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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

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SETH PRICE



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Wang Guangle,
Terrazzo 200807,
2008, oil on canvas,
70 7/8 x 59".

Trained at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, this thirty-three-year-old artist has hardly exhibited in the West. In different contexts, the same works of art could have quite distinctly diverse meanings. If Wang's "Terrazzo" paintings were to be shown in a Chelsea gallery, I would think them a shrewd commentary on Sylvia Mangold's representations of floors. And his smaller "Coffin Paints" could allude to Jo Baer's edge-focused abstractions. *Coffin Paint 081031*, 2008, is uncannily similar to some brightly colored Mary Heilmanns. The larger *Coffin Paint 090104*, 2009, a near monochrome whose shallow, illusionistic depths reveal a softly shaped rectangle, could be by a wayward follower of Victor Vasarely. Thinking like a New York critic, I imagined that Wang's

title should be "Coffin Paintings," referring to the much-discussed death of painting. But Wang's allusion is quite different. Just as his "Terrazzos" are not abstractions but images of floor coverings, so the "Coffin Paints" have a very specific cultural reference: It is customary for some Chinese, as they reach late middle age, to purchase their coffin and repaint it every year, thus hoping to achieve longevity. Wang imagines that his pigment asks to live.

According to the label on the entrance wall, Wang "sets up a world of sheer 'spirit' and 'feeling' for the transferring of the 'object.'" In doing this, he "makes us feel lost between the importance of painting and man himself." The "Six Elements" of Hsieh Ho, the fifth-century articulation of classical Chinese brush painting, claims that painting requires "Spirit Resonance," "Bone Method," "Correspondence to the Object," "Suitability to Type," "Division and Planning," and "Transmission by Copying." Wang's "Coffin Paints," which look like Western abstractions, are in fact both abstract and representational, resembling in this both a great deal of old-master Chinese art and postmodern painting such as Peter Halley's "cells." It is important not to fetishize either of these connotations, however. After all, Thomas Nozkowski also says that his works come from things he sees, but doesn't say what those things are. However we interpret Wang's pictures, in any sophisticated visual culture they would stand out. Amid the cheap surrealism and banal political commentary all too prevalent in the city's 798 art district, they were revelatory.

—David Carrier

MEXICO CITY

"Chronicles of Absence"

MUSEO TAMAYO ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO

Crónicas de la ausencia (Chronicles of Absence) presents works by Rosângela Rennó and Óscar Muñoz, artists (from Brazil and Columbia, respectively) who appropriate images from newspapers, archives, photography studios, and albums. Most of the works shown (installation, photography, and video) have an open, transparent quality to them. This may be due to the fact that the artists lend a material quality to everyday relationships, gestures, attitudes, and social dynamics without worrying about historical accuracy. They are, rather, con-

cerned with making visible the general desire to register and store particular moments. Time plays an important role—via the psychic distance between memory and its subsequent representation, but also in the sensitive materials the artists have chosen to work with. Rennó uses photographs from old archives and albums sometimes damaged by humidity or dry weather. Muñoz uses water to deform an image or heat to puncture paper. The results are decaying entities that reveal their disempowerment, the alterations they have suffered, and their new state of existence as recontextualized in art.

Rennó's *Cerimônia do Adeus* (Farewell Ceremony), 1997–2003, consists of thirty-nine black-and-white photographs that portray anonymous couples taking leave of their weddings, intimate moments that also render the vulnerability of the image itself as a material trace. Her *Bibliotheca* (Library), 2002, comprises a series of albums encased in separate glass cabinets. The viewer is frustrated since only one of the many images contained in each album can be seen through the painted glass surface. On the walls are maps indicating where the albums come from: Brazil, Portugal, Argentina, Cuba, Germany, Spain, and so on. Another table holds an index card box. The cards describe the albums—their size, color, number of pages, type of paper, and subject. We read the characteristics of the image but do not have access



Óscar Muñoz,
Paístiempo (detail),
2007, burned
newspaper, eight
front pages and
eight spreads.
From "Chronicles
of Absence."

to it. Next to the box, a last album, this one open to the viewer, contains a selection of images—historical, political, celebratory—from among the photographs hidden away in the vitrines.

Muñoz's *Paístiempo*, 2007, is a suite of eight front pages and eight spreads taken from two Colombian newspapers, *El País* and *El Tiempo*, presented on four rectangular tables. The artist has transformed the diaries by burning tiny holes in the pages that simulate offset printing and give a tactile dimension to the work, a precarious quality that reminds us of how information may or may not become part of archival memory. *Simulacrum* #1, #2, #3, 1999, are three photographs of the artist's hands, torso, and feet, respectively, set in light boxes. Muñoz first allowed drops of water to fall on the negatives, distorting the images, then printed them, introducing a gulf between the image and its source.

Memories are built collectively as well as privately. In either case, "Chronicles of Absence" reminds us, invisible operations are at work; images mark absences that have emotional impact. What has been lost or forgotten may be recovered in order to question the way we have held onto or discarded narratives that continue to resonate.

—Jessica Berlanga Taylor

BUENOS AIRES

Sergio De Loof

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A prince and a pauper, Sergio De Loof has been a luminary in the Buenos Aires scene since the 1980s, an artist with an unusual ability to captivate the fashion world, the underground, and the intellectual establishment. He founded mythical bars like Bolivia and discos like El Dorado, decorating the places himself by fusing the garbage found on the streets with runway fashion and transforming everything into