

GESCHICHTE WIRD KUNST / IMPRINTING HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

PEENEMÜNDE PROJECT: GESCHICHTE WIRD KUNST / IMPRINTING HISTORY took place between July and October 2015 in the historic area of Peenemünde in Germany. In partnership with the Till Richter Museum for International Contemporary Art, Schloss Buggenhagen, and the Historical Technical Museum, Peenemünde, two visual artists, Gregorio Iglesias Mayo (Catalonia) and Miguel A. Aragón (Mexico/USA) were invited to respond to Peenemünde, the location of an arms and weapons research centre that was, between 1936 to 1945, the largest armaments centre in Europe.

Usedom is a Pomeranian Island, on the edge of the Baltic Sea, an idyllic fishing village and unlikely setting for a history of war crimes and forced labour during the national socialist era in the mid 20th C. A testing site for rockets and long-range weapons, acts of death and destruction were formulated here before wreaking violence on the rest of the world. Gregorio Iglesias Mayo responded to the history of place through painting and imprinting a colossal canvas on the grounds of the power station site now the Historical-Technical Museum. While printmaker Miguel A. Aragón worked on photograms and direct prints that reference the layered and complex history of this former research station.

"The most direct witnesses of history are the historical sites and the most personal commentaries are those by artists"

Co-curator Dr. Till F.A. Richter, founder and director of the Till Richter Museum of Contemporary Art.

Traces of violence form scars and craters on the landscape, in contrast with the natural beauty of the island. The work weaves a narrative that includes a history of both violence and technological advances.

Both artists developed a significant depth of understanding through time spent analysing, connecting and creating a haptic relationship with place. The two artists returned to the earth for knowledge, their processes like that of archaeologists, uncovering the secretive past of the site. Dichotomies co-exist within the works that were produced, in their use of natural and industrial materials, and the indexical impressions of rust, debris and organic objects.

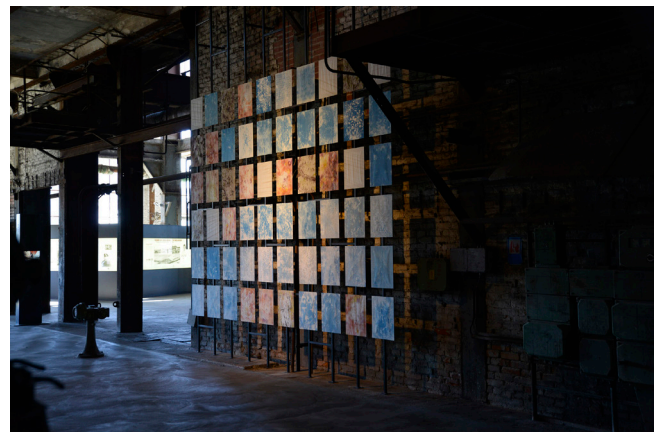


Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure 1. Installation of work by Miguel A. Aragón. Photo by Erica Botkin

Figure 2. Miguel A. Aragón by Gala Oro

Dr Richter reminds us that our ability to access history is often limited to language and “only reveals itself relatively slowly, word by word.” The artworks encourage engagement with the site through their considered aesthetic, creating a connection to past events while moving away from the traditional use of historical text or archival photos.

SHEER SCALE

For Iglesias Mayo’s project, a bespoke canvas was manufactured by local upholsterer Stefan Bluhm measuring 38.5 metres in length and 11.8 metres in height, covering a total area of approximately 454 square meters made to withstand the elements over the 11 weeks it would be worked on. The sheer scale of Iglesias Mayo’s canvas echoes the elaborate and overbearing scale of the buildings. His fabricated tools resemble brushes, made from broomstick handles and fisher nets, his hands were his main instrument of application, and images of him standing on the canvas show the use of his entire body to extend the marks of cloths and sponges.

The effort and cooperation required for creating work on this scale reflects the unnerving ambitions of the original site and the intention of terror behind them. The expanse and extent of various elements on the canvas appears as an immense curtain dramatically set against the windows of the former boiler house where the final work was installed. Dark marks of figures, architecture and nature weave a narrative that is both energetic and ominous. Shadows surface on the canvas suggesting traces of the people, technology and progress which were once active here. It is uncertain if the forms and figures of the canvas are emerging or disappearing, the overall effect seems to reflect the passing of time and the capacity of nature to bear witness and reclaim.

IMMEDIATE IMPRESSIONS

Miguel A. Aragón’s approach to this project involved creating more than a hundred small works, some of which were displayed in the former power station while other variations were presented in a corresponding exhibition that took place in the Till Richer Museum.

His main work included 60 individual plates assembled to form a larger installation that was installed in the hall between the boiler room and the turbine hall. He followed a three-step process, working with semi-transparent paper, he imprinted the sheets with found materials, utilising the rust and debris from threaded rods to imprint and create lesions on the surface of the paper, in the second stage he coated the paper in rust, charcoal and sediment from the site, his use of materials simultaneously activated the site while also pointing to its deterioration and weathering over time.

For the third stage Aragón creates a cyanotype photogram. He takes the paper he has imprinted with rods and debris from the site and placed them on light sensitive paper, the paper was then exposed by sun light. The direct nature of his process takes an immediate

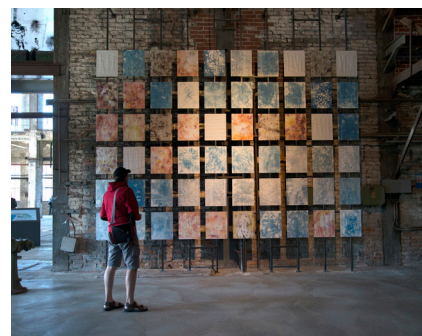


Figure 3



Figure 4

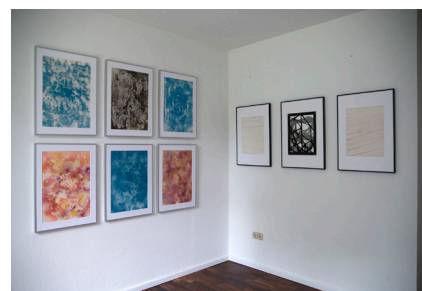


Figure 5



Figure 6

Figure 3. Installation of work by Miguel A. Aragón. Photo by Erica Botkin

Figure 4. Installation of work by Miguel A. Aragón. Photo by Erica Botkin

Figure 5. Installation of work by Miguel A. Aragón. Photo by Erica Botkin

impression and preserves it in time, revealing a present-day observation on the falling away of industry and a grounding in the elements, encouraging the viewer to engage with the historical site. The blue cyanotype pieces and rusted industrial prints formed a tableau of works that was both immediate and subtle, the use of materials directly references the site, the light reveals the contrast between the opacity and transparency of the paper, the use of remnants and artefacts to imprint and tear the paper indicates that history can only be viewed through the cracks of the present as time both reveals and obscures past events.

The parallel exhibition at the Till Richer Museum presents another narrative, Aragón employs aerial images from the site of an American bombing in 1944, laser cut cardboard plates that were used as his printing matrix, the plates were passed through a traditional etching press without ink to create a blind embossing, producing a relief surface on the paper, the matrix simultaneously imprinted the residual marks as brown lines on the surface of the paper while flattening and essentially destroying the matrix. Through his print process the artist has effectively mirrored the acts of creation and destruction that are embedded in Peenemünde's history.

Imprinting Histories offers insight to the layers and complexities of Peenemünde's history. The artists ask us to consider the speculative nature of history through viewing their creative outputs. The overall emphasis falls on the power of art to move beyond language to communicate a past that is embedded in the elements of place and a place that is embedded in history.

Peenemünde Project: Geschichte wird Kunst / Imprinting History, by Philipp Aumann and Till Richter

Paperback, 112 pages, ISBN 978-3-86228-165-7

Published: 18 August 2017

Available for purchase on Amazon, or by contacting the artist:
<http://aragonmiguel.com/contact> < <https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Faragonmiguel.com%2Fcontact&data=02%7C01%7CWuon-gean.Ho%40uwe>.

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Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

Figure 6. Photo of Gregorio Iglesias Mayo at work by Gala Oro
 Figure 7. Canvas by Gregorio Iglesias Mayo. Photo by Gala Oro
 Figure 9. Gregorio Iglesias Mayo installation. Photo by Sabela Eiriz

IMAGE GALLERY



Installation of work by Miguel A. Aragón. Photo by Erica Botkin



Miguel A. Aragón by Gala Oro



Installation of work by Miguel A. Aragón. Photo by Erica Botkin



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Photo of Gregorio Iglesias Mayo at work by Gala Oro



Canvas by Gregorio Iglesias Mayo. Photo by Gala Oro



Canvas by Gregorio Iglesias Mayo. Photo by Gala Oro



Gregorio Iglesias Mayo installation. Photo by Sabela Eiriz



Photo of Gregorio Iglesias Mayo and Miguel A. Aragón by Gala Oro