



A R
C O

FERIA INTERNACIONAL DE ARTE CONTEMPORANEO

The Americas

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Up & Coming curator Arco'04

Hemispheric Contemporary Art?

The given parameter of *The Americas* for curatorial selection is quite curious, but particularly so at this political and cultural moment. What really is the basis for an approach rooted in the fraught and contested territory around the term the Americas—its legacies, boundaries, and pluralist identifications? As **Coco Fusco** suggests, the discussion is as much a political discourse as it is a semantic imperative. How is this subject approached, based on proclivities of geography, migration, the market, artistic influence, and citizenship? How does this category or thematic take into account the migratory status of both the artists and the artworks, attending to the multivalency and cultural positions of artist and viewer, curator and consumer? How are we to return to a framework gesturing towards geographical- cultural specificity in an era defined by various conceptions of new internationalism, globalism, transnationalism and neo-multiculturalism? How does one approach hemispheric contemporary art? How can one approach cultural representation along these lines? This impossibility begs one to question various interests vested in inclusivity that the discourse maintains.

In the context of *The Americas* section, this brings us to the selection of the Mexican artist **Pablo Vargas Lugo**, who is currently producing a new body of work with local artists in India. His canonical abstractions turn to appropriated photographs and international maps. The photographic image is transformed, deconstructed, and recomposed in various ways to represent complex perspectives and layered collaged elements of imagined and current events. For the exhibition "The Conceptual Trend: Six Artists from Mexico City" at the Museo del Barrio in New York, Vargas Lugo exhibited a sculpture of a map of Japan at the entrance of the institution to dislocate questions of geography and nationality as inevitably germane to artistic invention and comprehension. His practice helps to question whether the intention of *The Americas* is to call for difference, for homogeneity, or merely to suppose that cultural identity and practice are inexorably bound.

Selections: **Jean Shin** and **Julianne Swartz**
Mixed Greens, New York

Jean Shin's artistic production is characterized by sculptural proxies for the body in the appropriation and re-assemblage of found objects—shoes, umbrellas, trousers, and ties. Shin expresses her interest in the obsessive accumulation of personal detritus '...because [it maintains] a certain history of dysfunction, rejection, and abandonment.' Her neo-minimal accumulation-installations fuse politics with poetics in a manner akin to her contemporary **Do-Ho Suh**. Shin's *Hair Wall* is a kind of diagrammatic abstract drawing bearing the inscription of the artist's own body: her hair sited in the holes of the gallery wall. This randomised mapping produces an unintelligible cosmology of corporeality. Her work speaks to a chaotic dispersion of identity in opposition to notions of cultural definition, or appropriation. A recent series of colour photographs taken during a residency in Seoul, South Korea, picture street carts of multi-toned vats of threads and textiles. The series is discussed by **Joan Kee** as work that '...draws attention to the existence of global synchronicity, which is often ignored in contemporary art in favour of celebrating the novelty of the specific' ('Claim Check,' *Tema Celeste*, March/April 2003). The photographs are documentary, yet abstracted in their decontextualisation. They operate in a like fashion to Shin's sculptures—quasi-temporary monuments—structures of memory and anonymity. Shin's contribution to ARCO is a project that the artist approaches as a 'constructed portrait'. A collection of garments is deconstructed. Silhouettes are cut,

re-sewn and starched, creating flat architectural structures. A wall and canopy of clothing create a physical yet levelled abstraction of the former inhabiting bodies.

Julianne Swartz's site-specific installations or *Line Drawings* invade unobtrusive, often extra-gallery spaces, entering the territory of the private, the storage, the archive. Using a Luddite approach, Swartz takes pleasure in lyrically exposing the armature of technology for its formal potential rather than its procedures. Swartz is interested in pointing to what is normally unseen in our built environment, illuminating it through a sculptural panegyric. She provides an elusive, contemplative and activated space for her viewers, manipulating the transience of light—converting the banal into subtle spectacle. Hers is a sculptural practice that is insubstantial, ephemeral and in the words of the artist 'noncorporeal.' Imagery is produced through faint mechanical manipulations. Swartz utilizes mirrors, light bulbs, fiber optic cables and distortive lenses in order to activate operations of shadow, reflection, distortion and projection. In subtle yet highly performative ways her installations provide a place for the theatricalization of the mundane. Her canonical ethereal-material abstractions often reflect her interest in buildings as bodies. Her transformation of given architectural environments and the anthropomorphization of architectural space is largely invested in animating the invisible—air, light and memory.

Anton Vidokle and Pablo Vargas Lugo

Massimo Audiello, New York

Russian-born, New York-based artist **Anton Vidokle's** project is invested in the co-option of modernist, revolutionary iconography via various techniques of abstraction, decontextualisation and re-signification. Vidokle's work reveals the transference and translation of signs, removed from the realm of the socio-political to the space of the commercial, into the terrain of art. His iconography masquerades as popular, referential and institutional design. For example, his series of stickers *Popular Geometries* features faux logos, mainly extracted from Eastern European and Latin American companies, combining real and imagined iconography. The multiple transpositions of early Modernist language is not purely an aesthetic question for Vidokle, but a reflection of his concern with the manner in which the early Utopian ideals of modernism were dissipated by the market, and depleted of their revolutionary social potential. Vidokle's logotypes investigate the extraction and reintegration of information into systems of vision, identity, use and translation.

A photograph taken of a building façade in Mexico City is manipulated into a detail of a modular modernist façade, scanned and multiplied into an abstracted grid pattern and later silkscreened onto canvas. The same façade, flattened into an icon, is filmed in *Salto del Agua* (a collaboration with **Cristian Manzutto**) cinematically reanimating the abstraction of the source architecture. In *Salto del Agua*, the interface between the banal and the visionary graphic address gestures to the 21st-century Latin megalopolis's consumption of its radical potential. The building's facade has now been painted red by Vidokle, returning to the original site of appropriation, duplication, literalising this site as sign.

Vidokle's newest project *Nuevo* readdresses the same structure of the previous film *Salto del Agua*, what Vidokle views as 'a visual examination of the social and aesthetic potential inherent in a mundane metro-station building in central Mexico City.' Painting the structure's façade red in a modular fashion, this polemical performance in a public urban setting speaks to traditions of Mexican muralist painting as well as the formal minimalist sensibility that the work maintains. The color red is highly charged for its larger political signification and personal identification for the artist. Through a cinematic series of photographs to accompany the film representing the metamorphosis of the structure, Vidokle's interest in *Nuevo* rests in its

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Artistas en arco'04 Artists at arco'04

Jean Shin
Julianne Swartz

Artistas de la galería Gallery artists

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Mixed Greens sells original, contemporary art. Founded on the belief that great art should be accessible to everyone, the company reaches further than traditional art markets and gallery settings. Mixed Greens presents eight solo shows annually, provides art-consulting services to businesses and individuals through innovative programs, participates in trade shows, sells art online and in a gallery.



Jean Shin
Suspended Seams (detalle detail), 2003

Retales de tela e hilo
Fabric (cut clothing) and thread



Jean Shin
Cut Outs, 2003

Retales de tela almidonada sobre pared
Fabric (cut clothing) starched onto wall