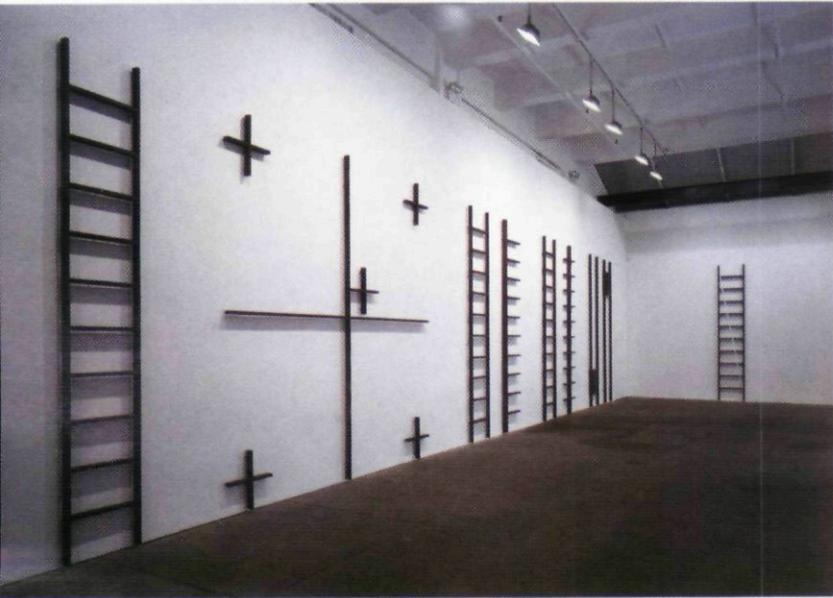


REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS



View of Cildo Meireles's "Descalças", 2002, 16 steel units; at Lelong.

NEW YORK

Cildo Meireles at Galerie Lelong

For several decades, the Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles has deployed simple, familiar objects and materials in formal arrangements and interactive environments that explore bodily self-awareness, global and institutional modes of order and control, and the relationships between rationalized space and open-ended experience. Two works recently installed at Galerie Lelong exemplify this practice in contrasting forms.

Strictu (2000) consists of a small wooden table flanked by a pair of chairs and two rows of stainless steel poles between which a chain, strung with handcuffs and iron balls, zigzags across the floor. On the table rests a quotation attributed to a Ku Klux Klan leader speaking of a planned demonstration: "We want to steal their time. We want to steal their space. We want to steal their mind." Below that is a statement by Meireles interpreting the quotation as a perfect expression of authoritarianism in politics as well as in cultural, artistic and curatorial matters.

The sparseness of this installation suggests an interpretation of societal relationships in terms of conformity and domination: participants who elect to be shackled are bound to each other, joined by a chain that, like a circuit con-

necting different geographical locales, winds its way throughout the room. That one can choose among different modes of participation—e.g., sitting at the table or walking about while handcuffed—suggests an element of voluntariness in one's place within networks of repression, even as one's navigation through the space is dictated by the chain's path. But *Strictu* teeters on the edge of bombast in its verbal coda, becoming a catch-all protest that associates political authoritarianism with merely artistic or curatorial control.

"Descalças" (2002), a much more subtle and rarified installation, comprises a series of 16 permutations of a Cor-Ten steel ladder, deconstructed and reformed in one linear configuration after another. In one, the rungs are unlatched from the uprights but suspended in place between them; in another, the uprights stand together on one side of the rungs; in a third, the uprights have been crossed to create a quadratic plane, like a Mondrian painting, with plus signs made of crossed rungs within; and in others, the rungs are split down the middle or float above the verticals into empty space. With its restricted vocabulary, "Descalças" suggests (in contrast to the repressive order of *Strictu*) the notion of a productive constraint, like the sonnet form or variations on a musical theme. That the ladders cannot be climbed upon suggests that they

function in only symbolic terms, as figures of intellectual or spiritual elevation, like the ladder connecting specific material beauty to its universal form in Plato's *Symposium*, or like Jacob's ladder, by which angels ascend and descend, a conduit between earthly and heavenly realms. While *Strictu* incorporates the experience of its audience as it reflects on authority, "Descalças" resides in a seemingly autonomous sphere of formal inventiveness as it points to the abstract or divine. —Jonathan Gilmore

David Altmejd at Andrea Rosen

Given how many reflective surfaces (mirrors, Plexiglas, crystals) David Altmejd uses in his sculptural installations, it's apt that his underlying meanings stare us back in the face with a perplexing symmetry. Was this show (his first at Rosen) a young artist's dark, ironic take on a beautiful world of surface appearances? Or is Altmejd truly striving to uncover a more elusive beauty lurking in the seamier side of things?

Installed in a gallery painted as black as an experimental theater was a large (approx. 9 by 18 by 21 feet), multitiered installation piece titled *The University 2* (all works 2004). It is something like a serious, theory-driven architectural model with disorienting shifts of scale, and a little disco glam thrown in. Mirrored staircases lead to platforms topped by empty Lucite shelving units; mirrored dollhouse-size rooms are strung with gold costume-jewelry chains. Altmejd has an exhibi-

tion designer's command of display tropes (recessed lighting, pedestals, vitrines), but he also has a bad boy's love of horror-film gore, and here he marries the two. Inhabiting the piece are large, dead creatures, part man and part beast, with fur and "decaying" flesh (the artist refers to them as werewolves). Their arms and heads puncture the otherwise clean, reflective walls.

Altmejd's carcasses are positively alluring. Glittering metallic dust clings to the edges of a snout; exposed innards grow clusters of what seem to be precious gems. Like some even-handed alchemist, Altmejd merges worlds biological and mineral, rendering them approachable and sinister in equal parts. Within this strange terrain, it's hard to pin down our feelings of revulsion. Altmejd's touch with glittery, if rotted, flesh is so loving, yet the attendant surroundings are so coolly discordant, that we can come away from the show more horrified by the consumer-culture decadence of an average department store jewelry display than by the inevitable way of all flesh.

The University 2, though the tour-de-force work here, ultimately falters under its own ambition. A simpler, wooden platform piece featuring two decayed werewolves in an eternal embrace (*The Lovers*) outshines it. And when the artist ventures into complete abstraction—as he does in *The University 1*, an over-the-top send-up of Sol LeWitt in the form of hundreds of clustered, mirrored cubes—he is more successful still. Paring down his means might solve some of

Elizabeth Simonson: *Current*, 2004, wire, approx. 33 feet long; at Plane Space.



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