

PROYECTOS MONCLOVA

Inauguration of *The Zone, Chernobyl (2013-2020)*, by Raúl Ortega Ayala

- Proyectos Monclova will open the exhibition *The Zone, Chernobyl (2013-2020)* by Mexican artist Raúl Ortega Ayala, Saturday the 18th of June, from 11 am until 4 pm.
- The exhibition addresses the social issues and the political and ecological implications that were unleashed in the city of Pripyat and its surroundings after the Chernobyl nuclear accident in Ukraine.
- Raúl Ortega Ayala recounts the story of four former inhabitants of that area who suffered the ravages of the disaster.
- A part of the proceeds from the sales will be donated to the collaborators of the project and their respective families.

For the first time in Mexico, the artist presents *The Zone*, a project that derives from multiple visits to the Chernobyl exclusion area over a period of five years. Through this show, the artist reveals the environmental repercussions of the accident that occurred in 1986 at the local nuclear power plant, belonging to the former Soviet Union, currently Ukrainian territory, and the consequences it had on the lives of its inhabitants.

The exhibition includes a film entitled *The Zone (2013-2020)*, in which Ortega Ayala recovers testimonies from former inhabitants of the city of Pripyat and its surroundings who were displaced after the accident. From a cinematographic exercise, almost ethnographic in nature, the artist generates a narrative that portrays the story of four people: Alexander Yesaulov, deputy mayor of Pripyat at the time of the disaster; Alexander Sirota, who was a child when the accident occurred; Vladimir Tarasov, a physical education teacher and Natalya Pantelevna, a mother with a young son. Through the film, the artist seeks to set aside the official narrative, the one that explains the events from a global political and economic perspective, to give a voice to the people who experienced the nuclear accident and directs the conversation towards the personal realm...surveying individual memory through oral history. The exhibition is also made up of "Field-notes": photographs taken between 2013 and 2017 in Pripyat. In them, different spaces that were relevant in the daily life of its inhabitants

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can be seen: government offices, a gymnasium, kindergarten classrooms and domestic environments in a state of abandonment.

There are also deteriorating buildings and monuments, an amusement park that was never opened, desolate schools and bookstores that emerge as the remains of a city in ruins and that, it seems, can only be known through an exercise in archeology, in that uninhabited objects and spaces are recorded by the artist's camera. This is how the camera takes on an important role in the work of registering almost extinct places. The photographs and video that result from their tours contribute visually to collective memory.

Since the beginning of the project, Raúl Ortega Ayala established that a percentage of the earnings collected from the sales of this work would be granted to foundations that work in Chernobyl. On this occasion, the artist has decided to donate part of the proceeds collected during the exhibition to the collaborators of the project and their respective families, who currently reside in Ukraine or who have been displaced by the recent Russian invasion.

Raúl Ortega Ayala (Mexico City, 1973) lives and works between New Zealand and Mexico City. Initially trained in painting, his artistic practice derives from extensive research carried out over long periods. He has previously used ethnographic methodologies, such as being a participant observer, and from these experiences he has produced series that explore the world of labor, gardening, and food. A crucial element in his practice is the process of gathering materials that he uses to produce his videos, installations, performances, and photographs. He has recently focused on works that explore memory and the detritus of history. He is currently an associate professor and co-director of the Whitio Rehua/Massey University School of Art in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

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