

Pablo's Birthday is proud to announce:

beneath the bridge.

A group exhibition of Brazilian emergent artists.

Presenting:

Celina Portella & Elisa Pessoa, Manuela Leal, Mariana Palma,
Tatiana Blass and Tatiana Ferraz.

Organized by Juliana Moreira da Silva.

June 27 – September 11, 2008

Reception for the artists June 27, 6 - 9 pm

528 Canal Street @ Washington Street



Tatiana Blass, PAWS, cast brass and painting, 2007-8

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528 CANAL STREET NEW YORK NY 10013 212 462 2411 PABLOSIBIRTHDAY.COM



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
'beneath the bridge', organized by
Juliana Moreira da Silva

EXHIBITION DATES:
JUNE 27 – SEPTEMBER 11, 2008

GALLERY HOURS:
WEDNESDAY – FRIDAY 11 - 6PM,
SATURDAY 12 - 6PM

(GALLERY IS OPEN IN AUGUST WEDNESDAYS
AND FRIDAYS ONLY, OR BY APPOINTMENT.)

Pablo's Birthday is proud to present 'beneath the bridge', a group exhibition of six emerging Brazilian artists, introducing Tatiana Blass, Tatiana Ferraz, Manuela Leal, Mariana Palma, Elisa Pessoa and Celina Portella to New York. 'beneath the bridge' was conceived by a desire to investigate, pause and reflect upon the feminine through particular intellects and practices. There were constraints in the present exhibition: how comprehensive this small grouping could be, a wish for gatherings far and beyond Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo and for additional intentions, genders, and organizers. The feminine investigated here is inevitably and assertively ambiguous, made complex by an array of influences, encounters and fusions of ethnicities, cultures, schools and religions. The feminine is a woven fabric of Indigenous, African, and European legacies. Local nature abounds hypnotically in Brazil, and is for this feminine an analogous vast gestalt palette.

Stereotypes fit nostalgia; nostalgia is here both embraced and refused. Women's contribution to the arts in Brazil has been recognized on a greater scale than that of their counterparts in the Northern Hemisphere, in so far as one considers Brazilian art history as starting with Modernismo, and does not take into account the Native's so called artifacts, another chapter, or the religious art of the Baroque era. The feminine transcends gender, for the latter is rather a confining notion. The art historian Rodrigo Naves introduces the idea of TIMIDITY as pertaining to Brazilian art, destabilizing superficial foreign expectations of it. According to Naves, Helio Oiticica, for example, and here we begin by referring to an internationally well-known male artist, developed an aesthetic rather more concerned with the ingredients of intimacy than those of expansion, often alluding to the realm of the womb.

The exhibition opens with a series of panels by Manuela Leal, the only one of the present artists residing in New York. Leal borrows images from the internet, which are then blown up and mounted on Masonite. In the process the images are rendered almost abstract, violated of their former integrity. The artist works the surface, sanding and scraping it, applying patches of colors, like flowers springing up from a battlefield. In the panel *Icon*, behind a violet purple haze, one traces vestiges of a bombed temple, the house of icons destroyed; in *Altarpiece*, a Yemanjá blue, the color of the sky after a storm, veils the remains of the ceremonial site of a war-ravaged cathedral; *Coffin* is an assemblage of sources, including an image of Tito's funeral, and filling the upper right corner of the panel is what could be small flags at a folk party. One senses that Death has come and gone in these works, and that the artist continues unchanged, placid and detached. It is as if Death's riddle were an allegretto, sung by a messenger bird on its post, in synchrony with the bright industrial colors used by Leal. A passage from the artist's writings during her years at Yale is particularly symbolic: "In the same group of caves, of the sanctuary of Bom Jesus da Lapa, there is said to live an evil serpent with wings who is imprisoned and ready to escape and eat all men and living things, thus ending the world as the pilgrim knows it. The only antidote to the end is, predictably, prayer. Each time a believer prays to Virgin Mary, one more feather falls from its wings..." A snake with feathers is a mythical bird, Death itself or its messenger. Leal's ruminative practice as a painter resembles prayer. What are the colors of the feather of the snake, Manuela Leal?

Much of Tatiana Blass' artistic investigation dwells on the idea of interruption. To quote Walter Benjamin, "This discovery (alienation) of conditions takes place through the INTERRUPTION of happenings. (...) One can go even further to remember that interruption is one of the fundamental devices of all structuring (...)." The sculptures *Hooves* and *The one who would tell us the hours* are made of brass, which here emphasizes interruption. In the former work the shining field of standing horse legs defines the void above, while the rest of the animal belongs to the realm of the invisible. In the latter work, feathered parts of a pheasant emerge from an iridescent metallic shell. Organism and metal, the bird and the cast shield, are juxtaposed in a manner as abrupt as the act of delineating. *Hunt* is a shelf for two books. Blass speaks of two permanent essentials: Capture and Flight. A horizontal golden stripe runs through each page in the books, cutting through a photograph of a lake landscape, interrupting it. One sees ducks diving into the lake. The photograph's skyline shifts from page to page, and the golden line sometimes hits the ducks. The five-minute video *Deceit is the luck of the contented* engenders similar tension between evasion and apprehension. The video presents a woman as an orator accompanied by a magician. She, for instance, proclaims: "... Let's avenge the truth because only truth can be self-defrauding and turn fraud into an absolute truth ...". Her discourse, enhanced by the magician's maneuvers, formulates, ties together notions that entirely escape established logic. Regarding Blass' diptychs, with deliberate interruptions between the panels, Thiago Mesquita writes: "The forms appear to be dissociated from each other and operate in the painting as autonomous objects. They do not establish solidarity or intimacy with their fellow guests. They have no objects or common ideals either. Nor, in general, do the colors resemble each other. They are well defined and do not seek tonal relationships. (...) The artist does not devote herself merely to the tame ordering of the forms in a neutral space." And yet, as one looks at Blass' canvases, inspiring insight also resonates from Rodrigo Moura's words: "My first impression about the paintings by Tatiana Blass was that of standing before a timidly hedonistic solar poetics that was nonetheless propped on an idea of decorative or voluptuous shape..."

Celina Portella and Elisa Pessoa's films borrow the earnest subjectivity of feminist artists of the 70's, using their own body as the subject. However one also sees pop modern dance from the 80's and contemporary acrobatics. Improvisation and choreography are their tools. Part of the gritty street culture, the artists breathe, speak, run, fight the wind but do not cry. Schizophrenia is also embraced, and the duo sets out to different sites, a rooftop in Paris, a corner bar in downtown São Paulo, to release other personas. Elisa, the camerawoman and Celina, the dancer, state that they both construct the image and execute the performance. Often working on super 8, the transposition from film to digital format is done manually, with the artists redefining and re-coloring the material in search of new interfaces. In the present exhibition, two of their works are looped, *O Corpo* and *No Bar*, bringing together two autonomous works.

Tatiana Ferraz studied Fine Arts and Architecture separately, proceeding to systematically integrate both disciplines. Daniela Labra writes that Ferraz "devotes herself to observing the city with a calculated eye, searching for situations and materials as metaphors for man's effort to appropriate nature to his artificial habitat. The artist makes open space, urban or not, her theme. Formally her artwork is marked by the precision of technical architectural drawing, plans and models on macro and micro scales." Ferraz combines wood laminate and Formica in the triptych *Sobrevoos I*, recreating a distant planar view of an unblemished and miniaturized suburban landscape. If models often carry the fetishistic qualities of a toy, this work is poetically neutralized by the artist's Dada-like spirit. The piece's pastel blue frame is placed to the side on the floor, perhaps the outline of a swimming pool, or an unprecedented square lake. Ferraz chooses a delicate palette of pastels and wood grains, like one of Hans Arp's colored woodblock reliefs of the early 20's resembling childlike jigsaw trees, ponds, etc. The *Mirante (Watchtower) series* are diptychs each accompanied by a small stereoscope – an old fashioned souvenir for the viewer to look through – and a Formica panel depicting a tower. Situated among lush branches, as if nature could break and then mend the architecture, or on top of a snowy hill, the watchtower asks for a view, a narrative perhaps. A dialogue is suggested with a photograph of an almost abstract and homogenous seascape seen inside the stereoscope, bringing forth a meditative narrative, calling into play other realms not limited to the image.

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526 Canal Street
New York, NY 10013
Telephone +1-212-462-2411
Mail: info@pablosbirthday.com

Mariana Palma stands alone in contemporary Brazilian art. Her practice, while thoroughly formal, is strange to constructivism, expressionism, and minimalism. It is neither overtly conceptual, nor a cheerful psychedelic trip. The arabesques and abundance of patterns in Palma's paintings may bring to mind the carioca Beatriz Milhazes, an influence she mentions; but the young artist turns a corner. Tunga perhaps waves from afar. The painterly constructed field of fabrics in her canvases negates illusion, sets no scene, and yet she creates a feeling of suspense. It is as if Ingres had dismissed the Odalisques but kept their clothes, the perfume embedded in them, the incense burning. The four watercolors on view are from 2005, the year of Palma's first solo exhibition, when the artist needed to lay down her oil brushes and oil paints, and rest her mind from pattern making by drawing and sketching nature anew. The figures in the watercolors are hybrids. Palma is like the hermit Amazona emerging from the woods and disclosing secrets. The taxonomist's archives are here expanded, perhaps transgressed by these rare creatures. They are a *poetic structure, reminiscent of the magic of the conjurer's legerdemain*, with Flora becoming Fauna, and Fauna and Flora something new.

The title 'beneath the bridge' relates to the feminine by suggesting unsettled meanings. It attempts to trigger the viewer's personal image archives. Everyone has a different vision of the space, or locus that is *beneath the bridge*. The title also serves to play with our tendency for hasty assumptions: for the Portuguese speaker *beneath the bridge* means a state of absolute poverty. While that is not exactly the case for this exhibition, it may be stated that art's essential paradox lies in materiality. An artwork departs from materiality whether it is to affirm, negate or transcend it. Is *beneath the bridge* the dense fog above the river? What is *beneath the bridge*: the flux of tides, water and passing boats, or rather, a dusty road? Can one see the flashes of speeding automobiles on a highway? Is *beneath the bridge* where the pilgrims and nomads find shelter? Or is it where the fairies bury their treasure or the believers place their offerings? Is it the obscure hidden site of forbidden encounters? Is *beneath the bridge* the acoustic niche for a violin, or for the faun to rehearse his flute?

To appropriate the *bridge* is to allude to Die Brück's reverence for Zarathustra: "What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal ..." The art historian Jill Loyd writes: "The image of the bridge in Zarathustra is a powerful metaphor for man's position, stretched between spirit and body, between past and future, strung out between contradictory alternatives". In Brazil, it is said one lives between the asphalt and the jungle. And yet, to understand Brazilian contemporary art, profoundly structured by the constructivist tradition, is also to dismiss the narrative and to praise the *bridge* as purely and formally as a line in space. The *bridge* is not just the Equatorial line separating Northern and Southern Hemispheres, nor is it just the feminine elliptic curve of waistline, with the navel and knees below.

This press release has been written in collaboration with Lianor da Cunha.

PLEASE NOTE: the poster accompanying the exhibition includes a schedule for film screenings of Brazilian classics, a reenactment of Lygia Clark's *Baba Antropofagica*, and other events. Please, contact the gallery if you have questions.