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Research on the Modelling Standard

Modelling Standard is a collaborative project by artists and is a book that explores how history, knowledge, and visual culture are connected. It was created by two Mexican artists named Erick Beltrán and Jorge Satorre, and was illustrated by a seasoned comic artist named Jorge Aviña. The project began in 2010 at Gasworks, an art center in London. The book takes the way academics and historians research things and turns the process into art. The artists were interested in a research method called Italian microhistory, which studies big ideas by looking at small clues. According to the Labor Gallery, the artists “lay out a web of relations based on a shared interest in the methodology proposed by Italian microhistory” and use Aviña’s “old-fashioned political cartoon and comic book styles” to explore “mythology, science, philosophy, popular fiction and cultural themes” (“Modelling Standard”).

As aforementioned, the project began in 2010 at Gasworks in London, where the artists covered the walls with photocopies of text, images, and diagrams that are now found in the book. This installation then became the book published by Roma Publications in 2014. This publication brings the visual research together as a mix of images and short texts (which resemble political cartoons), offering a new way to explore how ideas connect.

Satorre and Beltrán were inspired by Carlo Ginzburg’s “microhistory,” which was coined to describe a way of studying history that focused on looking at small clues and details instead of huge events. They use this concept to build a more abstract network of short stories, scientific

facts, myths, and philosophical thoughts. Each page links different ideas together, showing how meaning can shift depending on context and echoing the artists' goal of "working like a detective" by connecting "hints and traces" to build new forms of history (Beltrán and Satorre). The connections are meant to be just as important as the information itself.

The Modelling Standard project draws further from Carlo Ginzburg. Ginzburg outlines three elements of historical writing: "the search for clues, symptoms and fragmentary witnesses," "the reduction of scale," and "the exhaustive analysis of sources" ("Modelling Standard - Galeria Joan Prats"). The title itself refers to "the concept of the Standard Model... used in the field of physics to explain the almost invisible interactions which occur on a subatomic level in matter." Using this analogy, the artists aim "to detect and understand those fragile connections which already exist," creating "a network of caricatures and texts in which a series of famous characters become victims and killers of a great irresolvable crime," including figures like Freud, Ginzburg, and Warburg ("Modelling Standard - Galeria Joan Prats").

Another important idea that is present in the Modelling Standard is apophenia, which is seeing patterns in random information. The artists used this idea to show how people make connections between unrelated things or concepts. The Longitudes interview describes the project as involving "phantom limbs, microhistory, devil's drool, apophenia, collaboration, [and] information systems," showing how it mixes science, myth, and personal imagination ("Longitudes: Modelling Standard"). This concept of apophenia being used in the creative process helps reaffirm this idea of the artists inviting the viewers to think like detectives and trying to connect clues, even when the links are uncertain.

The Modeling Standard, as a book, somewhat preserves the original experimental and visual nature of the original installation that the artists did. The Longitudes interview explains

that the 58 individual drawings were “set out more like a draft,” giving a sense of the artists’ research process rather than a finished narrative (“Longitudes: Modelling Standard”). The comic-like illustrations by Jorge Aviña make complex ideas more accessible. It invites viewers to explore the connections between the different illustrations and subjects on their own. The book serves as a visual investigation, allowing the audience to engage with the author's methods and process.

Though not part of the physical media being discussed here, it is worth mentioning that the Modelling Standard project led to a comic called *El Hallazgo del Miembro Fantasma*, which was also by Erick Beltrán, Jorge Satorre, and Jorge Aviña. The comic develops the ideas from the drawings, using a story and pictures to show how images can affect the way we see things. While the book shows the research visually, the comic adds a narrative and characters, making it a complementary piece to the project.

Overall, *Modelling Standard* shows how artistic practice can make research into a visual and investigative experience. It is a book that invites active engagement and critical thought, and preserves the original thought behind the initial gallery and exhibition.

Works Cited

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