

# frieze

## Xavier Ribas

### ProjecteSD

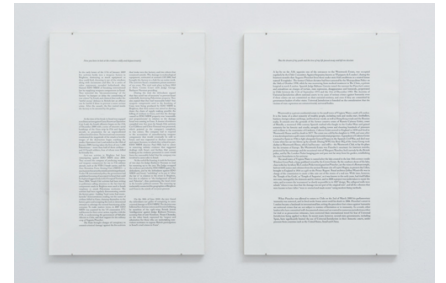
Xavier Ribas's astute exhibition 'Nitrate' was shown last year at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), toured to the Bluecoat, Liverpool, this summer and will visit the Museo Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona, in September. It comprises a condensed survey of the Catalan artist's career since the 1990s, alongside an expansive recent project that explores the history of nitrate mining in Chile. Ribas could simply be described as a photographer, yet the approach of his recent work is more akin to that of a tireless investigative journalist. In 'Nitrate' what, on the surface, appear to be photographs of rocky landscapes and street scenes around London's Bishopsgate, lists of people and property, and a collection of used tobacco wrappers, unearth an explosives-and-fertilizer money trail through colonial politics, from the Atacama Desert to the City of London and the trenches of World War I.

Ribas's third solo show at ProjecteSD amounts to an appendix of this long-term project and the artist's almost forensic approach to localities couched in broader political contexts, as well as an ongoing reportorial engagement with Chilean history. At the core of the exhibition are four large-scale photographs, three printed in black and white, each of which is companioned by a panel of text. Although the pairs comprise individual works, with particular photographs belonging to particular texts, Ribas places images and words far enough apart to enjoin that the case studies they disclose are each entangled with the other. *Thus the Dream of My Youth and the Love of My Life Passed Away and Left Me Desolate* (2015) depicts a ruined classical temple surrounded by woodland, as if an Arcadian scene from a painting by Claude Lorrain, while the work which lends its title to the exhibition, *It Would Never Be the Same Again* (2015), shows a headless marble figure. We read that the former is a bogus ruin close to the exclusive Wentworth Estate in Surrey, where the Chilean dictator General Pinochet was held under house arrest from 1998–2000 following an international arrest warrant issued by Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón that charged the former leader with torture, conspiracy and the

### About this review

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By *Max Andrews*



Xaver Ribas, *Now You Have to Look at the Evidence Coldly and Dispassionately*, 2015, ink-jet print on paper, each 59 x 41 cm

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Xavier Ribas, *Thus the Dream of My Youth and the Love of My Life Passed Away and Left Me Desolate*, 2015, photograph, 1.5 x 1.9 cm

Spanish diplomat. The ruins are composed of columns and stones from the ancient city of Leptis Magna, in present day Libya, and were shipped to England in 1816 on behalf of the Prince Regent (soon to be George IV) and later installed as a picturesque fantasy in Windsor Royal Park. The headless marble figure is a two-metre statue by sculptor Neil Simmons of a friend and supporter of Pinochet: former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. It was commissioned for the Houses of Parliament and decapitated on 3 July 2002 by Paul Kelleher, in order, as explained in Ribas's account of his trial, 'to help protect his son by drawing attention to the dangers facing the world'. Nearby, a shot of an empty and anonymous road, together with the story of a group of Brighton activists – who, in 2009, destroyed equipment at a factory supplying weapons components to Israel – comprises *Now You Have to Look at the Evidence Coldly and Dispassionately* (2015). (They were acquitted by the same judge that convicted Kelleher.) The view from a window at a museum in Vilafamés, Spain, in *Una Voce Única e Inevitable* (A Unique and Inevitable Voice, 2014) is of an unremarkable hillside. From 1971–91, the museum held 'in exile' an archive assembled in support of Salvador Allende, Chile's elected Socialist President who was deposed in the violent 1973 military coup launched by Pinochet with the support of the CIA.

That the view is from the archive, rather than being of it, is crucial: in these potent works, Ribas attempts a form of

triangulation with the trajectories of the photograph and written language – yet, what he hopes to pinpoint is not really to be found by looking directly at locations so much as from audacious moral and spatial strategies: covert action, expatriation, universal jurisdiction, coup d'états, vandalism and the 'lawful excuse' defence that committing an offence can be justified in order to prevent a more serious crime.

### **Max Andrews**

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