

VIK MUNIZ

pictures of paper

june - july 2009

san lorenzo 11
 28004 madrid
 t (34) 91 308 0468
 f (34) 91 319 0169
 info@elbabenitez.com
 www.elbabenitez.com



Crowd at Coney Island, Temperatura 89°. They came early and they stayed late, July 1940 after Weegee, 2009

In his third solo exhibition at the Elba Benítez Gallery, Vik Muniz (Sao Paulo, 1961) continues in the vein that has made him one of today's major artists, included in many major collections and solo shows at leading contemporary art museums and centres. He starts by choosing images that are cultural icons due to their importance in the history of art or in the media, and then he applies an attractive and playful treatment to them which consists of analysing their meaning and structure in order to propose an alternative rendering, a kind of aesthetic and ethic commentary, based on what they evoke for the artist, and how they are built. The works are the end result of a bold, incisive and painstaking dialogue with images that seduced the artist's eye. On occasions he seeks a true likeness, on others he displays a more poetic approach, or simply tries to depict his memory of an image. Vik Muniz handles that which we regard as public iconography and imagery with absolute ease, regardless of whether it is a work of art or a press photo. He plays with these pictures and creates new ones at a surprising pace.

One of Vik Muniz's achievements is the way he successfully combines a slow development stage (when he makes portraits of celebrities using clippings taken from society gossip magazines) and a fast execution stage (his famous chocolate drawings are executed as quickly as possible, which enables them to be photographed before the material starts to crackle). Vik Muniz groups his works together in suites and he has a great talent for inventing new ideas that invariably lead to impressively effective visual results. Although the medium of his work is photography, there is a preparatory stage to it that we could better regard as sculpture, painting, collage or drawing, because of the values defended and the media employed. In his most recent work, a suite significantly titled Pictures of paper, he recreates a number of photographic icons (Margaret Bourke-White, Arnold Newman, Albert Renger-Patzsch, Charles Sheeler, Weegee, Edgard Weston and Garry Winogrand), by making such precision-made preliminary, handcrafted, collages from tiny pieces of paper in all shades of grey, that he casts doubt once again in the spectator's mind about how the image has been executed. In effect, the study of perception, sight, and visual paradox is the hallmark of Vik Muniz's work.

The artist's highly attractive recreations of photographs, of pictures that are part of the collective imaginary, comment upon the original works contending that they are not yet concluded and can still be seen from new angles, from complementary perspectives. He encourages us to pursue this idea, complete with knowledge of the media and a humorous outlook. He spreads and multiplies the greys, making them almost physical, as if eager to insert an ironic remark about the alleged two-dimensionality of photography. Only on rare occasions, such as this exhibition, can such a wide range of formal approaches be seen together.

This exhibition is part of the Off Festival, PhotoEspaña 09
 Gallery opening hours: Tuesday to Saturday, from 10.00 to 18.00.
 Contacto: maria.montero@elbabenitez.com