



Nicola Costantino, *Still Life, the Dinner, 2008*, 184 x 275 cm, edition of three

## South of the Border Down Mexico Way

**PINTA - The Modern and Contemporary Latin American Art Fair I Metropolitan Pavilion and B. Altman Building, New York**

by Edward Rubin

Three years ago the newly hatched PINTA, the annual Latin American art fair, added itself to the now burgeoning list of art fairs and biennales. Opening at two sites along West 18th Street in Chelsea, PINTA was an immediate hit. Continuing its winning streak, last year's installment (November 19-22, 2009), with double the amount of galleries exhibiting, stormed the city. Roughly speaking, half of the 60 or so galleries involved were U.S.- based (mostly from New York and Miami), while the other half hailed from South America, the Caribbean and Mexico. Five galleries from Madrid, one from Berlin, a scant showing considering, were all to be seen from Europe. Aside from increased attendance and sales in general during

its four-day run, purchases by important art museums like London's Tate Modern, the MFA Boston and New York's El Museo del Barrio skyrocketed. Capitalizing on their successful track record, and hoping to conquer the European market, PINTA is taking their fair to London this coming June.

As one might expect at such a cattle call, prices and quality ranged widely. The most expensive item, at \$450,000, was the sculpture *Rape of Europa* (2005) by renowned Columbian artist Fernando Botero, a small, compact bronze of a naked woman resting atop a muscular bull with lust in his eyes. Also at Nohra Haime Gallery (New York) were two richly colored photographs by British-born Hugo

Tillman, from his 2008 *Daydreams Are Mine* series. Tillman, a superb behind-the-camera man, is known for his intervention-style interviews with subjects about their daily lives, the city they live in, and politics in general, all the while snapping pictures. What he creates out of this, sometimes by adding props, costumes and bit players, is essentially a staged happening. One photograph, *The Echeverría*, inspired by Raul Castro's relaxation of the Cuban government's former stringent position on homosexuality (Raul's daughter is a lesbian), documents the once hidden underworld of drag queens at a local community center.

At Galeria Baró Cruz (São Paulo), Fabiano Gonper's *The Manipulator* (2007-09) series of black and white drawings depicts executives, politicians, and men of power and money, in silent film mode, reducing them to simple, mute outlines. By erasing their image (identities) and leaving only the outline



Nicola Costantino, *Still Life, Death of Nicola 1*, 2008, 184 x 275 cm, edition of three

of their figures we are left to fill in the blanks as to their behavior, a visual game in which greed and power are being played out. Peter Fetterman Gallery (Santa Monica, California) showcased the work of renowned Brazilian economist-turned-photographer Sebastião Salgado, who is especially noted for his documentation of workers in third world countries. On view at Fetterman were two stunning photographs, *Iceberg between Paulet Island and the Shetland Islands* (2005) and his iconic *Serra Pelada, Gold Mine* (1985), a harrowing image showing hundreds of Brazilian miners slavishly digging for gold by hand, no doubt at five cents an hour.

Ricco/Maresca Gallery (New York) devoted their entire space to the work of Martín Ramírez (1895-1963), whose estate they represent. The self-taught Mexican artist, lionized by the NY Times as "one of the greatest artists of the twentieth century," ended up in a

psychiatric hospital in northern California where he spent the remainder of his life producing an astounding body of work. Ramírez's natural talent found expression in the unusual and vividly patterned drawings he made on a variety of found materials, as well as in his collages, clipped from magazines, of women, cars and buildings. A specialty of his was depicting trains and undulating tunnels in otherworldly landscapes. While Ramírez is widely collected here and abroad, his work is still poorly represented in the major Latin American museums and private collections.

At Galería Sicart (Barcelona) was Nicola Costantino's enormous ink jet retablo *Still Life*, whose end panels folded back to reveal *The Dinner*, or *Death of Nicola No. 1* (both 2008), like the before and after. The Argentine artist, known for using dead animals in her sculptures, has in recent years turned to starring in her own

productions as figures from artworks, such as Edward Steichen's mysterious *Gloria Swanson, the dead Ophelia*, and the expectant young girl painted by Gerhard Richter. In *Still Life*, Costantino's naked body is seen laid out on a silver platter, in altarpiece fashion, in the center of a long table littered with food and glasses of wine. Her recumbent figure, lit up like a Vermeer and deployed as an incantation or metaphor for art, opens up to the most diverse readings, ranging from art as sacrifice to Christ breaking bread at the Last Supper. It also brings to mind Peter Greenaway's 1989 movie, *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover*.

Mexican artist Carmen Mariscal's colored photographs from her series *Recuerdo (Remember)* graced the wall of masArt Galleria's space (Barcelona). Known for her interest in the human body and its fragility, Mariscal's videos, installations and photography, examine

such issues as identity, eating disorders, and fragmentation. One photo that caught my attention shows a female with hands covering her face. By superimposing her body onto a well-weathered wall we are left with a multilayered image that seems to be telling a story. For Mariscal, walls, as well as our bodies, carry their history. Each little mark on the wall, every wrinkle and scar on her person, reminds us of something that happened. It's as if walls carry the DNA of the building, house and city as our bodies have ours. With decades of history written on both face and wall, it is inevitable that our own mortality comes into view.

Raquel Schwartz's serpentine cassette-tape sculptures dominated the artist-run Kiosko Galería (Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia). Known primarily for her videos and full-bodied installations—her prison room in fluorescent-pink fake fur shown at the XXV São Paulo Biennial is legendary. Ten years ago Schwartz started using the tape from old cassettes her musician husband no longer wanted. With the patience of Penelope and the magic craft of Rumpelstiltskin, loath to toss the material out, she began to weave it into coats, dresses, hats and scarves. Two of these uniquely flowing creatures crisscrossed the gallery like a snake coming down from a tree. Reaching some 30 yards in length, they each took a staggering four months to complete.

A number of different artists at PINTA used raw meat to tackle the violent times we live in. At Y Gallery (New York), Argentine artist Tamara Kostianovsky magically fashioned fleshy animal hindquarters from her old clothes, complete with bone, gristle and veins of fat, so realistically, in fact, that you'd swear it was the real thing. On her website she points to Argentina's historic ties to the slaughterhouse, both gastronomically and politically. Peruvian artist Grimanesa Amoros's hanging sculpture *Meat Market* (2009), at Hardcore Art Contemporary Space (Miami), has candy-colored nipples made of silicon, cut into slabs and

penetrated by rusty hooks. The grisly work draws on her visit to the Vault, an S/M club in New York's meatpacking district, breast feeding her daughter in the jungles of Peru, and the child

prostitution she witnessed firsthand in Thailand and Malaysia.

Perhaps the most arresting of these gory avatars was Brazilian artist of Japanese descent Oscar Oiwa's *Beautiful*

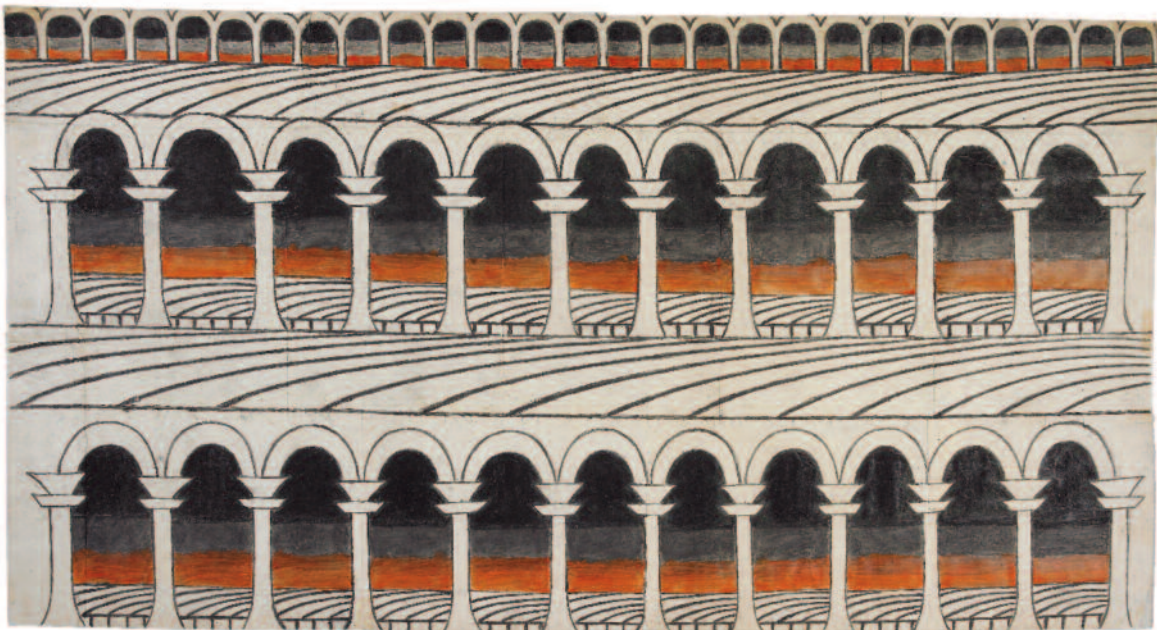


Grimanesa Amoros, *Meat Market*, 2009, mixed media

*World Meat Market* (2004) at Galeria Thomas Cohn (São Paulo). Portraying cuts of meat hanging higgledy-piggledy from a metal frame, the large painting features a neon sign, the type found above restaurants the world over, that spells out the work's title in Chinese characters. On closer inspection, we notice that each slab is shaped like a different country. In the background, there appears the misty entrance to a restaurant, with meat hanging all over and steam rising from pots. Like all three "Meat Artists" his inferences, though cleverly disguised for all to see, are obvious and highly resonant. In the artist's own words, "If one looks without attention this shop is like an ordinary Chinese restaurant. But looking more carefully, each meat represents a country. It's a metaphor. The world is like a cow and each country is like a piece of meat. Each country wants to be more powerful than other countries. War still happens very often. But most of people don't care about that."



*Carmen Mariscal, Recuerdo (Remember), 2008*



*Martin Ramirez, Untitled, 1960-63, graphite on pieced paper*