

SPECIAL REPORT: MIAMI 2003

Art in America

DECEMBER 2003

ERWIN WURM

ISTANBUL BIENNIAL

ICP TRIENNIAL

ISAMU NOGUCHI



\$5.00 USA
\$7.00 CAN £3.50 UK



Milena Dragicevic: *Skoolp-too-ra*, 2003, oil on canvas, 86 by 57 inches; at Artlab at Imperial.

day to adult film companies. Sultan, who is a native of San Fernando Valley, also points out that these houses are just like the one he grew up in. Previously, the area was featured in his well-known 1986 series "Pictures from Home," which depicted his aging parents living in their stylish 1960s rancher. "The Valley" further scrutinizes American suburbia, its fantasies and facades.

Surprisingly little in these pictures—11 of which were on view here, from the over 50 comprising "The Valley"—is X-rated. Sultan focuses instead on actors relaxing offscreen, their workaday life on the set, the banal architecture and, above all, the bizarre confluence of these elements. In *Woman in Garden* (2001), a topless actress pacing a nondescript yard in curlers and cargo pants laughs as she talks on her cell phone. Her sunlit profile blends with the fake limestone wall behind her. Nothing about the pool-side view of the modern condo in *Cabana* (2000) is unusual until you notice—partially hidden by a striped tent and a rosebush—the flesh of a tangled threesome.

The fascination of these pictures lies in the way they manifest different realities at once, although in some of them the porn stars look so at home in their temporary quarters that the crucial sense of displacement is lost. The glamorous

woman in *Boxer Dogs, Mission Hills* (2000), for example, strutting by the pool with a cadre of boxers sniffing at her platform heels, could easily pass for the actual lady of the house. Whereas in *Kitchen Window, Topanga Canyon* (1999), a naked man standing in the kitchen and a thick black cable draped on the countertop clearly do not belong in this domestic setting. Yet even here Sultan catches something interesting: the man's elegant contrapposto and his pensive expression as he gazes out the window create a melancholy, strangely moving picture. The dreamy light transforms even this corny country kitchen into a poetic space. Harmony reigns where you would least expect it.

—Melissa E. Feldman

LONDON

Milena Dragicevic at Artlab at Imperial

Milena Dragicevic is a London-based painter, born in Serbia and educated in Canada. Her work draws on this cultural heterogeneity with combinations of deadpan delivery, former-Eastern-bloc imagery and '60s-type Color Field backgrounds. Dragicevic overlays motifs of Communist propaganda—sad-looking plinth sculptures and heroic perspectives on high-diving platforms—onto summarily quoted third-rate abstraction, the kind of striped compositions and drab monochromes that entered the storage racks of middle-American studios 30 years ago. Once ideologically polarized, these disparate modes now share an irrelevance. By putting them together, however, Dragicevic presents us with a discomfiting visual experience.

Larry Sultan: *Kitchen Window, Topanga Canyon*, 1999, C-print, 40 by 50 inches; at Stephen Wirtz.



This show was organized by an artist-curator duo who call themselves Artlab and use a space at Imperial College. Positioned on the end wall of a narrowing space, the 5-foot-square *Bronza* (2003) depicts the straining forms of a hefty Lipchitz-like sculpture spilling over the edges of a stepped platform flanked by tapering cypress hedges. As if replicating a badly printed magazine spread, this image is bisected vertically and shifted off-register, using a dull palette of ocher and viridian. Dragicevic drew her imagery from old Yugoslav publications, products of a reduced economy.

At 7 feet high, *Skoolp-too-ra* (2003) is the largest and most complex of the five paintings on view. Vertical black and purple stripes serve as backdrop to three unequal horizontal sections, each featuring a different view of the same curvilinear aspirational sculpture, school of Naum Gabo, perhaps. It is wrapped up in a green tarpaulin in the lowest section, and in the others its looping white surfaces twist through sunlight and shadow. The oil paint is used dryly and sparingly in the unceremonious manner of practiced mural painters.

The archeology of esthetic distaste has been productive for some painters. The structure and imagery of these paintings are not meant to be fun. Their severity recalls *rappel à l'ordre* work of the 1920s, although in this case the ethical compensation intended by the regulation of scopical pleasures is withheld. Dragicevic's combination of bleached-out chroma, lack of bravura and resurrected idioms makes for commendably uningratiating paintings. The prospect that these works are intended to remain stubbornly unlikeable deserves a still-warmer response.

—Mark Harris

BARCELONA

Marcel·lí Antúnez at Mercat de les Flors Theater

In 1979, when he was 21, Marcel·lí Antúnez helped found La Fura dels Baus, a Barcelona-based theater group characterized by its raucous mixture of

nudity, medieval-era theatrics and stunts, and high-tech stage settings. Antúnez left the group in 1989, but his subsequent work—graffiti, experimental music and objects—retained the will to shock and amuse.

At Mercat de les Flors, Antúnez presented three multimedia performances: *Epizoo*, *Afasia* and his most complex piece to date, *Pol*. In *Epizoo* (1994), the stocky, bald-headed artist appeared nude, except for a black thong, a beanie-like helmet and a shiny metal apparatus fitted to his body that incorporated orthopedic devices, pneumatic pumps and plastic tubes. Viewers were encouraged to manipulate Antúnez's body using a computer set up on one end of the small stage. On the monitor, there were a dozen buffoonish configurations of him to select from. Depending on the model chosen, gizmos flapped the artist's ears back and forth, pulled his nostrils upward, stretched the corners of his mouth open wide and/or lifted his pectoral muscles and buttocks. At the same time, stage lights blinked on and off and constantly morphing images of Antúnez flashed on the screen behind him. For the grand finale, flames shot out of his helmet. *Epizoo* is no doubt painful for the artist (who's endured it over 50 times), but its humorous presentation somehow takes your mind off that.

Afasia (1998), which won the best video art prize at Montreal's 1999 Festival of New Cinema and Media, is loosely based on Homer's epic, *The Odyssey*. Antúnez was rigged up in a contraption of straps and wires on his arms, legs and torso, and acted as master of ceremonies for the video projections depicting his "voyage." Four elaborate musical robots were brought to life when the artist pointed his metal-encased index finger at them; they made ear-splitting sounds approximating drums, an electric guitar, an organ and a synthesizer. The projections feature animated images of Antúnez on a bed sailing across fantasy landscapes. These scenes are interspersed with bizarre occurrences such as actors smearing bloody animal guts on each other, a one-eyed monster threatening to eat people trapped in a cave, and individuals scarfing down watermelons and slobbering the juice