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Capitol Collective

Jorge Otero-Pailos

25 September 2026–9 January 2027

OPENING RECEPTION

25 September 2026, 5–7 p.m. in the atrium
of the gallery. The artist will be in attendance.



JORGE OTERO-PAILOS | *Capitol Triptych*, 2022

Triptych: acrylic paint on canvas

Left and right panels: 34 x 18 in (86.4 x 45.7 cm) each, center panel: 34 x 34 in (86 x 86 cm)

Photo by Marylene Mey © Jorge Otero-Pailos

(SANTA FE, NM) Jorge Otero-Pailos Reimagines the Visual Language of Architecture and Collective Memory.

Zane Bennett Contemporary Art presents *Capitol Collective*, an exhibition by artist, architect, and experimental preservationist Jorge Otero-Pailos that expands the visual language of the architectural plan to explore its painterly potential, questioning its authoritative portrayal as the origin of architecture, and revealing it as a generative medium that continually renegotiates historical meaning, collective memory, lived experience, and dreams of the future. The exhibition investigates a collection of architectural plans from well-known public buildings to intimate portraits of the artist's childhood home, each of which brings to mind different collectives from the nation to the family, and different architectural forms to which feelings of belonging attach.

At the center of the exhibition is a new body of paintings and drawings based on the architectural plan of the United States Capitol. Rather than treating the plan as a neutral technical document, Otero-Pailos approaches it as a changing artifact of civic life: a spatial instrument through which collective ideals of democracy, access, representation, ceremony, and power have been given architectural form and repeatedly transformed over time.

The Capitol works are shown in relationship to plans of the artist's various homes over time; deeply personal spaces painted from memory. The continuity in visual language between these paintings invites a dialogue between them, reflecting on the transference of collective meanings and attachments from private to public architecture and vice versa. For example, the painting titled *The People's House* explores how domesticity inhabits this architectural plan and participates in the construction of individual and collective identities.

The visual dialogue in the first room around notions of being at home expands in the second room through the artist book *Treaties on De-Fences*, which contains a series of prints exploring architectural plans associated with being abroad. The book incorporates the famous triangular architectural plan of the former US Embassy in Oslo, designed by Eero Saarinen in 1959, which Otero-Pailos helped preserve between 2017 and 2023. The room labels on the plan are replaced by the titles of the 51 prints, turning the architectural drawing into a table of contents. The prints can be folded and inserted over the plan, where they also function as paper models of the embassy. A selection of unfolded prints is shown on the walls of the second room.

Across these different architectural scales, from the home to the embassy to the Capitol, the exhibition examines architectural plans not as static containers of history, but as material and visual media through which collective memories are produced, layered, contested, altered, and transmitted.

Gallery director Carina Evangelista writes:

"Otero-Pailos begins with one of architecture's most authoritative forms of representation: the plan. But the hand-drawn lines, washes, and handwritten texts in *Capitol Collective* continually disturb its apparent precision. The works remind us that while architecture can prescribe order, the life that unfolds within it never remains fixed. Buildings, and the institutions they represent, are continually reshaped by those who occupy them."

In *Capitol Collective*, Otero-Pailos extends the methods of experimental preservation into painting. His practice has long challenged the assumption that conserving architecture means returning it to a singular, authoritative historical state.

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For press or image inquiries, please contact Spencer Linford at spencer@zanebennettgallery.com.

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Instead, he approaches buildings as accumulations of material evidence, environmental change, human occupation, interpretation, and memory.

Otero-Pailos states:

"Architectural plans conventionally project certainty. Walls occupy precise positions, rooms have designated purposes, circulation follows prescribed routes. Collective memory, and these paintings, are far less orderly. They are processes that generate a different kind of clarity; one that emerges through accumulation, association, and change."

About the Artist

Jorge Otero-Pailos is an American artist, architect, and experimental preservationist whose work operates at the intersection of art, architecture, and cultural heritage. Through installations, sculptures, paintings, prints, public art, architectural interventions, and preservation projects, he investigates what societies choose to preserve, what conventional preservation practices leave behind, and how overlooked materials and forms of evidence can generate new understandings of the past and future.

A pioneer of experimental preservation, Otero-Pailos expands preservation beyond the conservation of recognized monuments to include ephemeral and frequently overlooked forms of cultural evidence, including atmospheric dust, smells, sounds, architectural fragments, barriers, and other traces of human occupation. His work treats preservation not simply as the protection of inherited objects, but as a creative and critical practice capable of revealing latent histories and producing new cultural meanings.

His ongoing series *The Ethics of Dust* transformed conservation cleaning into a method of cultural inquiry, using translucent latex casts to remove and preserve atmospheric pollution accumulated on historic monuments. The resulting works give material form to substances normally discarded in the process of conservation, revealing pollution itself as a record of environmental and social history.

Otero-Pailos's works have been commissioned for and exhibited at major heritage sites, museums, foundations, and biennials, including Artangel's public art commission at the UK Parliament, the Chicago Architecture Biennial, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Frieze London, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Venice Art Biennale, the Victoria and Albert Museum, Tai Kwun Centre for Heritage and Arts, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. He was a visual arts resident at the American Academy in Rome in 2021.

As a preservation architect, Otero-Pailos collaborates on the creative restoration and interpretation of landmark sites. Alongside his artistic and architectural practice, Otero-Pailos is Professor and Director of Historic Preservation at Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP), where he also directs the Columbia Preservation Technology Lab. In 2017, he founded the first PhD program in Historic Preservation in the United States.

He is founder and editor-in-chief of *Future Anterior*, editor of *Historic Preservation Theory: An Anthology* (2023), co-editor of *Experimental Preservation* (2016), co-author with Rem Koolhaas of *Preservation Is Overtaking Us* (2014), and author of *Architecture's Historical Turn* (2010).

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Otero-Pailos is a licensed architect who studied architecture at Cornell University and earned a doctorate in architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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JORGE OTERO-PAILOS | *Capitol 3*, 2022
Triptych: acrylic paint on canvas
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Photo by Marylene Mey © Jorge Otero-Pailos

JORGE OTERO-PAILOS | *The Unthinkability of Letting Go*, 2005
Acrylic paint on canvas, 16 x 20 in (40.6 x 50.8 cm)
Photo by Marylene Mey © Jorge Otero-Pailos



JORGE OTERO-PAILOS | *Time Signature*, 2005
Acrylic paint on canvas, 16 x 20 in (40.6 x 50.8 cm)
Photo by Marylene Mey © Jorge Otero-Pailos



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