

Pedro Cabrita Reis

After all, constructing an art work is still building a dream, stated Pedro Cabrita Reis on the poster for his exhibition at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, in Gateshead in 2002. In the exhibition he showed his 'house', *The Project*, a machine for living which cannot be entered or owned. Three storeys high and solidly constructed from concrete, wood, aluminium and glass, *The Project* is a melancholic, archaic sculpture despite its modern materials. In the following year his large work *Longer Journeys* in the Portuguese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale allowed visitors access to the ground floor at least, but there were no stairs leading the way up to the first floor, where doors opened into rooms with no floors.

Since the early 1990s Pedro Cabrita Reis's work has revolved around the subjects of homes, housing and architecture. Alongside works based on elements of daily life like tables and chairs, doors and windows, he also continually creates installations, which seize the exhibition spaces with architectonic structures as complex as they are violent.

With his installation *Catedral #3*, shown in 1999 at the Museu Serralves in Porto, Cabrita disrupted the classical white cube of the museum with rough brick walls, rising from floor to ceiling and breaking into the fresh walls of the newly opened contemporary building designed by Álvaro Siza. Shortly before this, in the Palais Liechtenstein in Vienna, he had installed a row of *favelas* in one of the sumptuous baroque halls.

Even if Cabrita's raw walls and his cardboard huts held together with tape refer to social realities outside of art, they do not enter these realities, and certainly do not redouble them; they transform them into artworks with multiple connotations, mysterious and in part literally opaque. Where windows appear in Cabrita's work, they are fundamentally blind, nailed up, painted over; the doors to his houses are impenetrable. *Cidades Cegas*, 'blind cities', is the title of a group of works whose stoic, melancholic appearance refers us to the homelessness of humankind as a basic constant of the human condition. In an interview Cabrita explains: *Melancholia considered as the condition of being deprived of an external image of the self. Having lost the comfortable reassurance of being part of Nature, we are only left with the perception of the self. And this knowledge implies the drawing of a territory, shall I say an exercise of architecture, an assumption of a self that builds a sense of place.*¹

Sabrina van der Ley & Markus Richter

¹ Adrian Searle, A Conversation with Pedro Cabrita Reis, *Pedro Cabrita Reis*, Ostfildern 2003, p. 70.