

## frieze



### BRAZIL

#### 9TH BIENAL DO MERCOSUL Porto Alegre

I love small talk about the weather. Rain, sleet, drizzle, snow, fog, sunshine, thunderstorms, hail, hurricanes, heat waves, gales, cooling breezes, bone-chilling frosts – what infinite variety there is to discuss! Aside from needing oxygen, food and water, it's perhaps the only thing that every human being on the surface of the planet has to deal with. Our lives are lived according to the weather.

'Weather Permitting' was the title of the 9th Bienal do Mercosul, held in Porto Alegre. (Mercosul, or Mercosur, is the name of the trade agreement between Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay and

Venezuela.) In her catalogue introduction to the biennial, curator Sofia Hernández Chong Cuy pointed out that weather permeates our language: 'figures of speech that express emotional "atmospheres" and political "climates"'. She suggests that the exhibition title is 'an invitation to ponder when and how, by whom and why, certain art works and ideas have or lack physical or cultural visibility at a given moment in time'. Cultural and intellectual weather is just as unavoidable as rain or shine.

If these observations, along with the somewhat over-determined set of nomenclatures that structured the show – an exhibition called 'Portals, Forecasts and Monotypes'; a closed discussion series and publication titled 'Island Sessions', and an education programme called 'Cloud Formations' – sound like your average foggy curatorial premise, the show itself had notably clear characteristics. Featuring 59 artists – 32 from or currently working in Central and South America, and many producing works commissioned



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Dan Fox, "Brazil: 9<sup>th</sup> Bienal do Mercosul, Porto Alegre," *Frieze*, November/December 2013, p. 163.



3  
Cinthia Marcelle  
*Traveller Swallowed  
by the Space*, 2013,  
installation view

4  
Allan McCollum  
*The Event: Petrified  
Lightning from Central  
Florida (with  
Supplemental Didactics)*  
(detail),  
1997–8, mixed  
media, dimensions  
variable

specially for the exhibition – 'Weather Permitting' was shot through with Romanticism. There were petrified lightning bolts (Allan McCollum's *The Event: Petrified Lightning from Central Florida [with Supplemental Didactics]*, 1997–8; replicas of fulgurites, glass, tube-like objects that remain in the ground after a lighting strike) and rumours of a crashed satellite (in actual fact, Aleksandra Mir's superb contribution, comprising industrial parts bolted together into the suggestion of a large spacecraft, unsignposted and half-buried in the earth on the shore of Porto Alegre's estuary). There were field recordings made by messenger birds, at the location of a meteor shower 200,000 years ago (Malak Helmy's *Music for Drifting*, 2013) and an artist sinking in a lake a chest of memorabilia collected on a journey from Bogota to Toronto (Daniel Santiago's *tesoro, dialogo entre tiempos*, Treasure, Dialogue Between Times, 2012). Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla attempted to contact the International Space Station as it passed over Porto Alegre with an elaborate coat-hanger receiver made in the shape of the space station, like the work of an obsessive radio ham. Lightness was the order of the day: Mario Garcia Torres wrote and recorded an album of songs in response to the ideas behind the biennial. Tatiana Pérez Córdova made an intriguing suite of sculptures in which she attempted to put everyday objects 'on pause'; the left sleeve of a shirt was held tight between sheets of wood, a phone sim card slotted into a plaster

wood, a phone sim card slotted into a plaster block and held in stasis until the biennial is over (*Cosas en pausa*, Things in Pause, 2013).

Technological nostalgia haunted the show; there was a feel for the analogue rather than the digital. One of the principle inspirations for Hernández Chong Cuy was LACMA's 'Art & Technology' (1967–71), a programme developed by Maurice Tuchman, which partnered visual artists with industrial manufacturers and technology corporations. 'Imagination Machines' was a commissioning strand for the Mercosul show that brought participating artists into contact with Brazilian companies, researchers and communities. Lucy Skaer, for instance, made *Resin Translation* (2013), a set of amber-coloured ingots created from a tree which the Irani Company use for chewing gum and hair wax. Cinthia Marcelle magnetized the floor of one of the exhibition venues, the Memorial do Rio Grande do Sul, across which she spread soil from a Brazilian mining operation, the iron sticking to the floor to create what looked like nature's take on a Carl Andre sculpture. Key historical works from 'Art & Technology' were presented, including Tony Smith's *Bat Cave* (an ephemeral, room-size sculpture, which looked like a Rubik's snake, made from cardboard and developed with the Container Corporation of America) and Robert Rauschenberg's *Mud Muse*. The Rauschenberg was a surprise: a large vat of prehistoric-looking sludge, with speakers fitted underneath and hooked up to a device relaying sounds recording in the gallery, causing the mud to bubble and fart.

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Historical works were some of the strongest inclusions in 'Weather Permitting'. For example, archive documentation of Marta Minujín's *Simultaneidad en simultaneidad* (Simultaneity in Simultaneity, 1966) told us of the attempt to stage a simultaneous happening between Minujín in Buenos Aires, Allan Kaprow in New York and Wolf Vostell in Berlin – the events transmitted using early satellite broadcast video and international flights. The restaging for the first time since 1971 of Juan José Gurrola's work *Monoblock* – pieced together by Mauricio Marcin and Fernando Mesta – was particularly poignant. Gurrola worked across art, theatre, film, cinema, dance, poetry and music, and was a contemporary of figures including Fernando Arrabal, Alejandro Jodorowsky and Roland Topor. *Monoblock* was made in response to the urban rumour that the USA had, with the so-called Bucareli Treaty of 1923, banned Mexico from manufacturing heavy machinery and car parts (such as the monoblock engine). Gurrola's *Monoblock* comprises three sections: a set of engine photographs made on Bucareli Avenue in Mexico City, an ode to the monoblock engine written by the artist, and a play fusing poetry, experimental sound and performance. Restaged in the theatre of Porto Alegre's Culture House, *Monoblock* touched on emotions and narratives that wove national identity with technology. The act of restaging *Monoblock* reminded us that climate control for art works is not just a technical service provided by museums. Other atmospheres and weather conditions might prevail; visibility can be good for some artists, for others their work gets lost in the mist.

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