

Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle
Christopher Grimes Gallery



Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, L'Oiseau dans l'espace, installation view, 2012, Courtesy of the artist and Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica

A HALLMARK OF IÑIGO MANGLANO-OVALLE'S IS A DESIRE TO bring together a wide variety of seemingly unrelated subjects through a vast range of media. Each exhibition could contain its own rhizomatic diagram charting these references but Manglano-Ovalle chooses to let the viewer freely associate and provides few clues.

In his current exhibition "L'Oiseau dans l'espace" (all works 2012), Manglano-Ovalle has literalized Brancusi's 1920s sculpture, subjecting the bird to flight. Brancusi reduced the shape of a bird to its essential form, devoid of feathers, wings, head and beak. This sleek bronze statue became a symbol for non-representational art. Manglano-Ovalle has recreated this form to scale in steel, aluminum, high-density resin and concrete and subjected it to a MACH 10 Hypervelocity test, photographically documenting the effects on the sculpture. According to NASA, hypervelocity tests are designed to safely check hazardous targets and simulate impacts on shields, spacecraft, satellites and spacesuits. Manglano-Ovalle's sculpture, and the accompanying photographs of the work in the wind tunnel show what would happen should the bird be in flight at 10 times the speed of sound. To suggest that the sculpture shares qualities with space ships and satellites equates it with the finest products of high technology.

Flight (or movement through space), the underlying theme of the exhibition, is also manifested in the other works. *Apophis Orbit Drawing* tracks the projected path of the Apophis asteroid that is predicted to hit the Earth in 2029. Manglano-Ovalle's drawing is a minimalist map consisting of dots and concentric circles charting two possible paths of the asteroid. An anodized aluminum model of the asteroid (based on scientific data) sits atop one of 42 exquisitely fabricated wooden boxes. These are Langstroth beehives, which were patented in 1852 and still used today by beekeepers worldwide. These carefully crafted hives appear as a grid of waist-high white boxes in the gallery. They simultaneously reference headstones in a military cemetery or an exhibition of minimalist sculptures.

Like Alfredo Jaar, who in *Caritas, Real Picture* (1995) used the forms of minimalism and conceptual art to comment on photography and violence, Manglano-Ovalle simultaneously infuses his pieces with a formal elegance and socio-political content.

The reference to Brancusi is literal, but placing the sculpture in a wind tunnel can be seen as a belief in human ingenuity. The seemingly obtuse relationship between the Brancusi, the asteroid, the beehives and a bat house hung high on the wall and easily missed can be interpreted to be about extinction. While the bees are losing the navigational ability to find their hives, and bats' homes are being destroyed despite their ability to navigate in the dark, earth is threatened by an asteroid whose path can't quite be determined despite increasingly sophisticated technical prowess. The plight of the bees and the bats and the possibility of an asteroid hitting earth might be sensationalized in the news media but are real world problems pertaining to long term sustainability. Manglano-Ovalle distills the issues, creating evocative and thoughtful artworks that use formal devices to call attention to scientific questions and environmental dangers.

- Jody Zellen