



Critic's View: PINTA Art Fair Packs a Punch

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by Esperanza Leon

Pinta Art Fair opened this weekend with a strongly curated fair. With about 70 exhibitors from 20 countries, Pinta NY manages to be a small fair that packs a punch. It resists and contradicts the stereotypes that survive and surround art from Latin America. In singling out this creative output, the fair actually provides a venue that allows for a better understanding of its roots and local and global context.

In this edition, there is a broader scope that demonstrates not only the breadth of creation by artists from these regions, but also the high caliber of work.

Pinta Art Fair 2013 is formed by six distinct yet somewhat overlapping sections: Pinta Next, Pinta Centro, Pinta Video, Pinta Modern, and Pinta Contemporary (which includes Pinta Emerge, solo installations by emerging artists). Each is organized and selected by different curators and spread fluidly over two floors at 82 Mercer in SoHo, in a layout devised by architect Warren James.

The result is an overall cohesive and elegant show, gratefully lacking the usual art fair pomposity. In fact, it might feel more like visiting a small, if eclectic, museum, right down to the intimate cafes, the one on the ground floor featuring work by Ray Smith, who reappears upstairs with a terrific installation at GE Galeria, Monterrey.



Cafe Comodo featuring work by Ray Smith.



Ray Smith wall at GE Galeria.

Pinta Centro focuses on artists and galleries from Central America, selected by Omar Lopez-Chahoud. The most significant work there is presented by EspIRA/Adrede, an artist run space begun in Managua twelve years ago to fill a void of arts education in Nicaragua.

Particularly arresting are Alejandro Flores' stitched masks like those worn for *lucha libre*, or professional wrestling. They also evoke long-standing traditions of embroidery and textile work and mask making, with a twist. Across the way, Walterio Iraheta's wall of *Eggs Typology* (hi-def print on cotton paper) at Fugalalternativa, El Salvador, is an intriguing play on abstract-geometric composition, which has been a reference at Pinta from its inception. Surely, overall this is a rare opportunity to see art from this part of the world.

For Pinta Video, perhaps one of the strongest contemporary platforms of the fair, seven artists were selected by Spanish curator, Octavio Zaya. Video art can either mesmerize or bore the viewer. Three artists here stood out with captivating work: Dani Martí (Spanish, works in Sydney and Glasgow), Lucia Pizzani (Venezuelan, works in London), and Zoe T. Vizcaíno (Mexican, works in Madrid) screen very different but equally poetic proposals that connect emotionally with the viewer in similar ways.

Pizzani's [*De la Ofelia del Sena y otras desconocidas*](#) (2012-2013) is a single-channel video with sound accompanied by a gesso mask installed at the entryway. The piece relates to a late 19th century story of a young woman who drowned in the Seine River and whose face became famous amongst 20th century writers and artists, the Surrealists in particular.

The video loops through a repeated sequence of a woman plunging into water, the action slowed, one getting pulled in by the initial near-tranquility of the water, suddenly impacted by the body, then the gentle, enveloping movement of the bubbles, followed by a return to calm. Pizzani resurrects the Seine Ophelia's story as a parallel to modern-day women pushed to (self)destruction, whose stories are also buried and forgotten over time.

Martí's [*Mariposa \(Butterfly Man, 2012\)*](#), presented by Breenspace, Sidney, films a chronic meth addict performing 'flagging' (regularly performed in gay clubs to dance music), his movements captivate while the man's presence repulses, as we witness his physical deterioration. [*The Only Evil by Vizcaíno*](#) (represented by Galería Moriarty, Madrid) is a simple shot documenting water in the process of boiling, accompanied by the voice of Jonas Mekas taken from one of his video diaries, part of his *365 Day Project*.

I should note that Julian Navarro Projects (LIC) presents here *Untitled Series (Painting Semiotics)* a slide-show piece by Richard Gareth, whose immersive visual and sound work I greatly admire. Gareth was recently part of the exhibition *Soundings: A Contemporary Score* at the Museum of Modern Art. One significant downside to the video art section, however, is that the sounds from different pieces interfered with one another. This may have affected my appreciation for Gareth's work on this occasion.

Moving on to Pinta Next, Taller Bloc from Santiago features works by Tomás Rivas who works with modern/contemporary architecture and classical Greek and Roman architectural/sculptural motifs in Photograms and carvings on drywall and gesso that have semblance with archaeological excavations. His simple hand-embroideries juxtapose the architecture of public housing in Chicago, with Classical shell motifs. Notably, this is another artist run space that devotes itself to education in the arts, promoting local artistic production and dialogue between artists, both in Chile and

internationally.



Thomas Rivas at Taller Bloc.



Thomas Rivas embroidery at Taller Bloc.

RGR-ART, a new gallery from Valencia, Venezuela, brought several artists that don't seem to be part of their usual roster, but were a welcome sight, among them José Vivenes, Francisco Bugallo, and especially Carlos Zerpa, whose quirky assemblages and paintings deserve far more exposure and recognition in this country.



Jose Vivenes paintings at RGR + ART.



Carlos Zerpa on left at RGR + ART.

At Yael Rosenblut (Santiago) there is another instance of embroidery with the wild work of Argentine duo Chiachio and Giannone who, not unlike Gilbert & George portray themselves, though always in lush, tropical surroundings and accompanied by a dachshund. Theirs is an undeniable wink and nudge to magical realism.



Chiachio Giannone tapestry at Yael Rosenblut.

Presenting another notable play on the predominantly known languages of Latin American art, Luis

González Palma's most recent work presented at Blanca Berlín, Madrid, is worth following. Attempting to reconcile the opposing vocabularies of figuration (socially conscious, exotic, magical realism) and geometric abstraction, González Palma (Guatemala) continues with his sepia-toned photographs of indigenous faces, here printed on Japanese papers in various translucent layers, the portraits distorting through geometric configurations.



Luis Gonzales Palma wall at Blanca Berlin.



Luis Gonzales Palma piece at Blanca Berlin.

Upstairs, Pinta Emerge, curated by José Roca did not have particularly stand out artists, save perhaps Ricardo Alcaide (Venezuelan, works in London and São Paulo) at Baró Galeria, São Paulo. Not unlike González Palma's current work, Alcaide's are geometric interventions in photographic space, in this case distorting and deconstructing modern architectural and urban spaces. The work seems to reflect on the destruction of the ideologies behind those places and the decline and decadence of mid-20th century imagery and icons. This artist's work is also at the booth of Josée Bienvenu Gallery, New York, where he currently has an exhibition through mid-December.

Apart from GE Galería, Josée Bienvenu, Pan American Art Projects, and Y Gallery, the Contemporary group of exhibitors selected by Ian Cofre, the new fair director, is not compelling or revealing of notable, much less new, talent. At Pan American, work by Cuban artist Abel Barroso, a map of migrations made with pencil shavings, has a tremendous 'wow' factor. Among the artists presented by Y Gallery, Arnaldo Morales (Puerto Rican, works in New York) titillates and threatens with one of his machine assemblages.



Abel Barroso st Pan American Art Projects.

In the Modern portion, curated by Cecilia Fajardo-Hill, Henrique Faría presents two immaculate booths, one filled with abstract geometric expressions, including Gego, Mercedes Pardo, Eduardo Costa, Victor Valera, and Willys de Castro, to name a few; the other with conceptual works from Marta Minujín, Yeni & Nan, Pedro Terán, Claudio Perna, and Álvaro Barrios, among others. The two

booths presented by this one dealer are the perfect showcase for “art that doesn’t *look* like Latin American art”. Faría will be the first to say there is still a long road ahead to putting this artwork on the map where it truly belongs, successful auction results in recent years notwithstanding.



Henrique Faria Fine Art Modern booth.



Henrique Faria Fine Art Conceptual booth.



Alvaro Barrios at Henrique Faria.

Cecilia de Torres is another prominent reference here, representing and championing Joaquín Torres García and his Constructivist alumns. One of them, José Gurvich (1927-1974), is honored in this edition of the fair with an exclusive exhibition booth. De Torres presents acrylic sculptural work by Marta Chilindron that interacts wonderfully with new painting by Jesús Matheus. Eduardo Stupía is a thrilling discovery, while ceramics by Lidya Buzio, whose exhibition in the gallery I reviewed earlier this year, are a great reencounter.



Eduardo Stupia at Cecilia de Torres.



Detail of Eduardo Stupia at Cecilia de Torres.

Also in this booth is Gustavo Bonevardi, whose father was a recognized Argentine abstract artist, and who collaborated on the installation of searchlights, the commemorative *Tribute in Light*, for the World Trade Center site. He offers intriguing work here, in particular *Paper Planes* (2013). The

piece tricks the eye as a pure construction of white, geometric planes, but on closer inspection reveals they're fashioned like paper airplanes.



Gustavo Bonevardi Paper Planes at Cecilia de Torres.

Pinta touts itself as a 'leading voice in the championing of Latin American Art'. It is more recently presenting itself also as a 'leader in promoting Latin American, Spanish, and Portuguese art abroad', but I found the latter two localities not so well represented. At one point, it ran the danger of focusing too specifically on the resurgent interest and trend toward geometric abstraction.

Overall, Pinta presented a cohesive and elegant show that presented a high-caliber of Latin American art.

BASIC INFO: Pinta is being presented from Nov. 14 - 17, 2013 at 82 Mercer Street, New York, NY 10012. The art fair presents modern and contemporary Latin American art. Tickets are \$25 or \$10 for students. Pinta Forum, a series of public lectures, is presenting programs from Friday through Sunday.

For information and details on Pinta, visit www.pinta-ny.com.

RELATED: "[Art Review: Lidya Buzio Ceramic Sculpture-scapes and Abstractions](#)" by Esperanza Leon.

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