

Field of Depth: Landscape as Metaphor in Emerging Photography at latincollector art gallery from June 15 to August 6, 2004

Field of Depth: Landscape as Metaphor in Emerging Photography, features the work of 14 international emerging photographers who approach the "landscape" as a place for social commentary and debate. The photographs in the exhibition range from documentary to staged, from digitally constructed to microscopically recorded and from travel photography to carefully constructed scenes. All of the works rely on formal strategies, method of presentation and the use of technology to convey a common preoccupation with the role of photography as a method of representation as well as a metaphorical connection to the world of ideas.

Social & Political Landscape

Mariana Silva's art projects are deeply rooted in the social and political reality of her native Chile. Silva's videos, interactive installations and photographic documentations are just a result of her interest in the role of an artist as a mediator between people and their land. "Collective Behaviors of the Inhabitants of Chile", 2003, her latest project, investigates contemporary ritual behaviors throughout Chile, which act as foundations for a sense of social belonging. Silva has documented religious, political, sportive, and cultural events in which individuals become part of a (ideologically driven) social group. Her role as a 'mediator' allows the subject to speak for it self, providing a framework through which contemporary historical events might be analyzed and comprehended as part of a historical chain. The methodology of art gives Mariana Silva the possibility "to access the people of a nation and try to unmask the way in which the history of an individual and the national history are interconnected. It also gives *Silva* the possibility, through the use of technology, to reconstitute the territorial weaving, allowing human existence and experience to operate as the only way to represent history".

Gaston Zvi Ickowicz has spent the last two years documenting the rapid changes occurring in the West Bank. His series *Monument* was shot in the territory where Israeli and Arab homes meet. The Israeli government has built concrete walls with the intention of protecting its population from unexpected bursts of violence. As a consequence, these constructions separate the two groups. Ickowicz photographed the walls from the Israeli side; his images show sections of the concrete walls that have been decorated with depictions of landscapes. Ickowicz's series *Settlement* looks at the construction of Israeli settlements in the same region. Virgin lands have been developed to accommodate a "handful of people". His photographs present roads and construction gear against the breathtaking landscape. Gaston Zvi Ickowicz's still and reflective photographs exist as 'documents'. The images are centrally composed allowing its subjects to slowly reveal the social and political weight intended by the artist. These photographs are evocative of a long tradition of landscape photography; as images they lack any cultural specificity. But Ickowicz achieves to transcend ideas of the sublime and invites through contemplation, to the restitution of consciousness about politically induced social change.

Cultural Landscape

The photographs of Lina Dorado and Luis Cantillo that form the project *Second Sight* present scenes and objects familiar to a world traveler. Mundane instants photographed on the road while visiting places away from home. Not unlike postcards, these photographs reveal some of the intricacies of the locations that they reference. Cultural signs such as typography, architectural details and typical natural or urban landscapes attempt to reveal their place of origin. But Dorado and Cantillo insist that these photographs, while indexical to a source, fail to represent the places that they depict. They are interested in the role of a

photographer/traveler as a producer of culturally predetermined meaning. In the words of Dorado and Cantillo: "Is what he or she (the photographer) transmits only an extension of his or her peculiar point of view? Perhaps he or she has revealed everything about his or her identity and nothing about his or her journey."

You are what you eat is the title of Roni Mocán's project in which he meticulously documented all the food that he ate and drank for one year. Presented in chronological order in form of a large-scale colorful grid, this work operates -according to the artist- as a self-portrait. But what do we learn about the artist through these images? Each one of the photographs that composes the work presents a set of cultural ciphers. The kinds of plates, types of silverware and brands of foods intend to point to the artist's location, social positioning and taste. But it is the obsessive nature of his motivation and his particular use of the photographic medium that provides a framework to unveil his intentions.

Giada Ripa presents the audience of her photographs with intimate encounters between a traveling woman and the 'distant' sites that she visits. In a photograph, the desert in its vastness and natural harshness is the environment in which this woman stands, (always) giving her back to the camera. Clearly out of place' the character reenacts experiences reminiscent of Albert Camus' *Adulterous Woman*, whose protagonist experiences 'a mystical union of the sky and stars' before returning home from the desert with a new awareness. Camus' protagonist has been 'unfaithful' while contemplating the beauty of the landscape; she has asserted her individuality and freedom. Ripa suggests in her photographs that her character might be in a similar search.

In *Dead in Turkestan*, 2004 Ripa refers to tales of historical events such as the "theory of the Great Game" and interweaves them with personal interpretations. Two empires, Great Britain and the Russian Empire, were fighting for this territory of Central Asia, still unknown and untold to many, mainly because of its terrifying surrounding and monstrous mountain and pitiless desert. That part of the silk road, became the platform for ambitious journeys of western archeologists and European travelers wanting to search for the lost treasures of central Asia and bring back to the western world their fame and pride. The few that made it across the terror lands came back known as the foreign devils on the silk road (Aurel Stein, Sven Hedin, Paul Pelliot, Albert Von Icoqu).

Emotional Landscape

Nicolas Goldberg's photographs of the series *Unstable Geographies*, present people in transit and places of passage. An aerial view from a plane of a city insinuates a destination and simultaneously a point of departure. In another image the silhouette of a man is fused with a dramatic waterfall behind him, projecting a sense of vulnerability. The contemplative nature of his photographs and the transient relationship between figures and landscape are almost cinematic. Time for Goldberg is a crucial element, for it implies in the manner of a film-still, a narrative. His photographs seek to present the viewer with a fictional 'psychological' space through which personal emotional content is efficiently represented.

A photograph in Jenny Gaulitz's *m-series* presents an apartment that seems to have been vacated. Nobody is visible. There's only dirt, some furniture, scattered pieces of clothing illuminated by a lamp and some rays of sun filtering through Venetian blinds. Another image shows a detail of a wooden floor, which mimics a seascape; the frame divided by a horizontal line confronts the viewer with an eerie feeling of longing.

m-series is a visual essay about Gaulitz's mother's apartment, which "was nice, with new wallpaper that she had chosen herself. Very few people were visiting the apartment during the thirteen years she lived there. It was *her*, *her* brother and maybe the janitor of the building". This contextual information is not necessarily recognized in the images. The 'm-' heading the title *m-series* might insinuate that something remains to be discovered. The emotional weight

of these interior landscapes rests on the visual signs that are present and prompt to be decoded.

Guido Albi Marini's series *New York Buildings* reduce views of the monumental architecture of high-rises to flat pictorial planes. Albi Marini explores light, shadow, color and form as instruments through which he assigns his images metaphorical content. The city in Albi Marini's photographs is deserted and nostalgic.

Perceptual Landscape

Frank Oudeman's beautifully imposing photographs appear at first sight to be images exclusively concerned with light, form and color. At closer inspection though, Oudeman's pristine vertical surfaces reveal their photographic referent and with it the volume of his intentions. Oudeman's photographs are deconstructive in their attempt; the window blinds that he uses as sets to construct the field of his photographs function as materials through which he comments on the perceptual, physical and psychological experience of space as projected from photographic surface. From another perspective, this type of blind is embedded with cultural significance. Common to the US interior design of the early 90's, the blinds are signifiers of economic prosperity and upscale social positioning. Viewing Oudeman's work through this prism accentuates his interest in duality of meaning: public/private, emptiness/fullness, abstract/real, voyeurism/participation and synthetic/physical. Perhaps the most radical of Oudeman's photographs is "S. 5th" in which the artist reveals the previously hidden set. This photograph confronts the viewer with the mechanism used to hold the window blinds in place, the photographic seamless paper conventionally used as a neutral backdrop and a mass of synthetic green grass, which transforms the photograph into a statement about the troubled nature of photographic representation.

Michelle Kloehn uses the Ambrotype Process to record her images. Developed in the mid 19th Century, this wet plate collodion process achieves an image by coating a piece of glass with various chemicals. While wet, the glass is placed in the camera and the photograph is taken directly onto the glass. Taking advantage of the limitations of mobility, time constraint and lack of control self-imposed by choosing this archaic technique, Kloehn produces imagery that goes beyond the traditional expectations of this process. Though Kloehn's plates represent subjects not uncommon to the 19th Century tradition, her portraits and landscapes challenge the process and the perception of her intentions. Kloehn's landscapes are not concerned with ideas of beauty or the bucolic. In fact these are constructed scenes that speak about the photographic surface and its methodology of illusionism. Paper backdrops and fragments of rocks appear skewed in the frame, revealing her hand (the photographer's) as the ultimate producer of meaning. Kloehn works like an alchemist "mixing up emulsions that I laboriously coat on to each glass plate, and similar to that of an 18th century Polaroid, shoot until I am satisfied with the image. Perched delicately on top of thin glass plates, this image can seem fragile, perhaps fleeting. There is something intangible in these images, as if with a blink they could disappear."

Biological Landscape

"Nature is not a photograph -life needs time- and we are running out of time to preserve the part of ourselves which lies within our reach but beyond our skin", writes **Ariel Ruiz i Altaba** in the introduction for his book *Embryonic Landscapes*, a collection of photographs taken by this artist and molecular embryology researcher. Ruiz i Altaba's handsome photographs represent aesthetic compositions whose specific molecular referent speaks of a way of achieving scientific knowledge. Ruiz i Altaba's biological landscapes brings us beyond the limits of our perceptual field; they unmask through the use of microscopic devices the complexity of human cellular functions as well as the importance of scientific investigation and applications of technology for the understanding of our organism's behavior. When viewed exclusively as

abstract photographs though, these images confront the viewer with the infinite pleasure of contemplation. Ruiz i Altaba's use of formal strategies such as line, composition, tonal intensity and self-conscious cropping frame his work within a tradition of formalist photography- reminiscent of Edward Weston's or Ernst Haas'- for which the natural landscape was but a starting point for reflective meditation.

Lyrical Landscape

Alejandro Gómez de Tuddo's photographs inhabit a place between the realms of the real and the symbolic. His images are evidence to a personal search for social rectification through a sort of visual mourning; a heart-felt investigation on death as an unavoidable destiny. Gómez de Tuddo's found objects, dead animals and composed scenes are connected to anthropology and mythology. The photographer looks for the life of the remnants and assigns it through his thorough compositions, a 'spirit' or a 'voice' that leads to metaphysical questions about permanence and transcendence. Gómez de Tuddo relies on formal characteristics such as scale and color to highlight that "the figure of a thing is essential for the realization of its functions". This phrase borrowed from Ovidio's *Metamorphosis* concerns Gómez de Tuddo as his photographs present figures that are in a final transformation yet retain their metaphorical essence.

Raissa Venables' large-scale digital collages of interior spaces face the viewer with images more real than ordinary photographs can boast. Venables optimizes the details of many photographs and incorporates them into one massive rendering. In the resulting images the inside of a tent, an elevator and a stairwell evoke an almost philosophical awareness of the impression that familiar spaces have on the psyche of their inhabitants. "Sometimes in the presence of a familiar object we experience an extension of our intimate space", writes Gaston Bachelard in "The Poetics of Space"; similarly, the rendered objects in Venables photographs bear the weight of our emotional projections and attachments. Venables proposes an experiential encounter with her photographs achieved by challenging the viewer's traditional expectations of the reading of an image.

--- Carlos Motta, Exhibition Curator