



Who Owns the World?

Ohad Meromi takes over Country Club Gallery

MATT MORRIS // OCT 8, 2008

Ohad Meromi is part of a group of Israeli artists who migrated from Tel Aviv to attend Columbia University's graduate program. Matt Distel previously made us aware of this group when, while working at the Contemporary Arts Center, he brought Guy Ben- Ner's work there in 2005. Now he has brought Meromi's installation *Who Owns the World?* to his Country Club gallery in the West End for a show that lasts until Nov. 22.

Meromi currently lives and works in New York City and has an impressive international exhibition history, including recent New York solo exhibitions at P.S.1 Contemporary Arts Center and Harris Lieberman Gallery. Similarities arise between Meromi and Ben-Ner. Both see video as a crucial element, both have Constructivist sympathies and both use performances that (at least at some point) activate their installations of sculptural objects.

Most of Country Club's gallery space has been divvied up into four constructed rooms for Meromi's show. Each room correlates to specific symbols referenced in the twostage video work projected near the back of the gallery that are more fully explored in Meromi's diverse sources.

The videos themselves are two interpretations of a learning play by Bertolt Brecht that is rife with Marxist sensibilities. And true to Brecht, the entire exhibition embodies a kind of functional aesthetics — its beauty is built out of its utility. Everything is presented in a way to convey basic attributes without romanticism. However, within this limited range of skeletal walls and extremely simple furniture, broad visual possibilities have been explored. It easily calls to mind Modernist painting and architecture.

Edges of two-by-fours are painted in various bold hues so that slender colored marks dart around the constructions, composing complex views from slats and planes. Of the different built spaces, the "architect's studio" is full of spatial conundrum and visual punch. Above the work area is a hanging fluorescent light, placed below the actual fluorescent lights in the gallery space. Building blocks and an amphitheater model have been color-coded and set about on pedestals.

Their presence is conceptually problematic, in that these and other elements purport to be sculptures, models and created elements, as if the rooms themselves are not also sculpture in their own right. This *mise en abyme* continues across the back wall in the series of prints collectively titled "Stage Props." In these, images of the installations and similar stage sets are placed into compositions on pages, cropped awkwardly and incorporated into compositions of colorful borders and negative space. An edition of these prints comes in an elegantly debossed ochre case, and after spending time in this exhibition wandering in and out of rooms and watching the nearly silent video pieces, one might feel that those boxes represent a compression of many rooms, characters and experiences with functional beauty.

Much of what can be experienced with Meromi's work is not immediate. In some ways, the relatively obscure texts and philosophy with which the work is fortified makes for some

difficulty in digging through it. Nonetheless, the first and lasting effect of the installations and prints is a strong sense of displacement, where the viewer is relocated to simple rooms where everything inside feels significant.

WHO OWNS THE WORLD? is on view at Country Club Gallery through Nov. 22.

<https://www.citybeat.com/arts-culture/visual-arts/article/13018881/who-owns-the-world-review>