip announcing the conference on top at the center, a drawing of the outside landscape continues to the right. Handwriting notes on the drawing sections describe: on the left, place of conference, on the right, port, beach, the ocean.

Claudio was happy and surprised with the experience. He was curious about the experimental conception of the whole thing... also curious about the brotherhood that was forming in that particular place and time, a brotherhood of architecture, art, and poetry, where the city, its people, and the natural environment, were of vital importance. Claudio decides to stay, to become a teacher. He talks to his uncle Godofredo, who is happy to take him in. He becomes a member of the re-foundation of the School of Valparaiso. He becomes an Argentinean lost in Chile.

## II- Un Argentino perdido en Chile:

Looking at these images – that compile several exhibitions and sculptural interventions that Claudio Girola realized in Valparaiso, Santiago and Buenos Aires between 1958 and 1999 - I ask myself about the concerns he might have had in the moment each photo was taken. In most of them the surroundings seem to be as important as the sculpture itself:

A sculpture finds its place in a construction site.

A sheet of paper hangs behind a sculpture, trapping its shadow, or, in another version, several sheets of paper attached to each other form a large white surface that hovers above the sculptures... they create and play with the notion of ephemeral architecture, they modulate light, shadows, and position themselves as large neutral surfaces in space.

Other photos show sculptures with the Pacific Ocean as a backdrop, on top of a humble stool with a wooden platform.

A couple show a hand holding a sculpture, or holding an improvised cardboard photographic background. One photo shows Claudio himself holding a sculpture as playing with its possibilities.

Four photos show futuristic like pieces, two frontal views with the ocean behind, two taken from below which makes the sculpture rise into the sky as some sort of space-age or even alien-like construction.

A series of photos shows a group of linear sculptures placed on top of high platforms that look like giant tables. They are aligned crossing several rooms in a space that looks more like a house than a “proper gallery”. A woman looks at them, all aligned, placed higher than average, with paper hanging behind. The height, the position in space, the shadows on the paper, it all seems to add up together nicely yet also so strangely. The same woman stands in front of a large “wall” of hanging paper, which now also contains the announcement of the show: *exposición simultánea – CLAUDIO GIROLA*.

Another group of photos shows what seems to be an afternoon of family and sculpture experimentation (the album in the university archive is actually titled *Escultura y familia*). A large cube made out of what looks like plaster is tilted, standing on one of its corners in 45 degrees. It is placed in the center of a patio and flanked by a few mirrors. The sculpture becomes alive in its reflection. Meanwhile, a couple of mothers and their children take once (Chilean tea time).

Secondary-thoughts:

In general light and shadow are protagonists.

Each photo seems to capture a spatial experimental gesture.

On opposition to other images published in other catalogs, these seem more contaminated...  
Being the sculpture in constant dialogue with the space that contains or frames it.

Some sculptures are delicate linear constructions, a la constructive, others are more material and organic, others even a bit "primitive" looking.

Seems like the adventure of the insecure attracted Girola.

III- Lo que abunda no daña (open to interpretation):

Maybe: Girola wants to exhibit his work in Valparaiso, he decides to create a series of hand made posters. Or maybe they are printed but in very small editions. Silkscreen or probably stencil made. Or better, some are handmade and others printed in small editions. He hangs them in different places inside the Architecture School and also in other faculties, Medicine for sure... Later on, the posters go out and about and can be found in a lobby of an office building, in a shoe store window display, in a pharmacy window display... in the middle of a small park, functioning in-between a sculpture and a poster.

These posters also play with different design styles. From the naïve to the Soviet-inspired, from the elegant hand signature of the artist to the dada-like metallic 3-D composition. Girola enjoys himself making these elements and installing them in the city. The gesture is beautiful in the sense that sculpture disappears. The protagonist, the main subject, is no longer necessary, it is replaced by its announcement, the announcement of an event, and this in a confrontation with the university and its students, the city and its people. People walk by, cars and buses drive by, a seagull may stand on the poster-sculpture located on that small triangular plaza. Something that is not present dialogues, interrogates, jokes, and questions.