

I'D SETTLE FOR BEING ABLE TO SLEEP
MONDONGO



2013

artsawa

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ART SAWA DIFC
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This show marks yet another radical excursion into the possibilities of pushing sculpture in new directions. This series of constructed “floats” or expansive assemblages has a clear relation to a carnivalesque spirit but, at the same time, is also full of their characteristic appropriated imagery and acid social comment.

Mondongo has resorted to the fairy story on other occasions as a means of presenting an allegory of Argentinean society, picking up on the moral content of the Victorian children’s story but subverting it through classic postmodern strategies: irony and appropriation. One of their earlier series dealt with an endlessly multiplied Red Riding Hood who wandered the parks and Japanese gardens of the city escaping and perhaps provoking the threats of a lecherous male world. Their work always cuts and comments, parodies and imagines.

On this occasion Manuel Mendanha and Juliana Lafitte have turned to a blending of two classic fairy stories: Snow White and Sleeping Beauty. Both figures are emblematic of white purity and innocence and, as such, easy victims of postmodern irony. Juliana herself serves as a model for this figure. It is not a gratuitous gesture since Juliana herself emerged, as it were, from one of these problematic barrios. The figure juts out as a three dimensional bust but she is gradually being overgrown, literally taken over, by the villas miseries that surround her, so characteristic of the immense peripheral expanse of Gran Buenos Aires. She is set centre stage – a distant and self-contained image of the comforts of the bourgeoisie – but, at the same time, she is being contaminated and sullied by the spread of poverty. However, Juliana’s enigmatic smile also suggests a certain positive recognition of the chaotic and irrepressible energies of life in these barrios. Life in the megalopolis is increasingly becoming a conflict-zone between the rich and the poor, between those who have access to culture and consumerism and those who simply manage to survive.

The appropriations invariably tie into the theme of the work at multiple levels.

The putrid body of the hare might easily be found on the streets of the barrio but it also relates at a metaphorical level to their approach to art and its potential meanings. Their intention is to make the work intelligible to a wider public. The hare can, therefore, be seen as a reference to Joseph Beuys's famous performance *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*. Beuys locked the gallery doors from the inside, leaving the gallery-goers outside, only able to observe the scene through the windows. Beuys had his head entirely coated in honey and gold leaf and began to explain the pictures to a dead hare, whispering to it in an apparent dialogue.

This performance was the high point of Beuys' development of a broadened definition of art, which had already begun in his drawings of the 1950s. He ironically celebrated the ritual of "explaining art" with an action that was, for his viewers, effectively silent. The relationship between thought, speech, and form in this performance was characteristic of Beuys. Obviously Mondongo not only appropriates the image of the hare but also its broad symbolic meanings in many religions. In Greek mythology it is associated with the goddess of love, Aphrodite, to the Romans and Germanic tribes it is a symbol of fertility, and in Christianity it is connected with the Resurrection. Beuys has said of this piece: "For me the Hare is a symbol of incarnation, which the hare really enacts- something a human can only do in imagination. It burrows, building itself a home in the earth. Thus it incarnates itself in the earth: that alone is important. So it seems to me. Honey on my head of course has to do with thought. While humans do not have the ability to produce honey, they do have the ability to think, to produce ideas. Therefore the stale and morbid nature of thought is once again made living. Honey is an undoubtedly living substance – human thoughts can also become alive. On the other hand intellectualizing can be deadly to thought: one can talk one's mind to death in politics or in academia."

This remark of Beuys offers a possible reading of regeneration from putrefaction, of a certain optimistic hope that things can improve despite all the evidence. Mondongo frequently appropriate imagery from their own immediate circle of family and friends and the image of their daughter Francesca stretched out on the ground seems like another injection of positive energy that acts as a counter force to encroaching strangle-hold of the villa miseria.

The fact that Juliana's head rests against a pressed meat cushion carries reverberations both of an earlier series of portraits, such as the one of Lucien Freud's Leigh Bowery, and of the proliferation of cheap and often expired food. And this multilayering of meanings that is so much a part of their work also allows us to read the image as referring to Argentina's history of meat production that has so often been the bulwark of their economy. Mondongo willingly complicates the referential field and the image of the hare is equally indebted to a Brueghel image where characters are seen eating or vomiting fish. And similarly the small-scale skull reminds of a recent series where the skulls served as repositories for a fecund and garrulous imago mundi of appropriated images from infinite cultural sources. The fact that the skull is ironically capped with an image of a turd suggests either that the series is definitely over or that, contrary to Beuys, their minds are void and that momentarily they feel threatened by a loss of ideas: a sudden burst of existential anguisse.

This is an important work that is taking Mondongo into new territory. It courts both spectacle and surprise. It remains much more ambiguous than the blending of the two fairy stories!

By Kevin Power

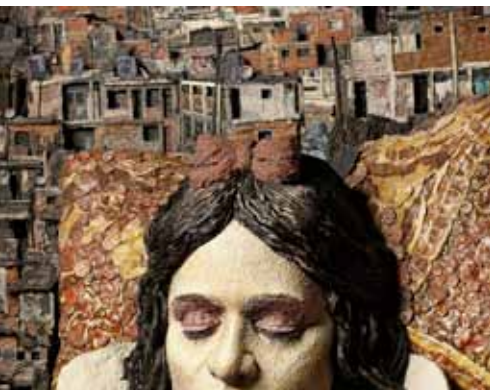


ME CONFORMARÍA CON PODER DORMIR)

Mixed Media & Leds on Wood

180 x 195 x 115 cm

2009-2013



Details: ME CONFORMARÍA CON PODER DORMIR
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TENER UN MUNDO (CAJA DE LUZ #4), Mixed Media and Leds on Wood, 98 x 148.5 x 59.5 cm, 2011-2012





TENER UN MUNDO (CAJA DE LUZ #3)

Mixed Media & Leds on Wood

98.00 X 148.50 X 59.50 cm

2011- 2012



TENER UN MUNDO (CAJA DE LUZ #2)
Mixed Media & Leds on Wood
98.00 X 148.50 X 59.50 cm
2011 – 2012

“The play’s the thing”

Hamlet Act 2, scene 2, 603-605

For cultural iconoclasm, playful irreverence and magpie bohemianism, there are few to beat Mondongo, the art collective from Argentina. This feature that marks them out starts ab initio, or from the very beginning of their existence. The group who make up Mondongo led by Manuel Mendanha and Juliana Lafitte, first looked into the kitchen to give a name to themselves. Their Muse was “Mondongo,” the word for the traditional Argentine tripe stew. Mondongo is not only partial to the name of the stew, but make their work from a cauldron of ingredients. “We’ve used a huge variety of materials in our art, depending on what best reinforces the concept of the work,” says one of them. “It’s always a process of experimentation until we finish it. We’ll keep experimenting with materials till death comes!” Or they run out of material, both possibilities which don’t seem anywhere near. Just about everything – we mean everything – is grist to their feverish art making imagination. The material they use for their mixed media art include burnt toast, stale bread, resin, gold chains, nails, clay, velvet, cultured sequins, cookies and bullets. These wide varieties of mediums they use give them leverage to create an astonishing range of art results. They helped the artists burnish their works with vivid colors; subtle nuances and that often provide a three-dimensional effect to their pieces. Scale or detail does not frighten them. They can condense a city block in a cabinet triptych or a forest in a frame. A human skull, which is thing for morbid fascination for most of us, is only yet one more object d’art for Mondongo to try their transformative skills. In their hands, it becomes a canvas to carve African totems, dinosaur - or even Dubai’s Atlantis, which fronts a sea with mediaeval sailing ships in it. The total impact is such that we are sure if Shakespeare’s Hamlet had got his hands on it, he would have burst into another immortal monologue like “Alas, poor Yorick!”

levels.

“We are like three witches stirring it up in a cauldron... attempting to alchemize, to distil and to ooze all the chaos and the all possible ‘all-ness’ in it,” they say in their manifesto, taking their Puckish Shakespearean imagery further. Bold and inventive, Mondongo does not fear to go where others fear even to enter. What is more, their art is so inviting and unique that viewers are mesmerized into following them on their journey. The social experiment, blessed by an in-your-face sass, does not shy away from exposing the dark undertows of daily subjects. True, some of their offerings have an erotic twist while some precariously walk the tightrope between playfulness and disrespect. But, to their credit, they have an unsullied standing in the art world.

Mondongo’s work is now not only held in high esteem in Argentina, with their Buenos Aires gallery talking about “Mondongo mania,” but has begun to make an impact internationally, with works collected by the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, the Tate Gallery, UK and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Their works are found in public and private collections worldwide and they have exhibited at the Valencia and Sao Paulo biennials, shown in the USA, (Art Basel Miami), Spain, UK, China, Korea and Latin America.

Q&A – Manuel Mendanha & Juliana Lafitte

1- how were you first exposed to art? (Through family, school, etc.)

Manuel:

I remember that drawing has been an obsession since I have memory. The first memory I have of a work that influenced me is the show of the monsters of Antonio Berni (las pesadillas de Ramona Montiel) in which plates and trash used to build some monstrous giants to speak of life in society as banks used the same elements as was in those places. It was the first one to become aware of the concept of materials.

Juliana:

My first show was in a bar on Calle Corrientes (Buenos Aires that they call 'the street that never sleeps') because it is full of shows, all-night bookstores, and bars. Here I put some pictures in a basement where rock bands also played.

2-Tell us about your educational background, as well as your personal background (Where were you born, grew up, lived etc.)

Manuel:

Juliana and I studied at the National School of Fine Arts in Buenos Aires Pueyrredon Prilidiano that no longer exists but we met in the last year painting career, two years after we married.

My mother is Italian and Argentine father and during the 70s were radical leftists in Argentina.

Where upon our cots are totally antagonistic. And our work reflects the struggle of characters.

Juliana:

I was born in San Nicolas, a small town 300 km from Capital Federal, I lived there until I was 13 and then move the whole family to the capital.

My upbringing was normal, very average. In public schools that were near my house. That was the search for my education.

I studied 5 years at the National School of Fine Arts in Buenos Aires where the last year I met Manuel and immediately got together, got married, and a year started working together.

3- what was your first exhibition and where?

Manuel:

Our first exhibition as a group was in 2000 at the Recoleta Cultural Center in Argentina, was an Installation with 120 masks mortuary and remake of the Last Supper in the back of the room.

Beyond work nonstop, luck helped us because in 2002 we were commissioned to portray the Spanish Royal family while we were very young. We decided to perform them entirely 1x1cm color mirrors, as there is a myth, which relates that when the Spanish colonizers came to America they offered to native little mirrors in exchange for substantial gold from these lands.

In those days of the crisis in 2001 in Argentina, Spain was at the height of its economy, had bought the phones, the state oil company, multimedia, etc.

So we changed snake oil for euros to the Spanish crown reversing the colonial exchange.

The event had an impact on society Argentina and came to Spain when we portraits exhibition in Madrid.

From that foolish fact, the wheel began to turn more quickly.

Juliana:

With Mondongo did our first show in 2000 at the Centro Cultural Recoleta in Buenos Aires, with 150 direct copies masks with faces and then interpreted by us with various materials in resin blocks, also had a large table with 7 direct copies sculptures of our bodies at the table, all a great delusion.

4- what is the inspiration behind your Work?

Manuel:

Our inspiration comes from multiple sources. We believe in sustained, in the trial and error as a method, as well as in the shared work.

Disbelieve the notion of ownership of ideas in the manner set out today.

We believe that the work we can produce are in dialogue with dead and alive, with traffic of influences from past masters to everyday life mates.

The works often take many years to acquire a definitive way which perhaps the intent with which a job is started which has at its end.

Juliana:

Depending on the period that is modified or actually always talk about the same thing? I always wonder.

5- what are the messages you convey through your art?

Manuel:

We would like to portray some meaningful aspects of our time.

We believe that our main task is to ask about the days we walked.

Juliana:

There are no direct messages, or closed. Our desire is to produce mental

or sensory shocks people, or better yet generate excitement or emotion in the viewer.

6-Tell us about this (current) Mondongo | part II show

Manuel:

The new show, I'd settle for being able to sleep, was thought of as a set of thoughts near the possible paths offered by the subconscious. As a means of escape of hyper organized reality we live in,

Figure numb Snow White is a little reflection of the whole society, with its demons and latent beauty.

The tunnels are like exhaust possible avenues or life decisions; we may be inclined by technology, nature, religion, etc.

Juliana:

It is difficult to speak of 'concept' of a sample or a work for us.

I think if I tell you why I did what I'm closing, caging 'thinking they're going to see. Would be nice if everyone who sees the show can unfold their feelings without prior explanations that limit the mind and spirit.

7-How did you select the works for this exhibition?

Manuel:

We chose them because they have the same line of thought and formal development. They are an exploration into high relief and sculpture and also a walk in the land of dreams.

Juliana:

With Manuel talked a lot before making any statement, and we are working pseudo Snow White four years ago and has matured along with us, and Dubai's proposal came just at the time she was asking us to leave and in peace, so here there was. Tunnels are that, runaways, leaks, leaks, keys...

8- when you choose works for a show in Dubai, are they different than works for the shows in another country? Are they different than for shows in Europe?

Manuel:

We look for the universality of the concepts in our work, we want, at this stage of our development, that those works who leave the studio have a certain degree of honesty and hope you can talk to as many minds as possible.

Juliana:

We do not think strategically according to where the work is. We understand that art has no language or idiosyncratic defined.

9- as you appropriate icons from local, regional, and international contexts do you envision these having different meanings/messages in each context?

Manuel:

We live in a world where information flows exponentially, equating culture will over time.

The use of different symbols and icons allows us to generate views that can be interpreted and understood in different latitudes. Can officiate as hooks to the concepts.

At one point there is no difference between local contexts, regional and international.

10- how do you envision you future of art on?If so how will it be accomplished?

Manuel:

We believe deeply in the power of art to awaken consciences. It is one of the oases within ultra sistematizada in life that are developed today. This kind of Big Brother, which is transforming our daily, lives increasingly less room for freedom and artistic creation of sincerity when there is a crack to breathe.

On the other hand the progress of the art market means that in many cases, demand depreciate exaggerated proposals with some degree of radicalism, through an eternal repetition aimed to satisfy your voracious appetite. We believe that in all ages as most of the things that occur today, tomorrow will be forgotten.

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