

frieze

Around Town

Various venues

The first Barcelona Gallery Weekend took place at the beginning of last October. One week earlier, two separatist parties had won a combined relative majority in the Catalanian elections, a supposed de facto referendum for independence (an interpretation that has not gained recognition internationally, let alone in Madrid). The move towards segregation strikes a discordant note with any hope for the process of integration in a Europe whose political unity is already under pressure due to the ongoing migration crisis.

That historic progress can be reversed was demonstrated impressively by Bouchra Khalili in her exhibition at adn galeria. Her video and series of photographs, 'Foreign Office' (2015), tell the story of how, between 1962 and '72, Algiers became the global capital of liberation movements. It was there that everyone from the Black Panthers to Nelson Mandela's ANC, to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf, kept a base. The story is told by two young Algerians trying to reconstruct this period by looking at photographs from the 1960s, layering them on top of each other, creating impromptu collages where political activists rub shoulders with poets and musicians. What remains today of global dreams of liberation is documented in contemporary photographs of Algiers hotel lobbies and drab staircases: just emptiness.

Francesco Ruiz, at Galeria Estrany–de la Mota, focused on the here and now. Yet, his series of small-scale, intricate black and white digital drawings ('Los Aldredores', The Surroundings, 2015) is more than just documentation of facades on the block where the gallery is located. The central, industrialization-era Dreta de L'Eixample district, with its rigid grid of streets interspersed by diamond-shaped junctions, is a museum of former bourgeois grandeur. But in Ruiz's drawings, the art deco doorways and modern shop windows are reinterpreted as frames in a minimalist, manga-style narrative about hybrid microcosms, where a fur shop, an Italian hairdresser or the place where members of the Ukrainian orthodox church community meet are all less than a stone's throw away from each other – while in a shop window we see the reflection of a Google Street View car roaming the streets.

At nearby Projecte SD, Matt Mullican opened up the more

About this review

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David Bestué, *Luces* (Lights, detail), 2015, mixed media

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than 600 pages of his diary of collages on paper (*Untitled [The Meaning of Things]*, 2015) to create a half-systematic, half-intuitive encyclopedia of online imagery. The small pictures, stuck on A4 pages and hung in a large grid, range from the violent and sexual (war, porn) through the icky (peanut-butter lips) to the banal (getting up, working, eating, TV, sleep). Mullican responds to each of these pictures with a calligraphic gesture, surrounding them with half-voluntary squiggles and symbols indicating, for example, visceral intensity (electric bolts emanating from a press button). What emerges is an apt portrait of our era's pleasures and traumas, created with the artist's subjective desires and reactions as compass.

For the short ride to the L'Hospitalet district, no compass was required. The beautiful industrial building to which Nogueras Blanchard have recently relocated provided a fittingly elegant backdrop to the gallery's inaugural exhibition: a cabinet of witty curiosities provided by Croatian conceptual veteran Mladen Stilinovic'. Especially striking was his *Little Papers* (1992), a pinboard full of empty notes, as if a gracious (or tyrannical?) god had erased all pending tasks.

David Bestué's exhibition in the director's house on the site of a defunct ceramics factory took the whimsical and witty and ran with it. Commissioned as one of five projects for 'Composiciones' (Compositions) – the official Gallery Weekend fringe programme curated by Latitudes, the Barcelona-based duo of Mariana Cánepa Luna and Max Andrews (a contributing editor to this magazine) – Bestué told a persuasive story as much about the site itself as about the history of mankind. Each room emblemized a different era, tracing the evolution of artificial light, from simple candle through gas lamp to light bulb to LED, and pairing the different fixtures with sculptural collages that combined findings from the ceramics factory such as faux-ancient vases with, say, a large plastic-skinned sausage.

Back in the city centre, 'Composiciones' continued with a project by painters Pere Llobera and Rasmus Nilausen entitled 'Vera Icon' (2015), at Casa de la Misericordia, a former orphanage. Llobera's pictorial visions are somewhat reminiscent of Michaël Borremans's neo-romanticism, expressed for example in an elaborate self-portrait as a levitating figure in a thick forest that the artist literally scratched, virtuosically, into thick dust on a desk. These kinds of works rhymed surprisingly well with Nilausen's deadpan Philip-Guston style, maybe best exemplified by huge paper tongues hung in an otherwise empty wardrobe. This house was humorously haunted.

Meanwhile, institutional shows proved a mixed bag. Michael Snow's retrospective at La Virreina Image Centre showed the breadth of the work of an artist otherwise famous for one pioneering film (the 45-minute-zoom *Wavelength*, 1967): his taste for experiments in eroticism and humour, for instance,

as in the awkward and confusing life-size vista of a couple having sex (*Powers of Two*, 2003) on transparencies hung from the ceiling. At MACBA, in contrast, it was hard to ignore that the museum has been in crisis in the wake of what has generally been perceived as a censorship scandal, which led to curators Valentín Roma and Paul B. Preciado as well as director Bartomeo Mari having to leave the institution in March 2015. Just in time for the Gallery Weekend, new director Ferran Barenblit took up his position, yet Roma, who had put together the retrospective of the post-minimalist sculptor Sergi Aguilar, had pronouncedly not put his name to the wall text or press release. Curator Frederic Montornés did sign his 'Species of Spaces' themed group show which, titled after Georges Perec's eponymous 1974 book, took the reference to the humorous master of literary list-making as an excuse for accumulative, painting-by-numbers curating, loosely bringing together work that somehow had something to do with 'space'. That said, a few works, such as Stanley Brouwn's *door opening* (2005) stood out. The titular door, inserted into an exhibition wall, has the dimensions of an actual door in a Barcelona street, determined by an old local measuring unit, the 'Barcelona foot' (25.9 cm). In this day and age such local idiosyncrasies are so much more charming than regional separatism.

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