

# ArtNexus

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35  
years

**Diango Hernández**

Luisa Richter • María José Arjona

The 8<sup>th</sup> Mercosur Biennial

12<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial 2011

The Lyon Biennial

The Whisper of Things

Wifredo Díaz

Carlito Carvalhosa



\$8 US





Gabriel Orozco. *Untitled*, 1994. Print on paper.

disengage from the search for identity that had so occupied the discussion in Mexico, and in general across Latin America, in the 1990s—a discussion that was centered on diasporic and forced-migration processes—to focus on a new discourse derived from economic neoliberalism and the loss of a center provoked by globalization. A kind of committed art that militated between aesthetic object and satirical critique, almost always focalized on the distorted image of Mexico that the State apparatus insisted on constructing, particularly facing the United States.

Satire as an argument to problematize Mexico's degraded social landscape, as well as the extreme fragility and the hilarious situation of power represented in its official media, is also present in one of the show's most eloquent works, Yoshua Okón's *Orillese a la orilla* (1999-2000): A series of videos, manipulated to various degrees by the artist, showing police playing the nefarious role of

guns-for-hire and establishing themselves as society's anti-heroes.

In turn, SEMEFO attempted in his performances to understand Mexico's social degradation beyond a comical or satirical function, carrying it into a historical plane and highlighting the status of violence in contemporary Mexican society in the political, social, ethical, and even cultural realms. In their *Larvarium* (1992), a wooden coffin appears upside down, closed by several chains, like just another object that were part of our lives' collective imagination. Undoubtedly inspired by the aesthetic of Viennese action-art, of Joseph Beuys or Gina Pane, SEMEFO sought to subvert the canon of representation in Western art through a variety of means, and especially in radically different contexts.

Titling this show *antes de la resaca* seems particularly accurate if one understands the context of the 1990s as the golden age of what many consider the "boom" era of Mexican art. It is clear that later cohorts were not compelled by the need to create work spaces, having learned the methods and exhibition circuits implied in contemporary art in detriment of experimentation and dialog.

In recent years, a large number of art galleries have emerged as the main spaces of exhibition for young artists. The fact that the show ends in 2005, the year of Mexico at ARCO (Spain's contemporary art fair), is not a coincidence. While in previous years artistic practice had been deeply influenced by political and social debacles, now commercial events became fodder for production and scaffold for visibility. Yet, and despite risk having been substituted by comfort, Mexico's inefficient cultural policies soon enough overtook all the new discourses generated in the 1990s. Above all, because many of these artists began to be widely recognized and collected at the international level. I believe



Yoshua Okón. *Orillese a la orilla* (*Get ashore of the shore*), 1999-2000. Detail of the series of manipulated videos.

that this has spurred many young artists to work on the basis of new references, once again questioning the past and the construction of history on the one hand, and the mechanisms of the city (no longer interested in its idiosyncrasies as the result of a failed modernity, however, but in the way in which Mexico has adapted to the global process). This is a type of art that reformulates the idea of the historical archive and the explanation of history from alternative perspectives, deploying strategies of micro-history in order to juxtapose and thread "personal theories" capable of achieving an echo in the Mexican public sphere. Perhaps this is a moment for reflection, after the whole *resaca* (hangover).

Ruth Estévez

## **Disillusions. Gendered Visions of the Caribbean and its Diasporas**

Middlesex County College. Studio Theater Gallery. Edison, New Jersey

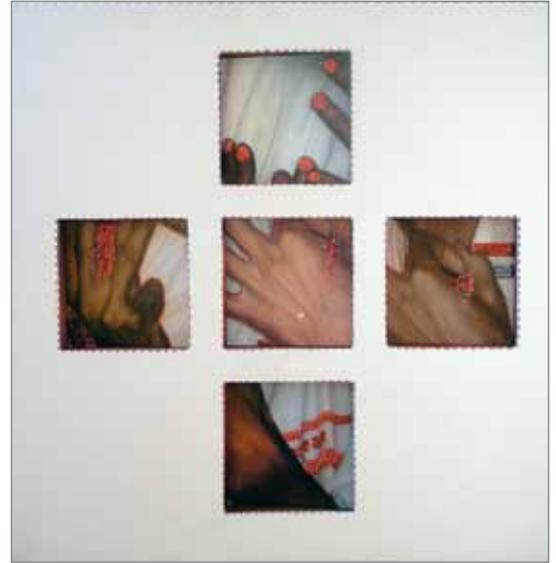
*Disillusions* is first perceived from outside, through the large window of the Studio Theater gallery. It is a gender-based exhibition that brings into view twelve artists who are not commonly seen in these parts. Gender and diaspora are the articulating threads that connect in the majority of the works presented. Video and video-performance, performance

and installation as its record, collage, object, drawing, painting, photography, and mixed techniques are the range of expressions found through the forty two works selected by curator Tatiana Flores, who says that "... through this art by women of Anglophone, Francophone, and Spanish-speaking origins, it becomes clear that common themes emerge from the experience of

gender despite regional differences. The title of the show, *Disillusions*, refers to the tendency of the works on exhibit to break illusions—pictorial or of any other kind—to encompass formal fragmentation, incorporating discontinuity and blurring meaning. These artists refer a disarticulated, subjective, and often incomprehensible contemporary female experience."



**Asha Ganpat.** *Things*, 2011. Ink on paper. 24 x 46 x 4 in. (60 x 116,8 x 10 cm.). Courtesy of the artist.



**Vladimir Cybil Charlier.** *Red Cross Tristan*, 2009. Sequins and beads on inkjet and acrylic, canvas and wood. 36 ¼ x 34 in. (92 x 86,3 cm.). Courtesy of the artist.

Entering the exhibition, viewers encounter many paintings and videos to their right, and a large column at the center. There—inside of which hides an elevator—Sofía Maldonado, born in Puerto Rico and active in the Eastern US, created an ephemeral large-format drawing-painting on the theme of the female figure. To the right, three artists share the space. Nicola Awai, hailing from Trinidad, plays with an impressive graphic language, always well received in the Caribbean. In the way of the color scales characteristic of 1970s conceptualism, that paper displays rectangles that refer not to the chromatic material of the visual arts but to cosmetics available in the local market. A guardrail—resembling

spears, or crowns, or the friezes of medieval buildings, or signals—forms a space where halting pictorial references to “banana republics” appear.

Next, three works by Haitian artist Vladimir Cybil Charlier are among the salient points of the show. She has four mixed-technique works, three in the first floor we are currently visiting and one in the lower level. In relief, with clearly narrative titles, Charlier depicts details of scenes that evoke the world of transvestite and homosexuality. These are references to her family, with sequins and beads embroidered on ink-jet and acrylic prints on fabric, representing male body figures. In three TV monitors from the 1970s, Jessica Lagunas brings back fragments

of the Red Riding Hood story through the titles of her videos: *Para besarte mejor*, *Para verte mejor*, *Para acariciarte mejor*. The screen presents a reiterated painting of lips, eyes, and nails, in correspondence with these titles. A large figure suspended on the last wall of the gallery and the articulation of a hallway/balcony attend to the relationship between architectural features. A sequence of small works on paper opens alongside Laguna’s videos, like the pages of a book. These are interventions on antique floral publications. Ana Patricia Palacios adopts a tragic reference to the irony of an always-active femininity: she refers to a beauty contest in Ghana for female war amputees. In acrylic and gouache, the Colombian artist intertwines the

**Sandra Stephens.** *Intangibility*, 2009. Single channel video and tire. 5’2”. Courtesy of the artist.



**Ana Patricia Palacios.** *Those Missing II*, 2009. Pigments on canvas. 46 x 44 in. (116 x 112 cm.).





**Holly Bynoe.** *Generation Fight*, 2010. Digital collage on aged duratone newsprint. 28 x 28 in. (71 x 71 cm.). Courtesy of the artist.

rigidity of military training with femininity and motion in space.

María Elena Álvarez, from Venezuela, participates with two mixed techniques on canvas. The collage sections introduce female figures in

newsprint paper, like news items on the board of the game of life. With luggage and home items, she refers to aspects of the language of women in diaspora. Firelei Báez is the author of the already mentioned giant female figure. In mixed technique, graphically fragmented, she responds to the abundant physical proportions that are typical of Caribbean women, as well as their flirtiness and penchant for makeup. In vertical opposition, in the gallery's lower level, we find three more works by the same artist. In acrylic on canvas, her gestures create original, evanescent embroideries. Contiguously in the lower level is Melissa Calderón's installation: Calderón created *Linger* and deposited on it the fragments of paper that were part of the performance. The Puerto Rican artist brought forth organic materials—little twigs—as well as industrial ones. Holly Bynoe (from Bequia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines) used ancestral figures and constructions to present in her three works a careful technique of graphic visual collage, with refined openings and interventions.

Asha Ganpat (Trinidad/USA) creates in *Things* an installation of everyday objects that represent a portrait of her family, constituted by a shelf with ink-on-paper drawings and cutouts. Her single work in this show is original in nature and reso-

lution. Rejin Leys (Haiti/USA) exemplifies in *100 Drawings, Including Secrets* the fragmentation and dispersion of tender organic disassemblies. Through three mono-channel videos, Sandra Stephens presents several versions of Jamaican women and the diaspora. *Hair*, a repeated topic concerning personal grooming and the lack of acceptance of naturally curly hair. In collaboration with Allie Tery, Stephens presented *Snow White Remixed*, a video-installation where a prepubescent girl symbolizes the realms of inherited and ratified femininity. The installation is comprised of an armchair for the viewer, matching the baroque frame set for the projection, and headphones. Stephens' other video-installation, *Intangibility*, from 2009, emerges from diaspora, the sea, and sand as the symbolic site of movement towards diaspora; here, a car tire set on the floor circumscribes the projection. These two solid interventions just mentioned complete the scene of the central thematic duet. In closing, a coincidence: The Caribbean is a unique, insular, labyrinthine geographic region that has found in this gallery an adequate physical space for the exhibition of its shapes.

**Graciela Kartofel**

## The Twenty-Sixth Santo Domingo Biennial

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

In Latin America, where cultural projects often lack solid structures and policies that guarantee their continuity, the Santo Domingo Biennial stands out for its longevity.

The first edition was held *from* and coincided *with* the start of the second Trujillo regime, in 1942. Other cultural enterprises were also launched during the dictatorship, such

as the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes and the Galería Nacional. The Museo de Arte Moderno, MAM, for many years the site for the Biennial, opened in 1976 in the context of the creation of the Plaza de la Cultura, which, conceived from the centralizing perspective of confining *all* culture in a *single* territory, aggregates several of the country's important cultural spaces. Such is the case of the *Museo del hombre dominicano*, whose discourse seeks to project the notion of the Dominican Republic as a nation felicitously formed by the harmonious tripartite integration of its ethnic and cultural components. In contrast, the MAM, under the brilliant leadership of María Elena Ditrén, leans more and more towards a conception of the museum not as a *center* of culture and knowledge, but as their *generator*. The 26<sup>th</sup> edition of the Santo Domingo Biennial clearly showed the dialectic between both tendencies.

Despite its solemnly official character and the fact that it continues to operate under a competitive, Nineteenth-Century model circumscribe to national spaces, the Bien-

**Guadalupe Casasnovas.** *Dissolution al 4%*, 2011. Lenticular print. 30 x 40 in. (76 1/2 x 102 cm.).

