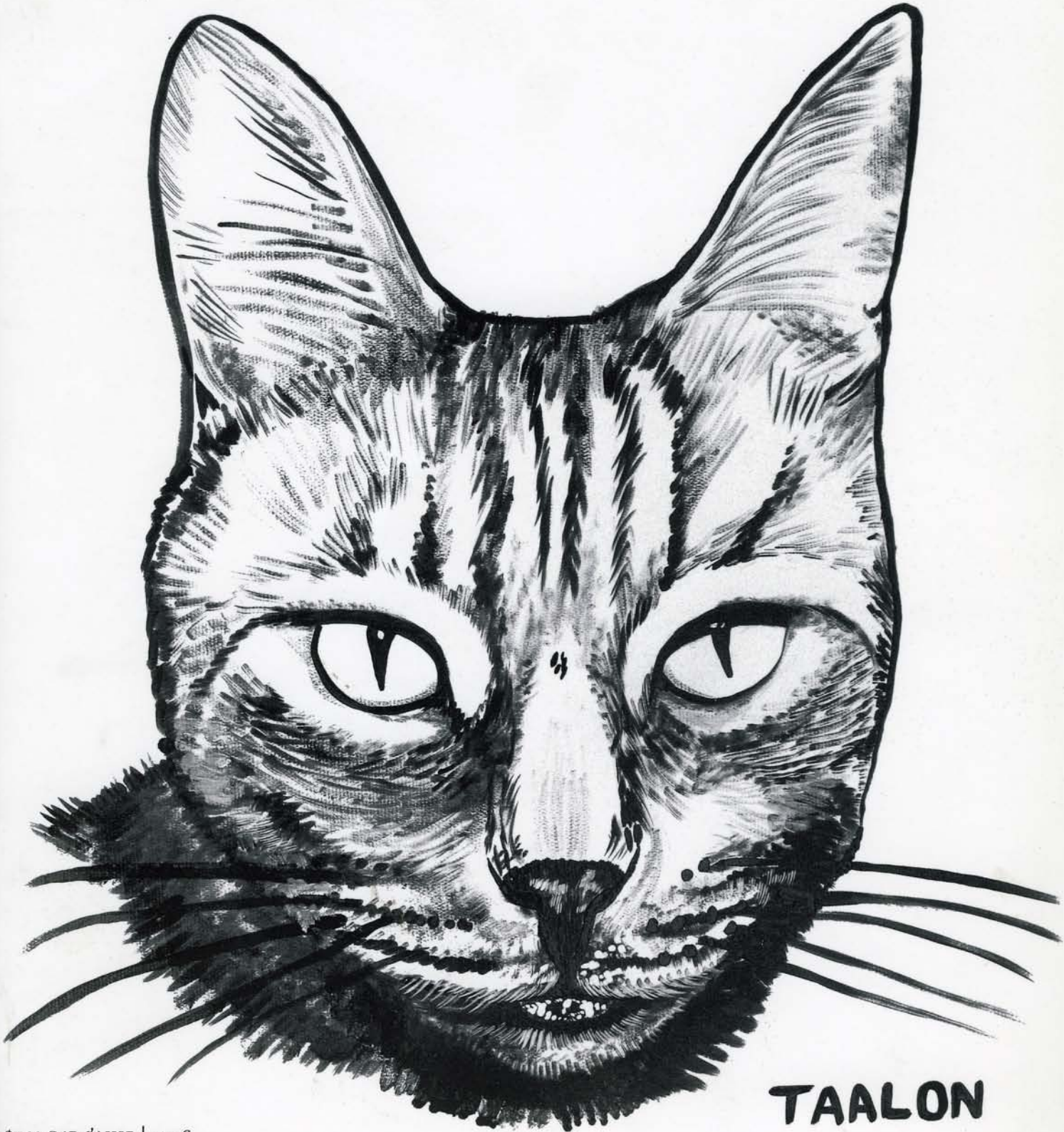


cmagazine98

International Contemporary Art
Summer 2008

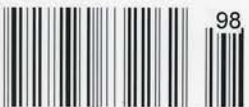
THE ART SYSTEM

FASTWÜRMS | Montréal's DHC/Art | On Hal Foster |
Community Art and the Avant-Garde



TAALON

\$7.50 CAD & USD | 5.00€



7 25274 83226 2

Your gaze is pulled from screen to screen, taking in the live rehearsal from several perspectives at once. The appreciation for the sprezzatura inherent in classical dance is soon displaced, as you notice the unflattering spandex bodysuits, which meld with the dancers' curves, nooks and crannies.

At the back of the gallery hangs a darkly romantic canvas of Paternoster Square rendered in the style of the paintings commissioned by Prince Charles in the 80s, which presented his vision of the square's regeneration. The painting is surrounded by a flamboyant golden frame and covered in a thick gloss, making it almost invisible under the harsh halogen lighting. London's skyline in the background is an unnerving, hellish red. Is this the scene of the square's original destruction during the bombings of World War II? Or is it a foretelling of the creepy result of the regeneration, echoing the misplaced and outdated neo-classical ideals of the British upper class?

Bronstein may approach his subjects with genuine curiosity and love, but his renderings of them are less generous. This pungently critical work is made up of a layering of styles, times, places and media. It uses an overtly pastiched approach to reference postmodernism generally, and specifically the architecture associated with it. Bronstein's work is a thoughtful and articulate consideration of the state of our city spaces. The globe's population is now more than 50 percent urban; what kind of world do we want to build for ourselves from here on out, and who gets to decide what it will look like? I find this work especially urgent in the UK, as 'public-realm art' has entered into fashion again thanks to the impending 2012 Olympics and numerous regeneration plans. Is this what we need again? Maybe in the end, we should just focus our creative thoughts into considerate urban planning and decent architecture. ▶

THE 2008 WHITNEY BIENNIAL

Whitney Museum, New York

by LEAH MODIGLIANI

To walk through the 74th Whitney Biennial was to experience the somewhat schizophrenic nature of contemporary American art, a situation that curators

Henriette Huldish and Shamim M. Momin optimistically characterized as "heterogeneous and disperse." When anything goes and no rules apply, art is all over the place. The Whitney Biennial is where you can see it all at once.

Eighty-one artists, with a surprising number from the West Coast, were spread out between two locations, the museum and the Park Avenue Armory down the street. Video, sculpture, installation, sound, performance and social practices were strongly represented. Painting barely put in an appearance, with practically no representational or figurative work, and there was less photography than in past years.

The "unmonumental" gesture of assemblage and collage, recently highlighted in an exhibition of the same title at the New Museum, took up almost a whole floor. Rachel Harrison's *Sops for Cerberus* (2008) exemplified this trend. One room contained a cubist-like sculpture painted in a colourful harlequin pattern that held three small carrot sculptures, nineteen painted-over photos of dolls and statues, a video projection of the film *Pirates of the Caribbean* and a video projection of a man selling paring knives produced in Switzerland. Alluding to Hercules' labours and the ability to get around a difficult task, the title raises the question implicit to the so-called unmonumental gesture: does it compel viewers to decipher a work?

A number of sculptures were the result of artists' formal experiments with common materials. Mitzi Pederson's untitled (*ten years later or maybe just one*) (2005) consisted of a stack of broken cement cinder blocks made less prosaic through the careful application of grey glitter to the cement's jagged edges. Jedediah Caesar's *Dry Stock* (2007) also elevated the low to the high; he cast urban detritus like dirt and fabric scraps inside a block of white resin, which was then cut and polished into one-inch slices and installed as abstract paintings on the wall.

The exhibition contained many overtly or indirectly political works. The poetical-titled, *not a matter of if but when: brief records of a time in which expectations were repeatedly raised and lowered and people grew exhausted from never knowing if the moment was at hand or still to come* (2006) was one of these. Collaborators Julia Meltzer and David Thorne filmed Syrian performer Rami Farah reciting improvised stories that seemed to reference both real events and symbolic metaphors, such as one tale of people who are forced to eat

poisoned bread by their oppressors but magically do not get sick. Farah's charisma and gift for narration endowed this work with poignancy, crossing a cultural divide to speak of human fear, anxiety, love and hope. Another standout was Daniel Joseph Martinez' *Divine Violence* (2007): 125 gold paintings arranged in a grid from floor to ceiling contained the names of groups he has designated terrorist organizations (Mossad, Blackwater, Al Qaeda, etc.). These minimal blocks of gold referenced both the worldwide economy ("black gold" and the lost gold standard) and the international currency of the art market. Memories of 60s political confrontations also surfaced, as in William Cordova's installation about the house built by Frank Lloyd Wright where Black Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were killed by police in 1969; and Adler Guerrier's fictional artist group named BLCK that he situates historically in the real Liberty City (Miami Beach) race riots of 1968.



Julia Meltzer and David Thorne, *Still from not a matter of if but when: brief records of a time when expectations were repeatedly raised and lowered and people grew exhausted from never knowing if the moment was at hand or was still to come*, Video projection, color, sound; 32 min., COLLECTION OF THE ARTISTS

"Networking" is a media buzz word for this Biennial, referring to the social connections between the curators and selected artists, and also the inclusion of artists or groups whose work is social in form. Among the latter, Ellen Harvey's *100 Biennial Visitors Immortalized* (2008) seemed truly participatory: she drew 100 15-minute portraits of visitors at the Armory, which they got to keep after the exhibition in exchange for their written criticism of her work. Neighbourhood Public Radio (NPR) was a guerrilla radio station based in a storefront near the museum that broadcast on local frequencies and depended on community participation. Organized by artists Linda Arnejo, Whiz Biddlecombe, Jon Brumit, Lee Montgom-

ery, Katina Papon and Michael Trigilio, NPR achieved true freedom of speech by operating entirely outside of corporate sponsorship and by playing whatever the public brought in.

Many of the works at the Armory referenced the site, but were overshadowed by the grandeur of the building itself. Carved wood, high ceilings and organically shaped wrought iron all competed with artists' projects that often did not measure up. Mungo Thomson's work, *Silent Film of a Tree Falling in the Forest* (2005–06), escaped this fate. The colour 16mm film projection shows six trees falling in the forest, each one disappearing into the background foliage. The mortality and materiality of film and nature were artfully echoed in the clicking of the film reel and quiet space. Back at the museum, the memorializing of nature was taken up quite differently by artist Fritz Haeg, who

created twelve "animal estate model homes" for animals once living where the Whitney now stands. *Animal Estates 1.0* (2008) included a built-to-scale eagle's nest located high on a roof above the visitor's entrance. At once funny and sad, this empty nest seemed a particularly rich metaphor for the times. The concept of home feels increasingly unstable, as war, climate change, immigration and a recession continue to rise to the surface of Americans' consciousness about themselves and their place in the world.

These challenges were represented in the work on display, and visitors likely found the 2008 Biennial either a delight or a disaster depending on whether they seek the reassurance of finely crafted formal works, or less reassuring records of ideas and actions still being tested. The latter type was more evident this year, and, while not pretty, it does seem necessary. ▶

OSCAR MUÑOZ

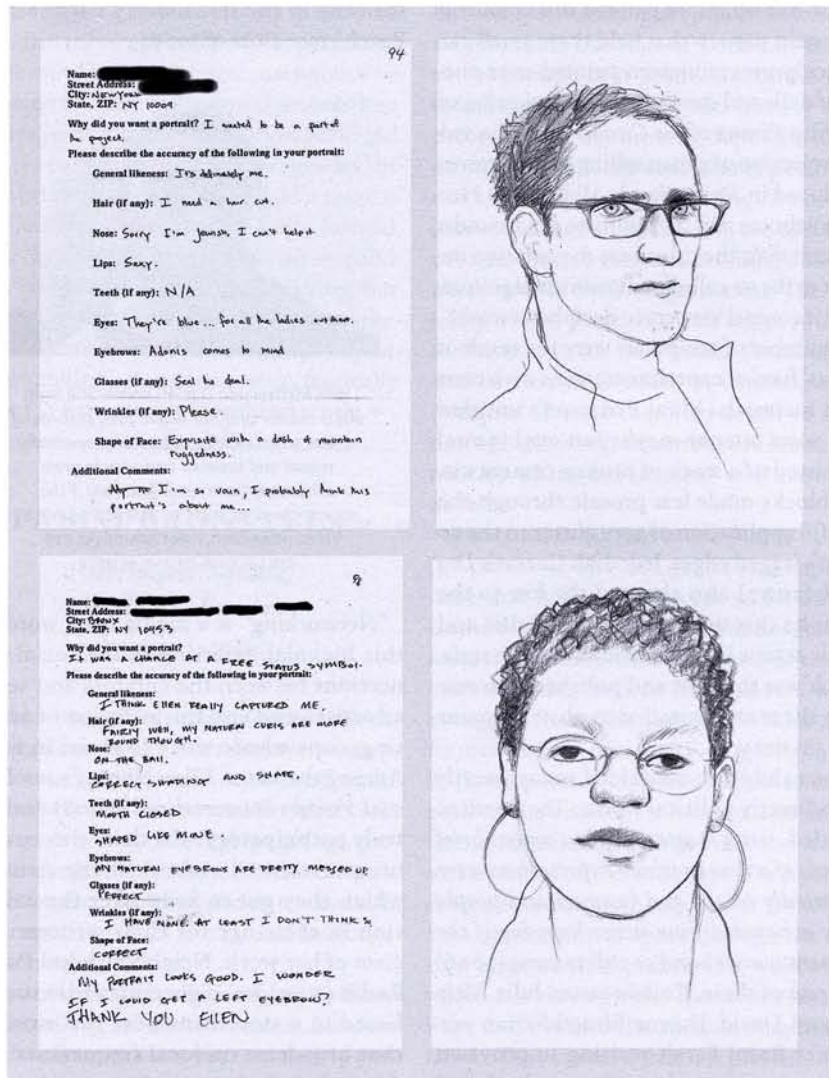
Imprints for a Fleeting Memorial,
Prefix Institute of Contemporary
Art in association with YZY
Artists' outlet

by TAMARA TOLEDO

Imprints for a Fleeting Memorial revealed glimpses of both inevitable death and the everlasting modernist quest for attempts at commemoration. Curated by José Roca, the exhibit includes 12 of Colombian artist Oscar Muñoz' celebrated works. Muñoz participated in the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007, has exhibited his work extensively across Europe, North America and Latin America and is regarded as one of Latin America's most important contemporary artists. The artist's conceptually solid interpretations and poetically inventive representations of memory, place and time speak to a universal process of globalization including the loss of history and of identity.

Does memory lapse in times of war, death and violence? Muñoz asks, "How can a society articulate a past when it is apparently shielded against events which are necessarily incorporated into everyday life to such an extent that they become almost imperceptible?" It is not sufficient to define Muñoz's work as commemorating disappearing lives and ideologies, yet a visual vocabulary composed of the disappeared in Colombia fill the gallery walls and floors. Muñoz makes vanishing and decomposing portraits of himself and of the deceased, taking their images from obituaries published in local Colombian newspapers. The artist's form of commemoration replaces the materiality of obvious forms of memorial and replaces it with ephemerality and poetry. Absence and presence dance with each other, permeating the room with metaphoric meaning and giving the audience an uncommon opportunity to engage with Latin American art.

The act of disappearing, the role of absence and the process of remembering unfortunately are all too familiar in the lives of millions of people throughout Latin America. In Colombia in particular, thousands of lives have been shattered in the incessant crossfire between right-wing paramilitary forces, drug cartels and left-wing guerrilla armies for over 50 years. In the floor work, *Ambulatorio* (1994–2003), a black and white photographic aerial view of Cali is protected by security glass, which the audience is allowed to step on. The audience not only



Ellen Harvey, *100 Free Portraits*, Performance offering 100 free 15-minute pencil portraits in exchange for questionnaires