

THE AMERICAS: BETWEEN SHORTAGE AND EXCESS

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I think that in the end the project *Las Américas* has been overwhelmed by the magnitude of its goals. You will agree that it is enormous task to try to make some kind of a meaningful statement about current art with a future, in a continent that it is actually two continents, even three if we look at Central America and the Caribbean separately from North and South America.

It certainly seems that the organisers of ARCO contemplated this possibility, since for this task they enlisted no less than 16 art critics and curators to choose 25 galleries from Latin America, the United States and Canada. Supposedly, these galleries were to bring to ARCO the artists who have the future of American art in their hands.

Whether this was the reason or not, the truth is that this large assembly of critics has failed to properly carry out the mission assigned to them. Unless you think that the endless American diversity can be contained in some fifty-odd names and that the future expected from that continent (as is suggested by the project *Las Américas*) is nothing but a continuation of its current state. It is the current state of art in the Americas, but it is also the state of international art, as is shown by the fact that the overwhelming majority of the artists brought to the fair by the aforementioned galleries do their work from within the same coordinates and using the same variety of rhetorical and technical devices as the contemporary artists featured in what could be called the normal section of ARCO (since the word commercial may seem offensive to some). The artists featured in *Las Américas* use video, photography, performance, installation, surrealistic or unspecific objects and they address issues related to the prosaic nature of daily life, personal mythologies, the impact of advertising and the media, and new tech-

nologies, asides from more controversial topics such as gender, identity and otherness. There are even some pieces that criticise or deconstruct the panoptical regime and its mate, scopophilia.

Possible itineraries

I know that in such a scenario, the itinerary can be begun at any point, but I would recommend starting at the gallery *Lucía de la Puente* from Lima, Peru. I don't make this suggestion just because in Spain we have very little knowledge of contemporary Peruvian art, but because this small stand contains very valuable work by two young artists. Their work is clear and cannot easily be condensed, and yet it is very representative of what it means to be artist within the context of South America, in a land that is subjected to all kinds of extreme tensions.

The most direct work is by *Cecilia Noriega-Bozovich*, who is showing a series of tampered photographs depicting some of the most emblematic places in the capital of Peru, accompanied by the photograph of a Jeep, the classic all-terrain North American car, painted flamingo pink. And a series of scale models of helicopters, and tanks, also North American and painted pink. The work of *Sylvia Fernández* is perhaps complementary. Her paintings, which she calls picto-infographies, establish revealing dialectics between her own self-portrait and the contradictory encouragement women receive, such as promiscuity and virginity, or marriage and prostitution.

The next step in this imaginary course would take us to the *Enrique Guerrero* gallery, from Mexico City, who probably has the most well-rounded stand in this section of ARCO, although it is also the most updated one, and perhaps one of the up & coming. Here you can see, a couple of the soot paintings made by a flame-eater hired by *Santiago Sierra*, with a video that documents how the series was made. You can also see a piece

by *Teresa Margolles*, a colleague of *Sierra* who is exhibiting a stuffed horse foetus placed on a metal swing, like a toy horse (perhaps a perverse tribute to the little wooden horse by *Gombrich*?). This stand is completed with large-format paintings by *Carlos Amorós*, who is as renowned a Mexican artist as *Sierra* and *Margolles*.

Finally, the third step should take us to the *Alcuadrado* gallery, from Bogotá, which is showcasing recent, very impressive works by *Óscar Muñoz*. On a solitary monitor and on a large plasma screen we can see the artist's hand holding a paintbrush and painting large portraits of adult men on a rough stone or concrete surface. But, we are told, since he paints them with water, the water evaporates and the portrait vanishes and it would disappear completely if it weren't because *Muñoz* insists on painting it again, indefinitely. There is also a group of portraits framed with unvarnished wood, which are made with sugar cubes stained with coffee. In both works, this great current artist expresses his will to deconstruct the eternity of portraits, whether photographic or not.

The south also exists. Indeed, it does exist, judging from what galleries from Argentina and, especially, Brazil are showcasing. The gallery *Ruth Benzacar* is showing small-format paintings by *Rosana Fuertes*. Each of these has borders whose geometric design features borders that contain quotes from political leaders and intellectuals, from differ-



1. Proyecto de parque infantil, Teresa Margolles (Galería Enrique Guerrero, Stand 9UC31); 1. S.F., Sylvia Fernández (Lucía de la Puente, Stand 9UC20)

ent periods of Argentina's past, which show the artist's desire to make it clear why the what happened in Argentina, indeed happened. The gallery is also showing a series of gauchos by *Daniel Ontiveros* which he selected from a popular calendar and stained with blood.

Regarding the representatives from Brazil, the gallery *Nara Roesler* stands out for its impeccable stand. There we can see work by *Chaves* that makes reference to the "sculptures" improvised by neighbours to warn each other about potholes in the street. *Brigida Baltar* shows large-format cibachrome images illustrating her repeated attempts to metamorphose into another life form, different from her own.

In conclusion I'd like to recommend the video *An American Day* but *Jonathan Calm*, in the gallery *Caren Golden*, which narrates in six minutes how an African-American girl's life was changed on September 11. Hers and all the other Americans, obviously. ■

