

## ARBITRARY GEOGRAPHIES.

Cuauhtémoc Medina, in *Reforma (cultura)*, February 20. 2008

There are times when "the artistic" is expressed through the relative insignificance of a gesture. Perhaps even one as simple as saying "we get each other"; when the echo of transportable experiences is turned into a sign, and calls into attention a place or object that has a shared meaning or is restored by the understanding of a shared impotence.

The gestures and images that Mauricio Guillén gathers, produces and translates tend to be located in the terrain of such types of simplified forms of communication, assuming that the medium has been replaced by a semantic and objectual cultural circulation, enough to leave behind the binnacle of common experience, or, in this case, the geographical anxiety of the present.

Common Ground 1990-2005 is a photograph, which documents a stain in the shape of a map of the world found on the facade of a building. The first impulse of the viewer is perhaps to think this is the result of some kind of miracle. But as suggested by the dates of production of this piece, it is not the account of a specific event but a historical residue. In reality, this map is the result of the dust accumulated behind the original lettering of what was once an Iraqi Airways office in London.

Guillén contrasts the serious sense of melancholy in this image with an object placed a few steps away on a plinth, and which has a rather utopian precision. *Ubication and Influence* (2007) is perhaps the materialization of a kind of cosmopolitan dream: A modified compass manipulated by a magnet, which when moved, will drag the needle to point towards a new desired "North".

On the one hand the historical reference is inevitable: This utopian toy is a revision of *Inverted Map* (1943) by Joaquin Torres Garcia, who proposes the School of the South by representing South America inverted in order to abandon the geographically diffused vision of colonialism. Guillén's compass suggests a new development whereby the artist and the contemporary subject are able to choose - in all arbitrariness and consistency - their own symbolic "North".

At the same time, this piece strips bare a fatal dialectic, namely that of centre and periphery – where all “ubication” is postulated by cultural dependency, in other words, by the emanation of an “influence”.

To all of this, Guillén adds another photograph, which illustrates, in a slightly enigmatic way, the fascination and paradox of the changes of perspective. On the white sand of a beach the artist traces an eight-point star formed by the marks of a rocking chair. This improvised compass rose clearly seems to suggest a changing of orientation three times over, as though wanting to find the horizon. The mystery lies in the title, which describes four points of views, with the fourth point of perspective being the hypothetical centre formed by the crossing lines.

The rest of the works in the exhibition portray a diverse play on the notion of displacement, nostalgia, and geographical confusion in an array of mediums that seem to add to the general perplexity: Ranging from the conversion of solar light cast through a window in a London room by means of a video projection on the gallery floor, a series of text pieces describing the desire to be somewhere else but washed away by rain to the point of being unreadable, to the documentation of a Babelesque turmoil from what could be the viewpoint of a skyscraper. The set of works culminates in an installation covering a whole section of the gallery with a grid made of yellow, blue and red bracelets that serve as souvenirs from the church of Nosso Senhor de Bonfim do Bahia in Brasil.

Net no. 1 (2008) makes reference to the linear grid of primary colours by Piet Mondrian, employing a popular and globalized lucky charm. This act proposes a corruption of references, suggesting that universality does not necessarily need to mean certainty obtained through constructivist order, but can be a miscellaneous collage of superstitions.