

Art in Review



Dias & Riedweg/Americas Society

"Raimundos, Severinos and Franciscos," a 1998 piece by the duo of artists Dias & Riedweg, enlisted 30 blue-collar Brazilian men, who each had one of three common last names.

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DIAS & RIEDWEG

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Paul and Suzanne Jenkins/D. Wigmores Fine Art

Paul Jenkins's "Phenomena Matsumi Chant" (1962).

... and It Becomes Something Else

Americas Society

680 Park Avenue, at 68th Street

Through Aug. 1

Working as a team since 1993, the Brazilian artist Maurício Dias and the Swiss artist Walter Riedweg helped to shape some of the defining features of art in a self-consciously globalist era. One was the idea of the artist as a universal citizen with no fixed national allegiance. Another was the concept of art as public intervention, often political, always ephemeral. A third was a belief in the efficacy of collaboration, among artists themselves and between artists and audiences, which for Mr. Dias and Mr. Riedweg included groups of people with no connection to the art world.

All three elements play out in the Americas Society show, which gives a sampling of work from the past decade. The earliest piece, "Raimundos, Severinos and Franciscos," from 1998, is a charmer. In researching a project for that year's São Paulo Biennial, the artists found that many of the city's janitors and doormen shared one of three names and a common history: the men came from Brazil's poverty-stricken Northeast, and once they had landed city jobs, they tended to disappear into its fabric, becoming anonymous and as interchangeable as their names.

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For the biennial the artists brought these invisible citizens center stage, literally. They invited 30 to build a small, free-standing model of the kind of cramped quarters they occupied where they worked. They then asked the men to enter the set one at a time and perform some everyday action — making coffee, fixing a meal, taking a nap — as if they were alone, even when the space became crowded.

The result, seen on video, is a kind of ballet of ordinary beauties, as ingenious as a [Marx Brothers](#) routine, as poised as Balanchine, in which each performer shines, a virtuoso.

For the video “David and Gustav,” the artists interview two of their contemporary heroes, the Conceptual artist David Medalla and the artist-activist Gustav Metzger. They are eloquent in completely different ways about their own countercultural histories, which were based on the interchange of art and life.

Another historical lodestar, [Marcel Duchamp](#), is remembered in a video installation that tracks versions of his suitcase piece “Boîte-en-Valise” being passed from hand to hand in the streets of Rio de Janeiro. For an installation made in 2000 — only half of it is in the show — the artists spent time at the Mexican-American border, interviewing immigration officers, specifically those in charge of training guard dogs. A video contrasting the tender relationship between animals and keepers and the hostile purpose that relationship serves is uncomfortably moving.

Dias & Riedweg have been so active internationally for so long that it’s hard to believe that this is their first New York show, but so it is. Organized by Gabriela Rangel, director of visual arts at the Americas Society, it catches the balance of gravity and wit in their work and suggests that the aesthetic of art-into-life that has been so important a source for art in the past 15 years is far from exhausted. As money shrinks and digital communication expands, it could well be — again — the next big thing. **HOLLAND**

COTTER