

Art in America



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ART & MONEY IN CHINA

GLENN LIGON

BOSTON'S NEW ICA

JENNIFER STEINKAMP

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\$7.00 CAN £3.50 UK

Threaded letters beneath it read (in Spanish) "This Land of Roses." The mournful haiku continues (in English) "Roses in the land," followed by (in Spanish) "Over/A temple of Death." Similarly, above an aging storefront sporting an old RCA Victor sign, thread-writing interacts with the title itself to create a new phrase: "PueRCA VICTORiA" (Filthy Victory). Cursive thread-script below intones (in translation) "that honors us/UNSPEAKABLE life/the one that we honor." This mock-heroic language, of course, pays homage to Fidel Castro with all the mixed feelings the venerable dictator engenders. It is infused with the biting irony that animates all these works.

In another room, four slidelike video projections featured more pavement logos, the names heavy with mixed meanings (Washington, Sin Rival, El Volcan). Now part of the international art festival set, Garaicoa has begun transferring his insights about Havana as locus of tragic aspiration to other cities, including New York. But his touchstone remains the Cuban capital, a metropolis that, as those who have visited it know, remains frozen in 1961. Traveling its streets, one is invited to imagine how things were, could have been and might be in the future. Garaicoa's postmodern rendering of the "city as text," which focuses on names like "La Gran Via" and (with a sidelong reference to the Communist anthem) "La Internacional," wittily reminds us of urban commerce's pretensions. But it also acknowledges, through the artist's pin-stabbed overwriting, that we constantly project our own desires, memories and frustrations on the demanding, failing world around us.

—Carey Lovelace

Abelardo Morell at Bonni Benrubi

The fabricated *mise-en-scène* of opera was central to "Furthermore," Abelardo Morell's seventh exhibition at Bonni Benrubi. His most recent experiments with the camera obscura and the photogram were also included. In 2005, Morell, a Cuban-born, Yale-educated photographer who teaches at the Massachusetts College of Art, went backstage at New York's Metropolitan Opera to shoot a *New York Times Magazine* "Portfolio." The black-and-white images from

that session were shown here in 30-by-40- and 20-by-24-inch formats, mounted on aluminum. *The Metropolitan Opera: Romeo and Juliet Set* (2005) shows that the set designer paid homage to the Renaissance traditions of trompe-l'oeil marquetry by painting onto theater flats a grand but shallow space with arches, columns and parquet flooring. The illusion is broken by a movable panel—painted with the parquet pattern—standing ajar like a door. A short length of rope lies on the stage floor in this opening, the real within the illusion.

Photographs of two rugged urban backdrops toe the line between reality and illusion that is maintained by the theater's flats and drops. In *The Metropolitan Opera: Carmen Set I* (2005) and *The Metropolitan Opera: Manon Building Façades* (2005) the textured, dense and repetitive architecture of *Carmen*'s Seville and the mansard roofs of *Manon*'s Paris are seen close up and from the side, their *repousoir* effect—a large foreground element to increase the sense of receding space—here clearly exposed for the device it is.

Morell's photograms, composed of light and the shadows of objects, are made with large-format film. The stark contrast of scale in *Two Pitchers: Photogram on 20 x 24" Film, Contact Print* (2006) seems anthropomorphic, a frame-filling large pitcher towering benignly over one much smaller, like a parent with a child. *Water and Ink: Photogram on 20 x 24" Film, Contact Print* (2006) is composed of the subject materials thrown directly on the surface of the film.

Morell began working with the camera obscura in the early '90s. In his recent experiments, allowing color into the process, he uses large lenses in place of the more familiar pinhole to admit the outside world into darkened rooms; the exterior images are thrown upside down against a far wall. In *Camera Obscura Image of the Philadelphia Museum of Art East Entrance in Gallery with a de Chirico Painting* (2005), the surreal nature of this method is amplified by the presence of the de Chirico painting oddly centered on the museum's wall, picture hooks at left and right and a simple step stool on the floor, all of which are dwarfed by the inverted image of the museum's elegant pediment and columns.

—Edward Leffingwell



View of Carlos Garaicoa's exhibition "The drawing, the writing, the abstraction," 2006; at Lombard-Freid.

"Contested Spaces" at Baruch College and "Into the Future" at Plus Ultra

"Contested Spaces" was an exhibition of post-Soviet art primarily from Russia. Curator Elena Sorokina says that the title refers to the spaces left behind by an empire that no longer exists, spaces that various forces are now vying to control.

In the center of the Sidney Mishkin Gallery at Baruch College were works by Anatoly Osmolovsky, a major figure of Moscow actionism. *Mayakovskiy/Osmolovsky* (1993) is a photograph of a performance in which Osmolovsky climbed to the top of a monumental statue of Vladimir Mayakovsky and clung to a perch on the poet's shoulder. This is a type of work that speaks plainly to people from the artist's native region

but less clearly to the rest of the world. Osmolovsky's ascent of the statue and his identification of himself with it are meant as a symbolic retrieval. Mayakovskiy represents the cultural humanism behind the revolution and Osmolovsky is defending the statue in an era when the toppling of monumental statues has become almost an entertainment. In another Osmolovsky work, *Reenactment of the Barricade 1968* (1998), a series of photographs records a major demonstration of art activism in Moscow in 1998, for which, in homage to the Paris student revolt of 1968, a barricade of empty boxes was erected some 650 feet from the Kremlin and defended for several hours.

Erbosyn Meldibekov's performance video, *Pastan* (2005), shows the artist standing near an outdoor market in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Another man wear-

Abelardo Morell: *Camera Obscura Image of the Philadelphia Museum of Art East Entrance in Gallery with a de Chirico Painting*, 2005, C-print, 50 by 60 inches; at Bonni Benrubi.

