

ARTFORUM

MAY 2011

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

SUMMER PREVIEW

50 SHOWS WORLDWIDE

\$10.00



technology. This same perspective is what organizes *Gramática de meseta* (Meseta Grammar), 2010, a work that—through slides, photographic prints, plans, and drawings—documents the displacement of antique monuments to make way for infrastructure projects, thus attesting to the vulnerability of place and all the traces that time leaves on it.

The idea that landscape can no longer be considered nature, but rather is a battlefield on which many social and political actors contend, is the most explicit of the narratives that the exhibition puts forth: It makes constant reference to what human actions do to natural terrains. *Política hidráulica* (Hydraulic Politics), 2004–10, consists of ninety-eight aerial photographs of swamps and reservoirs showing the damage that infrastructure does to landscape. *Mar del Pirineo* (Pyrenean Sea), 2006, materializes a flooded landscape as an upside-down topographic model. Both the descending and the ascending perspectives reach the same conclusion: Civilization is also a subtle, twisting form of barbarism with airs of progress; it is always ultimately the violent maker of ruins. In terms of the relations between nature and culture, the influence of Robert Smithson's work is at least as strong as the influence of Robert Morris's sculptural "anti-form."

The final outcome of this constellation of narratives is the deconstruction of landscape, which emerges as a social and cultural construction. In the film *Exercises on the North Side*, 2004–2007, this sense is overwhelming: The attempt to portray a dramatic, snow-covered mountain setting through technology seems futile in the face of the sublime power of nature, yet that very failure ends up obliquely presenting it to us.

—Martí Peran

Translated from Spanish by Jane Brodie.

CAIRO

Asunción Molinos Gordo

TOWNHOUSE

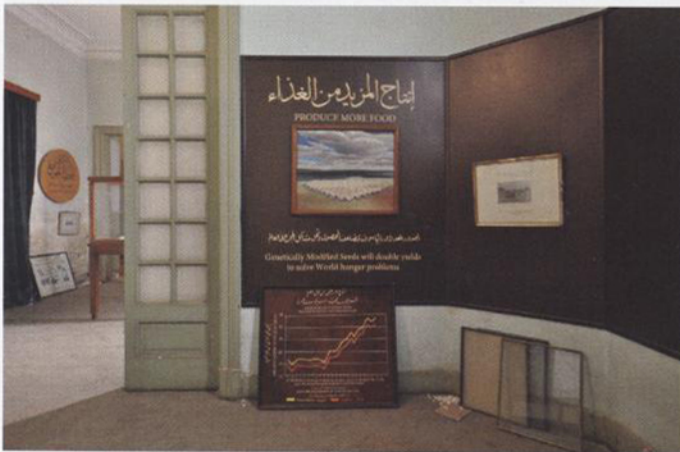
Downtown Cairo is filled with decaying century-old early modern buildings, a testament to an era when the city aspired to be the Paris of the tropics, a desire shared by other municipalities from my own hometown, Rio de Janeiro, to Panama City. Abandoned by the city's more affluent inhabitants, Cairo's once impressive belle époque and Art Deco buildings are today in a state of disintegration—modern ruins in the global periphery. Here, on the third floor of a building on Abdel Khaleq Tharwat Street not far from the now world-famous Tahrir Square, right below one of the city's most important contemporary art spaces, the

Contemporary Image Collective, was what seemed to be a satellite of Cairo's Agricultural Museum, itself an institution in shambles. On the metal plaque outside the apartment, one read what was in fact the title of the 2010 installation by Cairo-based Spanish artist Asunción Molinos Gordo: *UNTITLED 3 WAM* (WORLD AGRICULTURE MUSEUM). The exhibition was the result of the artist's residency at Townhouse, an independent contemporary arts space nearby.

Inside, in six rooms, one found a fascinating display of objects in vitrines, pictures, maps, graphs, and texts painted on boards, all addressing issues related to farming and biotechnology, the global food crisis and ecological disaster, and all in a style reminiscent of mid-century pedagogical signage—and in tune with the dilapidated official Agricultural Museum across town. Blending fact and fiction with humor and incisiveness, offering data to question, reveal, and create old and new myths, the satellite museum was meticulously constructed as a sort of cabinet of curiosities by a team of local artisans, craftspeople, calligraphers, carpenters, and electricians directed by Molinos Gordo—and everything was presented with explanatory texts in Arabic and English. Here were charts that traced the crossing of a cow with a soybean, a butterfly with an apple, a rat with lettuce. On the floor, a painted board with a map indicated the number of suicides in India due to "indebtedness through use of Genetically Modified BT Cotton." In another room, handcrafted wooden fruit and vegetables from Haiti were on display, as were that country's infamous mud cookies. Many different species of patented seeds deposited in a library of glass jars were on view elsewhere, along with a telephone to "report suspicious behavior of Seeds Exchange." In the central hall, five doors had signs on them indicating some of the museum's departments: INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY, TRADE, HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT, LEGISLATIONS [sic]; on the floor, apparently without a room to house its office, was a sign for the neglected department of LABOUR. In a room at the back of the apartment was a diorama of Norway's Svalbard Global Seed Vault, popularly known as the Doomsday Seed Vault, housed on a remote Arctic island.

Leaving the flat, one found the very last room, tucked away behind a door just before the exit, filled with different types of plants in pots improvised out of canisters, under fluorescent lights, much like a laboratory for breeding the real things about which we were learning. In light of the revolutionary events that unexpectedly closed the exhibition for part of its run, the site-specificity of *Untitled 3* (*World Agriculture Museum*) went beyond its location in downtown Cairo amid the ruins of a frustrated modern epoch; it also pointed to another anachronistic and decaying ancien régime. Perhaps the great changes the country is undergoing will turn out to be a harbinger for the real Agricultural Museum as well.

—Adriano Pedrosa



Asunción Molinos Gordo, *Untitled 3 WAM* (*World Agriculture Museum*) (detail), 2010, mixed-media. Installation view.

NEW DELHI

Zarina Hashmi

GALLERY SPACE

What do you do when home is somewhere you will never be? You could bemoan your exile with hilariously depressing fiction à la Salman Rushdie. You could fashion crystal-studded paintings of hybrid beasts (neither fish nor fowl, but always glittering) in the vein of British-Kashmiri Raqib Shaw. Or you could aim for subtlety, as New York-based Zarina Hashmi did in "Recent Works," her recent solo show of paper works and fragile installations. For all their pretty serenity—paper has been sliced and woven to resemble a cream-hued *chatai* (mat), or coated with black obsidian to imitate a shimmering night sky—Hashmi's works hover around memories of personal and communal loss. She maps the falling-