

Armed with irony, fighting the system

BY CHRISTINE REDFERN, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE NOVEMBER 13, 2009



A paper gun in an installation about weaponry by Brazilian artists Gisela Motta and Leandro Lima.

Photograph by: Paul Litherland,

Restraint, a showcase of work by nine South American new-media artists, occupies both the Oboro and Maison de la Culture Marie-Uguay's galleries.

The artworks in this exhibition reflect the technological, social and political restraints encountered by the citizens and artists of São Paulo, Brazil, and Lima, Peru.

Brazilian curator Kiki Mazzucchelli and Peruvian Miguel Zegarra teamed up with Montreal curator Julie Bélisle to select the artists included in Restraint. I spoke with them before the exhibition opened last weekend.

The guns immediately caught my eye.

Kiki Mazzucchelli: They are by an artist duo from São Paulo, Gisela Motta and Leandro Lima. What they did was to hack some of the most popular shooters – you know, video games. They extracted the 3-D files and blew them up digitally to real size, printed them out and then folded them into a 3-D object again.

If you look closely, you can see the pixels. At the time they produced this work, they were looking at how children learn to interact with the world. Obviously, it discusses the banalization of violence in video games. The idea was to use something that is virtual for kids and bring it into real life again.

How often would children in São Paulo and Lima see guns?

KM: Depends on the kid. If they are from the suburbs, it is really part of their daily life. There are lots of guns in Brazil. It is a bit like America, a culture with guns. We actually had a referendum three years ago. Everybody could vote pro or against guns and people voted for them.

Tell me about some of the other works.

KM: Target, at Marie-Uguay, is also by Motta and Lima. It is a projection that is only activated when someone is in the room. It projects a target onto the person who is moving the most and it follows them.

Miguel Zegarra: Next to the target installation is Matari 69200 by Rolando Sánchez, a Peruvian artist. He programmed five different games; each game is about one episode of the political violence in Peru during the '90s. 69200 is the number of fatalities during that war. It sounds serious, but the work contains humour too. It is on an Atari console – you can play the games.

KM: South Pole is by Rodrigo Matheus, another artist from São Paulo. It is part of a video trilogy he did using Google Earth. South Pole plays with the fact that the satellites cannot photograph the South Pole because the light refracts. It is a bit about the impossibility of surveying a space like this, but it also has a beautiful, aesthetic quality.

MZ: The piece Brutalismo, by artist José Carlos Martinat, is a scale model of the “Pentagonito” in Lima. It houses the Ministry of Defence. This piece is a parody of the power of the secret service and its control of the media during the violent period in the '90s. The name Brutalismo is a play on the brutalist architectural style of the building.

KM: Video #15 is by another São Paulo artist called Amilcar Packer. He quite often works with his own body in relation to certain environments. In this case he shot this video in the back of a truck.

It looks painful.

KM: It is kind of like a work by Bruce Nauman; it is a pointless activity. Basically he is trying to stabilize himself in a chair with the truck in movement. It is about a 30-minute truck ride. He keeps falling all the time.

It is a metaphor for a lot of different things in relationship to this exhibition, including forced, illegal immigration; the idea of how the body is subjected to violence; and how the individual is often not in control of their situation.

All the work is by young artists.

MZ: Yes, and I think their approach is new. There is a concentration of Latin American art that is made in relation to politics.

I think the approach of these artists is not in the classic way of very serious militancy, or of criticism. The way here is with humour, with irony, with parody, with different resources. And for that reason it is

different from South American art made in the '80s.

What else is important?

KM: This idea of recycling and having an inventiveness with cheap materials I think it is very characteristic of Latin America.

You have to find creative ways to dodge the system and make things work.

The exhibition *Restraint: New Media Arts Practices from Brazil and Peru* continues until Dec. 12 at Oboro, 4001 Berri St., Suite 301 and until Dec. 13 at the Maison de la culture Marie-Uguay, 6052 Monk Blvd. For more information, visit www.molior.ca.

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paul litherland José Carlos Martinat made this scale model of the headquarters of Peru's Ministry of Defence, which stifled the media during violence in the 1990s that killed almost 70,000.

Photograph by: Paul Litherland,

