

SURVEILLANCE/BRUTALITY (I)

TWELVE-CHANNEL VIDEO INSTALLATION

Year: 2023

Rodrigo Lopes de Barros

What is the relationship between architecture, art, politics, and state surveillance? In order to investigate this question, filmmaker Rodrigo Lopes de Barros departed from a series of photographs created by Rashid Billimoria that focused on Le Corbusier's only building in the US, the 1963 Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts (CCVA) at Harvard University. Lopes de Barros selected ten photos in total: two photos of the façade and eight photos from the inside of the building. The CCVA building is a symbol of brutalist architecture in the US with its structure eliciting visceral reactions from those who have experienced it.

This architectural style, which originated from modernist values, was later appropriated and became associated with state surveillance owing to its presence in the Eastern Bloc. However, in the US, this association can be traced as well. The headquarters of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in Washington D.C., known as the J. Edgar Hoover Building (1974), also possesses a brutalist aesthetic. In 2016, it was revealed that the National Security Agency (NSA) used the 1974 AT&T Long Lines Building (33 Thomas Street) in New York City, designed by John Carl Warnecke, to host a contemporary center for the surveillance of foreign states—that site was internally named TITANPOINTE by the NSA.

Lopes de Barros processed, in his video synthesizers, the eight photos taken from the inside of the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts in order to distort and animate them, also adding soundtrack, generating two-hour-long videos from each image. These photos were mixed with declassified aerial surveillance videos of street protests recorded by the FBI during the Black Lives Matter demonstrations of 2015. Copies of declassified NSA security posters dating from the 1950s through the 1970s are printed and displayed in the installation. The two photos of the façade, also turned into videos with soundtrack, are projected on a wall. On the opposite wall, two more projectors play the live feed from a thermal camera installed to register the thermal image of visitors. On the side walls, eight CRT TVs play the videos created by Lopes de Barros from the photos and FBI footage.