

LOUIDGI BELTRAME « GUNKANJIMA »



The deserted island of Gunkanjima (Battleship Island) condense Japan's race towards modernity and its organised and willing entry into the industrial era during the Meiji Restoration. This islet, 480m long and 160m wide, surrounded by walls and covered in reinforced concrete blocks, used to be just a desolate reef off the coast of Nagasaki, until Mitsubishi decided to exploit its layers of coal in 1890. Since then, Gunkanjima has been a collector of paradigms:

- 1916, construction of the first reinforced concrete block in Japan.
- WW2, exploitation of the mine by Chinese and Korean prisoners of war (the hardest labour camp in the country).
- Following the war, full development in coal extraction.
- 1960, Gunkanjima becomes the most densely populated place in the world.
- 1974, drop in profits. Mitsubishi definitively evacuates the island within 3 months.

I film these ghostly buildings - deactivated now - in all their materiality, like monumental sculptures. These empty shapes are nevertheless inhabited by layers of history: the conditions for production, the ideology behind these sites, the men who built and exploited them. As many ghosts that haunt this concrete labyrinth eroded by "typhoons". Gunkanjima collects the vestiges of modern Japanese architecture - a "miniature" of the Japanese archipelago, a contemporary ruin, an object of vertical urban experimentation, extreme and unplanned. Intertwined with a network of arcades and passageways, it used to have a school, cinemas, temples, baths, a swimming pool, sports rooms, a hospital and collective buildings. The underground network of mines reached a depth of 1000m, well below the level of the ocean floor. The ruins also tell the story of this underground activity and of the life of the insular community that lived there. My approach is rather like that of a contemporary archaeologist. I make a systematic survey of the island's buildings. I approach these modern remains in the manner of observational documentary and scientific fiction.

Louidgi Beltrame's (1973) work revolves around a deconstruction of the formal and narrative structures of cinema, envisaged as a medium with its own particular syntax, also as a political power that influenced the development of the last century. His research also build a documentation of modernist architecture and its vestiges.

Considering architecture itself as a narration, his work, hinging videos (a combination of documentary and fiction) and architecture drawings, contributes to the elaboration of a system of analogies between the languages of architecture and film.

These analogies allow for filming characters as vectors, in order to capture the specific context in which they evolve and to propose a new look upon modernity and its heritage through the historical mediums of film and architecture. Beltrame's works will be presented in the Sao Paulo Biennial in September.