

Murray Guy

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PATRICIA ESQUIVIAS

*111-119 Generalísimo/Castellana*

12 June – 1 August, 2014

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For her third solo exhibition at Murray Guy, Patricia Esquivias presents *111-119 Generalísimo/Castellana*, a video and installation that navigates through a series of tenuous coincidences surrounding a block of five buildings erected in Madrid in the late 1950's on what was Avenida del Generalísimo (after Franco) and was later renamed Paseo de la Castellana.

The exhibition is shaped by a continually expanding narrative of interconnections made by the artist, linking biographical elements and memories to inventions and archive material. Originally ceramic murals, visible from street level, were created for each of the balconies in the buildings. Each mural depicted a different European city in order "to help spread the mood that Spain was a more open and international country" during the closed and repressive regime of Francisco Franco. In *111-119 Generalísimo/Castellana*, Esquivias meanders through disparate testimonies of the remodeling of the buildings' interior and exterior. Over time many of the murals were either removed or the balcony was enclosed. Central to the story is Esquivias herself. Through performative and processual narration she investigates the circumstances of the buildings' architect, Miguel Artíñano, his relationship to the muralists, and the mythologies that have been handed down from generation to generation.

In the video Esquivias sings the chorus of two popular songs that are about the Puerta de Alcalá, which is illustrated on a recently discarded mural that she salvaged. She also collected mosaics from one apartment and worked with jeweler Marc Monzó to make pieces to "wear the building". The jewelry is on display in the gallery along with various materials seen in the video including: contemporary photographs of the remaining murals, the Artíñano family tree, additional photographs of some of the individuals implicated within the narrative, and comprehensive texts written by Esquivias about each of these elements.

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Esquivias' tangential investigation of Miguel Artíñano brought upon a complimentary publication, *The World According to Patricia Esquivias* was recently published by The Office, Berlin, in collaboration with Akademie Schloss Solitude, which presents photographs and drawings of distinctive work by the architect Fernando Garrido.

Patricia Esquivias (b. 1979) lives and works in Madrid, Spain. Recently she had solo exhibitions at Kunsthalle Winterthur, Switzerland and at MARCO, Vigo, Spain. In 2011, she was the subject of a solo exhibition at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and in 2009 at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, and Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis. She has been included in numerous group shows including *Before Our Eyes: Other Cartographies of the Rif*, MACBA, Barcelona (2014), *Objects in Mirror are Closer than they Appear*, Tate Modern, London (2012), *Personal Histories*, MOCAD, Detroit, *The Generational: Younger Than Jesus*, New Museum, New York (2009), *Report on Probability*, Kunsthalle Basel (2009), and *When Things Cast No Shadow - The 5th Berlin Biennial* (2008). In 2007, she was awarded the Illy Present-Future Award at Artissima, Turin.

*111-119 Generalísimo/Castellana* was originally commissioned by Frieze Film in 2012.

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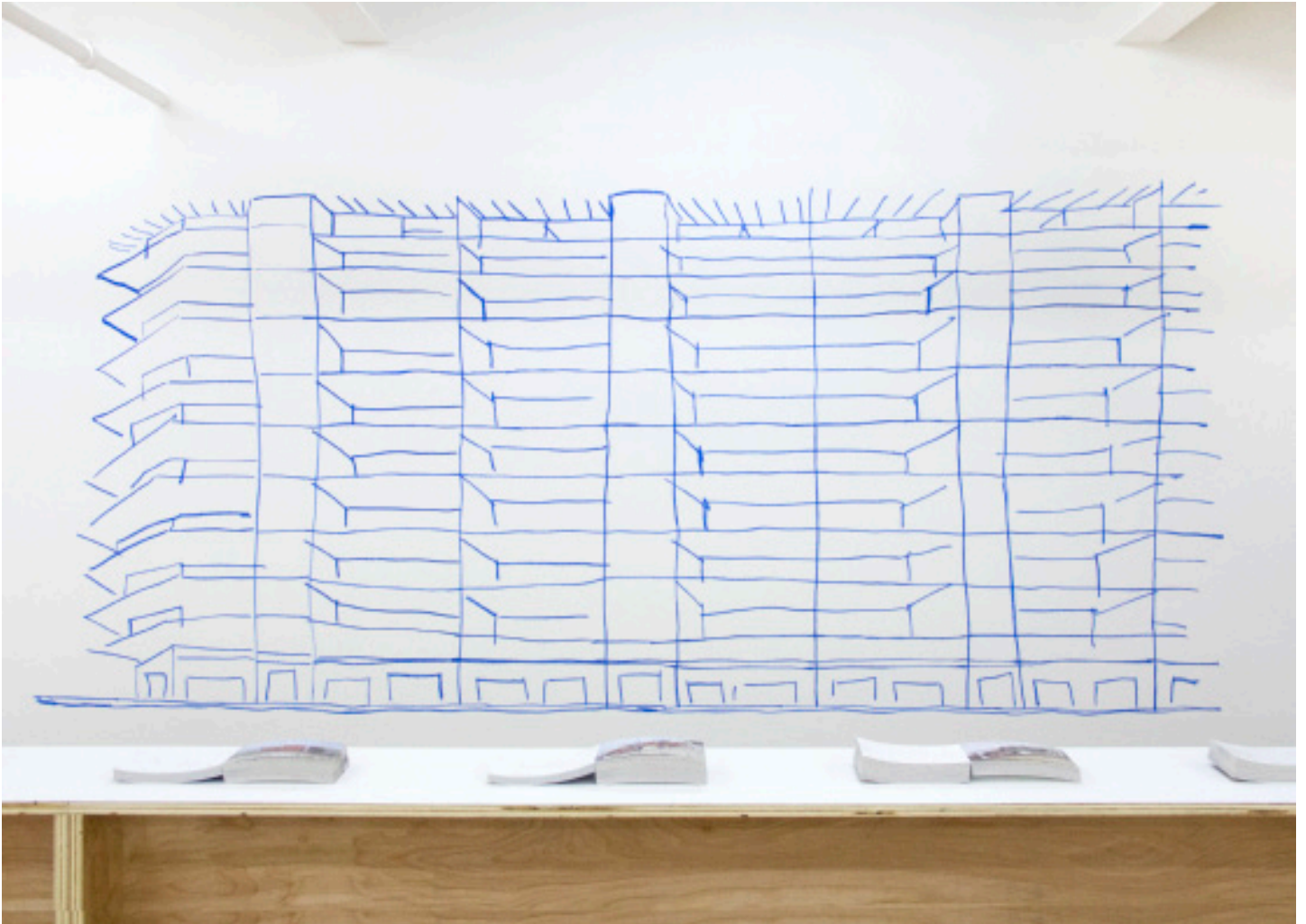
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PATRICIA ESQUIVIAS  
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2011  
Installation

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2014

Video

10 mins 40 secs

Edition of 5

<https://vimeo.com/user5556137/albums>

Password: [viewesquivias](#)

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In 1958, artists Amadeo Gabino and Manuel S. Molezún completed over one hundred ceramic murals for the terraces of a group of buildings in the north of Madrid. They were commissioned by the architect Miguel Artífano, who extended this invitation to the artists after seeing one of their murals in the entrance of a building in Madrid. None of Miguel's other buildings include murals.

A few of the murals are abstract, the rest depict views of European cities and the countryside. The wives of the artists, Elke, German, and Joos, Dutch, still friends to this day, told me how their husbands travelled all through Europe by motorcycle making drawings for inspiration. The ceramic tiles were painted in Manises, a town very well known for its ceramic tradition.

My father lives quite near the buildings with the murals. I first noticed them from the bus one day when I went to visit him. For a long time I took photographs of the murals only from far away. Much later I decided I wanted to see one up close, so I arranged to visit one of the apartments for sale. That day I saw two murals up close, one with the estate agent and one with the porter, who immediately became my ally. Since then I have been able to photograph only twenty.

The porter is friends with a building contractor who is in charge of many of the renovations that are done to the apartments. One day he called me and offered me a mural which was going to be destroyed. The day I went to pick it up, it turned out that the owner had decided to take it down and keep it elsewhere because he found out about my interest. I don't know if before he had thought it was ugly and then suddenly saw its beauty, or if he became aware of its possible economic value. The building contractor got in contact with me two more times about murals that were going to be destroyed, and in both cases I decided to hire him to take them down for me to keep.

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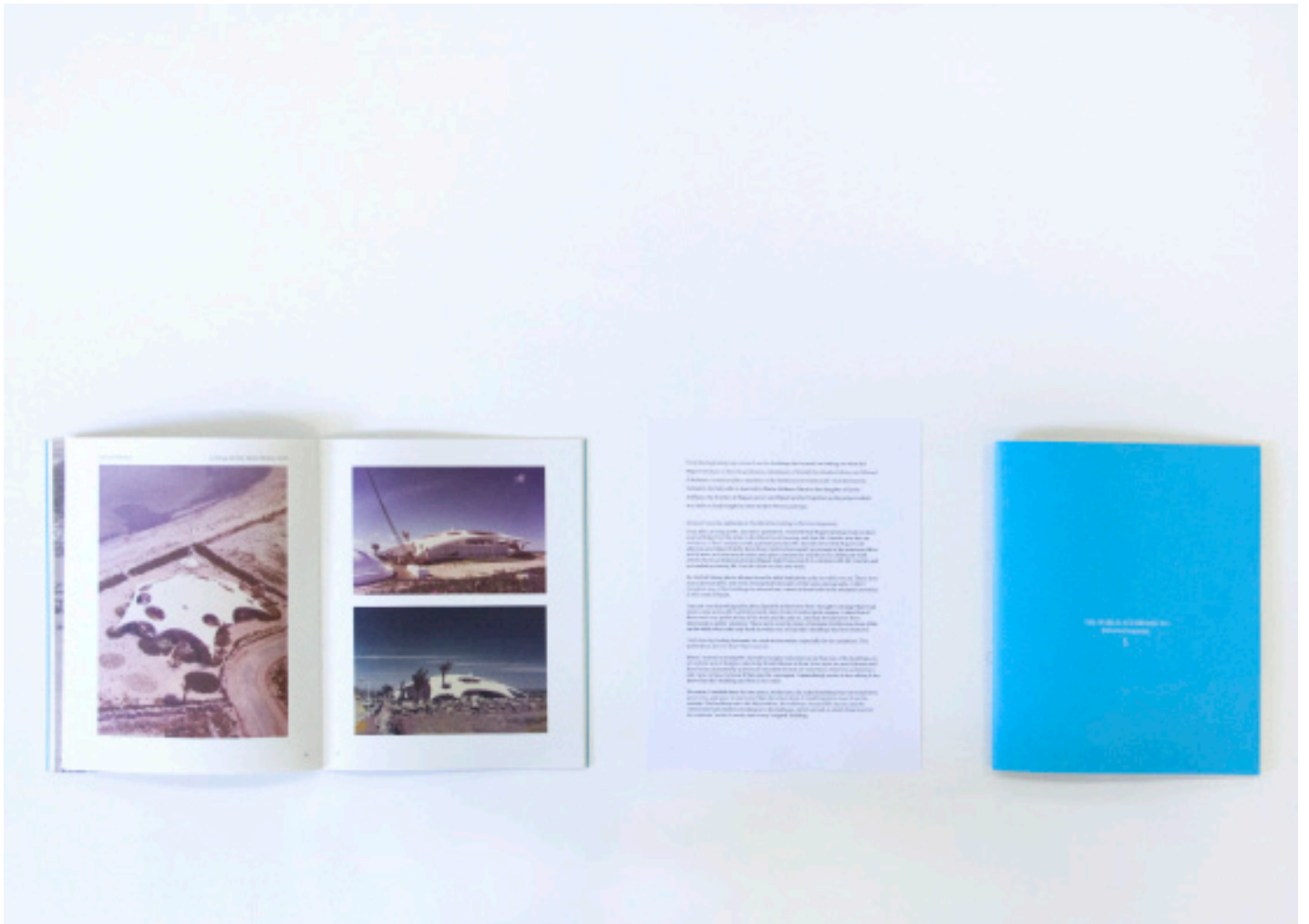
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The terraces of each apartment also have a wall covered in ceramic mosaic, dotted with large pins for climbing plants. During the renovation of the apartments this wall also gets destroyed. I collected the mosaics from one apartment and worked with jeweler Marc Monzó to make pieces to wear the building.

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From the beginning, my research on the buildings has focused on finding out what led Miguel Artiñano to the extraordinary commission of murals by Amadeo Gabino and Manuel S. Molezun. I tried to talk to members of his family and at some point I was directed to Fernando Garrido who is married to María Artiñano. María is the daughter of Javier Artiñano, the brother of Miguel. Javier and Miguel worked together on the project which was built on land bought by their mother Flora Luzarraga.

(Extract from the publication *The World According to Patricia Esquivias*)

Soon after arriving at Mr. Garrido's apartment, I learned that Miguel Artiñano had worked as an architect for the state in the Ministry of Housing, and that Mr. Garrido was also an architect, a "free" architect with a private practice. Mr. Garrido described Miguel with affection and talked briefly about how construction wasn't as corrupt in the nineteen-fifties as it is now, so it was much easier and quite common for architects to collaborate with artists. But in architectural terms Miguel didn't have much in common with Mr. Garrido and so I ended up having Mr. Garrido show me his own work.

He started taking photo albums from the table behind the sofa, on which we sat. There were many photographs, and many enlarged photocopies of the same photographs. I didn't recognize any of the buildings he showed me—most of them built in the nineteen-seventies in the south of Spain.

I am not very knowledgeable about Spanish architecture but I thought it strange that I had never come across Mr. Garrido's work, since to me it looked quite unique. I asked him if there were any publications of his work and he said no, and that he had never been interested in public relations. There were several copies of *Sunland Architecture* from 2006 on the table, this is the only book in which one of Garrido's buildings has been featured.

I left that day feeling fortunate for such an encounter, especially for its casualness. This publication aims to share that moment.

When I started scanning Mr. Garrido's images it dawned on me that one of his buildings, an art school, was in Burgos, where my friend Edurne is from. Ever since we met, Edurne and I have been connected by a series of coincidences that are somehow related to architecture, and I was curious to know if this was the case again. I immediately wrote to her asking if she knew Garrido's building and this is her reply:

Of course, I studied there for two years. At the time, the school building was surrounded by pine trees, and since it was lower than the street level, it could barely be seen from the outside. The building was a bit labyrinthine, the hallways seemed like streets and the classrooms had windows looking in to the hallways, which served as small showcases for the students' work. It surely was a very 'original' building.

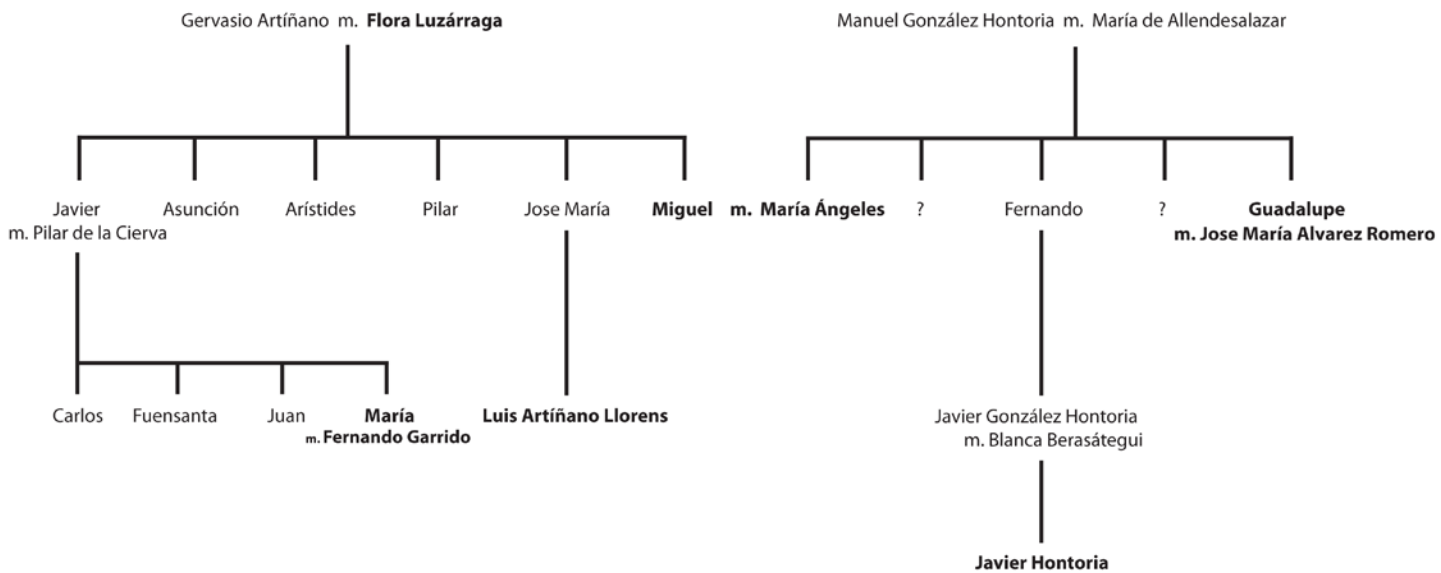
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Amongst the family members I have interviewed was Luis Artíñano Llorens, who works in the construction business and has a passion for auto mechanics. He was the first to give me a more personal account of Miguel. He spoke very highly of him and his wife and specially mentioned their kindness, highlighting how many architects' careers had been funded and supported by Miguel. When I asked him about the murals he said that probably Miguel had commissioned them because of the grandness of the project and its unique site. He said that Flora, Miguel's mother, didn't allow for any of the apartments to be sold while she was alive because she was particularly fond of them. Luis also thought that Miguel's decision to include the murals could have perhaps been sparked by a serious car accident he had around that time, which might have changed his perception.

Luis told me that Jose María Alvarez Romero was the executor for Miguel and that he would be the right person to ask about the whereabouts of his belongings. Alvarez Romero is married to Guadalupe Gonzalez Hontoria, and her sister, María Angeles, was married to Miguel. I knew of Guadalupe because of her arts and crafts collection, she was a person with whom I had wished to meet for a while. One day I phoned asking to speak to her husband, she answered the phone and said that he had left and that he wasn't coming back, so I assumed he had died.\* I said I was sorry and told her that I was researching Miguel Artíñano and that I was also a fan of her work. She said she would be glad to meet me and I arranged to visit her in the museum where her collection is on view.

On the day of our meeting Guadalupe told me about her life. In the 1960s she had won a car in a raffle which allowed her to travel all through Spain buying everything she thought would soon cease to be made by artisans. She soon collected 2000 objects, which she kept in two of the fourteen bedrooms in her apartment. Now, in her nineties, she still continues writing and studying and regularly gives guided visits in the museum. At some point Guadalupe mentioned Blanca Berasátegui, and her son, Javier Hontoria, an art critic. "Javier Hontoria who writes in El Cultural?" I asked. "Yes." Then she added that El Cultural's office was where Miguel used to have his architecture studio.

In October 2013, Javier Hontoria published a review of my show in MARCO, Vigo in *Artforum*. The video *111-119 Generalísimo/Castellana* in which I talked about his great uncle Miguel Artíñano, was included in the show but Javier must have missed this detail. When I got home I immediately called him and told him I had just met Guadalupe and found out that she was his great aunt. Javier was surprised and I was more surprised when he told me that he actually had two easy chairs that used to belong to Miguel. I asked to see them and

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after a couple of weeks I proposed to make him a portrait sitting in a chair. Rather than a portrait, he suggested that his father, an architect and artist, could make a drawing. Over the next six months we were unable to arrange a date to do this. Finally, I only made a photograph of the easy chair, which happened to be placed next to his pile of *Artforums*.

\* Several months later I was talking on the phone with Guadalupe and she told me she couldn't meet me Friday morning because that is when she takes Bridge lessons with her husband.

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# The New York Times

**"Patricia Esquivias: '111-119 Generalísimo/Castellana'"**

**Murray Guy**

**By Roberta Smith**

July 25, 2014



An installation view of "111-119 Generalísimo/Castellana," by Patricia Esquivias, at Murray Guy. Credit Murray Guy, New York

As seen in her third solo at Murray Guy, the work of the Venezuelan artist Patricia Esquivias is as much art history or urban archaeology as it is art, and consequently very dependent upon having a visually interesting, historically resonant subject. That is the case here, in a meandering installation that focuses on five apartment buildings in Madrid erected in the late 1950s at 111-119 Avenida del Generalísimo (named for Franco and later renamed Paseo de la Castellana), and Ms. Esquivias's gradual excavation of their history.

Attracted by the pictorial ceramic murals visible from many of the terraces, Ms. Esquivias manages, through sleuthing and personal connections, to discover that the buildings were designed by an architect named Miguel Artiñano, who commissioned the murals from two largely forgotten artists, Amadeo Gabino and Manuel S. Molezún. She also tracks down the artists' widows. Then, after befriending the buildings' superintendent, she takes photographs (seen here) of 20 of the murals and even gains possession of two that were tossed out to make way for remodeling.

This would be mostly a conceptual exercise if the murals weren't so beautiful: stylized renderings of European capitals that have the underlying geometry of folk art. They form a little piece of art history that you're happy to have. The largely documentary nature of the proceedings is further subverted by a short, episodic, musing video in which Ms. Esquivias, pausing twice to sing a cappella, recounts parts of her process of discovery.

Almost in passing, she weaves her own story into the history of the buildings while conjuring the utopian pretenses of life under Franco and the ways the present inevitably erases the past. The power of her effort sneaks up on you.

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# ARTFORUM

July 22, 2014

**"Patricia Esquivias"**  
Murray Guy  
By Nicolas Linnert



View of "111-119 Generalísimo/Castellana," 2014.

Probing the relationship between historical preservation and individual memory, Patricia Esquivias's film 111-119 Generalísimo/Castellana, 2014, traces stories around a 1950s housing project in Madrid's current-day financial district. Much of the film focuses on ceramic murals originally installed for the balconies of the buildings; each mural depicts a different city around Europe, the intent during Franco's reign being to project an image of Spain as a thriving, international state. Many were removed over time, some salvaged pieces of which are on view along with photographs and texts in this exhibition that, together with the video, constructs a historical narrative that oscillates between what is personal and what is factual.

The film depicts the artist's laptop screen, showing her opening and switching between various image files. The disjointed slideshow establishes that her interest in the housing development hearkens back to time spent with her father, hinting that her concern with facts is also viewed through a lens of rekindled childhood imaginations. One narrative references a refashioned marble wall element that appears to have originally resembled a seashore—the artist jokes that perhaps residents' fond memories from holidays at the beach will instigate the piece's restoration. In a printed text, Esquivias retells how a renter decided against destroying his ceramic mural after hearing of the artist's interest in the object.

Documents displayed on tables further illustrate the artist's efforts to uncover the buildings' histories, which included meeting with families of the architects and thwarted attempts to photograph more tiles. The artist's anecdotes and research foretell how objects and surroundings receive value through circumstances perhaps as fickle as they are personal. Esquivias's own instructive approach mirrors this condition as it seamlessly shifts between fact and childhood speculation, made believable via a puerile charm.