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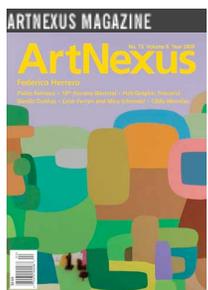
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NEWS



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Group Show **Space, Unlimited**

30/06/2009

Institution: Art Museum of the Americas

Terri Weissman

Ada Bobonis Ventanas



Angela Bonadies. Fantasma



Magdalena Fernandez. Mobilepa



Guerra De La Paz. Spring Sprangs

Space, Unlimited, a broadly focused exhibition at the Art Museum of the Americas in Washington, D.C. featuring five individual artists and one collaborative team, comments on the way processes of visual perception affect one's awareness of and attitude toward both private and social space and in both natural and urban environments. This is a big topic. In fact, as the exhibition's title suggests: it is unlimited. Yet as a theme for the show, it works. In part because the curators, Tatiana Flores and Laura Roulet, have done an excellent job of choosing artists whose projects, though highly variegated, nevertheless speak to one another on both formal and conceptual terms. And as a result, the show's installation challenges viewers to question how (or if) they differentiate between various types of space (personal, political, artistic, dream, technological, architectural, etc. al.), and, what such distinctions reveal in the first place.

On the first floor, an installation by the Puerto Rican artist Ada Bobonis, titled Ventanas (2008), includes a series of lightboxes featuring photographs of the renovation of the La Concha Hotel in San Juan, which, when it first opened in 1958 stood as a model of tropical modernism, embodying the era's optimistic attitude toward progress and growth. The boxes line the room as the title suggests like a chain of windows, but against the usual function of a window, these objects present not only a view outward (we see scenes from the La Concha's actual renovation—the building in mid-construction, equipment, structural supports, and so on), but also a reflection inward (we see scenes, tinted red, blue and yellow, of an abstracted interior space of which all specificities remain unknown). The play here between the imagery of modernization and its collapse into an abstracted dream or nostalgic memory space, speaks volumes about the failures of the hallucinatory nature of modernist utopian visions, but also about perseverance, flexibility and the inevitable transitions and slippages that occur between epochs of history.

Magdalena Fernández's video installation, 1pm006, Ara Araurana (2006), a nearly two minute video loop displays a digital animation of a geometric abstract pattern composed out of blue, yellow and lime green rectangles and squares. The visual reference is both to Fernández's national artistic heritage—she is Venezuelan and the video's forms clearly recall a history of Venezuelan geometric and kinetic abstraction—and to European Modernism, as the colored shapes also recall the spare canvases of Piet Mondrian and the early twentieth century De Stijl movement. But as with Bobonis's installation, the references to Modernism's (utopian) past are not without intention. Through her, that tradition is re-examined.

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Lilian Garcia Roig



Nayda Collazo Llorens, NCLdeta

intervention enough here that invention is communicated through humor and a sly wink-wink to the viewer. As viewers watch the animated shapes slightly shift form from moment to moment, they also hear the video's soundtrack, which consists of a squawking parrot. It is a funny moment: the realization that a caged bird is calling out to you, and not just any bird, but a parrot, whose key characteristic is the ability to repeat the sounds it is taught, to pause, and then repeat again. (¿All systems go.¿ Pause. ¿All systems go.¿ Or, more familiarly, ¿Polly want a cracker?¿ Pause. ¿Polly want a cracker?¿) This is repetition without understanding, a repetition of language dislodged from language's legibility, unrestricted and floating free. Unlimited, it functions as an effective, thoughtful commentary on complex and unstable relationship between historical, remembered and lived spaces.

It is a message too that resonates with ESCaperucita and Little Red Flying Hood (2008), a graphic work displayed in the museum's first floor back gallery by the Puerto Rican-born, New York-based artist, Nayda Collazo-Llorens. In this work Collazo-Llorens uses text to tell the story of a bilingual, same-sex couple traveling by a single engine plane up the Atlantic coast. At some point the couple encounters trouble, first expressed in Spanish and English, and then, more frantically, in the form of the Morse code SOS signal. Yet, as the situation becomes more dire, and the need for effective communication more desperate¿just at this moment, the (near) universally understood ¿beep, beep, beep¿ SOS signal, the precise signal designed to reveal location and convey distress, contorts into the indecipherable ¿bip, bip, bip,¿ rendering the message, and the couple's location, unintelligible. The transmission becomes nothing but sound, heard but not understood, repeated¿like the squawks of the parrot¿but emptied out of meaning.

However, the unbounded nature of the exhibition's theme also makes sense for how the chosen works defy expectation, in terms both of artistic identity, but also¿ and more pointedly¿of medium specificity. All of the work challenges the boundaries or limits of the space of painting, photography, video and sculpture, and in so doing, ask spectators to question how representation and perception operate. This is especially true of the work that occupies the museum's second floor, such as the striking installation, Spring, Sprang, Sprung, by the Miami-based, Cuban-born creative team, Guerra de la Paz (Alain Guerra and Neraldo de la Paz). The work, a giant tree constructed from discarded clothes envelops the viewer creating a space that, on the one hand, feels whimsical, but on the other, uncertain and indeterminate. For whose clothes are these? And where have the owners of these garments gone? The viewer is placed in an alternate reality, but it is unclear whether this place is playful or foreboding. Correspondingly, there is a confusion of media: the resolute thing-ness of the constructed tree would seem to situate the viewer in a space of sculpture, yet the glorious plays of color, announce a connection to the pictorial. This is, then, a space of neither; it is an in-between space where it has not yet been determined how the landscape will register its history. Similarly, the painting installation in the gallery next to Spring, Sprang, Sprung, a work by Cuban-born, Tallahassee-based painter, Lilian Garcia-Roig, creates a physical environment that challenges the viewer's assumptions about what a painted surface should look like. Heavily loaded with pigment, these works, like Spring, Sprang, Sprung, announce their thing-ness, and insist that the viewer engage with the work's materiality, its accumulated surface, its history in the making. The question posed throughout the show by its curators is: What role does visual perception¿how we literally see¿play in our understanding of both physical and conceptual place? The exhibition answers this question with six compelling installations, which, when viewed together provide diverse responses that nevertheless combine to reveal place exists increasingly just beyond our grasp.