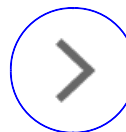




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Mondongo solo show sheds light on greed

Christopher Lord

October 29, 2012



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The work of Mondongo, like the tripe-based stew from which the Argentine art collective takes its name, has a pleasant veneer to mask its more visceral innards.

Tactile, malleable materials are a staple of the group - they make portraits out of broken biscuits or chewing gum, and melt Plasticine that's then used to paint menacing scenes of *Red Riding Hood*. Choice of material is sickly sweetened by its association with childhood.

"I think that every artist must be like a child looking at the world - they must be fresh, ingenuous yet willing to tell the truth," says the artist Manuel Mendanha by phone from Argentina. "It's important for us to be like that."

Mondongo formed in 1993 as a meeting of three artists and has now expanded to seven, who work together in a studio in Buenos Aires. The group came to prominence in 2004 when the Spanish royal family commissioned them to create a portrait and ushered in something of a Mondongo mania across the Argentinian capital.

Mondongo's solo show at Art Sawa in the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) offers insight into several driving concerns of the collective. A number of skull pieces feature, which play on the classical still-life subject of a human skull yet wrought here in melted Plasticine.

In one of these works, the surface of the skull has been shaped to reflect a passage of time that connects the Spanish conquest of the Americas to the swooning figure of Marie Antoinette. Images of the Pope and cardinals hover around a Bosch-like monstrosity with a conveyor belt gorging food into his open mouth; we see the Atlantis hotel in Dubai in among a swirl of fluttering dollar bills and Easter Island heads.

At the centre of this drama is a bowed figure in a toga heaving a wrought iron cog labelled Wheel of Life. "This is one of a series of 12 skulls, and we wanted this skull to be about money," says Mendanha. "We started with this image of a guy pushing a wheel and took it from a series of drawings made

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during the first stock market crash. We wanted to show how power has been in different hands across history."

All of the scenes in this cornucopia of consumption are poised at the yawning precipice of their power. The memento mori of this Plasticine skull has a double meaning - remember, power is always on the move and rarely stays put in the same hands for long. That idea feeds into the eerie Pac-Man background of the piece - it seems to say that, like the video game icon, our ever-present consumption is stalked by ghosts of the past.

Another interesting work here is Mondongo's take on the typical Catholic retablo, which Art Sawa will take to Abu Dhabi Art next week. Typically used to house devotional images of the *Madonna with Child*, the group's take on a retablo depicts a mounting stack of favelas and hillside shanty settlements from around the world.

"Money is now a religion. It doesn't matter if there are millions of people in poverty; that's what the accumulation of capital has done to our species," says Mendanha.

Mondongo is an attempt to bring the untouchable idea of art back to street level. It's punchy, irreverent work that shows off a virtuosity of craft and isn't afraid to tackle the human implications of Latin America's bounding economic surge.

Until November 3 at Art Sawa, Gate Village, DIFC. Visit www.artsawa.com or call 04 340 8660

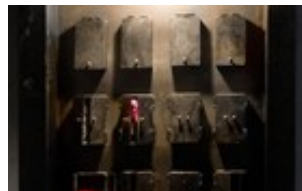
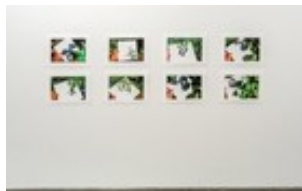


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