

BARCELONA

Christopher Mir

GALERIA SENDA

The ten paintings displayed in Christopher Mir's exhibition "The Dream of You Is Real" are tightly executed, smooth works of Photorealism representing sexy women, a lone caveman, galloping horses, flying birds and insects, and so on, all inserted into landscapes and often projecting a feeling of the uncanny and the exotic. Such an iconography recalls a surrealist discharge of imagination: A rich dream space profoundly mirrors often nightmarish psychological scenes. However, the serene or stormy skies that belong to Mir's world also include additional visitors: planes and helicopters, functioning as emphatic new archetypes of an age defined by contemporary military conflicts and their consequences—messengers, perhaps, delivering a warning that humans are unable to learn from the past. In *Arrival*, 2007, a helicopter hovers somewhere between a background of palm trees and a blond girl in the foreground. The site looks alien and forlorn, but the child seems familiar, like a next-door neighbor from an American suburb; the helicopter is paralleled by a large black bird, perhaps a hawk or an eagle. Curiously, a group of colored patches crosses the image like an accumulation of feathery clouds generated by a computer, apparently a glitch in the representational system, an abstraction that prevents our reading the scene as either a dream or nightmare.

For his sources Mir uses pictures from magazines, calendars, and the Internet, as well as photographs he himself has taken. The collaged and staged aspects of his works produce a feeling of distance, so that the viewer immediately grasps that the scene is unreal. In *Sudden Sun*, 2006, a romantic moment is brought into question by the presence of huge dragonflies that hover near a man approaching a sunlit seashore through a passage between two barren rocks. The juxtaposition of such seemingly unrelated images, and the lack of synchronicity among them, creates the distinct sensation that what we're seeing is not quite what was actually happening. This imagery might be generally described as digital surrealism for the post-9/11 era. Yet the meaning of such tragedies for Mir is unclear, as are their psychological consequences, clouded as they are by his paintings' explicit prettiness and cryptic mysticism. Instead of conveying clear meanings, his works transport us into a wasteland of imagination, a technological jungle with archetypal human presences in it.

Like other contemporary artists working in this vein, Mir attempts to capture an evasive sublime, locating awe and terror not only in nature but also in the hyperreality of the Internet. This new technological wilderness originates in the sense of isolation epitomized by the solitude of an individual sitting in front of a computer. With the electronic world mentally accessible yet physically absent, emotional short circuits occur with growing frequency. The return of pretty women, prophets, stallions, insects, and birds in Mir's painting might, in fact, register the growing slippage between our feelings of hopelessness and anxiety in the face of a digitally controlled world and the desire to recapture some corporeal presence in art.

—Marek Bartelik



Christopher Mir,
Arrival, 2007, oil on
canvas, 15¼ x 20½".

LISBON

"Bright Morning Star"

GALERIA ZÉ DOS BOIS

The art world continues to rediscover Kenneth Anger, most recently through the survey of his films this past summer at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center in New York. In Portugal, too, his work has attracted fresh attention. In an unusual initiative—given its location, experimentalism, and scope—Galeria Zé dos Bois, an alternative space in downtown Lisbon, sponsored a number of events dedicated to Anger. Among them was the exhibition "*Estrela Brilhante da Manhã*" (Bright Morning Star), curated by Natxo Checa, which brought together eleven Portuguese and foreign artists, including Alexandre Estrela, Jannis Varelas, Markus Selg, Brian Butler, and Anger himself.

The exhibition's title has a biblical echo but more specifically cites "*A Hora do Diabo*" (The Devil's Hour), a fantastic tale by Fernando Pessoa. In one passage from the text, the Portuguese modernist writer declares: "I corrupt but I illuminate. I am the bright morning star." The esoteric tone of this expression echoes Anger's short video *Brush of Baphomet*, 2009, based on reproductions of recently discovered paintings by the legendary occultist Aleister Crowley, one of the primary influences on Anger's own practice and a recurrent reference for underground culture in general, which was projected in the stairwell between the gallery's two floors, connecting the remaining works on view.

The exhibition opened with *Dein "ich" ist keine MUPPETSHOW, DU SAU, später erschien "Du Keintier" leider* (Your "self" is no Muppet Show, YOU SOD, later appeared "You No Animal" unfortunately), 2008, a painting by Jonathan Meese, whose eccentric symbolism simultaneously evokes individual introspection and collective self-analysis. This work echoed the paintings Manuel Ocampo showed here, such as *Redemption*, 2007, which was replete with gothic motifs such as a human skull, a fist, an ashtray with lit and spent cigarettes, and a clock. Ocampo criticizes contemporary society by means of political allegory, appropriating religious iconographic traditions and folk techniques to do so.

Tamar Guimarães presented *A Man Called Love*, 2009, a slide show based on archival images tracing the life of Chico Xavier, a Brazilian psychic well-known during the military dictatorship that ruled his country from the mid-1960s to the '80s. Xavier used automatic writing to transcribe the séances he conducted. Guimarães makes connections between this odd pop-cultural phenomenon and the class, race, and gender politics of her country in the second half of the twentieth century. In John Bock's video *Zezzimnnesang*, 2006, a small apartment crammed with useless objects is the setting for bizarre activities performed by a man and a ghostly figure who mimics his actions. Bock thus links the theater of the absurd that characterizes his performances to a reflection on the growing relationship between the sacred and the profane in daily life.

Upstairs, the exhibition reached its climax with works by António Poppe and Joachim Koester. For his untitled piece, 2009, Poppe wrote



Tamar Guimarães,
A Man Called Love,
2009, black-and-
white and color slide
projection with
voice-over, 20 minutes.
Projection view. From
"Bright Morning Star."