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The 26th São Paulo Bienal, curated by Alfons Hug around the theme of “Free Territory”, opened to the public on September 26 after a somewhat chaotic installation process. The city celebrates its 450th anniversary this year, and the Bienal aims to attract over one million visitors by offering free entry, a gesture made possible by prominent sponsorship. The theme of freedom also finds expression in the unprecedented mingling of works by the 80 invited artists and 55 national representatives. This innovation is to be welcomed but other claims made by Hug, such as the emphasis on “world art” and the rejection of documentary strategies, are more questionable. Many of the more intriguing video installations actually play with documentary convention and documentary photography is also prominent, even though the medium has not been allocated a distinct space alongside the Sculpture Park, Salon of Painting and Planetarium of Video. The reliance on formal categorisation proves somewhat unproductive on the ground floor, where a series of colourful, large-scale works compete for attention. Huang Yong Ping’s assemblage of stuffed animals, which proposes an alternative account of a hunting trip undertaken by George V in Nepal, is one of the few sculptural works to thrive in this circus-like space. Rosana Palazyan’s *Organ Grinder* (2004) is also appropriately sited, featuring a hired musician whose parrot dispenses texts culled from interviews with street dwellers.

The mechanics of exchange and collaboration are explored in greater depth by René Francisco, in a video documenting the repair of an elderly woman’s home, with resources drawn from a residency programme. Other works on the first floor, such as Fabiano Marques’ *Mar Pequeno* (2003) and Aernout Mik’s *Pulverous* (2003) employ video to explore futility rather than productivity. Marques records his struggle to keep a battered construction afloat on the open water while Mik presents a larger scale performance, focusing on the methodical destruction of a supermarket. Evoking memories of George Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead*, this piece highlights the pavilion’s striking resemblance to a shopping mall. Oblique references to consumer culture also surface in Mike Nelson’s installation. A tiny spiral staircase, similar to those found in the arcades of Rua Augusta, has been inserted into the fabric of the Niemeyer pavilion, leading to a secluded space where a collection of images and artifacts hint at the mythic character of modernist architecture. Parallel themes are explored by Dennis McNulty in <http://alpha60.info>, a project that encompasses a series of site-specific acoustic performances outside the confines of the Bienal building.

Explorations of memory and recovered history abound in various works on the edge of the Salon of Painting, including the drawings of Lithuanian resistance fighters by Mindaugas and Gintautas Lukosaitis, Fernando Bryce’s images of the Spanish Civil War, Hans Hamid Rasmussen’s embroidered textiles and Pablo Cardoso’s painted snapshots, which document his journey to São Paulo. The second floor is also the site of two ambitious architectural installations, which exploit rather than combat the virtual quality of the exhibition space. Jonas Dahlberg has created a tinted glass structure to house two silent video projections, one a continuously shifting steadicam journey through a depopulated urban environment, the other a similarly disorientating image of a pot plant tumbling around a water-filled room. Thomas Demand presents a series of photographs of cardboard models in a structure that is build around the

second floor escalators, and explores a different kind of illusion in a 35mm film loop, in which three plates spin endlessly. The only other 35mm piece in the Bienal, *Civic Life: Moore Street* (2004) by desperate optimists, is also characterised by continual motion. Shot with a steadicam on the streets of Dublin in a single take, it deals with themes of belonging and dislocation and is screened in Cinesesc, a São Paulo cinema.

Several of the works in the video projection area rely on bad taste and shock tactics for impact, but Martín Sastre's *Bolivia: The American Video Clip* (2004) is one of the few to invite repeat viewing. A cut-up of animation and Hollywood epics, it stages a comic battle between the South American Sastre and a well-known art star, ably represented by the children's favourite Barney, who appears complete with *Cremaster* costuming. Elsewhere, Julian Rosefeldt's *Trilogy of Failure Part 2: Stunned Man* (2004) echoes Mik's supermarket piece in its emphasis on wanton destruction, but borrows more from the martial arts genre than the zombie flick. In *Unexpected Rules* (2004), a reworking of the Clinton-Lewinsky fiasco by Frédéric Moser and Philippe Schwinger, theatre and soap opera serve as the main points of reference. This latter piece is filmed and presented in a purpose-built structure that dominates the surrounding exhibition space and, like Christine Felten and Véronique Massinger's pinhole landscapes and Doron Rabina's sculptural installation *Bare Back* (2004), *Unexpected Rules* employs dramatic lighting to good effect. In contrast, the nearby display of African photography, curated by Simon Njami, is poorly lit and seems to have been abandoned in a cluttered thoroughfare.

On the upper floor, new works by Luc Tuymans, Thomas Struth and Neo Rauch are located in an airy, climate-controlled space, a world away from Mark Dion's claustrophobic museological installation, *The Brazilian Expedition of Thomas Ender - Reconsidered* (2004). Dion has retraced the steps of a 19th century naturalist in the company of a modern-day expedition team, composed of Austrian art students and Brazilian artists. This reflexive exploration of failed intra-national colonial endeavour, realised in collaboration with the Bienal Foundation, is a timely contribution given the recent U.S. decision to cease sponsorship of an official representative at São Paulo. Dion's project also acquires an added, although perhaps inadvertent, significance within the overall context of this year's exhibition, where a critique of antiquated modes of presentation is particularly welcome.

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