

ArtForum Review

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ArtForum, P. 275, NY, EUA,
oct. 2006.

It was not easy to get there. To reach the top you had to climb a steep, precarious-looking wooden ramp, with just a fraying rope suspended from the ceiling to hold on to. Having reached the top, you found a choreographed spectacle of chaos and mayhem, a blizzard of sounds and images – a camouflage tent, a series of yellow glue sticks and blue-and-white bottles of glue placed side by side like enemy armies, a television playing MTV and ESPN, mud volcanoes, bricks hanging precariously by strings from the ceiling, fruits and vegetable evoking genitalia, loaves of bread covered by weevils, football shirts dangling in the air, and sections of several local newspapers, all from the same Sunday, sliding down the wall. For “Imperialismo Minimalismo”, Diego Bianchi transformed the gallery into a garage sale, a space where things are exchanged and nothing remains self-contained. With its rickety forms, the show seemed to be a reflection on the way international trends reach distant outposts of the art world as diffuse and contaminated echoes. One found oneself in an unstable border zone shaped by forces from elsewhere, beyond its control.

Registering expansion as essentially entropic, the show is full of images of all sorts of prodigies of improbability – random variations, strange viruses, new kinds of matter – an aestheticization of alterity but also a paradigm of national growth in postcolonial worlds. If the imperial aspirations of the nineteenth century were symbolically encapsulated in the idea of morphological lineage in which all parts formed an organic whole, the various nationalisms of twenty-first-century life find representation in the idea of the discontinuous, characterized by breaks, eruptions, and interruptions.

Bianchi's strength lies in an ability to condense knotty realities in a nonstereotypical way and in terms that don't erase or sidestep complexity. What the exhibits is not a romantic region that serves as a paradigm or alluring allegory for the meeting and mixing of different cultures. For in the cheap silver bucket, mirrored and hanging like a disco ball from the ceiling, the show appears to recognize the fact that a final, comprehensive knowledge of the world organized as a coherent whole is unattainable. If each tiny mirror reflects the reigning spectacle with precision; at the same time, placed side by side, they fragment and distort the scene, acknowledging the way fantasies and myth tend to distort history. And yet, despite the overriding sense of urgency and incomprehension, the atmosphere grows richer and stranger with each viewing. It's as if phenomenal world had been placed in a permanent state of red alert, with all the moral confusions and contaminations that occur in such state. The allusions to scars of war, to the alliance of information and power, to paranoia and corrupted materials, evoke something out of *Apocalypse Now*, something between the acid-trip inferno of the Do Long Bridge and the image of Colonel Kurtz sitting in lead-dappled sunshine reading articles from *Time* magazine.

In Bianchi's work, thoughts and sensations relate in a rhizomatic way, recalling Thomas Hirschhorn's spread-out environments of cardboard and duct tape. Four years ago, in a group show at a former Harrods department store – once emblematic of a buoyant Argentine elite – Bianchi covered a huge oval window with an enormous amount of black electrical tape, while an enormous hurricane of damaged everyday objects seemed to have swept the gallery from floor to ceiling. Then as now, he evoked with wit and sophistication a recurring feeling of dislocation and loss.