

Ferrari makes explicit his position in a text written on the occasion of the first encounter of "Tucumán Arde" artists, held in Rosario, Argentina, where he writes that "Art won't be beauty nor novelty; art will be efficiency and disturbance." As an author, he is as selective as he is broad-based, focusing primarily on the elements of destruction, negation, and oppression in 1960s Argentina, and claiming against the Church's silence regarding campaigns of massive extermination in the country. In his 963 'Letter to a General', Ferrari manifests an abstract writing/drawing capable of skirting around censorship. Although we must remember that history bears witness to the minimal tolerance or abstraction characteristic of all repressive groups.

This is the third time that León Ferrari's art is shown in New York in approximately twelve months. To wit: in the Argentinean Art show presented by ArteBA (the producer of the Buenos Aires art fair); at Sotheby's; at the Drawing Room; and at the Museo del Barrio. He is also garnering attention in other states of the American Union and in Argentina. It is symptomatic that this small space belonging to the sole non-for-profit US institution devoted to drawing and its ancillary expressions is showing now an artist whose voice, of undoubted historical value, is driven by the dual imperative of making itself heard in its whole magnitude and all of its variety.

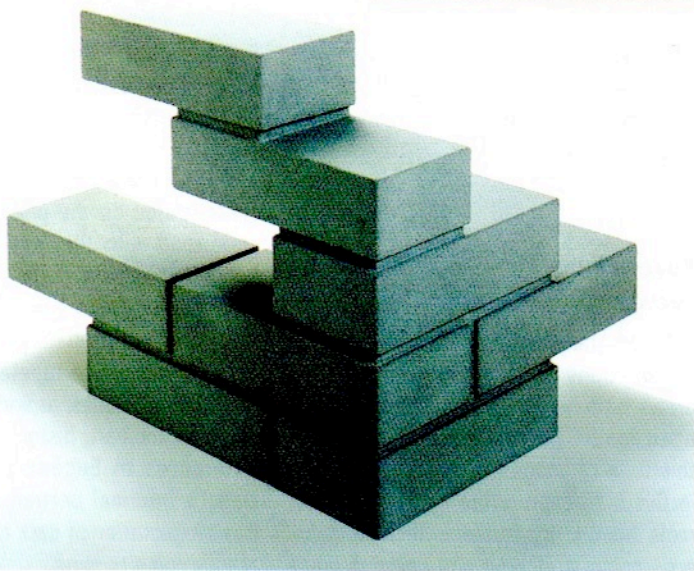
Graciela Kartofel

Iran do Espírito Santo

Sean Kelly Gallery

A box, a can, bricks, light bulbs—there's nothing extraordinary about the sources for Iran do Espírito Santo's sculptural works. In fact, what links them is their reference to a common, everyday reality that we usually ignore. The Brazilian artist seizes on this unconscious disregard as an opportunity to reawaken perception. His works are so thoroughly conceived and constructed that they shift the common out of context, disrupting the veil of familiarity. As a result, these lyrical works exist both as objects and ideas.^{ten}

Debris, a series of sculptures displayed on a low platform, is the best example of this strategy. Resembling groupings of bricks, these architectural "excerpts" embody the duality of object and idea. We can



Iran do Espírito Santo. *Debris* No. 16, 2004. Sand stone. 15 1/2 x 16 x 21 3/4 in. (39 x 41 x 55 cm.).

engage these works as fully contained within themselves or as eccentric fragments pulled from a larger, implied reality that nevertheless continues to hover around them in the mind's eye.

Their construction also evokes this duality, carved as they are from single blocks of Pietra di Tuoro (gray sandstone) to represent agglomerations of mortared brick. The nimble conceptual trick here is that the objects refuse to be what they look like. In the main gallery, the idea of a solid architectural excerpt is reversed with *Evasion*. The sculpture is a door-size empty space that "pushes" a shallow cavity into the surrounding sheetrock. This ingenious installation redefines the surrounding architectural context by existing, essentially, as a void.

The opposing dualities of solid/void, presence/absence also operate gamely in various stainless steel objects. *Can G*, one in the artist's series of distorted can forms, is wider than and twice as tall as the standard canned good. More importantly, what we expect to be lightweight aluminum is in fact solid-cast steel and terrifically heavy, a dangerous candidate for a game of "kick the can." Unfortunately, gallery visitors are not free to handle the piece in order to experience all the qualities that make it such a striking contradiction.

In another room, six stainless steel "light bulbs" are displayed in Teflon socket fixtures mounted on pedestals, mirroring actual fixtures in the ceiling above. Again, there is a sly menace at play, considering

the shocking consequence of screwing one of these objects into a live socket. More germane, perhaps, are the concepts of containment and illumination that are subverted by these solid-cast anti-objects, which defy their implied nature, again refusing to receive or perpetuate projections of the familiar.

With *Untitled (Unfold)*, this dynamic is reversed. Here, the familiar object—a box—begins as an oversized abstraction. Constructed of individual, glossy white aluminum panels, the suggestion of an unfolded box comes together only when the panels are arranged in certain configurations. The viewer's task is to pull the work through a mental transformation, to perceive the materials as a gestalt rather than as separate panels. The gallery helps by periodically rearranging the panels, thus accentuating the illusion of pliable box folds while at the same time multiplying the work's potential for abstraction.

These various punning pieces are successful because do Espírito Santo bets everything on a single caveat—seeing is *not* believing. When contradictions are present, the mind always chooses to expand on what the eye sees, sometimes poetically. In the case of the artist's keyhole sculptures, previously shown at the gallery, this impulse generates a paradox—a hole, strictly speaking, cannot be an object. Undoing a truism, the artist gives form to empty space, challenging the real and metaphorical boundaries of both. This tension between the material and percep-

tual realms is potent and all the more impressive given the artist's disciplined economy. It's the sensation of two worlds quietly colliding.

John Ewing

Ruvén Afanador

Throckmorton Fine Art

Ruvén Afanador's exhibition of thirty-six photographs at Throckmorton Fine Art draws from his newly published book entitled *Sombra* (Merrell Holberton, 2004). In this suite of images, Afanador's main objective is to capture the feminine aura of male beauty. His subjects include dancers—some stretching and pointing while wearing ballet slippers or a tutu—and fashion models—many of them often elaborately coiffed or decorated, offering a divine, yet mystical sense of glamour. Intermixed here and there are various images, such as sumptuous plates of prepared food, a succulent bunch of grapes, and rich, ripe vegetables, emphasizing that the ensemble of pictures is most definitely about desire and consumption.

Afanador is certainly not the first to examine male erotic beauty. Many photographers, from Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden to

Robert Mapplethorpe, have produced amazing bodies of work along similar lines. By comparison to Mapplethorpe, however, Afanador's nudes do not appear so cold and distant, and the eroticism is not heavily concentrated on the phallus, but is more concerned with the playfulness and the handsome features of the sitter. Afanador's work has much more in common with von Gloeden's affectionate portraits of young men from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as other masters from the early history of photography. References to Eugène Durieu's nudes, Nadar's informal portrait style, and Man Ray's exploration of dark room techniques readily come to mind.

For *Sombra*, which means shadow, Afanador has drawn from old photographic manuals to produce a series of black-and-white solarized prints, a process that literally reverses light and dark tones—or light and shadow—creating a striking, even somewhat surreal effect. In addition, Afanador's photographs have been printed in different metallic tones, such as gold and copper, and some were bleached before tone was added. The result is that many of the surfaces of his photographs reveal a sense of lavishness and add to the seductive look of the male subjects.

Afanador chose the title *Sombra* not only for the technical reasons of solarization, but also as a means to evoke the cultural folklore of his native Colombia. Some Colombians use the term "shadow" to mean photograph, and when Afanador photographs someone, he says: "I feel I am taking a shadow of their soul, the shadow being my perception of them." Afanador understands that in some cultures having one's photograph taken is like having one's spirit removed, and with this in mind, he strives to draw upon the essence of his sitter's soul and enliven it with his own artistic vision. Afanador also strives to focus his viewer's attention on the figure himself by consistently using the same simple, unadorned, nondistracting backdrop behind the sitter.

In 2000 Afanador received the award for Best Photographer at the Trophée de la mode in Paris and has worked for such notable clients as *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, *Elle*, and *Esquire*. Although Afanador has achieved immense success as a commercial photog-

rapher and his technical skill is highly impressive, many of his images have a strong relationship with high art as well, evoking the paintings of such old masters as Caravaggio. For example, a crouching young man with his hair raised and blown about holds his finger innocently close to his mouth, expressing a slight decadence in his overall naiveté, which brings to mind Caravaggio's portraits of young men. In general, Afanador's fetishistic photographs that make up *Sombra* are most enlightening, and convey femininity and masculinity, eroticism and athleticism, past and present, extravagance and simplicity, and sometimes even a sense of camp that is tempered by the photographer's technical and artistic mastery.

Craig Houser

Alejandro Mazon

George Billis Gallery

Alejandro Mazon's recent show at George Billis Gallery has expanded his recognizable aesthetic motifs and themes in myriad ways. His new work has extended his signature use of wood as foundation on which he applies his diverse media. For now Mazon has opted for vintage wallpaper as surface for his artistic explorations; but the type of paper that he uses was produced between 1890 and 1950. These surfaces are thus more than just background, however; and their readymade decorative motifs from Japanese and French sources formally and conceptually complicate his works consequently producing results that are poetic as they are cerebral.

Whereas Mazon's previous paintings on wood are evocative of a more historical style via attention to minutiae and an almost graphic-like handling of line, the new works are anchored in a tension between wallpaper and surface marks that also coalesces a disparity of formal elements: foreground/background, planarity/recession, and text/image. These dialectical palpitations create a contemporary sensibility while remaining steadfast in the formal style that is discerned as Mazonesque, if you will. Mazon also has an uncanny way of working with areas beyond the picture plane while making these same areas feel as if they are part of pictorial space. He employs the

Ruvén Afanador. *Untitled (No.2)*, 2003. 1/15. Solarized gelatin silver print. 14 x 11 in. (35,5 x 27,9 cm.).

