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by Walter Robinson



Bellver's *Nube Tormenta*, courtesy
Galeria Max Estrella, outside the
ARCO pavilion



Inside ARCO '04



H.M. Queen Sofia (center) and
other officials at ARCO



The weather broke crisp and clear for **ARCO '04, the International Contemporary Art Fair**, Feb. 11-16, the 23rd installment of the huge and hugely popular art fair in the beautiful and cosmopolitan city of Madrid. With a total of 277 galleries from 32 countries (including 93 from Spain) spread over 22,860 square meters in two halls at the modern **Juan Carlos I Exhibition Center**, ARCO is perhaps the largest of the world's art fairs and, with upwards of 170,000 visitors, perhaps the busiest as well.

A substantial level of government patronage -- symbolized by the opening-day tour of the show by **H.M. Queen Sofia** (with a formidable phalanx of protective security), to considerable local excitement -- helps give ARCO an air of institutional stateliness, not to mention an impressive roster of ancillary events. Notable in this last category is the **2nd International Contemporary Art Experts Forum**, a contemporaneous five-day series of panels boasting speakers ranging from **Miami Art Central (MAC)** founder **Ella Cisneros** and **Tate Modern** director **Vincente Todoli** to South African artist **Kendell Geers** and *New York Times* critic **Roberta Smith**.

Every year, veteran ARCO director **Rosina Gómez-Baeza** makes a point of adding still more attractions to the fair lineup. This year ARCO initiated a new purchase award for a young (under 40) artist, to be announced on Feb. 14, as well as an "Extraordinary Corporate Collecting Award," for 2004 honoring the **Colección Arte Contemporáneo**, an impressive consortium of 23 Spanish firms that together own some 980 works by 170 artists, a collection that is currently on loan to the **Museo Patio Herreriano de Valladolid**. What's more, this year's fair serves as the venue for the first ever national meeting of Spanish contemporary art museum directors.

Every year ARCO sponsors a special section of the fair devoted to invited galleries from a specific country, providing their booths for free. This time around (in anticipation of the 2004 summer Olympics in Athens), the guest country is Greece, represented by 13 galleries - a clever initiative that resulted in 11 dealers making a first-time showing at the fair. (The guest country in 2005 is Mexico, followed by Austria in 2006 and South Korea in 2007.) ARCO's illumination of the



Galería Manuel Barbié, Barcelona

Greek art scene includes two major exhibitions at spaces in the city, "Breakthrough! Greece 2004: Contemporary Perspectives in the Visual Arts" and "Self-Aboutness, Contemporary Greek Photography," as well as a presentation of films by **Gregory Markopoulos**.



Enrique Marty
Uncle Balta
2004
Espacio Minimo

As is frequently the case in such mega-fairs, a nice jolt of youthful esthetic energy is provided by a number of booths devoted to artists' projects and newer galleries, here dubbed "Project Rooms" (28 artists) and "Up & Coming" (works by three artists each from 53 galleries from 21 countries). Ironically enough, the actual selection of the artists was left to teams of curators, while the dealers still picked up the tab (though at a reduced rate of €6,000 for a small booth).

Special attractions in "Up and Coming" were two galleries from Africa organized by **Simon Njami**: **ATISS** from Dakar, Senegal, with works by **Camara Gueye**, **Soly Cissé** and **Jems Robert Koko Bi**, and **CHAB** from Bamako, Mali, with works by **Amadou Traore**, **Hamidou Maiga** and South African photographer **Jurgen Sachdeberg**.

Despite the large number of international galleries, ARCO is refreshingly free of the ultra-trendy wares that are the staple of more international fairs. Instead, the emphasis is on art from Spain and Latin America, which clearly occupies a world of its own. Identifiable stylistic tendencies, though arguably "Spanish," are not unfamiliar: a taste for uncanny and sometimes macabre realism; a preoccupation with national history and myth; a peculiarly "Latin" variety of geometric abstraction; and a material "informalism" like that of **Antonio Tàpies**.



Fernando Sánchez Castillo
Sendero Luminoso
2003
Juana de Aizpuru

As for sales -- ARCO is a marketplace, after all -- there is no shortage of red dots (and, in any case, works that don't find buyers today are sure to sell later, and if not, then they can be stashed away until the time for a revival has come -- such is the degree of optimism in today's market). Early reports of big-ticket sales include €7 million for a 1942 **Picasso** portrait of **Dora Maar** at **Jan Krugier Gallery** and €900,000 for a 1974 **Miró** sculpture at **Galerie Gmurzynska**. (At this writing, the exchange rate of dollars to euros is about 1:1.3.)

Though ARCO largely caters to contemporary art, many galleries that handle classic modernism like Gmurzynska and Krugier are in attendance. As part of the impressive selection of Russian avant-garde art for which it is known, in fact, Gmurzynska has several small **Malevich** Suprematist compositions from 1915, done in pencil on graph paper, works that were last seen in the **Guggenheim Museum-Menil Collection** Malevich show. They can now be had for about €125,000 each.



Tania Bruguera's chess set at Juana

Also on hand with a high-key selection of School of Paris works is **Helly Nahmad**, whose booth boasts three exotic works by **Dalí** and not one but two paintings by **Picasso** of his vacation studio in

de Aizpuru



Photos by Gianfranco Botto and Roberta Bruno at Galeria Oliva Arauna



Nadin Ospina
Vasua con Chaman
Galeria Fernando Pradilla



Marcos Lopez
Sanctuary
1999
Galeria Fernando Pradilla



Rafael Iozano-Hemmer

Cannes in 1955-56. And **Galeria Manuel Barbié** in Barcelona, which one local observer called "the best gallery in Spain," has an elegant installation of early abstractions by **Alexandra Exter**, **Albert Gliezes**, **Antoine Pevsner**, **Liubov Popova**, **Ivan Puni** and others, plus a delicate 1911 pencil profile by **Modigliani**.

Right up front by the entrance to the fair pavilion is the booth of the Madrid gallery **Espacio Minimo**, which holds a definite crowd pleaser by ca. 35-year-old **Enrique Marty**, whose gnarly little statue of *Uncle Balta* (2004), a tiny, querulous ruddy-skinned little man sitting on a Seven Dwarfs chair, just happens to resemble **George W. Bush**. The price: €8,000.

Work by Marty is included in "The Real Royal Road Trip," the survey of contemporary Spanish art organized by globetrotting curator **Harald Szeeman** that recently was held at **P.S. 1** in New York and that now is also on display at Herreriano museum in Valladolid.

Another Szeeman choice is **Fernando Sánchez Castillo**, whose monument-like bronze sculptures are on view at ARCO at the booth of top Madrid dealer **Juana de Aizpuru**. Sánchez Castillo's *Sendero Luminoso* (2003), a bronze and steel cast of a dog hung from a lamppost, is a harrowing and powerful citation of one of the Peruvian terror group's tactics of mass intimidation.

Another work by Sánchez Castillo, *Cascorro*, has a more pleasant storybook feel. Named after the Spanish hero who saved Madrid in 1808, the heavy metal sculpture is a cast of just the man's feet on a sturdy base. The works are priced, respectively, at €30,000 and €22,000 (in an edition of 3).

Aizpuru also represents the Cuban performance artist **Tania Bruguera**, who has sent an allegorical chess set. The squares are all the same color, but alternate in height, so that the game's traditional hierarchy is simultaneously banished and reinstated in a new form. Instead of actual chess pieces the game uses undistinguishable stacks of U.S. pennies. The work is published by the artist in an edition of six for €4,500.

At the booth of **Galeria Oliva Arauna**, Madrid, are new works by **Gianfranco Botto and Roberta Bruno**, a pair of Italians from Milan who make oversize digital photographs on sheets of PVC and who had their first show at the gallery a few months ago. Botto and Bruno focus on an alienated suburban youth; the pictures, in editions of two, sell for €8,500. The only painter represented at Arauna is **Rosa Brun**, whose large 2003 abstraction *Argaya* is a serenade in nursery pink and blue. The price: €17,000.

One of the top South American galleries at ARCO is **Galeria Fernando Pradilla**, which originally opened in Bogota with an ambitious, five-story gallery that was called **El Museo**, and which now has both a Colombian and a Madrid branch. At the fair Pradilla

El Perro
33 Questions per Minute
 Galeria OMR



El Perro
To Participate Is What Counts
 2004
 Galeria Salvador Diaz



Jana Sterbak
Monumental Crutches
 2002
 Galeria Toni Tàpies, with Artnet's
 Macu Moran



Jaume Plensa
Crystal Rain
 2003
 Galeria Toni Tàpies



now has both a Colombian and a Madrid branch. At the fair, Predillo is showing comical horror-movie-style photos by **Ixone Sabada** (a man casually crossing a bridge with an axe embedded in his skull), candy-colored "Argentine Pop" photographs by **Marcos Lopez** (a maid in heavy makeup gasps in surprise when the santos she is cleaning glows with a yellow halo) and ceramics that channel Walt Disney cartoon characters through a pre-Columbian time warp by **Nadin Ospina**.

Lopez' hand-tinted photos, in editions of five, are 4,000 euros, while a small Ospina sculpture of Minnie Mouse in an edition of four is 3,250 euros. Predillo also works with Latin America's most famous artist, **Fernando Botero**, and his booth at the fair has a small "back room" with recent paintings, drawings and a sculpture by the artist.

One of the most energetic art scenes in the world resides in Mexico City, and four Mexican galleries are at ARCO, including Galeria OMR, which works with "international" artists like **Stephan Balkenhol**, **Manuel Ocampo** and **Jane Simpson** as well as contemporary Mexican artists. One crowd-stopping work is **Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's** high-tech *33 Questions per Minute, Relational Architecture 5*, a computer with 20 tiny LED screens programmed to display randomly some 55 billion questions, plus the odd query entered by viewers via a handy keyboard. Now that's one curious artwork. Three of the edition of five are sold, with buyers including both a Spanish and U.S. museum. The price: \$40,000.

No art fair worth its salt is without provocations and white elephants. One of the former is at **Galeria Salvador Diaz**, whose Madrid headquarters is across the square from the Reina Sofia museum. The Madrid artist collaborative **El Perro** (**Ramon Mateos**, **Pablo España**, **Ivan Lopez**) has built a **mock shooting gallery** out of corrugated steel. For 50 cents, fair visitors can buy a paintball from a vending machine and shoot it at a video projection of people in the adjoining aisle.

Diaz also has some lightbox photo transparencies by El Perro -- which translates as "the dog," of course -- showing a comely young woman with a Molotov cocktail, a still from a video that casts political insurrection in the sporty language of a Gap ad. The *Shooting Gallery* installation is €45,000, while the photos, called *To Participate Is What Counts*, are €6,000 each.

Another eye-catching work, on view at **Galeria Toni Tàpies** from Barcelona, is **Jana Sterbak's** *Monumental Crutches* (2002), which measure more than six feet tall. In the center of Tapies' booth is *Crystal Rain* (2003) by **Jaume Plensa**, a dramatic theatrical cascade of blown-glass spheres lit by a few fluorescents.

At the booth of **Galeria Senda**, Barcelona, is a typically Spanish "informalist" painting by **Jose Maria Sicilia**, a large (nine foot tall) work from 1988 that is priced at €90,000. At **Galeria Colon XVI**,



Jose Maria Sicilia
Composicion (Diptico)
1988
Galeria Senda, Barcelona



Pedro Txillida
Torso XXV
2003
Galeria Colon XVI



View from the booth of Mark Müller, Zurich, with works by Markus Weggerman (right), Katharina Grosse and, across the aisle, Gunther Forg



Evan Penny
No One in Particular #13
2004
Art Core, Toronto



Bilbao, are works by **Chillida**, Tapies and **Miguel Barceló**, as well as some muscular, earth-colored paintings of abstracted athletes by **Pedro Txillida**, Chillida's son.

At **Galleria 111**, Madrid, are **two large paintings** by the late **Eduardo Urculo**, who became well known in Spain during the last 10 years or so for works done in a contemporary Cubist style. He died in 2003, and the compositions here, *Mythology* and *Carmen*, are the final works from his studio (they're priced at €60,000 and €57,000, respectively). Galleria 111 is also debuting at ARCO the finely done **allegorical paintings** of **Jose-Ramon Gallardo**, who combines a palimpsest of images into each work -- a weathervane, a hand holding a plumb line, a jumble of construction materials and the figure of Porky Pig, for instance. A "Measure of Man" for our time, perhaps?

The celebrated Latin American sense of abstraction was on view at **Galerie Nara Roesler** from São Paulo, via works by the Op Art pioneer **Abraham Palatnik** (b. 1928), who won a prize at the 1951 Sao Paulo Bienal for his "cinechromatic" objects. More contemporary is work by **Arthur Lescher**, whose **2003 sculpture *Elíptica*** manages to be both inside and outside the booth at once. (The price is \$25,000.) Lescher, who was helping Roesler man the booth, has also been commissioned by super-patron **Eduardo Constantini** to do a large installation of elliptical forms at **MALBA** in Buenos Aires.

However popular new-fangled mediums like photography and video may become, purist abstract painting never seems to lose its appeal. A large (250 x 320 cm.) abstraction of green, yellow and white cross-hatchings by **Gunter Förg** at **Galeria Filomena Soares** sold quite quickly at €55,000. Soares also had impressive **architectural sculptures**, constructed of wood and plain canvas, by the ca. 40-year-old Portuguese artist **Angela Ferreira**, that all sold -- prices not disclosed.

Across the aisle, dealer **Mark Müller** from Zurich had filled his booth with contemporary formalist abstraction, including a vertical untitled painting of massive brushstrokes by **Katharina Grosse** from 2004 and a painting from 2003, *Gemalde Nr. 157*, by **Markus Weggermann**, its surface a miracle of glassy smoothness done with auto lacquer. The works are priced at €14,000 and €7,000, respectively.

With all the project booths -- not to mention Madrid's innate attractions -- it's no surprise that several artists were on hand. The well-known 1980s painter **Peter Schuyff**, now resident in Vancouver (and also at www.schuyff.com), flew up from sunny Tenerife to visit **Galerie Leyendecker**, which features three of his new paintings on a "love" theme, just in time for Valentine's Day (the price: €14,000 apiece).

The Canadian super-realist sculptor **Evan Penny** was also greeting his fans at the booth of Art Core, Toronto. His series of unpeppery Me-



Showichi Kaneda and his work at
Beijing Tokyo Art Project



Works by Eduardo Costa (left) and
Marta Chillindron at Cecilia de
Torres



Joao Pedro Vale
Heroes of the Sea
2004
Galeria Filomena Soares



Nestor Torrens
Still from *Like Irregular Chickens*
Vegueta, Las Plamas de Gran
Canaria

his fans at the booth of **Art Core**, Toronto. His series of uncannily *ivo* *One in Particular* portraits, which cost about \$15,000 apiece, are done in low relief with colored polyester and real hair.

"Human beings cling to speed," says the Tokyo-born artist **Showichi Kaneda** of his exquisitely crafted model sharks covered with racing decals. "Sharks cannot stop swimming, either." His works are at ARCO at the booth **Beijing Tokyo Art Projects** (BTAP), which was established in Beijing in 2002 by **Yukihito Tabata**.

Marta Chillindron and **Eduardo Costa** were sharing a project booth sponsored by the New York private dealer **Cecilia de Torres**. At the press preview, Costa was waving a brush around as he put the final touches on a large abstract geometric sculpture, made entirely of pigment. Chillindron's hinged works, done in translucent colored plastic, can take on various shapes. As a whole, the two-artist booth was an exemplum of Latin American geometric abstraction.

In the project booth sponsored by Galeria Filomena Soares was a huge lighthouse apparently made of sand by **Joao Pedro Vale**. He said that the work's title, *Heroes of the Sea*, is a phrase from the Portuguese anthem. Vale ventured that the work is a typical lighthouse, made of sand as a child might play on the beach, but also ventured that the work might be a ghost rhyme from some ancient mariner.

Another artist in attendance was **Dzine**, a designer whose **multi-panel, glass-bead mural**, presented at ARCO by **Monique Meloche** from Chicago, is made with a secret process devised by **Maya Romanoff** (price: \$65,000). Dzine has recently showed at **SCAI the Bathhouse** in Tokyo and has made a special line of clothing that changes patterns in the sun for the **SOPH** boutique in Japan.

Among the "Projects" booths was a theater with a comic Bugs Bunny proscenium entrance by the 40-something artist **Nestor Torrens**. Playing inside was *Like Irregular Chickens*, an amusing stop-action video made with clips of war news borrowed from CNN, Fox and other cable shows, with the commentators in freeze frames with mouths open and eyes closed, all to a funky soundtrack of chicken and geese squawks by **Kid Koala**. The overtones were sexual, comic and political, in that order. The booth was presented by the gallery **Vegueta** from Las Palmas in the Canary Islands.

And last but not least, the booth of **Taschen**, the celebrated art-book publisher, featured a copy of the deluxe edition of its **Muhammad Ali** tribute, *Greatest of All Time* (GOAT), with the **Jeff Koons** multiple assembled -- a Rauschenbergian inflated tire positioned around a white wooden stool, which is surmounted first by the book itself and then by an inflated vinyl dolphin, Koons' mother figure. The price: \$7,500.

Carroll

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