

SUCURSAL

La Ene's Collection at Malba, Buenos Aires.

Curated by La Ene.

The irruption of La Ene - Nuevo Museo Energía de Arte Contemporáneo on the Buenos Aires art scene in the south american winter of 2010, brought a cool breeze to the otherwise strictly grown-up local institutions. Showing up with as much enthusiasm as it lacked pretension, the small museum-as-institutional-critique became quickly renowned as "that museum that lives in an 80s mall".

From the onset the divide in the city was very clear: the UBA (Universidad de Buenos Aires) was the keeper of everything academic and art history related, never to venture too far off into the contemporary art crowd; which in turn was loosely commanded by the Universidad DiTella Art Department and its rotation of young guns coming and going through the Kuitca Scholarship and Artists' Program. A few artist-run spaces were in existence back then, but as their untimely demise would show, they weren't nearly as determined as La Ene and its project.

Along with the possibility of DIY legitimation and the attempts to reconcile young audiences and art history, the realest strong point of La Ene is its international grasp. One could visit ten different Buenos Aires galleries or museums at any given time, and find only porteño artists showing in all of them. In contrast to what happens in Mexico City or Sao Paulo's art scenes with their ever shifting foreign input, the argentinian capital feels most assured when showing its own domestic production. La Ene then provided a unique structure for emerging artists and curators from all over Latin America [and sometimes Europe] to do residencies, have solo shows and engage other artists in the city.

Now in its fourth year, the show at Malba comes in timely for both parties: La Ene's collection has been shown in Montréal and Rosario, but had gone unrecognized by the local establishment; while Malba and its newly appointed artistic director Agustín Pérez Rubio, seem to have taken into account the sentiment of an art scene yearning for more inclusive representation.

The artworks in La Ene's collection are all storable in a portable hard drive, and accesible to be re-made and re-adapted anywhere they go. In this occasion, the selection of works presented at the bigger Malba is both clunky and thorough. It works as an affective souvenir for the audience who's been to all the shows in their original location, but also as an efficient survey of the museum's trajectory while maintaining its original DIY spirit. Works like Gala Berger's tracing of the original Ene façade, Esteban Valdés inflatable 'Solidaridad' sign, and Radamés "Juni" Figueroa's 'Never Ending Tropical Fountains' look distinctly un-Malba, with their handmade quality and inherent softness against the strict surroundings.

Not surprisingly, it's the works that benefit from the larger budget to grow on size themselves that succeed in bridging the divide between small-museum and big-museum. Adriana Minoliti's 'Queer Museum' as towering wallpaper, Luis Camnitzer's 'El Museo es una Escuela' gracing the museum's main entrance and Franco Ferrari's professionally printed bootleg version of Marcantonio Pasqualini's 'Crowned by Apollo' all manage to do this. But "Juni" Figueroa's 'La Isleña' is particularly successful: a wooden structure based on caribbean informal architecture made with help from local river delta house builders, is very similar to the ones he showed at the recent Whitney Biennial. It looks right at home under Julio Le Parc's plastic sun at Malba's lobby, as it would in the middle of a tropical jungle.

La Ene's show at Malba somehow feels like a homecoming, one of the expected results in a trajectory that has been shared by many members of the collective art scene in Buenos Aires. Hopefully, it also means the beginning of a new long-term project by Malba to more effectively engage their local audience.

—GABY CEPEDA