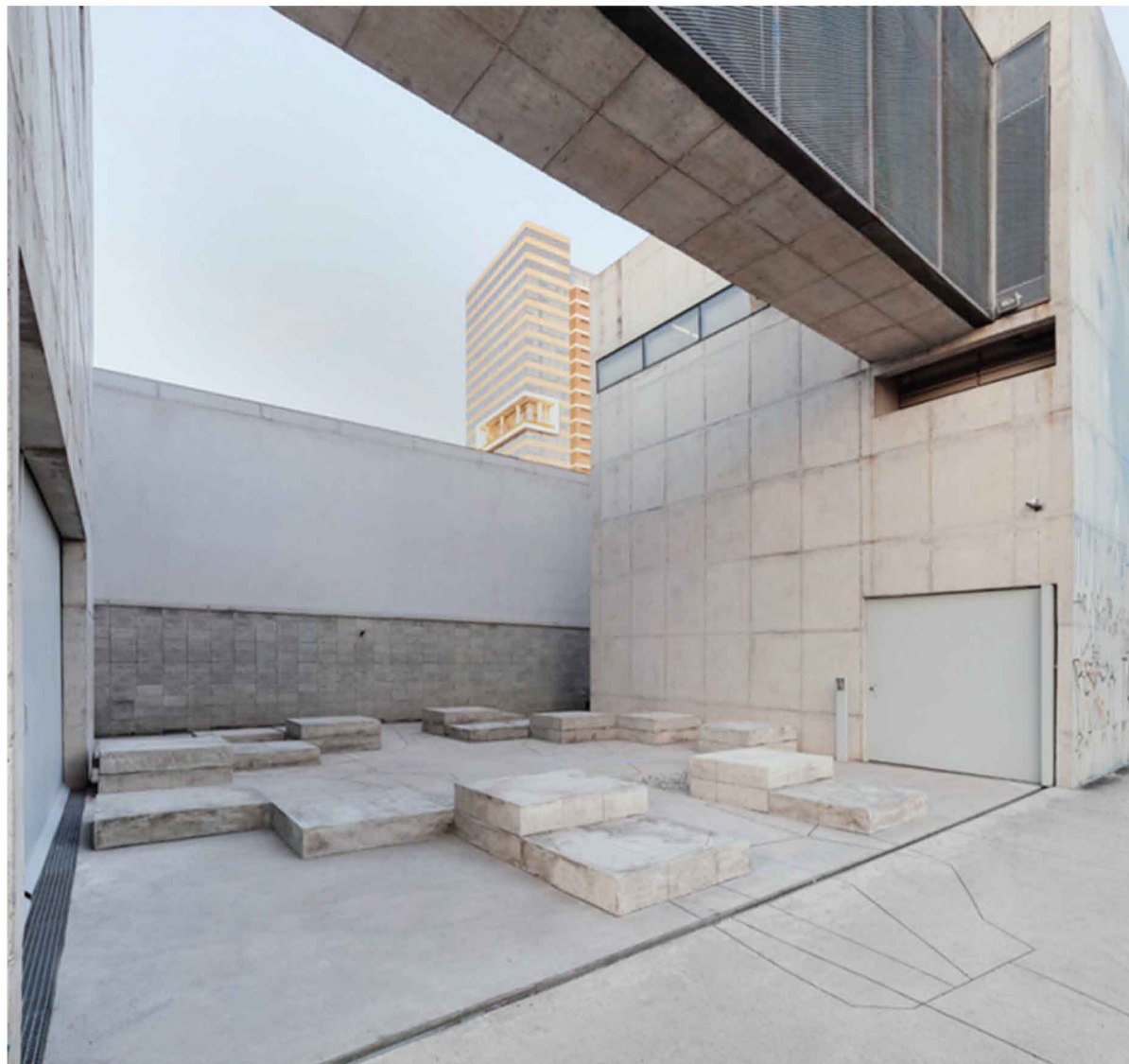


SÃO PAULO



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Sandra Gamarra, *Cielo Raso*, 2016, concrete blocks, graphite, false gold, screws, 30' x 32' 9" x 12 3/8". Photo: Filipe Berndt.

Sandra Gamarra

GALERIA LEME

Sandra Gamarra’s temporary site-specific installation *Cielo Raso*, 2016, orchestrated a powerful, if unexpected, collision between pre-Columbian religious culture and the modernist grid. In creating the work, the artist was responding to a commission by Bruno de Almeida, curator of the project SITU, which explores the intersection of art, architecture, and the public sphere. The work’s title is the Spanish equivalent of the English phrase “dropped ceiling,” but contains an ambiguity: *Cielo* means “sky” or “heaven,” and *raso* means “shallow” or “flat.”

Gamarra, whose work is deeply rooted in her Peruvian heritage and in the medium of painting, uses installation as a way of activating and establishing a direct dialogue with the environment her work is in. For this exhibition, the artist used concrete blocks that were the same size and material as those used to build the gallery, laying them on the ground perpendicularly to the visible grid on the building’s facade in order to outline the shape of a *chakana*, or Inca cross. This is an equilateral cross indicating the cardinal points of a compass, overlaid by a square with a circular void at its center so that it has eight points. To the Incas this was an auspicious symbol, pervasive in shamanic rituals, buildings, and body painting. Gamarra’s decision to bring such a mystically charged ancestral totem into a space designed by one of Brazil’s most renowned modernist architects, Paulo Mendes da Rocha, speaks to her interest in social commentary. Spaces built with a modernist rhythm, following rational and regular Cartesian order, foster extremely different social values than those created on a more porous and fluid basis, guided by cosmology and a higher spiritual order. The Roman cross came to represent the oppressive terrors of Spanish colonization in most of South America (Brazil was colonized by the Portuguese, with no less religious voracity); perhaps in Gamarra’s eyes the modernist grid is a contemporary equivalent, dictating how we organize our cities, draw the limits of private properties, and impose order. The Incas valued connectivity and openness and celebrated the unknown. Gamarra suggests that in observing their paradigm we may gain insights into new models that may be more appropriate for the twenty-first century.

The exhibition’s title (*Dropped Ceiling*) and the literal meaning of the two words (*sky* and *flat*) that compose it reveal a context in which to think about the work. Although the contours of the Inca cross could only be seen clearly from above, through the gallery’s second-floor windows (a metaphorical sky), at ground level a closer look at the floor revealed graphite markings that ran across it and over some of the blocks—these represented the land routes between major Latin American cities. The floor design was also reminiscent of an astrological map, and it could be read as a flattened mirror image of the starry sky, which the Incas used for spiritual and physical guidance and orientation.

Two additional lines painted in gold marked a large X at the center of the open circle and ran out of the center and over some of the blocks. The exhibition brochure explains that one line represented the Line of Truth or Life and the other the Inca Path, in light of which this marking could suggest the intersection of different points of view, concepts, or principles. Although we are familiar with the saying “X marks the spot,” this was not the X of a hidden treasure or of a contract to be signed. The golden marks drew attention to the middle of the installation, an open space surrounded by low concrete blocks that resembled tombstones, as a point of connection between earth and sky. Here, one could have an epiphany, and a new (world) order—neither too mystical nor too rational—could be struck at the intersection of ancient and contemporary cultures, a place representative of the world we’d like to live in today.

—Camila Belchior