

# KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013



ARTISHOCK  
—REVISTA DE ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO—

***VISIBLE ARCHITECTS: NEW CHILEAN ART AT A GLOBAL CROSSROADS***  
**CHRISTIAN VIVEROS-FAUNE**  
**JANUARY 2, 2013**



Ernesto Burgos, *Untitled*, 2012, Fiberglass, paint, wood glue, paper, 40.6 x 33 x 28 cm

Dateline, Brooklyn, October, 2012. The exhibition “Juan Downey: The Invisible Architect” opened at the Bronx Museum of the Arts in February of this year—a fitting signpost for this more modest exhibition. The first North American retrospective of this pioneering Chilean artist’s work, the eclectic assemblage of drawings, videos and performative installations from the 1970s to the 1990s on view at the museum served not only to encourage critical reflection on the mechanics of perception and the self—Downey’s particular phenomenological and multicultural strength—but also to mark a specific watershed for Chilean contemporary art. No doubt, this event constitutes a present-day art historical BC and AD for Chilean artists living in Chile and abroad.

Drawing on technological advances in video and audio recording and Downey’s ongoing interest in the rituals of various Latin American native cultures, the late artist (he died of cancer in 1993) devised a concept that he came to call “invisible architectures.” A flexible, mystagogical idea with which he reconsidered connections between society, history, geography and information, Downey’s freewheeling, techie-hippie aesthetics undoubtedly finger something of a raw nerve today. If, as one particularly astute *New York Times* arts writer suggested recently, the artistic radicalism of the ’60s and early ’70s has been largely sanitized from global art history, it also follows that emerging artists young and old will look beyond the conventional canon for inspiration during times of crisis.

This is the case of the six willingly displaced Chilean artists in this exhibition. As supremely global migrant artists working in New York in the second decade of the 21st century, there are few cultural producers better prepared to take up the challenge of making visible the previously

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invisible connections between global art, their respective societies and the increasingly fragile and contentious world at large. Working at the juncture of a developing society with as yet unarticulated ambitions with respect to visual culture (their native Chile) and a more powerful visual culture in a period of clear decline (their adoptive U.S.), these artists and others like them represent the immanent possibilities of art to make actually physical the stubborn, sometimes elusive, but resolutely expressive spirit of the age.

The artists Francisca Benítez, Ernesto Burgos, Pablo Jansana, Cristóbal Lehyt, Rodrigo Lobos and Andrea Wolf each exemplify the experimental approaches taken by Downey in their own highly individual ways. Unorthodox figures committed to a non-instrumentalized, actively innovative vision of art, they all display approaches to art making and its exhibition that expand the usual conventional studio and gallery practices. Their youthful examples significantly grow the field and relevance of art making today.

Lehyt, for example, creates “Drama Projections” or drawings, while in an “in-between” or “trance-like state” and transfers these often large-scale communications directly onto the walls of exhibition spaces (this artist’s work most follows in the direct lineage of Downey). Rodrigo Lobos makes horizontal works that superficially resemble Art Brut or informel paintings, yet hide a complex set of natural practices that involve the creation of actual crystals and, cumulatively speaking, topographies on found surfaces (which, in turn, begs the question: are these wastelands metaphors for an embattled age-old practice?). Francisca Benitez’s psychogeographies investigate what she has called “sites of dissent” within the seemingly placid urban fabric of cities like London and New York (her frottage of a design element from the entrance of the ITT building in Manhattan reminds viewers of the role this multinational played in bringing down the government of Salvador Allende in Chile).



Ernesto Burgos, *Untitled (Hoodie Brancusi)*, 2012  
Hooded sweatshirt, sofa cushion, fiberglass, paint, wood glue, 157 x 55 x 55 cm

Ernesto Burgos literally upends everyday materials like mattresses or vintage couches to turn into material for his totemic sculptures (his found and distressed objects effectively symbolize the violent riot uneasily contained within normal life). Andrea Wolf’s pocket video projections and sets create intimate scenarios via which viewers can imaginatively recall and examine their own empathetic memories (her use of anonymous super 8 home movies hints at an expanded realism inherent in today’s use of found material). And finally, Pablo Jansana’s historical explorations of

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the often yawning gaps existing between tradition and ideology lead him to novel, situational methods for establishing newfangled relations between form and content (while making, in his case, something of an ethics from the use of collage as a medium).



Ernesto Burgos, *Untitled*, 2012, Fiberglass, paper, wood glue, paint, 43 x 35.5 x 30.4 cm

While one interlocutor described Downey's idea of invisible architecture as the "intersection of metaphysics and topological investigations between societies and their environments" (Downey's own 1973 definition proved way more far out: "an attitude of total communication within which ultra-developed minds will be telepathically cellular to an electromagnetic whole"), the methodologies of these six artists productively grounds their work very much in the here and now. Culturally attuned figures that exploit their increasingly hybridized position, they look to further problematize not just their respective mediums (itself a sign of tremendous sophistication for artists of any generation) but also their own abilities to interpret our increasingly globalized society. Critical artists for a narcissistic, erratic and highly indeterminate 21st century, their work points the way forward toward cultural and artistic definitions that appear increasingly necessary and urgent.

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