

'Amnesia'

Bronx Museum of the Arts
1040 Grand Concourse, at 165th
Street, Morrisania
Through Feb. 27

"Amnesia" is a persuasive example of a familiar exhibition format: the broad-spectrum traveling group show of Latin American artists united under a catchy, one-size-fits-all theme.

Several of the 16 participants — from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela — will be familiar to New York audiences. The exhibition itself (which, oddly, includes only two women) was organized by a pair of commercial galleries in Los Angeles, Christopher Grimes and Track 16. The Grimes gallery has given at least three of these artists solo gallery shows.

Some of the best work is abstract. Such is the case with an elegant minimalist sculpture in stainless steel by Waltercio Caldas, Ernesto Neto's floor piece made of a swath of creamy silk twisted sensuously around an iron ingot, and other work based on distilled or edited real-life forms.

The pristine lines of Pablo Siquier's black-and-white paintings are derived from Art Deco architectural ornament. José Gabriel Fernández's delicate geometric watercolors are based on the shape of a matador's cape. A blocky sculpture by José Antonio Hernández-Diez is made from interlocking forms that resemble bed frames. And a fine wall piece of pleated canvas by Miguel Ángel Riós suggests both a festive cockade and a strategic map.

In each, the show's title seems to suggest, concrete sources have been creatively misremembered. Elsewhere a sense of loss is more acute, as in Tunga's photographs of a rubber cast of his own head floating out to sea and Mónica Girón's watercolors related to migrating birds in Patagonia. Black silhouettes in a piece by Roberto Obregón are cut in the shape of rose petals. Oscar Muñoz's series of reflective metal disks reveal politically "disappeared" faces when the viewer breathes on them. In a haunting slide installation by Miguel Rio Branco images of churches, bodies and landscapes seem to bloom into view and dissolve away.

Wit also plays a role. Marcelo Pombo gives life to disposable household products, like boxes of detergent, by adding ribbons and glitter. Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle invites visitors to drink a glass of chilled Antarctic water, thereby carrying home a trace of the South Pole. In a funny-sad piece by Sergio Vega, the recorded voice of Che Guevara speaks from an icon of St. Francis of Assisi, who wears combat fatigues under his tunic.

Add work by Alfredo Ramírez and Valeska Soares, and it's a strong gathering. It avoids reducing "South American art" to an ethnic or regional category but still keeps specific cultural histories in play. At the same time, however, introductory-level, thematically vague surveys of this kind are problematic.

Too often they substitute for the kind of rigorous, fine-tuned treatment routinely awarded to artists from the United States and Europe: career retrospectives (the show of the Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles now at the New Museum is a rare exception) or thematically focused historical exhibitions that help clarify important movements (as in "The Experimental Exercise of Freedom," which recently closed in Los Angeles.)

Contemporary art in Latin America is immensely varied and rich. It came of age long, long ago. It's time the rest of the world remembered — or realized — that.

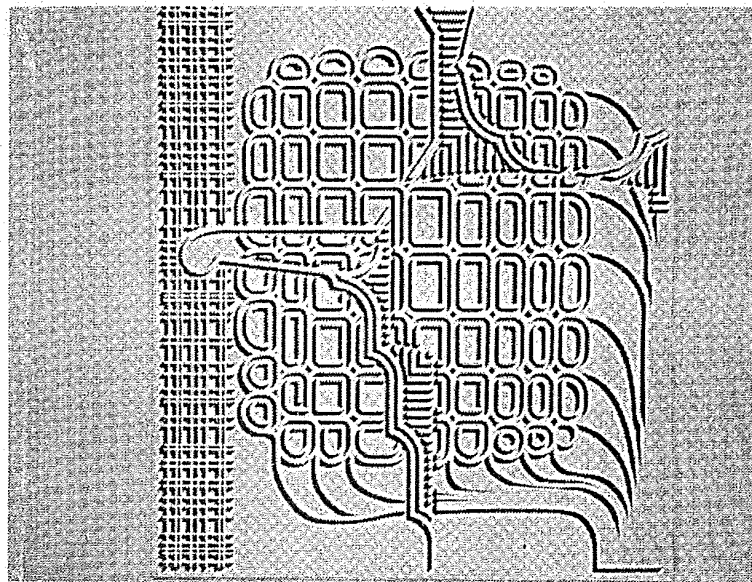
by the artist are on view, as is a patchwork quilt. The center of the gallery is taken up by a big pink fiberglass object, like a super-big bathtub duck, cast from the artist's design.

To say the show is all over the place is just to describe it. Speed and change seem to be essence of Mr. Gonzales's aesthetic. Occasionally he slows down, as in a series of small poem-paintings with phonetically spelled words written in gold ink, and the results are memorable. And sometimes he just explodes, as in a film clip of one of his readings. One minute he is standing behind a lectern; the next he is diving over a table headfirst, like a singer into a mosh pit.

At this point, poetry and performing are his strengths, but he is ambitious and entrepreneurial. (The show is part of a five-city tour that includes stops in Paris, Berlin, London and Tokyo.) He attracts an intriguing mix of fans; among recent visitors to Alleged.were teenagers in skateboarder-homeboy gear. Rivetted by Ms. Dunn's film, they also lingered a bit over the paintings and poetry. Mr. Gonzales may be shaping a future art audience no one knew was there.

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ART IN REVIEW



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