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Barcelona, España

**CAIO REISEWITZ**

Agua que cai



**DARDO / ¿Cómo cambió su trabajo en los últimos años?**

**Caio Reisewitz /** Cambió en el sentido de que ahora se puede observar con más atención la fuerte modificación de la naturaleza en Brasil y lo que busco es construir imágenes que busquen representar mi ilusión.

**D / ¿Piensa que el arte debe tener más en cuenta aspectos relativos a la sostenibilidad?**

**CR /** El arte debe tener aspectos de emoción y la fantasía y la sostenibilidad pueden ser parte de esa representación.

La obra de Caio Reisewitz supone una mirada continua sobre el olvido que el medio natural sufre por parte del ser humano y sobre las repercusiones que nuestras acciones tienen sobre el medio ambiente. Sus fotografías de gran formato recuerdan a aquellos paisajes del romanticismo alemán en los que la figura humana aparecía perdida en un entorno natural dominante y avasallador, y sirven para reproducir una experiencia de la mirada que se permite el tiempo de la reflexión antes de la captura. El motivo es elegido concienzudamente por el artista que no se apresura en su aprehensión. La iluminación, la colación de la cámara, la búsqueda de la perfecta perspectiva, son claves para la consecución de un efecto final de la imagen que casi siempre nos transmite una sensación de soledad y silencio del medio natural ante el ser humano.

Justo en estos momentos en los que aún es reciente la tragedia de las inundaciones en Brasil, que han supuesto la muerte de personas y la destrucción de lugares de asentamiento, aproximarse a la obra de Caio Reisewitz es acercarse a la obra de un ojo que en estos momentos ha de aparecerse casi acusador. Su trabajo ha estado siempre relacionado con una visión y apreciación de la naturaleza que se aparece al espectador como un organismo vivo y poderoso que está casi siempre en silencio, olvidado del hombre y que en ocasiones muestra su lado más terrible; su protesta ante la acción del ser humano sobre su piel. A inicios de 2010 en el verano austral, toda la región noreste, sudeste y sur de Brasil fue castigada por fuertes e intensas lluvias, que no se recordaban desde hacía al menos veinticinco años. Esto llevó a una situación de accidentes y riesgos de inundación para los asentamientos humanos de estas zonas, como una anticipación del desastre que llegaría a principios de este 2011. Con motivo de estas inundaciones, Caio Reisewitz se desplazó en esa ocasión a uno de los paisajes más impresionantes de la frontera entre Brasil y Argentina, las Cataratas de Iguazú. Allí tomó una serie de fotografías que ahora se encuentran en la exposición y que muestran los cambios provocados en el paisaje debidos a la caída de estas lluvias excepcionales. En las imágenes se aprecia la aparición esporádica de nuevos saltos de agua en lugares en los que normalmente solo hay vegetación. Otras de las fotos no reproducen lo extraño de la situación sino simplemente la excepcionalidad del paisaje de la zona. Esta exposición de Caio Reisewitz es la primera del artista en España desde la colaboración entre la Fundación Pedro Barrié de la Maza y la Fundación RAC en 2010, muestra por la que fue nominado al Prix Pictet, considerado como el principal premio del mundo de fotografía y sostenibilidad. / **REDACCIÓN**

A obra de Caio Reisewitz supõe um olhar contínuo sobre o esquecimento de que o meio natural é alvo por parte do ser humano e sobre as repercuções que as nossas ações têm sobre o meio ambiente. As suas fotografias de grande formato lembram aquelas paisagens do romantismo alemão nas quais a figura humana aparecia perdida num ambiente natural dominante e avassalador, e servem para reproduzir uma experiência do olhar que se permite o tempo da reflexão antes da captação. O motivo é eleito escrupulosamente pelo artista que não se apressa na sua apreensão. A iluminação, a colocação da câmara, a procura da perspectiva perfeita, são aspectos chave para a consecução de um efeito final da imagem que quase sempre nos transmite uma sensação de solidão e silêncio do meio natural ante o ser humano.

Precisamente nesta altura em que ainda é recente a tragédia das inundações no Brasil, que provocaram a morte de pessoas e a destruição de lugares povoados, uma aproximação à obra de Caio Reisewitz é uma aproximação à obra de um olho que nestes momentos se há-de revelar quase acusador. O seu trabalho esteve sempre relacionado com uma visão e apreciação da natureza que aparece ao espectador como um organismo vivo e poderoso que está quase sempre em silêncio, esquecido pelo homem e que de vez em quando mostra o seu

lado mais terrível; o seu protesto perante a acção do ser humano sobre a sua pele. Em inícios de 2010, no Verão austral, toda a região nordeste, sudeste e sul do Brasil foi castigada por fortes e intensas chuvas, como não havia memória desde há pelo menos vinte e cinco anos. Isto levou a uma situação de acidentes e riscos de inundação para as aglomerações humanas destas zonas, como uma antecipação do desastre que chegaria no início deste ano de 2011. Por causa destas inundações, Caio Reisewitz deslocou-se nessa ocasião a uma das paisagens mais impressionantes da fronteira entre o Brasil e a Argentina, as Cataratas de Iguaçu. Ali tirou uma série de fotografias que agora se encontram na exposição e que mostram as mudanças provocadas na paisagem devido à queda destas chuvas excepcionais. Nas imagens aprecia-se o aparecimento esporádico de novas cachoeiras em lugares onde normalmente só há vegetação. Outras fotografias não reproduzem o estranho da situação, mas simplesmente a excepcionalidade da paisagem da zona. Esta exposição de Caio Reisewitz é a primeira do artista em Espanha desde a colaboração entre a Fundación Pedro Barrié de la Maza e a Fundación RAC em 2010, mostra pela qual foi nomeado para o Prix Pictet, considerado o principal prémio do mundo em fotografia e sustentabilidade. / REDAÇÃO

P.168 ▲ ITAPERAHY, 2011  
C-print sobre diasec  
228x180 cm



**DARDO** / Como é que o seu trabalho mudou nos últimos anos?

**Caio Reisewitz** / Mudou no sentido em que agora se pode observar com mais atenção a forte modificação da natureza no Brasil e o que procuro é construir imagens que tentem representar a minha esperança.

**D** / Pensa que a arte deve ter mais em conta aspectos relativos à sustentabilidade?

**CR** / A arte deve ter aspectos de emoção e a fantasia e a sustentabilidade podem ser parte dessa representação.

P.169 ▲ IGUAÇU X, 2011  
C-print sobre diasec  
224x180 cm

# Caio Reisewitz

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY

The works in this survey of Caio Reisewitz's photography, organized by Christopher Phillips, could be grouped into three categories: those that focused on the Brazil-based artist's native country, on what he calls its "places of power"; those that focused on that nation's rain forests, which have their own peculiar power; and those that focused on China, where he attends to people more than to places. In Brazil, Reisewitz sets up a contrast between old and venerable places of power, as in *Ataide*, 2008, which portrays the Saint Francis of Assisi church in the city of Ouro Preto, and new, sleekly modern places of power, such as the building in *Ministério das Relações Exteriores (Palácio do Itamaraty)* (Ministry of External Relations [Itamaraty Palace]), 2005. He shows us the entire ceiling of the church, where heavenly figures fill the space of a huge mural, and the empty halls of the palace, where no figures dare disturb its sleek geometric clarity. In both cases, the architecture overwhelms, suggesting humanity is permanently trapped in it like a caged animal. Yet there is also a difference: Power in colonial Brazil seemingly had a more welcoming face, architecturally speaking, than power in modern Brazil, where it masks itself in abstract anonymity and seamless indifference. Pure abstraction is the new palatial sacred art, and modern buildings are the colonial palaces of today.

Reisewitz's rain-forest photographs—like the architectural photographs, the prints are usually magnificently large, with some small ones interspersed—supposedly deal with the exploitation of these ecosystems by human beings, but humans don't fare too well in them. Though a few images depict ecological destruction—he shows us a field of stumps, with some trees still smoldering—generally Reisewitz presents the forests intact, suggesting that they are a symbol of the integrity and wholesomeness that humans lack. In the photographer's depictions of the remnants of the Mata Atlântica (Atlantic Forest), which once covered Brazil's east coast, the foliage is a lush, glistening green; it evokes life-giving fertility. Reisewitz seems to deplore human presence: See, for instance, *Jaraguá VIII*, 2009, with its pathetically isolated human figures in a junglelike clearing. (The work also leaves one wondering whether the photographer is aware of research suggesting just how mythical the forest primeval is: Pre-Columbian societies, it seems, managed the rain forest intensively, planting trees among those that grew naturally and using various enrichment techniques to create vast tracts of the famously productive soil known as *terra preta*.) Perhaps *Carutapera*, 2012, is emblematic: A dazzling red flower—the vivid hue unexpected amid the usual green—appears on a brown branch above brightly churning water, the light purifying the blossom into a heavenly substance. For Reisewitz, nature is the new cathedral.

In China things change. The China photographs, most here from 2010, are all small collages composed of small figures and small houses.



Caio Reisewitz,  
*Casa Canoas*, 2013,  
C-print on Diasec,  
70 1/4 x 99 1/4".

In one, mountains set behind a vast stretch of farmland appear as substanceless ghosts, a primordial paradise lost to modern needs. More pointedly and surreally, in the collage *Yangshou II*, 2010, a giant hand with red fingernails seems to descend upon a crowd who worshipfully face it while standing in a garbage dump. We see their backs—they are faceless—as they are hypnotically held in the hand's grip. We've moved from the wasteland of burned-out nature to the wasteland of tyrannical society, and the pessimism that's implicit in Reisewitz's glorious nature photographs has become assertively manifest.

—Donald Kuspit

ART & DESIGN | ART REVIEW

## In an Ironic Lens, a Latin Myth Evaporates

### ‘Urbes Mutantes’ at the International Center of Photography

By HOLLAND COTTER JUNE 19, 2014

A Latin American spring is about to turn into a Latin American summer in New York City art museums. Purely, it seems, by chance, a record number of institutions have recently opened significant shows of work from South America and the Caribbean. The International Center of Photography, as usual one step ahead of the curve, has two.

The larger, “Urbes Mutantes: Latin American Photography 1944-2013,” is a roomy survey of some 200 small, mostly black-and-white pictures that fit, with trimming and squeezing, into the genre of “street photography.” The second is a solo devoted to a single artist, the contemporary Brazilian photographer Caio Reisewitz, whose big color images of tropical rain forests offer a lush antidote to urban grit, Manhattan’s included.

“Urbes Mutantes” — “Mutant Cities” — comes with potential liabilities. Street photography, roughly defined as documentary-style pictures of ordinary city life, has had, by now, a long and somewhat shopworn history. It gains interest here, though, because nothing about life in the eight countries represented — Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela — seems ordinary at all, at least as seen through artists’ eyes.

The survey format can be a chore to navigate unless sharpened with a narrative or propelled by a concrete theme. Neither is in evidence here, yet the exhibition, sorted out under loose labels, works. Looseness, in this case, feels like strategy.

It encourages you to drift, take in pictures slowly, one by one, as separate events rather than parts of a scripted flow. And it accommodates images that not only move beyond genre — there's some decidedly nonstreet photography here — but also beyond stereotypes customarily called on to package art as "Latin American." Those stereotypes are here, but so is a whole lot else.

A section devoted entirely to images of city walls gives a sense of the variety. One of the earlier photographers here, Héctor García (1923-2012), seems to have been inspired by the revolutionary fervor of the Mexican mural painting tradition in his photographs of striking workers. But so, in a very different way, and for entirely unsentimental reasons, is one of the youngest participants, Maya Goded, in 2005.

Roberto Fantozzi finds the components of serene still life — a hat hanging from a nail, a toothbrush left on a shelf — on a shadowed wall in Cuzco, Peru, in 1979. In a 1963 photograph by Daniel González, who was at the time a member of an avant-garde Venezuelan group called the Techo de la Ballena, or the Whale's Roof, a punched-through outdoor wall is a proscenium framing a drama: a second wall scrawled with passionate emblems (an impaled heart) and violent words ("Our hate will be implacable, and war will be carried out until death"), and, in a distance, the skyscrapers of a newly wealthy Caracas standing like targets in a gun sight.

To the Swiss-born photographer Barbara Brändli the wall, in her adopted city, Caracas, was a chaos of advertising copy and directional signage. To the Colombian photojournalist Fernell Franco (1942-2006), it was an abstract span of blistered plaster, but also a relic of a beloved city, Cali, then under demolition. And to an activist-artist like Eduardo Villanes, a wall was a political platform.

In 1992, in his home city, Lima, Peru, a military death squad abducted, tortured and murdered nine university students and a professor and buried the bodies; two years later, the remains were exhumed and delivered to their families in cartons for cans of evaporated milk. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Villanes plastered

the word “Evaporados” — evaporated — in huge letters on a highly visible stretch of a Lima freeway and photographed his handiwork.

As different as they are, all the pictures in this section share one notable feature: They are practically empty of street life. The human figure, the standard vehicle for stories and emotions, not to mention cultural clichés, is missing. Possibly this reflects balances in the source from which the show is drawn. Everything comes from a single private collection, owned by Leticia and Stanislas Poniatowski.

More likely, the choice is deliberate. The playing down of the human presence here, and in another section devoted to architecture, is in line with the clear aim of the exhibition’s organizers — Alexis Fabry, curator of the Poniatowski collection, and María Wills, a curator at the Museo de Arte del Banco de la República in Bogotá, where “Urbes Mutantes” originated — to break with an ethnographic view of Latin America as poor, backward and regressively religious that is fixed in North American minds.

And when figures do appear — they dominate much of the rest of the show — they come in hard-to-pin-down varieties: politicians, pool players, office workers, lovers, prostitutes, prisoners, students, athletes, peasants, soldiers, revolutionaries, children. There’s a sprinkling of V.I.P.s. Frida Kahlo shows up, courtesy of Lola Álvarez Bravo. So does Fidel Castro, though secondhand (on the cover of a book). But the most alluring celebrities are those that photographers help create: the Chilean cross-dresser named Evelyn in Paz Errázuriz’s portraits; Armando Cristeto’s Mexican bodybuilders; the tenderly kissing couple shot by Roberto Fontana in a psychiatric hospital.

Images of poverty and violence are here, too, many and moving. Indigenous peoples, at the bottom of the economic heap, look stranded and lost in cities, judging by the too few pictures of them. By contrast, documents of the political terrors of the 20th century are everywhere. In a 1986 picture by the Chilean photographer Claudio Pérez, an exhausted anti-Pinochet protester leans his head on the arm of a riot policeman who’s pulling him into van to an unknown fate. Thirteen years earlier, Christián Montecino (1946-73) had documented just such arrests before being kidnapped and killed.

These events and visual records are the meat of a continent's history, though that history has other facets, too. It's there in Paolo Gasparini's shots of shop windows, as packed with period information as Warhol's time capsules; in Luis Molina-Pantin's photos of narcotectural mansions built by Colombian drug lords; in Milagros de la Torre's hand-tinted "racially improved" versions of Cuzco street portraits; and in Alexander Apostól's 1994 self-portrait as a skinny, wedge-headed Latin American punk backed into a corner and ready to pounce.

Mr. Apóstol has newer work of a very different kind, in "Beyond the Supersquare" at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, a fascinating meditation on the complex relationship between Latin American design and Modernism. And that connection also turns up in the International Center of Photography's Caio Reisewitz show, organized by Christopher Phillips.

Mr. Reisewitz's pictures, with their visions of dense subtropical growth and extravagant colonial church interiors, seem to project exactly the exoticized Latin-Americaness that the large show tries to avoid. Yet his images of fecund wilderness are not what they seem. In reality, the jungle he photographs is a last stand of Atlantic rain forest under continuing siege. In one picture of just-cleared land, smoke is rising from the earth; in another, an exposed patch of the area's famously fertile orange soil looks fire red.

The forest itself is only about 100 miles from São Paulo, which, architecturally, with its Oscar Niemeyer designs, is a Modernist city par excellence. You see it rising, blinding white, in the distance, and its edges are spreading, the way European culture and religion spread unstoppably over the centuries in the so-called New World. He gives the invasiveness visual form in digital collages that splice together country and town. In them, police with shields march the forest floor; the slums of Rio de Janeiro hang from trees. Eden is diseased.

Yet in one 2010 photograph, the energy is different, calm. It's a straightforward shot of the Casa das Canoas, the house that Niemeyer built for himself in the hills of Rio. He walled it almost entirely in glass and surrounded it with high bushes and trees. He wanted to have the effect of vegetation entering the rooms, and that's the illusion captured in Mr. Reisewitz's picture.

It's a picture of a perpetually mutating house. Indoors becoming outdoors. Culture becoming nature. Old becoming truly new. Hope — maybe hope against hope — is the takeaway from this lovely picture and show, as it is from the rich, unspectacular, evenhanded survey. To the "Latin America" our museums have long given us, we say goodbye.

"Urbes Mutantes: Latin American Photography 1944-2013" and "Caio Reisewitz" run through Sept. 7 at the International Center of Photography, 1133 Avenue of the Americas, at 43rd Street; 212-857-0000, icp.org.

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# The São Paulo Issue

# Pictures

Caio Reisewitz,  
*Casa Rua Santa Cruz*  
(House on Santa Cruz  
Street), 2013

© Caio Reisewitz and  
courtesy Luciana Brito  
Galeria, São Paulo





Since returning to São Paulo in 1997 after studies in Germany, Caio Reisewitz has won an international reputation as one of Brazil's most significant photographers. His admiration for members of the Düsseldorf School such as Thomas Struth, Candida Höfer, and Andreas Gursky is evident in the meticulous accuracy of his monumental color photographs, yet his concentration on the landscape and architecture of Brazil lends his work a distinctive and immediately recognizable character. Reisewitz's images offer a sustained reflection on the struggle between primeval nature and the voracious human appetite to exploit it that has marked Brazil's history since colonial times. The title he chose for his presentation in the Brazilian pavilion at the 2005 Venice Biennale, "Threatened Utopia," signals the key preoccupation of his work.

The dense rainforest settings of many of Reisewitz's photographs have led some viewers to assume that he specializes in scenes from the Amazon region. In fact, most of his landscape photographs are made within a few hundred miles of São Paulo, a silver-white skyscraper city surrounded by an immense, verdant tropical forest. Reisewitz regards the still-extensive remnants of the Mata Atlântica (Atlantic Forest) that once filled Brazil's east coast as a natural wonderland, and he marvels that it is virtually unknown to São Paulo's twenty million urban dwellers. The relation of city and countryside in Brazil today could be described as one of close physical proximity and surprising psychological distance.

Often Reisewitz's photographs recall the extraordinary abundance of Brazil's natural environment and the history of its domestication for cropland, ranching, and mining. *Boituva* (2008) presents a close-up view of a patch of the famous red clay soil that eighteenth-century colonists discovered to be ideally suited for coffee cultivation. In *Cubatão II* (2003), we look down on a ribbonlike highway slicing through an otherwise pristine vista of mountain forests. *Itaquaquecetuba* (2004) shows a green hilltop set ablaze as part of a land-clearing operation. Such images register the current state of Brazil's breakneck quest for economic development and pinpoint the global environmental dangers posed by the wholesale destruction of Brazil's forests.

Reisewitz's work has recently moved in surprising new directions, notably in a series of small, handmade photo collages that extend his exploration of the tension between the city and the countryside. Visually more playful than his view-camera photographs, these works sometimes contain lyrically curving cutouts that echo the exuberant visual rhythms found in Brazilian modernist art and architecture of the 1960s. These collage experiments have led Reisewitz to new ways of conceiving his view-camera photographs. His latest large-format works often employ a dense visual layering, as in *Santuário San Pedro Claver III, Cartagena de Índias* (San Pedro Claver III monastery, Cartagena) (2007), in which elusive architectural details can be glimpsed through a tangled skein of tree branches and plant forms.

The city in the forest, and the forest in the city—this is the metaphor that currently drives much of Reisewitz's work. It underlies his photographs of Brazil's iconic modernist residences, such as that of the 1928 Casa Modernista by émigré Russian architect Gregori Warchavchik, *Casa Rua Santa Cruz* (House on Santa Cruz Street) (2013), and of the 1951 Glass House by Lina Bo Bardi, both located in São Paulo. It is probably most evident, however, in his photograph *Casa Canoas* (Canoas House) (2013), which provides a fresh look at the legendary minimalist-style house that Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer built for himself in 1951 on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. As Reisewitz portrays it, the glass-walled house all but disappears amid the luxuriant vegetation that presses in on all sides. At the same time, the building's elongated and sensuously curving white roof seems to reach out to embrace the forest. In images like this, Reisewitz holds onto the hope that nature and human culture may yet share common ground in Brazil.

Opposite:  
*Santuário San Pedro Claver III, Cartagena de Índias* (San Pedro Claver III monastery, Cartagena), 2007

# Caio Reisewitz

Christopher Phillips

Christopher Phillips, a curator at the International Center of Photography in New York, organized the exhibition *Caio Reisewitz*, on view at ICP from May 16 to September 7, 2014.



Opposite:  
*Cubatão II, 2003*

This page:  
*Itaquaquecetuba, 2004*







**Previous pages:**  
**Casa Canoas**  
(Canoas House), 2013

**This page:**  
**Diadema, 2004**

**Opposite:**  
**Boituva, 2008**  
All photographs  
© Caio Reisewitz and  
courtesy Luciana Brito  
Galeria, São Paulo



