

PRESUME, group show at Kunstraum Kreuzberg, Bethanien
the Mart Stam Prize
Curator: Kornelia von Berswordt-Wallrabe
4 - 20 May 2012

Andrés Galeano: Off the ground, lightly

“Part of my artistic research is concerned with the myth of flying and the archetypal figure of the human-bird, and their array of depictions across cultures.” (Andrés Galeano)¹

I must confess: having seen Andrés Galeano performing at the Savvy Contemporary gallery in November 2011 (Co-Lab Editions 5) made me familiar with his interest in the theme of flight and his sophisticated, unobtrusive and fresh way of working with ideas, images, objects and his own body.

Andrés Galeano's presentation for the PRESUME group show at Kunstraum Kreuzberg (Bethanien) consists of different parts: two performance videos, a dia-projection, a series of three framed photographs (*Zero Gravity*, 2012) and a single, bigger photo printed on paper hanging next to the projection wall (*Unknown Photographers #2*).

The video-performance *El Canto del Harzer Roller* (*The Singing of the Harzer Roller canary*, 2011) shows the artist imitating the chirping of a harzer roller canary, as the title says. This effect is obtained by showing the filmed material in speed-up mode and having it play in a loop. The artist's performance plays upon the tradition of the *pajareros* who catch special birds in order to cultivate their original singing and to organise singing competitions. Andrés' yellow sweater worn during the performance also conveys a note of humour to the piece, reminding you of Tweety, the animated canary. A witty and playful way of reflecting upon the interaction between animals and humans, nature and imitation, as well as questioning the sometimes cruel connection between freedom and aesthetics.

His interest for man's desire to lift himself off the ground is further explored in the dia-projection. Air-planes, snowy peaks and abrupt cliffs, cloud-stalking skyscrapers, amusement parks and roller-coasters, warmth-filled balloons, monuments targeting the skyline, parks, temples, graffiti walls, all of these and some more make up the various settings in his photos, filled with life, human

1 <http://www.andresgaleano.eu/page6/page65/page65.html> (last accessed: May, 10, 2012).

presence and spirit: trees, children raising kites, tourists, mountain climbers and dancers, contenders, families and loners (Einzelgänger), birds, pyramids and Renaissance Madonnas.

Reminding me of another one of his works, *Montages*, (2011)², the present dia-projection also works by accumulation, selection and associations. Andrés Galeano's selected images communicate and travel across cultures. The photos he uses this time are all found, whereby the name *Unknown Photographers*. Some have an artistic touch to them, others are simply holiday pictures each of us makes on different occasions; some are technically correct, while others are unfocused.

Spatially, the dia-show is framed by the video of Andrés Galeano's *Cue & Review* performance and by an enlarged, colour photograph: *Man on a ladder* I like to call it. Its actual title is *Unknown Photographers #2*, the image being taken from a found photo album. What you actually see is a man on a ladder, his back turned to the viewer, climbed on a tall hedge which is also a gate. There are flowers in the foreground and a house can be spotted through the opening of the living, green gate. The image could have been taken in a park, or maybe in the garden of a palace. The man on the ladder wearing plastic boots, his head a bit bent could be a gardener, trimming the grass. Due to a voluntary gesture or to a technical mistake the upper left side of the image, right where the man's body towers over the ladder, appears over-exposed, burnt. In terms of colour and composition the rising, golden-looking human figure corresponds to the iridescent, unfocused white mass of flowers at the bottom of the photo.



Unknown Photographers #2, variable size, 2012

2 “*Montages* is a photographic series-in-progress that creates surprising juxtapositions of found photographs that touch on the primordial desire to fly.” Andrés Galeano: <http://www.andresgaleano.eu/page6/page65/page65.html> (last accessed: May, 10, 2012).

For a certain reason the artist chose to enlarge this particular photo from his series of found images with unknown photographers. This is an almost domestic setting, there is nothing heroic about the man on the ladder. Except that, quite unaware of the fact himself, he seems to be in a different space. It looks as if the moment he takes even a little bit off the ground, man is in a different sphere, a magical one. An enlightened one, like the photograph playfully reveals.

All together, the artist's image collection reveals man's almost everyday engagement with the idea of flying, our manifold pursuit of leaving the ground for a short while and enjoying the world from a different perspective (be it a mountain top, a church or a dancer's stage). The beauty of these photos coming together lies in the fact that the artist does not discriminate between them, which doesn't mean he doesn't select. All pictures used by Galeano, independent of their provenance and looks, are eloquent testimonies of our desire to inhabit the air for a while.

And if the human body cannot always take off, the gaze can do it: in one of the projected photos a man lies on a meadow and looks up at the sky. The landscape surrounding him is completely flat, but nevertheless, his motionless act of looking draws out a vertical movement, an invisible gesture of leaving the ground, a momentary loss of gravity. This seems to be one of sight's most precious gifts: its weightless, its lightness of being, its freedom to roam and discover.

This takes me to the second one of Galeano's performances, *Cue & Review* (25 min., 2011) which was running on the lateral wall, close to the dia-projection. One of the moments that stayed with me after I left the exhibition was when the artist picks up a red apple, throws it in the air and lets it fall on his head. An unexpected, ironic gesture. A self-inflected pain aimed at calling out the wings of inspiration? After being hit by the apple Galeano opens a can of Red Bull and starts to drink, maybe in the hope of growing wings. A clin d'œil at advertising's appropriation of Icarus' myth of flight? Apples and flight, inseparable from gravity and falling: Newton, inspiration and Eve's promise of knowledge. And a light sense of humour which gently emerges from his thoroughly choreographed performance. It is a show carried out with gentleness and diligence, without any trace of ostentation.

There is also an element of surprise in Galeano's work. You experience it while watching his collections of juxtaposed images, be it a visual collage or a dia-projection; you also discover it in moments like his throwing of the apple which will hit him on the head the next moment. This surprising effect belongs to a view upon the world which, beyond being insightful and elaborate, remains curious and fresh.

Some of the key-objects Galeano used in his 2011 performance re-appear now in a different form and format: a green apple, a hammer and a feather show up as photos, all of them on black background (*Zero Gravity*, 2012). In a way, by becoming images, the objects loose their weight; they also loose context, which turns them into symbols and triggers a whole flow of associations

and cultural references (the apple: Eve, knowledge, food... for thought, the Fall from Paradise, Newton's gravity; the hammer: destruction, breaking and fixing, fragility; the feather: flight, writing, lightness). This loosing of context also puts the chosen objects out of function. By being photographed and displayed as photos, all three objects, as different as they are in their usage, powers and substance, become more alike: now they all share a neuter space and a state of levitation.



Zero Gravity, 2012

The triptych is a visual meditation on the interplay between knowledge, power and art and, in the light of Galeano's performance *Cut & Review*, on the juxtaposition between objects, actions and words in the flow of our life, in our various and repeated attempts at flying.

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