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SUMMER 2010 | ARTINFO.COM

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KUITCA
INTERVIEW BY ROBERT STORR

LATIN AMERICA'S NEXT BIG STARS



Seeing Stars

THE DIRECTOR OF COLECCIÓN PATRICIA PHILIPS DE CISNEROS INTRODUCES LATIN AMERICA'S MOST PROMISING TALENTS.

GABRIEL PÉREZ-BARREIRO

Latin America is as diverse as the rainbow itself. One of the occupational hazards of working as a curator of Latin American art is being asked to find common "realities" in a region defined by difference and by the collective isolation of each of its parts. Among these four young artists, I have tried to nominate a sense of this diversity. Their works, produced across Central and South America, never impressed me in different ways and for different reasons. One thing they may have in common is that each is something of an outlier in his or her country.



Alejandro Cesárco,
Eduardo, 2008 (cont.)
Oil, 30 x 40 in.
Courtesy of the artist.

ALEJANDRO CESARCO

URUGUAY

Alejandro Cesárco's work could be described as a kind of melancholic Conceptualism, faultlessly rigorous in its expression and construction. The subject matter often gravitates toward failure, regret, absence, and longing. Cesárco describes *Index*, 2008, *Index in Novel*, 2003, and *Index in Reading*, 2007–08—parts of an ongoing series—as index pages “of books I haven’t written and most probably never will,” in which the references range from the personal (loss, goodnight, farewell, parting) to the philosophical (*Meteva, Julia* on beauty and mourning) to the evocative (airy nights, followed by four pages of subtitles). While the

artist doesn't have to write the complete book, we also don't have to mind if the index gives us essentially all we need to know about the content, order, and frequency of what happens. In this case both the author and the reader have the same hands off relationship to what is probably a very intimate text.

The displacement of desire (otherwise known as synecdoche) was present in Cesárco's 2003 *Flowers*, in which he sent bouquets to the women artists he had admired at the time, including Vilma Celmins, Rosi Horn, and Yoko Ono. The act of giving again provides an index to a more complex set of relationships, summarized eloquently by the photograph of the flower and copy of the receipt. We are left wondering what the recipient made of this unexpected tribute. The conspiracy of failed encounters is summed up in the work 060303, described by the artist as “the story of a rendezvous missed because of confusion on the part of a young woman reading a

date expressed in numbers by her American lover,” a story both tragic and humorous, of a romantic destiny determined by different numerical (and cultural) conventions.

Since 2002, Cesárco has been making drawings in which the same text—“When I am happy I won’t have time to make these anymore”—is reproduced in bright colors. The beautiful irony is that we rely on the artist’s discomfort to continue the series. It reminds us that total happiness is as unattainable as it is invisible, and what’s more, I don’t necessarily mass for good art.

Cesárco’s recent projects have increasingly used the moving image. His 2006 film *Everness* weaves together narratives of personal loss with reflections on memory, youth, the Spanish civil war, and songs of the 1960s Brazilian Tropicalia movement in a circular structure in which no single story is resolved, but instead they all have overlapping fragments that want to connect, or perhaps that we want to connect.

JOSEFINA GUILISASTI

CHILE

Still life is not a particularly vibrant genre in contemporary art, yet certain artists are able to take this apparently defunct tradition and revivify it. Josefina Guilisasti’s composition consists of a small number of large and ambitious works in which still life is pulled apart, both formally and conceptually, through multiple canvases. Guilisasti’s concrete grid of everyday items beautifully rendered itself on canvas in such a way that they create the illusion of photographs or real objects. The subjects—aluminum cans, small animal figurines, bedroom furniture—are of modest and slightly outdated yet instantly familiar. By depicting each from many viewpoints, she creates an essay on perception and representation. Her overall project recalls Jorge Luis Borges’s fable “Funes the Memorious,” about a person blessed with perfect memory but unable to think abstractly. For Funes each perspective on the same object produces an entirely different



www.josefinaguisasti.com
Still life, 2008
Mixed media, 140 x 120 cm
Photo: Alejandro Cesarco

experience. Guilisasti uses painting to create a similar ambiguity between representation and abstraction; in the sense of abstract perception, in that each canvas is a unique representation of an object, yet the accumulation of shifting perspectives creates an effect of unfamiliarization. The tension between similarity and difference is also the theme of the series “Marta Huasco Viejo,” in which her black-and-white paintings of Donald Judd’s Minimalist haven in Marfa, Texas, are placed alongside almost identical structures in a similar landscape in northern Chile, this time created by illegal squatters looking for a cheap home. The huge social and historical differences between these two places are leveled out through painting and representation. Guisasti’s ability to use the power of painting to create doubt and to question our perceptions places her in a long tradition that goes back at least as far as Velázquez. While much of the debate about contemporary painting focuses on either abstraction or narrative painting, Guisasti’s work occupies a singular position that is simultaneously traditional and basically original.