

# Art in America

FEBRUARY 2015

EXHIBITION REVIEWS



Mark Lewis:  
*Staircase at the  
Edifício Copan*, 2014,  
digital video, approx.  
5½ minutes; at  
Daniel Faria.

## MARK LEWIS

Daniel Faria

Mark Lewis makes short silent films that command a viewer's attention without relying on narrative devices. The Canadian-born, London-based artist, who represented Canada at the 2009 Venice Biennale, portrays dilapidated modern structures as ruins attesting to still-salvageable ideals. He has largely focused on settings in North America and the United Kingdom, yet seven of the eight remarkable single-take films in his second solo show at Daniel Faria were shot elsewhere—one in Beirut; four in São Paulo; and two in Cheorwon County, South Korea, near the border with North Korea. (The remaining film was shot in London.) The South Korean settings provide a vaguely ominous context for Lewis's cinematic techniques. In one, the digital camera takes nearly five minutes to pan 360 degrees, surveying the snow-covered landscape and a portion of the border wall demarcating the highly fraught, World War II-era territorial divide.

The most visually striking of the São Paulo works was *Above and Below the Minhocão* (2014). For roughly 12 minutes, the film focuses on an overpass completed in 1970 to ease traffic congestion in the overcrowded city. Every Sunday, the structure closes to vehicles, becoming a pedestrian and cyclist thoroughfare and giving temporary respite to the inhabitants of the once-fashionable neighborhoods through which the "big earthworm" slices. Lewis's camera sweeps over layers of the past, moving from the geometric-tiled pavement below the Minhocão to the graffiti-covered skyscrap-

ers above, and at one point settling on a turreted villa in a state of disrepair. A man on a cell phone, one of the few street-level pedestrians, keeps entering the frame. The film's final image is romantic, if ambiguous: the camera zooms in from above on a young couple sitting between the car-free lanes, the artist perhaps imagining a permanently traffic-less Minhocão.

*Staircase at the Edifício Copan* (2014) feels both sculptural and filmic. Lewis's camera descends along a spiraling, 459-foot-high fire escape on São Paulo's Copan Building, designed by Oscar Niemeyer. For over three minutes, the camera tracks around the staircase's central column with an alien fluidity of movement. Shadows play across the white concrete cylinder as details of the broader cityscape enter and exit the frame.

*Beirut* (2011) is an approximately 8-minute film shot in the Hamra neighborhood of the war-ravaged title city, at an hour when the hotels, businesses and residential terraces there look eerily vacant. As Lewis's crane-mounted camera soars over the architecture, it reveals a brighter side to the Mediterranean metropolis, alighting on a rooftop, where it discovers a woman swimming laps in a small pool. This final image, like that of *Above and Below the Minhocão*, seems to offer a sense of optimism about the future, a hopefulness that lingers long after the screen turns black.

—Milena Tomic