

appear to move backward and forward, and fall in and out of sync. Meanwhile, the staccato rhythm of a woman's voice intoning the words *look, I, won't, and talk* repeats ad nauseam. The phrase, spoken as if out of defiance, is punctuated by the sound of the projector.

In addition to the two films, this show also included Sharits's schematic "scores," diagrams for his film installations, and two "Frozen Film Frames," ca. 1971–76, 16-mm filmstrips pinned between two rectangular Plexiglas panes. The diverse display was in keeping with Sharits's efforts, laid out in his 1978 text "Cinema as Cognition: Introductory Remarks," to exhibit not only films but the materials representing the thought process that led to their creation. To show such objects together, he says, "refuses to locate . . . meaning in one object or hierarchy of objects"—it also, of course, further demystified the material mechanisms of cinema.

To Sharits, it was important that the viewer could come and go during a film's screening. His invitation to viewers to release themselves from the cinematic illusion resonates with the burning and other acts of destruction in his oeuvre. These, he observed, are "an appreciation of the film in a sense," allowing the medium "to reveal itself, open itself up to us, show what it is." He looked upon film "with a certain empathy," as he might perhaps perceive "a living being who might be being burnt." In the recent show, an untitled work on paper (ca. 1980) cradled two 16-mm test strips; their gelatin emulsion—made of skin and bones, lest we forget—seemed to be barely clinging to the acetate base.

—Lauren O'Neill-Butler

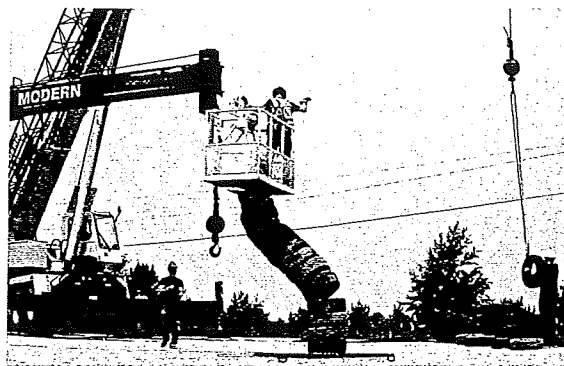
Aleksandra Mir

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Aleksandra Mir's video *The Seduction of Galileo Galilei*, 2011, is based on Galileo's fabled experiment with falling bodies. The physicist is said to have dropped objects of different weights from the top of Pisa's famous leaning tower in 1598, in order to demonstrate that they would accelerate at the same speed regardless of mass. In Mir's version, the tower itself is the object of experimentation: A group of volunteers piles car tires on top of one another until the stack gives in to gravity and crashes to the ground.

The video—on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art in a presentation organized by Carter E. Foster—has a disarming charm, and a heaviness that is worn lightly. It begins with shots of a crane and a cherry picker arriving at the go-cart track where the experiment is to be staged, followed by a brisk montage of still images that show a group of adolescent onlookers gathering, volunteers preparing the winch and crane, and caution tape being strung between chairs. Then the stacking begins: The first ten or so tires are laid down by hand, with volunteers taking turns carrying, rolling, hoisting, and patting them into place; the mood at this point is light and playful, as if the project were a game. As the tower grows higher, things become more serious. A volunteer in a lift corrals the tires, which dangle from the crane, and lowers them rather solemnly onto the growing stack.

The Seduction of Galileo Galilei is shown with a handful of works from "The Dream and the Promise," 2009, a series of collages that juxtapose devotional images of Jesus Christ and the Madonna with illustrations of satellites, rockets, and photographs of the universe: Halos become planets and satellites become implements of martyrdom. But rather than mocking or privileging one system of thought over the other, the collages merely posit different methods of ascension, one physical, one metaphysical. The video, too, invites us to contemplate the parallel trajectories of science and faith, partly through flickers of religious iconography: the crane and cherry picker arrive in solemn procession,



Aleksandra Mir, *The Seduction of Galileo Galilei*, 2011, still from a color video, 16 minutes 33 seconds.

like bishops during Holy Week; the artist and a crane operator greet each other in an echo of God's creation of Adam on the Sistine Chapel ceiling; and, in one lovely slow-motion shot, a man raises his arms in a helpless gesture that is frankly cruciform. Even the logo on the heavy machinery is drawn into Mir's symbolic system. Although the trucks provide help that—quite literally—comes from above, the company name, Modern, emblazoned on the machinery, brings things down to earth. These moments seem more spontaneous than staged, noticed by Mir and foregrounded in the film thanks to her careful observation of the event.

In the end, the experiment is finally resolved when the tires are chained together and then lifted into the sky in a long, twisting tube before being allowed to drop, awkwardly coiled, in an uncommonly joyful moment. What comes into focus is a sense of ludic collaboration—of strangers coming together—rather than scientific rigor or the pursuit of success. In this sense—as well as in its use of tires—Mir's video recalls Allan Kaprow's *Yard*. When he first executed the work in 1961, Kaprow filled a courtyard with tires and encouraged viewers to play. In this and other works he called *Activities*, he encouraged spontaneity, viewer participation, and restagings by other artists; in fact, he let the works' meaning be constructed from these elements, from mess and happenstance, rather than according to his own direction. Here such spontaneity leads to an interlude in which volunteers make stacks of doughnuts and coffee creamers. The playfulness and, somehow, perfect rightness of this moment suggests that Mir, too, enjoys the invention that can result from the loss of control. "You have to allow for a good deal of chance," she has said of her working process, "and count on the grace of others." In other words, one must have a kind of faith.

—Emily Hall

Antoni Muntadas

THE BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS

A few years ago, the *New Yorker* started a weekly cartoon-caption contest. I can be trusted to draw a complete blank about how to caption each week's illustration, and yet I am consistently impressed with wits in the general public knocking it out of the park with some seriously funny entries. A work by Antoni Muntadas stages a similar exercise, one whose high stakes reveal themselves only gradually. Part of a showing of seven new and old works organized by guest curator José Roca at the Bronx Museum, this iteration of the piece *On Subjectivity*, 1978, presents a selection of five historic and contemporary photographs of the Bronx and invites viewers to offer commentary, providing a logbook, a pencil, and a desk upon which to compose their exegeses. Every day, selections of viewers' captions are pinned to the wall above the desk,

recording a range of responses: some poignant, some vulgar, and some gravely sidesplitting. For hours I chuckled when remembering the wry “Gorilla Glue” rejoinder to the image of a seated ape joining hands with a young blond child—after all, photographs *do* have that way of gluing an instant into solidity. “I hate that I recognize these people,” accompanied a close-up of Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore at a Yankees game; elsewhere, a black-and-white photo of a bombed-out South Bronx apartment complex elicited these responses: “We are the 99%, bitches!” and “Cheap rent.”

Faced with a blank caption to complete, you too might be adrift. But paired with the dozens of responses pinned to the wall, the images start to make sense through a kaleidoscopic community of perspectives, through a lens of the utterly specific geographic context in which one finds oneself. It suddenly seems much easier to bounce ideas off this pool of sanctioned graffitos, to laugh and invent along with the entries on the wall. Rare is the artwork in which viewer participation allows it to become better than the sum of its parts; with *On Subjectivity* I felt I was part of an anonymous, powerful force given authorization to rethink the visual culture of the Bronx.

Working since the early 1970s in New York, the Spanish-born Muntadas has pioneered a type of work that explores the way in which media shapes not merely discursive spaces but actual public spaces. Muntadas’s several projects on the architecture and politics of sports

stadiums probe the charge of collectivity as opposed to representations of it. *Stadia, Furniture, Audience*, 1990, a suite of twelve photographs, joins photos of the coliseums, their empty seats, exit signs, and statuary, and the excited crowds that in transitory throngs come together to root for their teams. Fundamentally recreational, of course, these contests engender real passions in both audience and players alike, and the

images seemed appropriate in the central, recessed gallery of the museum that itself resembles an amphitheater. One of the most powerful works in the exhibition, *On Translation: Celebracions*, 2009, collages nearly ten minutes of television footage of soccer players rejoicing after goals. The elation of success produces a scarcely veiled homosocial zeal of male bodies physically connecting in victory. It’s euphoric to watch men in a moment of communal ecstasy, leaping into one another’s arms, hugging, kissing, and collapsing into joyful piles of limbs.

In contrast, Muntadas’s single-channel video and installation *Alphaville e outros* (Alphaville and Others), 2011, takes bodies’ loss of freedom and control as a more sinister possibility of architecture. Specifically, the piece focuses on gated high-rise communities surrounding São Paulo, wallpapering advertisements floor to ceiling in the gallery of housing developments that promise safety and well-being with images of groups of young people striding through clean plazas—yet in practice these spaces are desolate and unoccupied. In the video, clips from Jean-Luc Godard’s 1965 film *Alphaville*, in which a villainous mastermind computer melts down, thereby retarding the basic motor functions of the citizens it controlled, are juxtaposed in complex grids with sequences of “secure” walled compounds in Brazil scrubbed of human presence. Public street culture has been jettisoned in favor of a fiction of bodily security. With just a brief selection of works from

Muntadas’s production since the early 1970s, Roca adeptly triangulates public, private, and media culture, provoking viewers to reconsider their relationships to one another in the real space of the exhibition.

—Eva Díaz

GREENWICH, CT

David Altmejd

THE BRANT FOUNDATION ART STUDY CENTER

With its rusticated glamour and strangely artificial natural setting, the enclave known hyperbolically as “backcountry” Connecticut—home to collector Peter Brant’s elegant, capacious apple barn-turned-quasi-public kunsthalle—proves a surprisingly sympathetic setting for the riotous dazzle and decay of David Altmejd’s work. Set between an impossibly green polo pitch and a quiet stretch of road whose posh tranquility is disturbed only by the occasional lawn-service truck, the 9,800-square-foot space has been transformed by the artist into a series of ecosystems showcasing the various kingdoms of synthetic flora and fauna that make up his giddily complex, satisfyingly strange universe of sculptures, installations, and spatial interventions.

Altmejd remains one of contemporary art’s most resourceful collagists—his eye for the resonant connections between superficially anti-athetical juxtapositions is as keen as ever—but the main message of this mini-retrospective is one of diversifying modes of address. To be sure, certain basic impulses have remained consistent across the artist’s decadelong practice: a fascination with the body as both site for and agent of material transformation; a pursuit of the latent poetry in taxonomic display; a courting of negative space via physical ruptures, voids, and rifts; and a recognition of the rich generative potential to be found in degeneration. But as he has honed his formal and technical capabilities and refined his conceptual strategies, he has transformed what might once have potentially read as gimmicky—lycanthropic corpses cracked open like geodes to reveal crystalline eruptions, towering giants enrobed in fur and feathers or dripping with Technicolor sphagnum—into persuasive, fully formed presences.

What has perhaps been the most dramatic recent development in Altmejd’s work—the engagement of the surrounding architecture—is emphatic from the first moments of the show. Drawing the walls themselves into his scheme, the artist utilizes two brands of alteration in the first set of galleries: large-scale mirroring, which was seen most notably in his project for the Canadian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2007 and is here crazed and pockmarked with holes, and a striking illusionistic plastering technique debuted in his 2011 show at New York’s Andrea Rosen Gallery, in which the very material of the wall seems to



Antoni Muntadas,
On Translation: Celebracions, 2009,
still from a color video,
9 minutes 33 seconds.



David Altmejd,
The University 1,
2004, mirrors, wood,
66 x 71 x 106”.