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Runo Lagomarsino

BY MATTHEW RANA



Runo
Lagomarsino
*Cazador De
Crepúsculos (To
V.S.) (Twilight
Hunter [To
V.S.]), 2012,
mixed media*

The most noticeable thing in 'Even Heroes Grow Old', Runo Lagomarsino's solo show at Index, was the wallpaper. Scrawled across its gaudy pink surface were a series of black L-shaped symbols imitating the 'signature' or *rubrica* of Francisco Pizarro, the illiterate Spanish conquistador who, in the 16th century, destroyed the Incan empire. Interweaving space, language, image and narrative, Lagomarsino's *As in Pizarro* (2010) prompts several questions: Is Pizarro the hero referred to in the show's title? From whence does his *rubrica* derive its authority? Why pink? Born in Argentina, raised in Sweden and currently based in Brazil, Lagomarsino examines how we come to know and speak about the conflicting geographies and temporalities of power. While not

exactly forming a backdrop for the rest of the works on view, As in *Pizarro* was a fitting way to enfold an exhibition that attempted to rewrite history in associative and symbolic language.

Given the complexity of this gesture, one might expect that the other works on view would be indecipherable. Instead, the installation's formal vocabulary clearly relayed the subject of Lagomarsino's research. Slide projectors announced his engagement with history, while the unfinished wooden tables, on which a variety of small objects were meticulously assembled, became metaphors for knowledge. The objects themselves – which ranged from the everyday to the precious – seemed fragile even as they were fixed by the weight of the past. In *Tristes Tropiques* (2010–12), a magnifying glass invited viewers to take a closer look at a collection of 631 miniscule seashells from Bordeaux; next to it sat a grid of woven plastic measuring devices and a stack of wooden blocks that appeared unmovable, or at least not to be handled. As in the rest of the show, these objects formed a trail of clues meant to be 'read' as part of a hermeneutics of decolonization.

Elsewhere, Lagomarsino reconfigures, undermines and opens up various 'truths' of European modernity (represented here mainly as units of measurement) to new and perhaps contradictory truths. A brass ring sizer hung from a piece of red satin in *Untitled* (2011); *Perdidamente Paris* (2010), is a scale slide-projection of the marble prototype for the metre; as part of *Cazador De Crepúsculos* (Twilight Hunter [To V.S.], 2012), a candle – affixed to a metal plate from Parque de la Memoria in Buenos Aires – slowly burned away underneath the white-hot filament of a low-hanging light-bulb.

The artist's visual language suggests that the epistemological frameworks imposed during colonization were marked by an

excessive empirical rationality, and that this fact continues to gain expression in 'soft-power' strategies. However, if Lagomarsino's work seeks to inhabit an alternative rationality, or challenge the myths and practices of (post-)colonialism, then it also has a tendency to be too calculated. *Untitled (self-portrait)* (2011), a floor piece which featured a takeaway box from the 'Euroville' panaderia (bakery) sitting atop a white napkin embroidered with a red 'Hispano', took on the blatancy of identity politics, albeit in a somewhat more poetic register.

More successful is *Contratiempos* (*Contretemps*, 2010), a work for a slide projector featuring a series of photographs taken in São Paulo's Ibirapuera Park, Oscar Niemeyer and Roberto Berle Marx's 1954 experiment in Modernist architecture and urban planning. The title is a play on words, positioning the work 'against time', while making reference to accidents and setbacks. Here, the artist presents 27 slides of cracks in the concrete footpaths, which resemble the map of South America as it is represented in the global North. Some of the shapes are more accurate than others – the uncanny accidents of footsteps accumulating over half a century. But at the intersection of revisionist geography and gestalt-psychology, it doesn't really matter. The point is that the continuously shifting images show a continent in ruins. As a formal exercise or an absurd gesture, it's clear: for Lagomarsino, ideals too get old, persistent though they may be.

MATTHEW RANA



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London
1 Montclare
Street
London
E2 7EU, UK
+44 (0)203
372 6111

New York
247 Centre St
5th Floor
New York, NY
10013
+1 212 463
7488

Berlin
Zehdenicker
Str. 28
D-10119 Berlin
Germany
+49 30 2362
6506