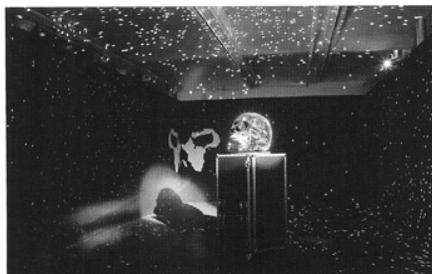


Claire Barliant, Artforum International, March 2006



Bruno Peinado

PARKER'S BOX/SWISS INSTITUTE—CONTEMPORARY ART

Having landed simultaneous exhibitions in Manhattan and Brooklyn, French artist Bruno Peinado took advantage of the geographical opposition to launch a site-specific investigation of duality, reflection, and inversion. Although the two shows were discrete entities, they became decidedly more interesting when viewed in relation to one another.

"Why Style," Peinado's exhibition at the Swiss Institute, riffed on *Wild Style*, Charlie Ahearn's 1982 docudrama about the budding hip-hop movement in the South Bronx. *Untitled, Vanity Flight Case*, 2005, loomed totemically at the center of the pitch-black gallery. A large mirrored skull mounted on a rotating turntable, it reflected circles of light that swirled around the space. The pedestal for this glamorous memento mori was a black trunk of the kind typically used to transport DJ equipment. Enhanced by a fog machine, it was an enticing setup, a nostalgic memorial for the early days, before hip-hop became a multibillion-dollar industry, when rap was hammered out during performance battles that were sources of local pride—and sometimes a form of protest.

Indeed, the co-optation of local, personal, and political symbols by the agents of capital seemed to be the underlying theme of the show. Appropriating recognizable shapes and draining them of color—a grayed-out Stars and Stripes hung outside the gallery—Peinado shuffled and rearranged familiar signifiers of Americana to suggest new meanings. Sometimes this strategy made the work appear morally heavyhanded, as in *Untitled, ErKorschach Test*, 2005, a black-and-white mural in which the outline of the US is superimposed onto that of Africa and then doubled, creating a Rorschach-like design with a clunkingly obvious anti-imperialist message. More effective is *Untitled, Air Jordan Magic Tree Mercedes Fame Dreamcatcher*, 2005, a large mirror cut into the shape of that New Age staple, the Native American charm used to prevent nightmares. Incorporated into the

design were motley (but distinctly American) forms representing pine tree-shaped air fresheners and the iconic silhouette of Michael Jordan's body, legs splayed and basketball in hand, stretching for a slam dunk.

Another dream catcher, *Air Jordan Crown Mercedes Magic Tree Dreamcatcher*, 2005, appeared at Parker's Box, where Peinado's make-over of the gallery space was even more extreme. Painting the floor white and the ceiling gray, the artist "flipped" the gallery upside-down, extending the gesture so far as to install inverted potted plants. Several blank white plastic signboards of varying shapes and sizes, lit from within, sprouted from the "ceiling" (that is, the floor) and walls. Devoid of text, *Silent Titanium Billboards*, 2005, became a set of quietly lovely neo-Minimalist objects and created a warm, even festive effect when viewed together through the gallery's window on a cold winter night.

At the Swiss Institute, Peinado's Manichaean reductions often seemed facile, sometimes appropriating slick, seductive advertising strategies rather too well, and creating an aura of spectacle and enchantment that tended to reinforce material desire rather than challenge the capitalist status quo. But considered alongside the muted, contemplative *Billboards*, the bombast and artifice of "Why Style" provided an appropriate and effective contrast. It was by exploiting this dichotomy that Peinado ultimately succeeded in calling attention to the interstices between absolutes such as white and black, upside-down and right-side up, and even Brooklyn and Manhattan, evoking a marginalized space in which nuance and gradation generate flux and foster possibility.

—Claire Barliant

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