

carlos garaicoa

Party! Not Tea Party

opening: saturday, february 5th, 2011

february - march 2011



Un día cualquiera en que la Habana se detuvo a recordar Berlín (II), 2011. Detail

Political ideologies come and go, one after the next, as if what were involved were no more than exchanging one hat for another, the new fitting with alarming ease into the space and structures left by the old. What does this tell us about the nature of political ideology itself? Does it consist merely of a single repeating structure, a type or mold devoid of any genuine content beyond an ingrained need to impose and reproduce and re-fabricate itself? Such questions have become increasingly germane in the current historical juncture, when the hard dialectics of political ideology supposedly came to an end with the end of the Cold War, yet where political rhetoric around the world grows increasingly fragmented, increasingly polarized, increasingly confrontational, and increasingly laced with violence.

Carlos Garaicoa's exhibition *Party! Not Tea Party* at the Elba Benítez Gallery contains a running and frequently sardonic commentary on the structures today's political ideology uses to sustain itself. In this respect the exhibition (consisting entirely of new work created for the occasion) is an extension of Garaicoa's ongoing examination of structures -- especially architectural and urbanistic, but also linguistic, social and artistic -- and at the same time displays yet again his characteristically meticulous aesthetic that allows him to invoke poetry as well as critique and to suggest intimacy as well as provocation.

Prêt-à-porter, the central work in the show, is a large-scale installation organized around the motif of hats and containing sculpture-like wooden hat maker's molds, drawings of hats on newspaper photographs of world leaders, and a series of hats, created in collaboration with Mabel Sanz, a Madrid-based hat designer. Hats, in the context of politics and power, acquire a heightened symbolism, especially when forming part of uniforms: at the same time, they occupy the head, the crowning point of the body, and the most immediately recognizable part of the public self. Approaching such loaded symbolism so directly yet with such irreverent means, *Prêt-à-porter* functions as a critique of media representations of power and of the simplistic perceptions such representations foster.

Heads or Tails consists of a series of specially manufactured silver coins, placed strategically on mirrored shelves in corners throughout the gallery. The opposite sides of the coins bear ostensibly oppositional words and images, such as the images of leaders of opposed political parties, or icons of hostile cultures. These small, discreet objects reflect the manipulated oppositions and tensions that increasingly characterize contemporary political discourse, exemplified by (but not limited to) the Tea Party in the United States, even as the genuine political content of such discourse becomes thinned and reduced to consumer-oriented slogans bordering on demagoguery.

A third element in the exhibition is a series of photographic dyptichs in which images of otherwise unrelated urban sites are overlaid. The resulting juxtapositions are poetically suggestive and reveal a genius loci or spirit of the place already latent within the sites, almost as if the sites themselves are imbued with a desire to be something other than what they in fact are.

Finally, *The Tree of Abundance* is a sculpture of a magnet-tree: the work achieves completion when visitors toss coins at the tree while making their private, silent wishes. Literally involving the spectator, the work adds an element of interactivity to the exhibition, while at the same time it maintains the motif of coins -- and by extension, the commentary on the current economic crisis provoked in great measure by economic wishful thinking -- that runs throughout *Party! Not Tea Party*.

Carlos Garaicoa (Cuba, 1967) has had solos shows at the ICA in Philadelphia, MOCA in Los Angeles, the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin and other museums internationally, and he has participated Documenta 11, the Sao Paulo Biennial and the Venice Biennial. *Party! Not Tea Party* is his third individual show at the Elba Benítez Gallery.

George Stolz

Note: The work *Prêt-à-porter* has been produced in collaboration with Mabel Sanz Hat Design Atelier.

April and May 2011: CABELLO/CARCELLER