

ARCHITECTURE

PHOTOGRAPHY

Brutalist beauties

Nine limited-edition images capture the power of Europe's concrete colossi, writes **Stephen Todd**.

Straight out of film school at London's Central Saint Martins college, Don Cameron began the millennium directing music videos for Blur, Moloko and the Pet Shop Boys. The retro-futuristic elegance of his aesthetic jibed nicely with a time focused at once backwards and forwards, and soon the Dubbo-born lad was being commissioned to create advertising for big European brands such as Audi, Braun and L'Oréal.

It was on one such job, for Switzerland Tourism, that he saw his first Brutalist churches: blocky concrete mid-century buildings that seemed to surge from villages dating to the Middle Ages.

So began a two-decade fascination with some of the most revered, and reviled, architecture of the past 80 years.

"I was reading a lot of JG Ballard's dystopian fiction at the time," recalls Cameron, now ensconced in the apartment-gallery in Sydney's Point Piper where he showcases mid-century furniture and lighting. "I'd also recently come across the 1967 book *Bunker Archeology*, in which

French philosopher Paul Virilio recounts the brutal beauty of these structures, thousands of which are spread across the Atlantic coastline of Europe."

Virilio likened these behemoths, built at Hitler's command to form a defensive wall between Nazi-occupied Europe and the UK, to Etruscan tombs, Aztec structures, "little temples". Or as Cameron puts it, they're "like silent sentinels marking the point at which land, sea and sky merge, staring out at the infinite".

Paradoxically, he notes, they were designed to evoke awe and heighten foreboding while practically disappearing into their surroundings, their giant forms composed to cast little shadow.

It's this aspect that he's striven to capture in *Communion*, nine large-scale black-and-white photographs chosen from a catch spanning 2002-2020 of bunkers, churches and spomenik s, the monuments built in Tito's Yugoslavia in the 1960s and '70s to commemorate World War II battle sites.

Shot on film using a classic Hasselblad



camera, the identically sized images are each named only by place.

Vienna depicts the Church of the Most Holy Trinity, better known as the Wotrubas Church after Austrian sculptor Fritz Wotrubas, who devised its neo-cubist form in the early 1970s. Nevers is of the Church of Sainte Bernadette of Banlay, in central France, designed by Virilio and architect Claude Parent as an evocation of the bunkers along the Normandy coastline.

The abandoned colossi Cameron photographed are on the Channel Islands of



From left: Don Cameron with his image Kozara ('Capitole' sofa by Pierre Guariche, c1960; foreground sculpture Costruttivo 74, Modulo L by Nicola Carrino); and the images Nevers, Neviges and Jersey.



Need to know *Communion* by Don Cameron is showing at Gallery Sally Dan-Cuthbert in Rushcutters Bay. Available as an edition of five, with two artist's proofs.



Jersey, Guernsey and Alderney; the spomeniks scattered across Bosnia and Herzegovina. "They're often in incredibly remote locations, at the edge of crumbling cliff faces on isolated islands, at the ends of trackless fields, deep in the countryside," he says.

The challenge of "collecting" these hard-to-find artefacts was one Cameron relished, the same way he thrives on locating rare furniture from the same period, which he imports for Australian clients.

Cameron graduated with a degree in visual communication from the University of Technology Sydney and completed a postgraduate degree at Saint Martins in 1999. His short films, such as *Sadisteria* (a hybrid of "sadism" and "hysteria") and *Paradisiac*, got him noticed on the indie film circuit and hanging out at Soho editing suites brought him into contact with producers from edgy record labels. "Before I knew it, I was directing three music videos back to back in three weeks," he says – including for Moloko's *Indigo* and Blur's *Music Is My Radar*, now part of the British Film Institute's permanent archive.

By his mid-20s Cameron was directing film commercials for telecoms, electronics and motoring clients as well as in fashion and beauty. "Working in the world of material culture, especially in advertising but also the music industry, which is essentially about selling product, I was obsessed with the staging, the production, all the elements that happen behind the scenes to perfect the final image," he says.

"Going off on my own to photograph silent things in isolation was about creating something ... outside the world of commercial imperatives."

And yet, Cameron still conceives of the total package. When a client shows interest in the furniture he imports, he creates a storyboard using key pieces as anchors and building up a narrative with work by contemporaneous designers.

"I like to include contradictory pieces that add an edge to a room," he says. "The best kind of narratives are created from unrelated objects brought into dialogue with one another."

As for *Communion*, the nine images are broken into three typologies – bunker, church, monument – housed in hefty brass frames – respectively right-angled, rounded, chamfered – of Cameron's own devising.

"A lot of people buy work unframed, then ask the gallerist how the artist would like the work framed. Well, this is my answer – they get no choice," he laughs.

"I wanted each piece to capture a little bit offorever." **L&L**

