

# ARTFORUM

## Miguel Ángel Rojas

SICARDI GALLERY

2246 Richmond Avenue

April 8–May 14

Miguel Ángel Rojas's subtle, affecting new works, which comprise strict text- and grid-based compositions that do not disguise the poignancy of their subject matter, implicitly trace the corrupting effect of the cocaine trade on Colombia and the United States. Many of the pieces in his latest exhibition, titled "At the Edge of Scarcity," use coca leaves and dollar bills, cut into countless uniform dots a few millimeters in size and fixed on large sheets of paper in low-resolution patterns. These works resemble the output of a giant dot-matrix printer; this, with the *Tron*-era typeface (as in *Expectations*, 2008) and cocaine references, implies a point of origin in 1980s party culture. Several are diptychs: half in coca and half in dollar. Close attention is needed to tell apart the two similar shades of green.



View of "At the Edge of Scarcity," 2011.

The diptychs' texts pair the sites of coca production with those of cocaine consumption. *San Bernardo del Viento Version 1*, 2011, explicitly spells out the accusation: "Mateo Matamala and Margarita Maria / have died at San Bernardo del Viento / their lives ended / by the drug dealers' rapaciousness and greed / from San Bernardo del Viento / to your party"; while in *El capital (CAPITAL)*, 2009, the text simply reads "More / Less." Another group of works uses small chips covered in gold leaf and hung one by one, slightly above the surface; they shimmer in waves if breathed on or passed close by.

Introducing the exhibition in the front hall is *Mirando la flor (Watching the Flower)*, 1997–2007, a silent video framed by two gelatin silver prints. Each depicts a man, Beto, who was young, healthy and beautiful in 1997 (at left) and deathly ill, with a ravaged body, in 2007 (at right). In the video, the older man sits and begins to talk, in an animated way, leading up to the terrible moment in which he will be confronted with the photograph of his young, healthy self. The multiplication of Beto's image compresses years of life into a single view, forcing attention onto the specter of death that the slowness of time normally keeps at bay.

— Benjamin Lima