

ArtNexus

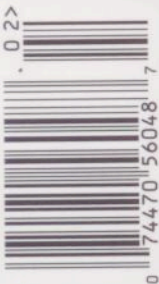
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Iván Navarro

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On the one solid wall of the courtyard, where arches form a series of niches, are paintings created especially for this installation. Turning the historical function of these niches on its head in a way—the niches look like they are meant to display portraits of civic leaders—Ramirez has installed three abstract paintings that both constitute a triptych and are integral parts of the installation. Each human in its scale, measuring six by six feet square, and each featuring his signature bulbous forms being squished by large black or brown rectangles, these paintings pit small, soft forms against large, hard ones. Like much of Ramirez's imagery, these forms are sexually charged. However, this series of paintings feels different because he juxtaposes the lyricism and humor of his biomorphic forms against the heaviness of the hard-edged geometric ones. Ramirez's juxtapositioning of these two brands of abstraction endows these paintings with a sense of struggle and psychological heaviness that is new to his work, especially in the painting hung in the central niche, the left half of which is entirely painted black.

The forms in Ramirez's *Chunk* paintings also, of course, relate to the curved and rectilinear shapes of the courtyard's Beaux-Arts architecture. The curves of the brightly colored arches echo the bulbous forms in his paintings, and black rectangles are visible on both paintings and walls. The comparison that *Blackout* compels us to make between these elements speaks to paintings' desire to escape the confines of two-dimensional space, and transform architecture (for the emphasis is the effect of Ramirez's painting onto the architecture, and not vice versa). This desire—which reiterates the utopian ambitions of many of the artists in the concurrent exhibition of abstract painting from the 1920s to the 1950s, *Constructive Spirit*—makes Ramirez's paintings look historical, another marked difference from previous work.

Blackout also speaks to the centrality of aesthetic experience in so much contemporary art these days, and testifies to the fact that issues of identity continue to play a significant role in installation and painting. Even though the paintings incorporated into this installation are less scatological than Ramirez's previous work, they nonetheless show that subjectivity still motivates his painting, as it does many of his peers who, like him, emerged during the mid-1990s (including Arturo Herrera, Carroll Dunham, and others). Above all else, however, *Blackout* reminds us that the best painting strives to be a sensorial experience.

Harper Montgomery

Valeska Soares

Greenberg Van Doren Gallery
Eleven Rivington

Valeska Soares has worked in a wide variety of mediums including sugar, glass, steel, marble, beeswax, perfume and photography. Her latest works continue her investigations of illusion, temporality and control and enlarge on previous material juxtapositions. Working with found and fabricated objects, her new accumulative sculpture / installations are based primarily on the selection and reconfiguration of pre-existing objects — objects that bear their own history and associational retinue.

In two concurrent shows in New York, Soares expanded her strategy, showing increased mastery of a potent conceptual process that began with Marcel Duchamp's readymades.

The passage of time is a key concern for Soares. Her choice of materials directly addressed this in "passa tempo" at Greenberg Van Doren Gallery. The poetic "Timeline 1" consisted of title pages from books strung together and hung in a horizontal line. Each differently sized and variously yellowing page included a quote vis-à-vis time such as "In the Beginning."

In a soulful relief called "Horizontes III", Soares affixed old wooden boxes to the wall, inlaid with scenes from her native Brazil. By repurposing these boxes and aligning the scenes into a communal horizon, she activates an interface between collective and individual responses.

In the centerpiece installation, the title "Un-rest" seems to indicate our inherent apprehension regarding the relentless passage of time. Soares ordered over a hundred footstools from E-bay and presented them in a sweeping arc. She had a glass chair fabricated, which stood at one end of the arc as if in command. The footstools, with their varying designs but identical functionality, took on anthropomorphic and sociological dimensions. The units gained personality and their legs implied volition.

From the far side, the glass chair became somewhat invisible, underlining the dissimilarity in materials and by implication, their relative hierarchical position. In addition to this divergence, the impossibility of sitting in the chair contrasted pointedly with the inadequacy of sitting on footstools.

At Eleven Rivington, Soares expanded her light bulb sculpture exponentially in an interactive installation called "Vaga Lume" (which could translate from the Portuguese as something like "vague light").

No less than 2,500 naked light bulbs in simple porcelain fixtures adorned the gallery. Fitted snugly against the ceiling in rows, long pull-chains dangled to within a yard of the floor. Gallery-goers could wade in and switch the light bulbs on and off. In a digital age of binary code, the artist reasserted the primacy of a single individual as an agent of change.

Just as a light bulb can be on or off, it can be a positive or negative signifier. An old fashioned light bulb symbolizes an idea — a Eureka moment — as the image pops above ones head in a cartoon. Ominously, it also infers incarceration and interrogation.

The location of Eleven Rivington — in the heart of New York City's lighting district where all manner of illumination is bought and sold — adds an extra dimension of social awareness to "Vaga Lume," making the piece geographically site specific.

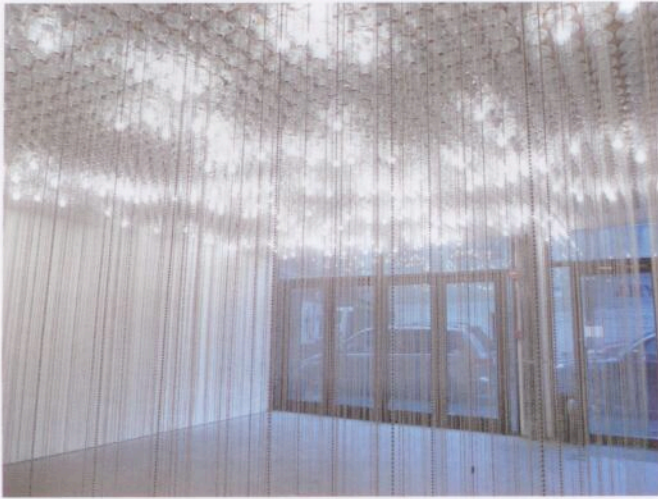
Entering the all-around environment produced novel physical and aesthetic sensations. A hazy intensity made the burning bulbs a little inscrutable and they were best viewed obliquely, the opposite of traditional art. The mildly oppressive heat (and intimations of global warming) accentuated the coolness of the chains, which bounced and clicked as one walked through.

In unbroken vertical lines, the shiny metal created a mirage effect as the focus shifted from foreground to background. Associations with doorways veiled by screens of beads led to an ever-present promise of entry — or exit — of sanctuary or escape.

As one walked along, the plethora of chains dragged across your skin feeling like jewelry or alternately, the clinging tendrils of all-consuming robotrons. Looking back across the gallery, the chains danced behind in a display of misty splendor, a kinetic record of your passage.

Soares has always found ways to reify minimalisms' aesthetic strictures while maximizing its metaphoric capacity. In form and matter, a sense of pureness recesses this artist's presence. Her works depart from monolithic narratives allowing the participant fuller ownership. She describes her multi-referential creations as "triggers that activate memories and contexts."

In examining the authorship of art, the philosopher Boris Groys has championed artwork with "inner value" that is "presented as being collaborative, participatory, and democratic." He could certainly be describing the work of Valeska Soares when he concludes: "This value derives from the participation of both artist and public in... a common affiliation that relativizes the space between artist and public."



Valeska Soares. *Vaga Lume*, 2006. Mixed media installation. Variable dimensions.



Tina Modotti. *Hands A/P*, 1923-1929. Platinum print. 8 x 10 in. (20,2 x 25,4 cm.).

The light bulbs in "Vaga Luma", with their patches of shadow and swaths of glare, are imprinted by the audience's engagement. The history of each individual's interaction lingers until it is replaced as another participant switches the light again to tell a different story. From the old outline, comes a new pattern. Valeska Soares is definitely onto something new.

Jeffrey Cyphers Wright

Tina Modotti

Throckmorton Fine Arts

When presenting a historical exhibition, a gallery must offer something beyond the pleasure of putting on display works by a renowned artist and the chapter of history in which they are inscribed. In the case of *Tina, Under the Mexican Sky*, Throckmorton gallery linked a significant number of works with the keys to certain moments in Modotti's photographic career in Mexico and with the spectrum of very well-known and identifiable works alongside others that have rarely been seen. It was also an opportunity to see vintage prints from the year in which the shots were taken. On this occasion, a traditional rhythmic museography worked very well and without monotony. The show, comprising forty-four photographs, is dominated by works between 8 and 9 3/8 inches, with a few in 10 and 13 inches, and six photographs in 5 inches or less. Articulated into the rhythm of subjects, dimensions, and chronology, the show allowed itself to be explored without monotony and always presented the viewer with consistent messages.

Besides her being a landmark figure from the first half of the Twentieth Century, why is Tina Modotti's work important? What did her photography contribute to the medium's general context, in Mexico and the world? Modotti lived through one of the most critical moments in Mexican history; she was a friend and active collaborator of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, as well as of Edward Weston, her teacher in photography. The show is enriched by Weston's portrait of Tina, from 1924. They both had arrived in Mexico the previous year; Weston was to leave three years later, while Modotti remained until 1930, when she was forced to leave the country due to her participation in local politics. One of the important aspects of Modotti's work is the fact that she was one of the first female photographers committed to life and to the responses demanded by society at the time. Post-revolutionary Mexico was a land of highly differentiated positions, and Modotti inserted herself in them. For her, life took precedence over art, while Weston held to a different view. He was after the artistic side of photography; Mexico offered him new subjects and he moved towards a kind of synthesis, seeking essences in simple objects. Modotti situated herself between the documentary and the aesthetic — if one refers to the creation of a local aesthetics, emerging from the autochthonous as well as from the quotidian. Thus her themes and series, such as the "hands at work in Mexico," present in the show with two examples. After the early years she started receiving a large number of commissions, among them one from Frances Toor to photograph more than 25 masks. This series was published in *Mexican Folkways*, including *Máscara con petate* from 1926.

An important portfolio of works are the Chapingo murals and the murals in Diego Rivera's first yard at the Ministerio de Educación, among others. These photographs by Modotti are one solid section of the show. The portraits show the difference in focus between a set and a figure, be it in close up or full body and with its surroundings, such as in *Concha Michel tocando la guitarra*. This work has an epoch-defining dedication: in the picture taken and printed by Modotti, Michel inscribes a dedication to Carlos Orozco Romero and his wife, María. This shows how the period's figures are interconnected, thus confirming the exhibition's title, *Tina, Under the Mexican Sky*.

Included in the show are key landmarks in Modotti's career, such as two of her most celebrated and reproduced images: *Bandolera, maíz y hoz* and *Bandolera, maíz y guitarra*. All the photographs are printed in silver gelatin. From 1929, an untitled work showing a formal character, so formal that it is almost comical, turns out to be a puppet. During the period of her house arrest, Modotti concentrated on photographing these puppets. *Manos del titiritero*, shot by Modotti around 1926, was to be printed by don Manuel Álvarez Bravo between 1976 and 1979. In 1930, when Modotti was forced to leave the country with two days notice, it was don Manuel Álvarez Bravo who gathered her camera and several originals. *Rosas* prepares the climate for other works with a romantic bent, such as *Cala*, from 1924-26, and -from 1924. The latter underscores Modotti's intermittent interest in the purely formal aspect of her art. The *Mujeres tehuanas* from 1929 are among Modotti's last works in Mexico. They