

Jon Gorospe

ENG

Urban Morphologies
27.03.2026–28.06.2026



Urban Morphologies

Jon Gorospe revisits a theme that was prominent in contemporary art in the late 1990s and early 2000s: cities. Artists of that period were simultaneously fascinated by and concerned about expert predictions announcing an alarming statistic: 50% of the population would live in urban areas by 2050. Thirty years ago, there were ten megacities in the world; today, there are already thirty-seven, each with more than ten million inhabitants, resulting in a total of seven hundred and fifty million people. As is often the case, this state of hypersensitivity to what is coming has gradually diminished thanks to the universal normalisation of this process, making way for other issues. Gorospe uses this normalisation to produce a kind of visual ontology of urban spaces and the individuals living in them. Marc Augé's "non-places"—an iconic term of globalisation defining those places of transit, services or consumption where the subject is a passer-by, a user or a customer—has already become commonplace, a collection of signs belonging to the concept that he dubbed "supermodernity": the condition of a world where spaces without identity or memory proliferate and human experience tends to become contingent, functional and anonymous.

For more than a decade, Jon Gorospe's entire body of work has revolved around architecture and its relationship with citizens. It has done so by dividing his reflections into series that address some of the problems of urban life. He primarily employs photography, video and installations to show his work without any sweeping statements, in a manner that Deleuze described as "a stammering of ideas": questions that he asks himself and poses to us, the viewers.

He employs various types of looking: one that emulates the omnipresence of surveillance

cameras, the metaphorical panopticon denounced by Foucault that has now also been normalised through the use of security cameras in urban spaces (London, for example, has nearly a million CCTV cameras monitoring urban spaces). He appropriates images from the Internet showing urban landscapes taken by anonymous individuals and specialist companies such as Google Street View, thereby allowing him to enrich his reflections on the identity of the landscape through “authorless” images. The presence of advertising is another subject of his analysis, translating the visual noise that surrounds us into three-dimensional formats and a video screen whose content symbolises the illegibility that advertising has for passers-by.

One section of the exhibition openly displays architecture’s hostility towards a segment of society, emphasising its exclusionary nature. Finally, he uses his own images of urban iconography fragments to identify the architectural features and cloned gestures of tourists and pedestrians, which for him underpin the degree of anonymity offered by public spaces, particularly those where business and institutional buildings demonstrate the absence of residential buildings. Spaces where the permanent coexists with the ephemeral, spaces where architecture embodies the concept highlighted by the Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han as the hallmark of 21st-century beauty: the polished.

Jon Gorospe prints some of his photographs using surfaces that enhance this polished quality: sublimations on aluminium, prints on subsequently lacquered Dibond, or projections on metal plates. In his own way, he utilises a specific aspect of photography, which in semiotic terms lies in the duality of the photographic sign, alternating between index and icon, the moment when an image achieves a symbolic and representative status within a culture or society. His work aims to bridge the gap between rigorous documentary observation and a conceptual, poetic interpretation of space. In one of his compositions, for example, inspired by the visual language of altarpieces, he reshapes ancient mythologies within a contemporary

context, creating visual narratives that alternate between the intimate and the monumental.

The prominence of images, an implied subject in Gorospe’s work, led the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk to argue that the “globe-image” is the surface of globalisation, where global reality is no longer experienced directly, but through images. These images not only represent the world, but also constitute it in themselves, functioning as the surface where globalisation is expressed.

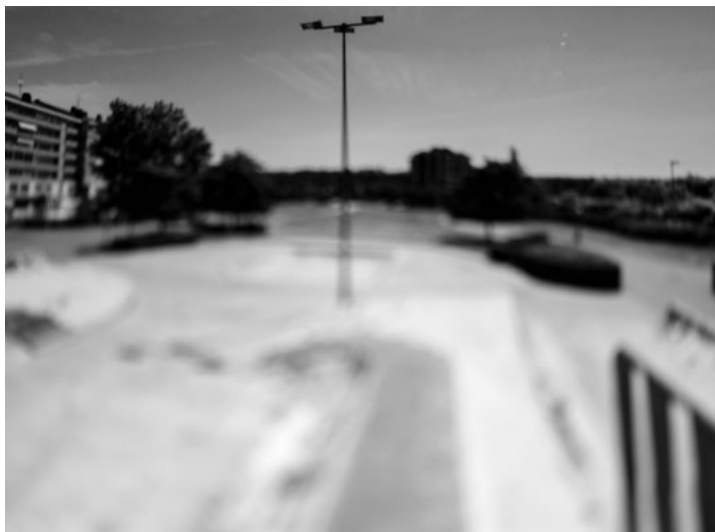
Noraezean
[Aimlessly]



A project produced by Getxophoto in which Jon Gorospe has become a kind of contemporary *flâneur*, immersing himself in the Internet to capture and re-photograph one hundred images limited geographically to the territory of the Basque Country: Alava, Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, Navarra, Lapurdi (Labourd), Nafarroa Beherea (Basse-Navarre) and Zuberoa (Soule). This digital exploration has yielded an archive that provides us with a new approach to a (hyper-recorded, hyper-photographed) landscape with a significant historical and symbolic weight, where algorithms, networks and peripheries intertwine. A view that updates and redefines our imaginary of an artificially altered landscape for urban, industrial or aesthetic purposes. Ports and industrial zones, avenues and squares, university campuses and sports centres are some of the spaces that Gorospe has drawn on.

All of the images he has used come from maps and street directories that can be consulted online. At first glance, these images seem to lack identity, but they may paradoxically have a very defined identity, although by showing dozens of them this is diluted, and perhaps therein lies part of their success. Given that he has often used 360-degree views, which allow him to navigate, crop, tilt them and, in the same way that a stone already contains a sculpture within it, “chisel them” to see what he can extract from them, and later see how they form a dialogue with others.

Noraezean enables us to draw some conclusions. The most striking and evident is the constant homogenisation, interchangeability and depersonalisation of built spaces. His walks at times show us a kind of zero-degree landscape in terms of identity. However, certain signs that have served to shape an identity can still be seen.



Polished Cities

This series refers to the common trait of beauty in the 21st century highlighted by Byung-Chul Han: the polished. We live in an urban environment—individual and collective—in which objects have been designed to offer no resistance to either sight or touch. This phenomenon is evident in the architecture and urban design of certain privileged spaces: financial districts, bureaucratic buildings, squares and places of transit. All of these now exhibit a morphology that tends towards smoothness.

Contemporary architecture dedicated to power proposes conflict-free designs for communal areas with a morphology that tends towards smoothness, where—as opposed to complexity, inequality and human mobility—conflicts have seemingly been eliminated.

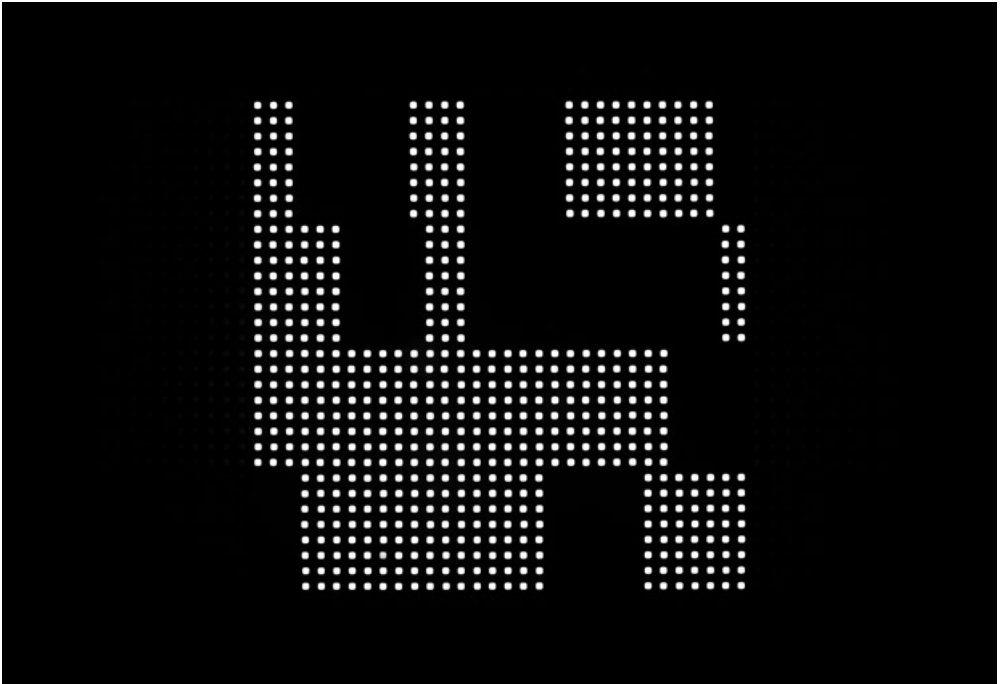
The refined, minimalist images in this work act as fragments of a new architecture, operating at the limits of figuration. These are streets and squares devoid of ornamentation, façades stripped of decoration and lacking in

textures other than evenness. The smoothness of the surfaces, modular structures and grids are constants, all of which serve an aesthetic of non-friction in which the subjects—those who walk, transit or stop—are extraordinarily easy to monitor, to the extent that any interruption to an even surface is quickly perceived. The builders of the ancient glacis were already well aware of this.

Also included is the polyptych entitled *El estilita* [The Stylite], in which the pillars and columns supporting the weight of financial and institutional buildings take centre stage. They record a new architectural order. By stripping the pillars and columns of their practical utility, these elements are reduced to their morphology, thereby producing the shift from architecture to sculpture. The title refers to 5th-century Christian religious figures known for dedicating their lives to prayer and penance on pillars generally located in the middle of a desert. This practice distanced them from the world and brought them closer to the kingdom of heaven.



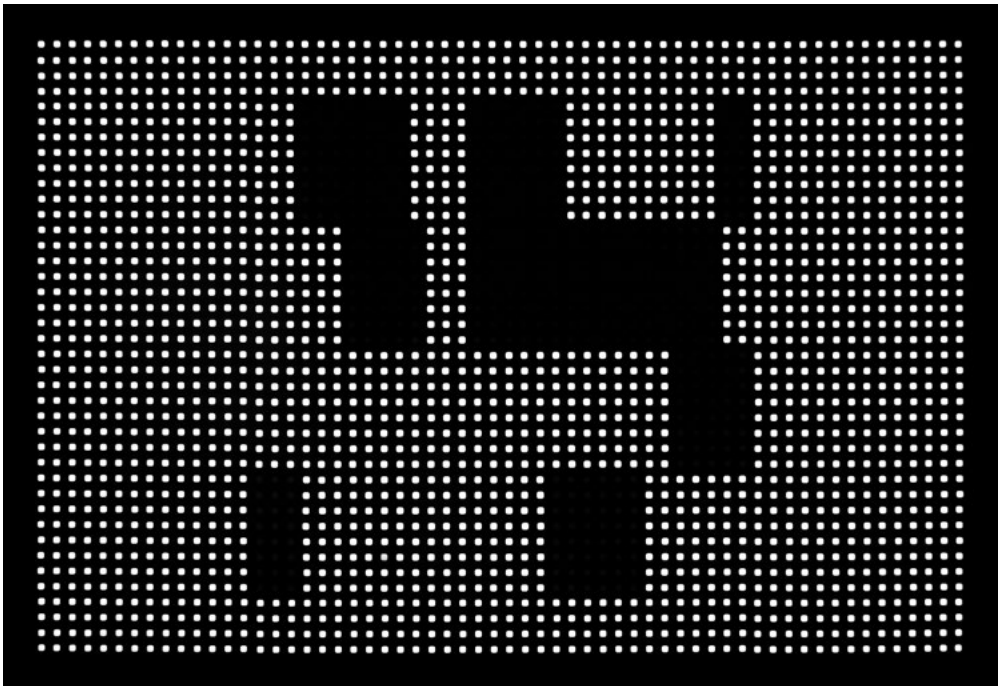
The Spot



This series examines the way in which advertising in public spaces affects our gaze, where illuminated billboards and large screens are becoming part of our surrounding landscape. Over the past few years, Gorospe has been filming and photographing these advertising screens, using his camera as a tool to push the form and content of these advertisements to their limits, so that abstraction takes precedence over any possible interpretation. He is interested in the idea of how abstract art can function as a visual alternative, a

defence against the constant stream of images trying to sell us goods and services.

Deeply interested in the camera's ability to confront the images received from advertisements by using the same tools as the image production system. To do this, he has constructed undulating three-dimensional pieces whose format spectacularises the coexistence we establish with advertising. And he uses video to highlight the visual noise condition of screens and the difficult readability of their content that many of these devices have for passers-by.



Peripatetic Studies: The Hostile

This project deals with the various forms and styles of contemporary defensive architecture, an openly hostile architecture characterised by designs and modifications that prioritise exclusion over inclusion. The series highlights the delimitation of use in the city, the layers of design decisions that silently segregate and isolate. These modifications to buildings and their elements—whether from conception or implemented after construction—deny certain ways of life (such as the nomadic) or demonstrate that rest and pause have been banished from urban centres.

This art project acts as a catalyst for crucial social introspection by confronting the insidious presence of hostile architecture. It uncovers the inherent value of public spaces as democratic and inclusive arenas for all citizens.



Peripatetic Studies: Bivouac



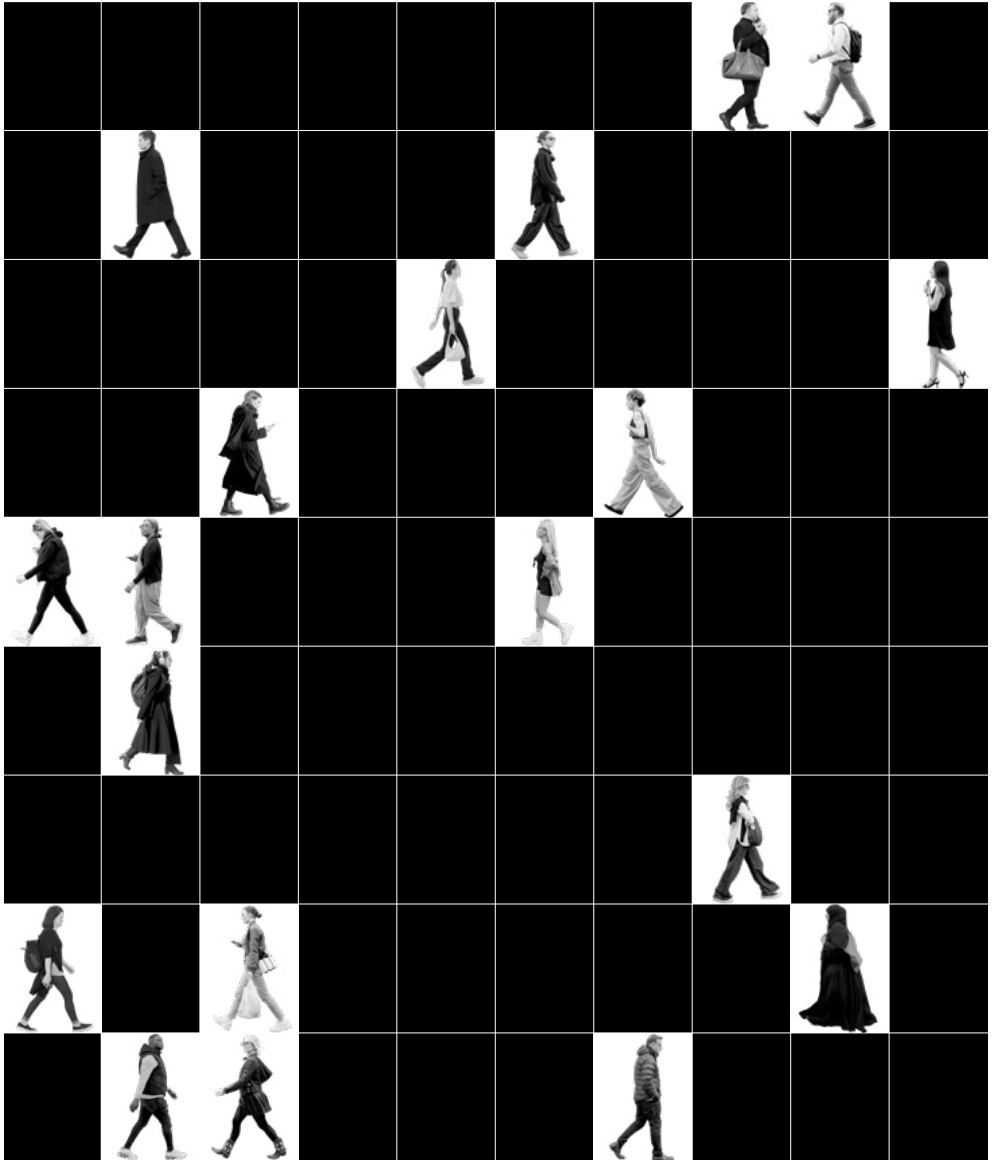
Bivouac focuses on documenting the improvised spaces created by homeless people in cities. Adopting an anthropological approach, the project aims to understand the interaction of these individuals with their urban surroundings and how the structures they construct reflect their needs, ingenuity and resilience.

From an architectural perspective, *Bivouac* reveals how homeless people transform and

reuse urban spaces. In cities where every square metre is carefully orchestrated and regulated, the transient and adaptable nature of these shelters interrupts the rigid structure of space. By documenting these ephemeral shelters, the project somehow demonstrates the limitations and exclusions of urban planning and questions its ability to respond to the needs of all inhabitants.



The Grid



A video-mapping installation that uses video, sound and photography to show people in different cities going about their daily commutes. The photographs simulate the stark neutrality of surveillance cameras, an optics that gives the viewer that fictitious power of being able to see without being seen, simultaneously underscoring the naivety of those who walk with the carefree attitude that no one is watching them. Gorospe pays particular attention to the way in which they move, their desire for uniqueness in their clothing and the devices they use as they move through urban areas. They therefore intermittently shift from visibility to anonymity in the projection. In a sense, they resemble the fictional people who appear as extras in the 3D infographics used by architects so that clients can visualise the final result of their projects. When they are built, pristine and imposing with a fresh face, they somehow force those who pass through these spaces must live up to their standards.

Gorospe drew inspiration from the celebrated work of Eadweard Muybridge, who dedicated himself to the study of movement in the late 1800s. Like him, Gorospe depicts commuters without a background to contextualise them. His interest lies in stripping the images of references so that the commuters themselves would be the focus, their individual identity seemingly dissipating in the hustle and bustle of people doing the same thing. He ultimately tries to document the phenomena that occur in the street because of or thanks to architecture, showing that urban design is not a harmless discipline, but that it sometimes solves problems and other times creates them.

Cities began to divide into zones after the Industrial Revolution, such as historic centres, residential neighbourhoods or industrial areas, among others. The need to move the population from one place to another was resolved by introducing public transport. This trend has become increasingly visible today. Cities are now clearly divided between their historic centres and residential areas. While urban centres are used for leisure- and service-related activities, residential areas have been reduced to mere places to live, as

architect and essayist Rem Koolhaas aptly points out in his book *The Generic City*.

For this series, Gorospe photographed thousands of people on their way to subway and suburban railway stations or emerging from them. He also recorded audio tracks on public transport in cities such as Tokyo, Paris, Milan, Oslo, Copenhagen and Madrid. He is interested in the way in which passengers become part of a socio-technological assemblage: humans + trains + urban infrastructure. This “collective body” is indicative of the idea of the “posthuman condition” described by Rosi Braidotti, where the boundaries between human and machine become blurred, where people have adapted to a system that far exceeds their scale and remain alienated.

Gorospe tries to capture the movement of these bodies at the service of a production line, their travel through the city in a manner very akin to the circulation of goods in an industrial assembly system, on conveyor belts. In order to convey the fascination that he feels for these mechanical gestures, he has created an animation that sequences the images and projects them onto tiles or metal sheets using video-mapping techniques. It is accompanied by a sound effects piece to make the installation more immersive, as well as vibrating speakers attached to the benches so that, when someone sits down, the seat emulates the experience of subway car benches.

Skyline

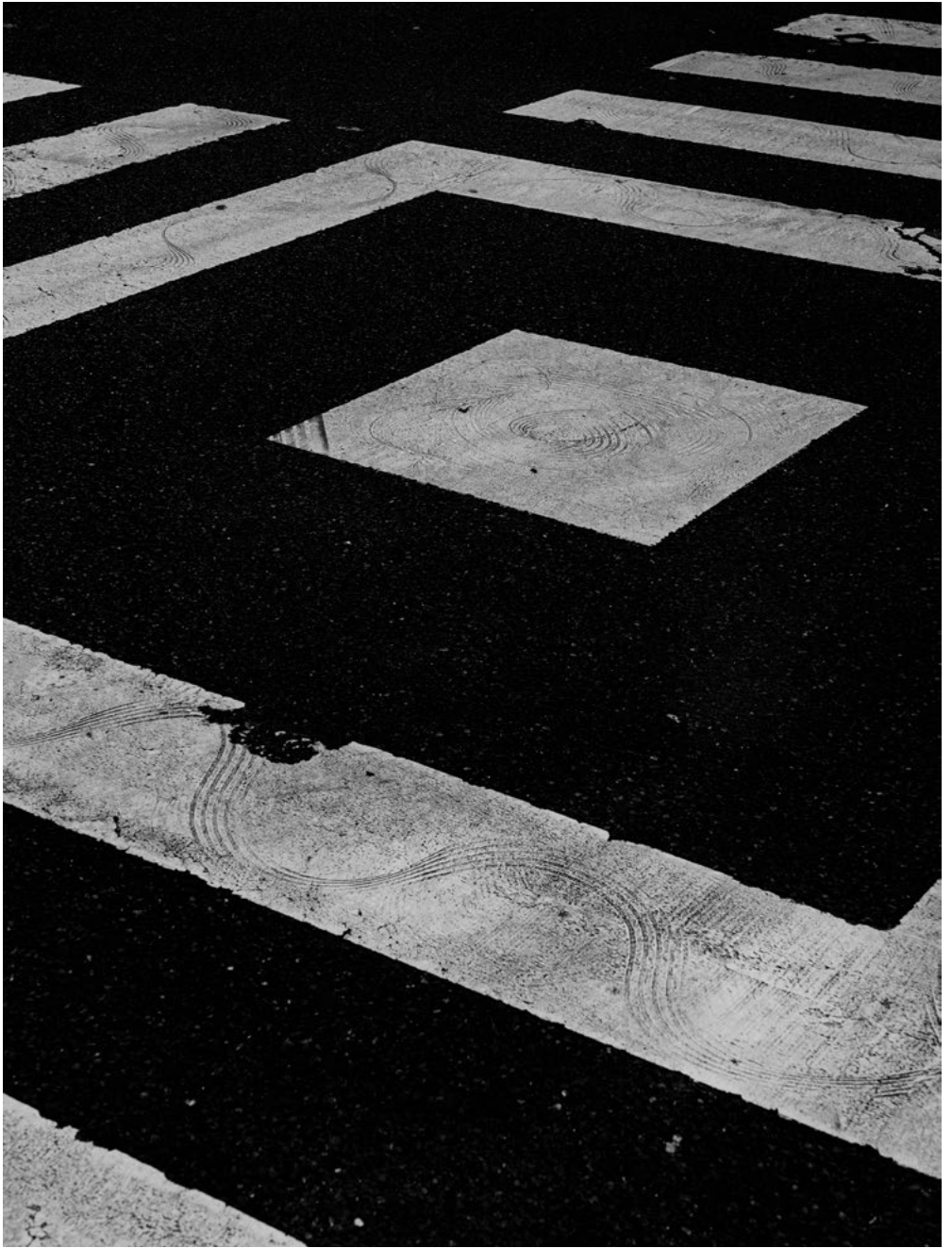
Skyline is a body of work that uses photography to examine the morphology of urban environments. The series refers to the ever-present essence of the city, where the permanent and the ephemeral coexist. This essence is constantly regenerated in the installation, flowing through architectural modules that emulate and sublimate the three-dimensional volumes of buildings that we associate with the concept of the contemporary city. The project aims to capture the perpetual flow inherent in urban life today.

Concepts such as compression, tension and speed form the basis of the images presented, reflecting the fundamental conditions of the current urban experience. Compression emerges in the dense overlap of people, architecture and infrastructures within a limited space, shaping the way in which individuals interact and move. Speed defines the accelerated rhythm of urban life: its constant movement, its urgency and its demand for efficiency. Tension arises from the friction between personal space and collective experience, between movement and immobility, between the desire for connection and the need for retreat. These forces are both physical and psychological, and they can be found subtly framed within the visual language of the work.

The images shift between the vastness of collective urban structures and the intimacy of individual perspectives, making room for a layered and multifaceted reading of city life. The modular grid enables the work to adapt seamlessly to various formats and contexts. It evokes the rhythm of the urban outline, with its irregular yet harmonious line of buildings emerging and receding. In this way, the work reflects the ability for adaptability of urban landscapes themselves: simultaneously ordered and irregular, structured and alive.

The project includes several large-format compositions that provide a non-sequential perspective, enabling viewers to discover narratives in multiple directions. These compositions update the tradition of altarpiece-type works for a contemporary context, employing them to interpret both new and ancient mythologies. For example, the pyramid mosaic *Ascensión* [Ascension] is a monumental work that symbolises the ascension myth used by many religions and cultures. It represents the ascent to heaven from the city. Its lower section captures the density and compression of urban life. At the centre of the altarpiece, the journey unfolds as a passage towards heaven through the sublime. Finally, in its upper section, the Moon emerges as a cosmic body, subtly revealing both the known and the unknown, that which has yet to be discovered.

These new, increasingly impersonal and interchangeable settings are simultaneously recognisable and awaken a type of familiarity. This is why new urban landscapes could facilitate the integration of migrants. After all, we can recognise and reinvent ourselves under the same contemporary urban standards. In a world where cities are becoming increasingly similar to one another, and at the same time our way of life is becoming more liquid—as Zygmunt Bauman would put it—with changes in employment, home, city or country, these types of phenomena can have unexpectedly positive effects. Things are ultimately never black and white; it is in this sea of grey that we must navigate.





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Kutxa Fundazioa would like to
thank the people and bodies that
have played their part in one way
or another in this exhibition.

Mediation

Guided tours

Every Sunday at 5.30 pm in Basque and 6.30 pm in Spanish
Free admission with prior online booking

Saturday 25 April 2026 from 11.30 am to 1.30 pm, Kutxa Fundazioa
Artegunea

Hiri garaikidea [The Contemporary City] **family-workshop**, with
La Casa del Vacío.

Just like people, cities change all the time. How can buildings help
us to live better? A workshop to reflect on the relationship between
cities and their inhabitants as well as the way in which architecture
influences our way of being.

Children aged 6 to 12 with an adult

Basque

5 euros per child, free for adults. Prior booking on the website

Public programme

Saturday 25 April 2026 from 11 am to 1 pm, Kutxa Fundazioa Artegunea

**Architecture and Urban Planning Workshop: ¿Cómo conseguir
que el espacio público urbano sea un espacio de encuentro y**

relación? [How to make urban public space a place for gathering and
connection?], with the architect **Koldo Telleria**.

Bilingual Basque-Spanish

Booking and more information on the website

Friday 12 June 2026 at 6.30 pm, San Telmo Museoa, assembly room

**Presentation of the photobook *Urban Morphologies* with Jon Gorospe
and Juanjo Justicia (underbau).**

Spanish

Free admission until full capacity



Saturday 13 June from 10 am to 2 pm / 2.30 pm to 6.30 pm and

Sunday 14 June 2026 from 10 am to 2 pm

Photography workshop: *Derivas y prácticas de fotografía urbana*

[*Dérives and Urban Photography Practices*] with the photographer
Jon Gorospe.

Spanish

Price 15 euros

Booking and more information on the website

Information

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Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday

12:00 – 14:00

16:00 – 20:00

