

ARTFORUM

Manhattan Transfer



Left: Stephen Koch with Douglas Crimp. Right: Artist Matthew Buckingham.

MADRID NUNCA DUERME, they've said. Of course, New York never sleeps either. (No rest for the wicked.) So it wasn't so strange, perhaps, that the two cities became bedfellows last Wednesday during the opening of Douglas Crimp and Lynne Cooke's revelatory and expansive "Mixed Use, Manhattan" at the Reina Sofía. That day brought not just New York art but also New York weather as the sun was supplanted by a cranky gray, though rain didn't stop a crowd of festive Madrileños from gathering to toast the occasion.

"I was daunted by the idea of the exhibition at first," Crimp admitted during Wednesday's opening conversation. "After all, I haven't done a show since 1977." (And what a show that was.) "Mixed Use" makes an argument both for the fecundity of cities in transformation and for the significance of photography to the art of recent decades—not simply as documentation or "critical" practice but as a mode of "use" proper. So the modernist vantages of Peter Hujar and Danny Lyon rub shoulders with more reflexive works by Cindy Sherman and Barbara Probst (and even nonphotographic representations, such as Glenn Ligon's text-based accounts of places he's lived).

It's a pedestrian show. Not *average* at all, but *cruisy*—characterized by various modes of flânerie. Weirdly, the "moving-image" works often seem the most "still," staying focused on a single site or subject (Steve McQueen's Statue of Liberty porn *Static* or Donald Moffett's projections-on-canvas of the Central Park Ramble or James Nares's mesmerizing *Pendulum*). In photography, which of course makes up the bulk of the exhibition, serialism is peripatetic—John Miller's sex clubs and Moyra Davey's newsstands and Tom Burr's bathrooms and Roy Colmer's East Village doors evince an insistent wanderlust. Hujar traces his night journeys down Manhattan's west side, Christopher Wool probes East Broadway, and David Wojnarowicz draws circles around the city. ("All of my favorite stuff in one place," raved Emily Roysdon, who's in the exhibition too.) Of course, you're always wondering what's *behind* the photograph (the sleazy "outside the frame")—except in the case of Alvin Baltrop, who rarely spares the details. You have to walk a lot to take it all in—the forty-plus-artist show is tight but expansive, something like six city blocks long, which must be traversed on the museum's unforgiving stone floors.



Left: Pepe Habichuela (left). (Photo: Emily Roysdon) Right: Artist Emily Roysdon.

“New York’s really come to Madrid,” Tate Modern curator Stuart Comer observed as we arrived at the elegant Paradís for post-opening tapas. Present amid the crowd were artists Ligon, Roysdon, Matthew Buckingham, and Vera Lutter; Stephen Koch of Hujar’s estate and Rena Gill of Stefan Brecht’s; and dealers Janice Guy and Rose Lord and Shaun Caley Regen (who’s at least an honorary New Yorker). A little after midnight, Guy suggested we hit the exclusive Bar Cock up the road. This piqued some interest, but it was not, despite what some first thought, much at all like New York’s (more salacious) Cock, and a few intrepid travelers soon ventured off in search of seedier fare.

Madrid never sleeps, but it also never seems to stop eating. Weekdays there’s lunch from 2:30 to 5 PM, and then dinner from 9:30 to midnight and beyond. The entire city appears to break for the long midday meal, and, apparently, some don’t bother to return to work. (You learn just how American you are when you arrive at a gallery at 3 PM to find everyone out to lunch.) Many of the New Yorkers found the slow-food culture crazy-making, and one artist went so far as to characterize the time devoted to food, satisfying as it so often was, as “terrifying.” Where did we go wrong?

In an erudite talk Thursday evening with Rosalyn Deutsche, Johanna Burton distilled the uncanny, displaced experience of “moving away from New York to Madrid in order to walk New York differently,” a sentiment that jibed with the smart crowd. If only New York audiences didn’t have to go all the way to Madrid to see it that way. Later on, after midnight, maybe fifteen of us—Cooke and Crimp, Lutter and Roysdon and Buckingham among them—found our way to Casa Patas in the city’s Lavapiés quarter for postprandial flamenco. We sat there, pressed to the stage, watching the prodigious guitarist Pepe Habichuela (“from a very famous flamenco family,” I was assured), the crowd around us evaporating into a chorus of fervent olés. At 3 AM we strolled back down Calle de Atocha to our hotels, the streets wet with rain, the city open before us. I guess I ♥ New York, but *Madrid me mata*.

— David Velasco



Left: Manuel Borja-Villel, director of the Reina Sofia (right). Right: An installation view of Sharon Hayes’s *In the Near Future*, 2005.