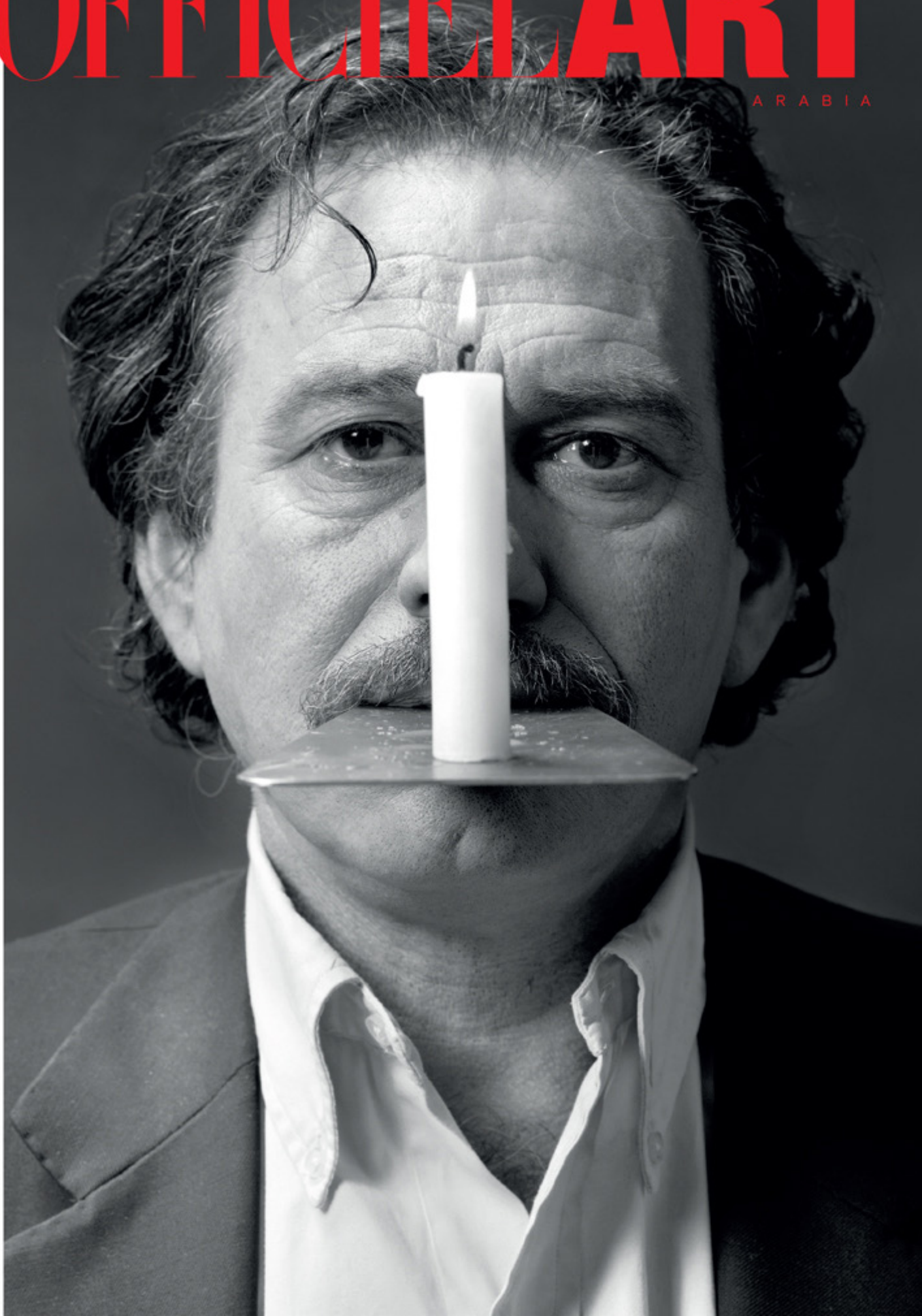


# L'OFFICIEL ART

ARABIA

**JANNIS KOUNELLIS**

Sebastián Velasco, Vincent Fournier, Reidar Särestöniemi, Anu Pentik, Roni Horn, Isamu Noguchi, Ketuta Alexi-Meskhishvili, Sarah Morris, Ari Marcopoulos © Archivio Claudio Abate





# VINCENT FOURNIER: BRASÍLIA, MODERNIST UTOPIAS

BY TANJA BELJANSKI



The National  
Museum #3,  
Brasília, 2019.

lends itself to Vincent Fournier's photography series that bear the name of the concrete capital. Here, architect Oscar Niemeyer's work constitutes the backdrop for Fournier's retrospect of the grandiose dream of posterity. Fournier's photographs buttress Niemeyer's consolidated vision that finds its counterpart from the urbanism of Le Corbusier; a political, as well as a technical project concerned with land use and its implications to transportation and physical activity.

In Fournier's images, Niemeyer's formalistic fictions appear like relinquished film sets from Jacques Tati's *Playtime*. The photographs exist as carefully composed and colored geometrical entities, just like Tati's, as if to remind us about the memory of a lost future. In this fictional mood of Brasília, states Vincent Fournier, "you feel like that you're wandering in a life-size stage, where fiction mixes reality. It reminds me of the novel *"Fiction"* from Jorge Luis Borges where the cartographers guilds struck a map of the empire whose size was that of the empire, and which coincided point for point with it. Everything is organized in a very mathematical way of seeing space, very abstract, like if the physical world would have been absorbed within a mathematical world. There is a contradiction in this as well. As a guiding concept, Oscar Niemeyer wanted to create a city that was meant to be shared, everyone in it together. But the opposite happened. Instead of drawing people closer, it separated them further away from each other."

In the contrived landscapes and interiors Fournier delivers, anything human is expressed rather via lack than excess. Throughout the series only a handful of people is positioned in the images.

"I use architecture like a cinema set. I'm playing with the balance of documentary style—with its distance, very frontal, very objective—but at the same time the images are carefully staged. They are composed of course, in a narrative and aesthetic way. All these figures in the urban landscape, I asked these people to stand there, to give this feeling, to impose this situation. It's all staged, but all the ingredients are real. These people were actually there. I talked with them and asked if they would mind following my instructions... It is an aesthetic intention to give a tension between a big solid concrete composition and something very dynamic on the scale of the small human figure."—explains Fournier.

In Fournier's exterior shot of the Chamber of Deputies, Niemeyer's concrete lines and curves appear like an absurdist outtake on governmental functionalism turned into an artistic experiment, more specifically into what appears like a flying saucer. Fournier's image constitutes a language that from the outset seems purely aesthetic but reveals itself to be above all ideological, like all modernist architecture was. Fournier's simple composition is elegant and clever, approaching the utopian object from an angle that provides us an opportunity to access the

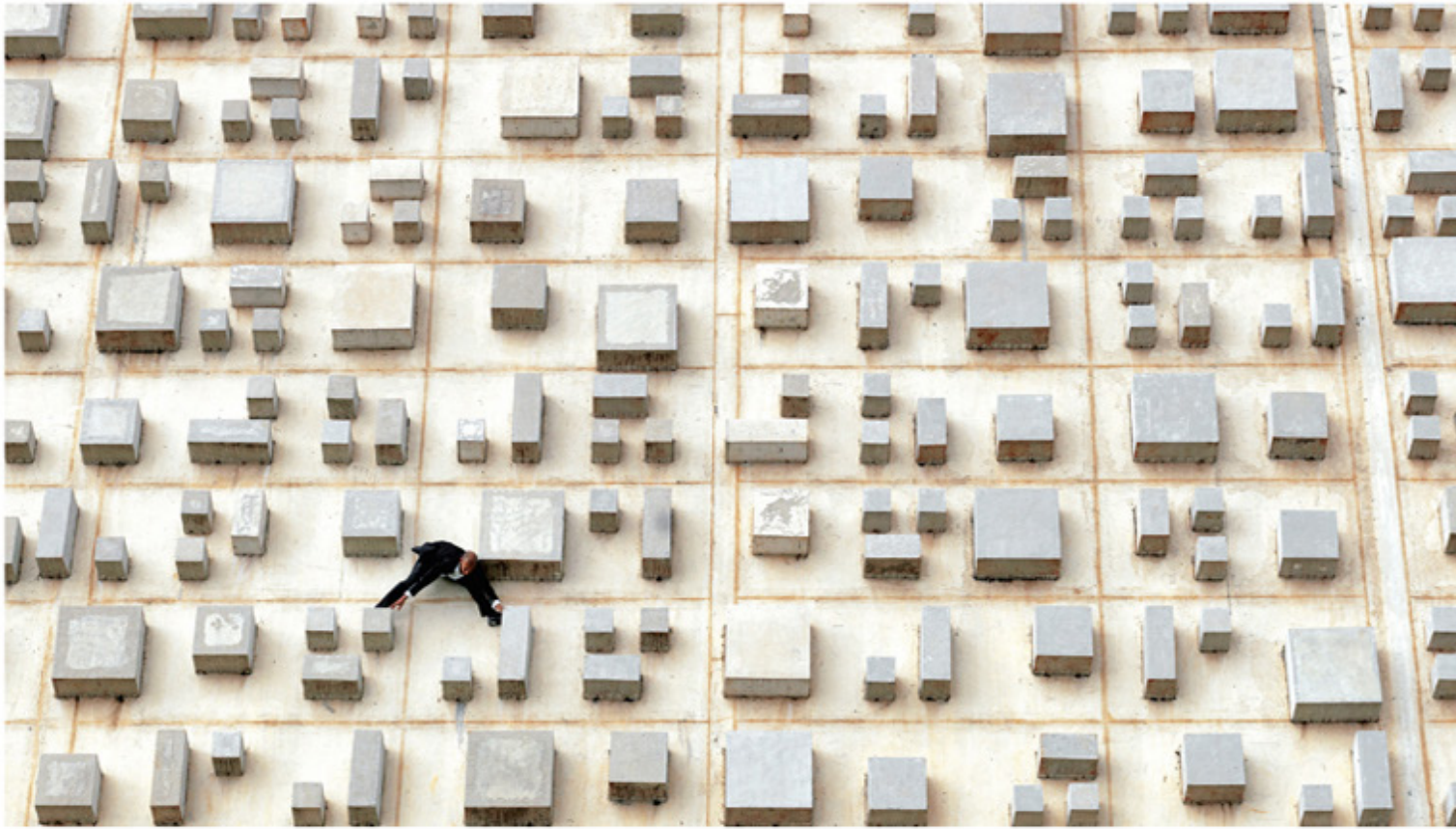
Brasília is a city in the middle of the desert composed of reinforced concrete, a paragon of the tenets of modernist architecture and city planning. Enfolded by the artificial Paranoá Lake, the city fashions a curious structural plane; a grid-like formula of post-war modernism arranged into a light curve. Brasília was constructed in the late 50's from scratch according to the blueprints by the urban planner Lucio Costa, landscape designer Roberto Burle Marx and the architect Oscar Niemeyer. The three designers proposed a set of speculative opportunities for the future of architectural utopia; future, that some sixty years later has lost itself somewhere in the murky water between the past and present. A far cry from the buzzing city streets of Rio and São Paulo, Brasília is a plateau mostly of purpose-built bureaucratic and governmental settings.

The austerity of modernist architecture



TV Tower, Brasília, 2012.





Facade of the Claudio Santoro National Theater, concrete panel by Atheros Bulcão, Brasília, 2012.

National Congress of Brazil #2, Brasília, 2019.







Chamber of Deputies (annex IX) #2, Brasília, 2012.

construction a new. Respectively, Fournier's work highlight the sophistication and precision of Niemeyer's practice.

In his interview with Christian Larsen, Associate Curator of Modern Decorative Arts and Design at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, for TLMag #31, Vincent Fournier explains: "Brasília is very unique. It's beautiful and fascinating how this city was designed with the same unified aesthetic. What rigor and madness! It is also a very special case since in just three years, the architect Oscar Niemeyer and the urban planner Lucio Costa, literally created this city in the middle of the desert, which, on the scale of the construction of a city, is instantaneous, like a photo that would immortalize a precise moment. The pilot plan of the city has thus remained unchanged, frozen in time due to its UNESCO World Heritage designation. Brasília shows the nostalgia for the golden age of the future of the 60s. It is a modernist temple fossilized in a utopian future that did not take place. My interest in Brasília also comes from my fascination with myths and stories that question and explore the future, from science to architecture, to technology. All my projects: space exploration, humanoid robots, the transformation of life through technology or even utopian architecture have in common to imagine the future in a historical perspective, as an archaeologist who dates different time strata. It may be the future of the past, or of a future very near, almost parallel to our present, or even of a possible future, a fantasized anticipation. The aesthetics and form of these "futuristic" worlds fascinate me, as do their way of rethinking the boundaries of the possible. I went to Brasília with this idea in mind. When I discovered the city with all those stilt-like columns, I photographed in horizontals only because I had this vision of a "walking city": a city with legs. I framed the city this way, with a very cinematographic mood, just like a long sequence shoot... I'm playing with the balance of documentary style—with its distance, very frontal, very objective—but at the same time the images are carefully staged. They are composed of course, in a narrative and aesthetically way."

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has made the

acquisition in 2016 of 5 large formats photographs from the Brasília series.

A book on this series of photographs, with contributions by Christian Larsen and Beatrice Galilee, Associate Curator of Architecture and Design at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, will be published by Noe in Spring 2020.

Vincent Fournier (Burkina Faso, 1970) is a French artist who explores significant mythologies of the future: space exploration, utopian architecture, artificial intelligence, living transformation... After being awarded a diploma in both sociology and visual arts, he studies at the National School of Photography in Arles and obtains his diploma in 1997. His works can be found in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) in New York, the Centre Pompidou Paris, the LVMH contemporary Art collection, the Dragonfly Collection in Massignac, the Museum of Fine Arts of Mâcon, Fondation Bullukian in Lyon, the ArtScience Museum in Dublin or the Baccarat Hotel Collection in New York, among others.

In recent years, his work has been exhibited throughout Europe and Asia.

Fournier's photographs from the Brasília series are part of the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the LVMH Contemporary Art Foundation in Paris. Space Project, Fournier's previous body of work addressed the scientific and technological utopias echoing in our collective imagination. You can read more about Fournier's Space Project in L'Officiel Arabia Hommes, November 2019 issue.