

ARTFORUM

CHICAGO

Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle
DONALD YOUNG GALLERY

Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle has probably passed enough professional milestones—participation in Documenta (in 2007), the Whitney Biennial (in 2000), and various other exhibitions in museums and galleries around the world; receipt of a MacArthur "genius" grant—to indulge himself in a one-liner. *Dirty Bomb*, 2008, is a full-scale replica of Fat Man, the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki in August 1945,



Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, *Dirty Bomb*, 2008, fiberglass, epoxy, aluminum, mud, 5' 2" x 5' 2" x 10' 8".

immaculately translated by the artist into white fiberglass and aluminum. Suspended from the ceiling, the bulbous, dirigible-shaped colossus has mud slathering its otherwise pristine snout, much of it dripping to the floor. There's undoubtedly precious little humor in the arena of dirty bombs, but however much there is Manglano-Ovalle manages to suggest in this somewhat obvious visual pun. Fat Man, though, was the last nuclear weapon actually

employed in warfare, and rendering it now as a crisply designed object besmirched with mud seems an earnest gesture, however small, toward leavening the unimaginable, the bomb presented as a sculpture to contemplate.

Juggernaut, 2008, a digital video transferred from 16-mm film shot at the Vizcaino Biosphere Reserve in Baja California Sur in Mexico, seems more in harmony with Manglano-Ovalle's usual concerns. Stupendously eerie and sober, the work possesses the stately rhythms and suggestive sparseness found in his earlier films. The video opens with a slow tracking shot moving from left to right about eighteen inches above the stark, flat salt plains, a landscape of white crystals extending to the horizon, appearing not unlike an arctic ice field. Spooky and amplified ambient noise adds to the expectant and dramatic quality of this place, which seems to be at once earthly and otherworldly. Suddenly, from the left, seventy-six wheels belonging to an enormous vehicle, perhaps a series of linked flatbed trucks—the camera's low positioning makes precise identification difficult—begin to crunch their way across the landscape, and off stage right. This sense of human intervention instantly overwhelming the environment gives the film a kind of Herzogian feel, as it presents nature as eternal and humankind as temporary and capable of incredible damage during its relatively brief stay.

Guerrero Negro, 2008, another film shot by Manglano-Ovalle in Baja California Sur, is a loop of ten still images taken in and around the landscape filmed in *Juggernaut*; in each case the artist has included a figure whose face is never seen and who holds a GretagMacbeth ColorChecker chart. Offering only the type of shot used to evaluate color and tone before the "real" work of representation begins, Manglano-Ovalle zeroes in on the human need to impose frameworks onto nature, and reminds us that photographs are not faithful renderings but manipulated constructions. In each image, various items appear in the background—broken road signs and whale bones, for example—but the camera focuses on the color chart, leaving everything else blurry and secondary. Here, Manglano-Ovalle cunningly shows that the sense of immersion produced by a film like *Juggernaut*

is always an illusion, offering a sobering paean to the photographic play that always precedes and underpins such work.

—James Yood

Mickalene Thomas
RHONA HOFFMAN GALLERY

Mickalene Thomas's exhibition "Girlfriends, Lovers, Still Lives, and Landscapes" far exceeds the decorative wallop of her first solo show two years ago at the same venue. She has become masterful at maximizing ornamentation and slick in her fearless color combinations. Her paintings, which combine large fields of poured enamel, thin brushy passages of acrylic paint, and thousands of fastidiously applied glitzy rhinestones, brazenly bring the feminist-inspired politics of the Pattern and Decoration movement to genre painting.

Landscape with Woman Washing Her Feet (all works 2008), which measures nine feet by twelve feet, is the least convincing of the exhibition's twenty-two works, attempting as it does atmospheric space while producing mere clumsy, flat horizons. The patches of blue sky and distant mountainous geography lack the artist's obsessive bejeweling, relying instead on awkward fields of characterless paint and dead opaque color, while the foliage bracketing the unspectacular vista is simply filled in, its array of green rhinestones conveying only illustrative effect. Thomas paints ornate, faux-wooden frames around many of her compositions, and the one here provides a welcome, playful illusion that distracts from the painting's inadequacies. The work falls short both as a romantic landscape and as a more abstract patchwork of organic patterns.

Thomas nails her still-lives, however. Here she strikes the perfect balance between Matisian flatness and excessive ornamentation. *Still Life with Lamp*, for example, portrays a lampshade with a gold-and-purple floral motif, numerous throw pillows, and various animal prints and geometric designs that abound in kitschy rhinestone-encrusted glory. Interspersed among the pillows are rectangular patches of a graphic daisy pattern that, painted in orange, green, and brown, evokes '70s wallpaper and complements the wood paneling. Like many of Thomas's latest paintings, *Still Life with Lamp* was based on a small photographic collage and contains multiple perspectives and puzzled-together patterns that together dramatize, rather than destabilize, its composition. The picture is extraordinarily powerful, and pushes the limits of the still-life genre.

Thomas is known for her portraits of strong and self-assured African-American women seated comfortably in lavish domestic environments; the women in these recent works, however, are subordinate to the exquisite, jubilant beauty of the compositions' surface ornamentation (a result of the artist's increased confidence in her handling of myriad, eclectic patterns). *Tamika and Jessica with Flowers* depicts two women cropped at their waists, sporting glittery eye shadow and shiny golden lipstick. It is the clothing and surroundings that convey exuberance and eroticism; the figures themselves are portrayed rather dully.



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