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ATLANTA / GEORGIA

Dario Escobar

1600 Gallery

Dario Escobar's exhibition at SCAD Atlanta's 1600 Gallery, *Singular Plural*, gathers for the first time in this city nine works created by the artist between 2005 and 2010. Here, Escobar recontextualizes archetypal objects from the world of sports such as baseball bats, soccer balls, skateboards, galvanized tires from bicycle wheels, and puts them to use as art materials, subjected to a reconceptualization that goes from utility and use to aesthetic contemplation.

As a whole, these works denote the way in which contemporary art tends increasingly to incorporate the internationalized expressions of contemporary culture. Escobar takes advantage in his work of the global transcultural character of the sports world. Through the mass-media and commerce, the sports industry has overtaken national borders and created an international public that recognizes itself both in traditional sports such as baseball and soccer, and in newly-minted ones, better known as extreme sports. The acceptance and world-wide popularity of these sports offers a platform of common cultural signs from which to communicate universally with a vast, diverse public—a significant platform that Escobar uses effectively in this show.

Morphologically, these works benefit from the lustrous aesthetic that characterizes industrial surfaces. They are carefully manufactured

and finished, satisfying the formal demands of refinement and sophistication that are current in contemporary artistic production.

Methodologically, they reveal that Escobar's creative process is based in this case in one single procedure. The artist intervenes, alters the appropriated objects, and reassembles them in an elliptical way in order to moderate or partially neutralize the original meaning they possess in their primary contexts. With this, he creates an expressive tension between their displaced functional singularity and their later transformation into elements of a work of art as totality, rendered intrinsically plural through the very integrative process from which it results.

Escobar created *Dawn* in 2009 using wooden baseball bats. Repeated as modules, the bats outline the perfect geometry of a rectangle on the wall. A negative space is projected into the rectangle, breaking its perimeter in order to expand the area of the work towards an infinite beyond. Some of the bats have been cut along the profile of a triangular shape and their remains are piled up on the floor as evidences of a singularity that was but is no longer. The shiny gold hue along with a deep black suggest the dawn light known to photographers as "the lovely light." In these abstract allusions to landscape and to natural elements, like *Black Snake II* from 2005 (based mostly on galvanized rubber bicycle tires), Escobar makes it possible for viewers to experience an irresistible attraction towards his work. The manifest ambiguity of these proposals acts as a hook.

Broken Cycle, from 2009, also contains a play between positive and negative space. The wheel's circle is interrupted, and with that, vacuum becomes discontinuity. One of its quarters has been displaced from the perimeter. Liberated. And it becomes a singular line drawing. The simplicity and economy of resources in this work are nevertheless highly expressive. Two basic shapes, a rectangle divided into four quadrants in the background, and a circle as the protagonist motif, speak of the exact mathematics of these geometric forms and of the way in which quarters make and unmake the unit. This work synthesizes also an abstract-geometric artistic tradition that explores the concise, brief but exhaustive character of expression.

Special mention is due to Escobar's three collages made with book pages. In *Silent Drawings*, from 2010, Escobar creates geometric abstractions filled with a lyrical sensibility based on chromatic relationships between the original white of the paper and the yellowing that results from its aging. The printed text on the other side of the pages is visible, but the communicative strength of the written word has been nullified. Words become traces, losses, absences in these drawings. In contrast, their support, the paper sheet, is freed from all functionality and becomes an expressive sign through its very materiality.

Singular Plural once again proves that Dario Escobar has created a body of work entirely of his own, and with it a voice that is sensitive to the expressions of today's international culture.

After Atlanta, the show will travel to SCAD Savannah, Georgia, and SCAD Hong Kong, China.

Ana Fernández

Dario Escobar. General view of *Singular, Plural*, 2012.



BARCELONA / SPAIN

Adrian Melis

Galería ADN

New Production Structures, the first solo exhibition by artist Adrian Melis (Havana, 1985) in Spain, addresses the failures of Cuba's system of production from an artistic perspective. A total of seven works—including installations, photographs, and videos—reflect the paradoxes of an unproductive work environment, as Melis proposes new production mechanisms generated through occasional unproductive states.

For one of the central works in the exhibition, Melis collected for four months the dreams of workers who would fall asleep during working hours in several government centers in Havana and other towns across Cuba. *Plan de Producción de Sueños de las Empresas Estatales de Cuba* (Plan of Production of Dreams in Government-Owned Businesses in Cuba, 2010-2012) shows a total of 300 dreams individually packaged in small wooden boxes. During another period of time, the artist bought the “excuses” workers would offer for not showing up to work. Each excuse was worth the equivalent of the amount of money deducted from the absent worker’s monthly salary, so the workers earned the same money whether or not they had gone to work. This later work entitled *El Valor de la Ausencia* (The Value of Absence, 2009-2010) implied 114 collaborators who collectively missed work on several dates until the total days missed added up to 327. Both projects showcase the implausible work dynamic that is unimaginable anywhere else outside the reality of the Island, as they also inscribe Melis’ work within the framework of useful, social, and, therefore, political art.

An integral aspect of Melis’ projects is the participation of collaborators that contribute to the collective creation of the content; one of the central aspects of that which Nicolas Bourriaud defined as relational art—although, fortunately, not sufficiently central in this Cuban artist’s work to be regarded as part of this current. In *Plan de Producción...* the collaborators assume their dreams as a form of production, as they selflessly commit themselves to working with Melis to share and describe the dreams they have during their naps at work. One of the collaborators, Jessica, an economist, shares her thoughts—in dream number 245—about why she sleeps during work: “... most of the time I have nothing to do, so I use the opportunity to take a nap...” Ironically, the result of boredom, lack of interest or incentive—or simply the consequence of feeling tired—300 numbered dreams are transformed into concrete productive performances by these workers, who are otherwise part of a highly unproductive environment, defined by uncommitted attitudes toward the workplace. Unlike other projects in which collaborators do not receive payment, in *El Valor de la Ausencia*, monetary remuneration is established not solely for financial gain but also for symbolic purposes. The project cost 3065,65 Cuban pesos to complete—the equivalent of 127,70 USD. This fact



Adrián Melis. Installation views: *Plan of Production of Dreams in Government-Owned Businesses in Cuba, 2010-2012* (in the background), *The Value of Absence* (on the right), *378,890 m2 Projected* (on the left). Photo: Roberto Ruiz.

somehow reveals the creative methodology behind Melis’ projects: to create through the unproductiveness of others; or, in other words, to find positive results in an error. The social dimension attained by both proposals is corroborated by the fact that they occur within, and immediately have a bearing on, the social structure that generates them—independently of the resulting narratives that will eventually be presented to viewers.

Another work in the exhibition that also manages to cleverly address the theme of unproductivity turned productive is the piece entitled *378,890 m2 proyectados* (378,890 m2 Projected, 2012). It consists of the design or mockup of an industrial park rendered with numbers that represent the materials that have not been produced by four construction companies in Cuba during 2011. The fact that it represents the design of an industrial park and not any other kind of construction, sharpens the critical commentary about the notion of progress that Cuba’s revolutionary model is based on. On the other hand, the work *Stock* (2012) suggests one reason—among others—behind the unproductive nature of government-owned businesses in Cuba. Twenty or so photographs depict abandoned warehouses and other industrial storage spaces. The title of each image speaks of the amount of materials that have been stolen from there. The paradoxical aspect of this work is that the images were taken by the very employees who ransacked these businesses. In this sense, the inclusion in the exhibition of the video entitled *Aquí Todos Me Cuidan* (Here Everybody Looks after Me, 2007) is quite pertinent. An undercover video shows the director of a business who appears to suffer from

schizophrenia and pretends not to notice the disappearance of materials. The monologue of the director becomes the other side to the story that showcases the convened condescendence and megalomaniacal attitudes found in these levels of power; thus completing the narrative of unproductivity of this exhibition.

I left for last the work that inaugurates the exhibition: *Late No. 1* (Batch #1, 2012), precisely because it subverts the workings of the other pieces in the show. A work that could very well be the introduction to a new line of artistic inquiry, it presents a container with useless objects including a microwave and an air conditioner. The purpose of the project is to send these objects as scrap metal to Cuba—notwithstanding that by law the island restricts their entrance into the country. In this instance, the project does not include—as it does in other pieces—the participation of collaborators as content of the work. It sets in motion an operation that pretends to disregard a prohibition to the fullest extent, no matter the absurdity of the gesture.

New Structures of Production conceptualizes the contradiction of the Cuban context through interactive and subversive methodologies, solid poetic and generous doses of absurd humor. It is an exhibition that, while not completely able to elude the paradoxes of the current Cuban context, it is associated with themes that are universally understood and experienced. As a whole, the show reaffirms the artistic practice of Adrian Melis, as one of the most interesting works among the young generation of Cuban artists.