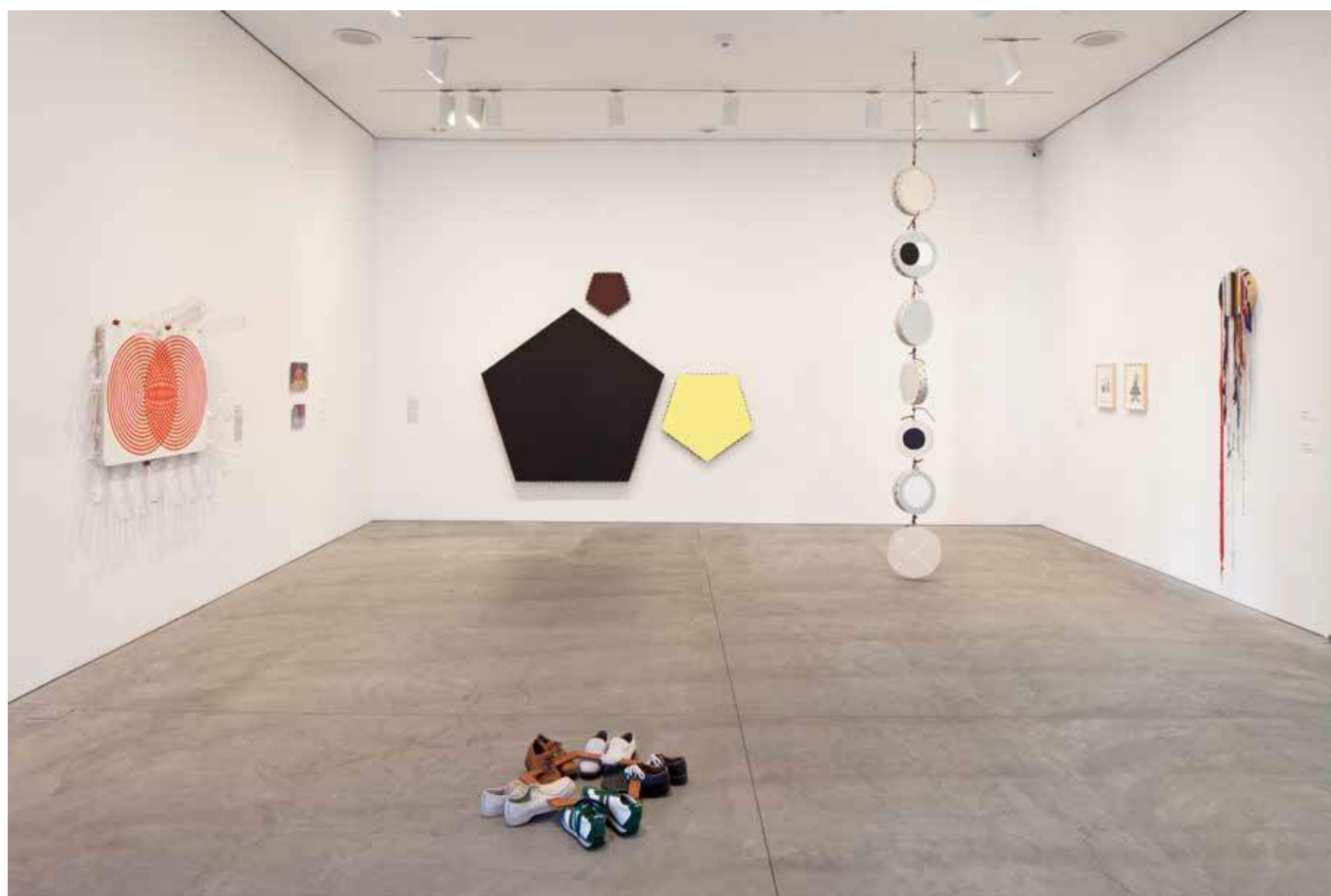


LOS ANGELES

PERCUSSIVE PAINTINGS AND QUIXOTIC CADENCES; THE TRAVELS AND TRAVAILS OF SCOLI ACOSTA

BY ANDREW BERARDINI



An artist chases a writer, clutching the map the latter made 63 years earlier, following the same itinerary along dusty highways, through souks scented by spices and roasting chickens. The year was 1959 and Paul Bowles, in his Beetle, gathered the melodies, chants and rhythms of his beloved Morocco, where he was to remain for the rest of his life. Scoli Acosta follows him, gathering new (or maybe ancient) melodies, and producing some of his own. Andrew Berardini narrates this research and its results.

Above - "Elementalisthus" exhibition view, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, 2013. Courtesy: Galerie Laurent Godin, Paris

Opposite - Ten Pentagonal Monochrome (Tambourines), 2009. Courtesy: Galerie Laurent Godin, Paris

On the road from Tangier, you'll search for the ghost of Paul Bowles.

Somewhere along that dusted highway, haunting the village souks, fingering their sacks full of clattering beans and whispery grains, huffing the scent of spearmint and gasoline, past skewered sheep and spicy chickens, the ghost of Paul Bowles traces invisible eyes over the cosmic geometries of textiles and tiles, its lusty abstractions the only allowable. He brushes up against the long lithe bodies of the young men, perhaps even peeking beneath their baggy djellabas, always with his ear tuned to the shift and rhythm of this place, these people, the creak of ancient doors, the phlegmy cough of geriatric motors, the patter of hard sales, the holy strut of Arabic mixing with the soft slither of holdover French, the punctuating prayers that the muezzin hollers over the cracked arches and tarnished domes, tarpaper roofs and rusting satellite dishes, the crumbling paints in saffron and salmon revealing brick worn smooth. The ghost of Paul Bowles doesn't mind the noon heat, but still sidles between the slivered shadows. While alive, he surely had the sense to siesta away from the punishing sun even as most desert denizens endeavor to ignore its solar retribution. His hard surreal stories are suffused with its light, and so are the people of Morocco.

After lengthy abuse from colonial lovers, would-be protectors and jealous possessors, in 1956 Morocco declared independence, and the next year Sultan Mohammed was crowned regent of Al-mamlaka Al-maghribiya, "the Western Kingdom." Bowles, sidelined but watching, armed with a love of the Moroccan people, received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Library of Congress in 1959 to travel the depth and breadth of the new kingdom in a Volkswagen Beetle and record. His trail followed the electrical grid of Morocco at the time, as Bowles taped on a reel-to-reel that needed to be plugged in to work.

"Instrumentalists and singers have come into being in lieu of chroniclers and poets, and even during the most recent chapter in the country's evolution—the war for independence and the setting up of the present regime—each phase of the struggle has been celebrated in song," he wrote.

With instruments and voices, in Arabic, French, and Berber, into Bowles's microphone urban professionals and nomadic tribesmen, street buskers and weekend songsters played songs for dancing and songs for parties, wailing chants and somber tunes for Ramadan, sundry other Islamic rites as well as a few ditties for a variety of animistic holdovers (Eastern religions, from Christianity to Islam, never quite succeed in stamping out the ancient, pagan ways of good country people).

Bowles was chasing the spirit of the people and we are chasing the spirit of Bowles. Like him, you travel in a car with two friends, using his map, shadowing his voyage across Morocco and recording what you find.

Looking for a ghost is its own weird quest, of course.

You will not find the ghost. Maybe a whiff of its passing, a distant flicker of its visions, but little more. You will find a mere quotation fluttering in the air, like the tufted seeds of a wished-upon dandelion. But you will find other things. You will find cinderblock apartments lined with luscious rugs rich with color and pattern where amateurs with the love of a good tune will play you a song or two, pass a cup of tea, and tell stories. You will find factories filled with lunch-breaking ladies, laden with robes, who can thump out a chorus on drums skinned and tight. You will find endless desperate salesmen untiring in their pitch, their aggressive pleas overlaying an urgent poverty. You will find patterns that sing, drums that look; in the place of old legends you will find new ones, woven out of your own jalopy crisscrossing a country looking for music and looking for Bowles and finding, in the adventure, the thing you always find in your questing: art.

That is, of course, if you are Scoli Acosta.

Questing is a Don Quixote kind of a word. And Scoli, reader of books, expert ambler and inveterate dreamer, is surely quixotic. Filled with stories, he chases after ghosts and finds in his meandering quests epic sagas and extraordinary beauty in ordinary things. Unlike the delightfully deluded Don however, Scoli understands that the windmill is a windmill, but he also knows that if we wish it, the windmill can be a marauding giant. The imaginary and reality commingle, adulterate, tango. Such a journey, begun in a book, chased across countries with a vision, easily maps the travels and travails of Scoli Acosta.

This is not Scoli's first quest in search of a wayward writer, the mythical scribbler so tied to a place that to readers and dreamers they are one and the same. Over a decade ago, Scoli went in search of Gérard de Nerval, the Romantic poet

who one black and white night hung himself from a lamppost, hat on his head, last literature tucked into his pocket. Charles Baudelaire wrote he "delivered his soul in the darkest street that he could find." He was a poet of half-reveries and long longings, of misty dreams in a tender alliance with the logic of absurdity. On meanders through the gardens of the Palais Royal, on the end of a blue silk ribbon, Nerval would walk his pet lobster, Thibault.

The best way to understand Nerval (and maybe Paris and France through this small chink), according to the dreamy logic of Scoli, is to walk a lobster of your own through the gardens. The quotation is way of getting one's bearings, finding a small hint in the pages of a book, and chasing its trail through the organic and dissociative chance encounters and unusual coincidences (according to Zen scholar RH Blythe some Buddhists call coincidences "the interpenetration of different realities").

The ghosts of Nerval and Bowles, of all the peripatetic poets, leave in their passing some glimmer of their visions, as Scoli might say like the warmth of a seat that someone else has left behind. They are not there, but their presence is felt. Is there something occult in these practices? Surely. We are always looking for meaning in the mysteries, staring down into the void and trying to make sense of the senselessness, to divine some secret from the reflection of the obsidian mirror, the patterns of tea leaves. We yearn to feel a spark of fraternity, of spectral inspiration, to grasp the strange moment of flickering ecstasy bestowed by the unknown and take it to whatever end.



It is one poet looking for another. If Allen Ginsberg can spot Walt Whitman haunting the produce aisle of the local neon fruit supermarket, why can't we? Why can't Scoli, along with his friend and collaborator Andreas Oskar Hirsch and girlfriend, the artist Alison O'Daniel, find the ghost of Paul Bowles still tuned into the songs of Morocco, humming its rhythms, tapping his foot, strumming the air with his shadows as he still tries to find the songs of a people undergoing change, finding their way through the centuries, he and Scoli half a century apart yet both recording angels, as perhaps all poets are?

Scoli is not a poet with words but with images. When he does recite stories though, enunciates words, they take on a soporific rhythm, narcotic, dreamy and definitely declaimed in such a way that if you listen to his uttered visions too closely, you may begin to utter your recitatives in the same hypnotic cadence.

A poet with images, a musician with things, I have heard Scoli play his pentagonal monochrome tambourines, scores of bottle-caps rattling away in the most powerful objects yet crafted by the itinerant dreamer. The purity of the monochrome (pendulous with Reinhardt diatribes and painterly projections) becomes the everyday thing, an image and an instrument, the arrays of which look and probably are occult, and what better instrument for the ritual than a tambourine, the jangle of metal and the percussion of hand against the stretched taut skin. Mention of Chris Marker's *The Sixth Side of the Pentagon* and Abbie Hoffman's attempt to levitate the Pentagon crop up in conversation with Scoli (unable to halt it, the only appropriate response to the madness of American foreign policy is the absurdity of art, the latter hopefully revealing the psychosis of the former), but the pentagon seems so essentially what it is, such a powerful image, number, alchemical and occult mystery, that it does not even need those references. Essential objects have the power of teasing all kinds of meanings to themselves, and throughout his career Scoli has expertly charmed out all these strange stories, a flute teasing a slither of snakes to dance.

In a field in France, circus animals eat circles around their tethers, forming moirés of hunger, musky and strange. Throw a camera into the air and you might be able to capture their beauty from above. New moirés form in the blurry spin of the camera in the air, patterns emerge and form in unlikely materials. A motif that can make still things shimmy in your vision, moiré is the rippling patterns of a raindrop on water; if you waterproof your camera you might see its subtle waves circle out from below, the undulating firmament of the fish. The water, so loved for its wet rhythms and tidal waves, begs in its ripples for a painting of its own to float on its surface, painted face toward the sky, held aloft by plastic bottles rigged to its frame. Titled of course, *Orange Floating Moiré Effect*, 2011.

Stories and visions ripple out coalesce, get chased and quote, the psychic detective work eventually settling into a form. Scolli is not just a chaser of windmills and a quoter of the essential, he is also a maker of things, making having its own pleasures and odd discoveries, the painting and drawing, the ready imagistic parallel to the wordy poem, the objects humble relics of adventures. His most recent exhibition at Galerie Laurent Godin in Paris displays percussion instruments, the bendir, a traditional Moroccan tambourine discovered in his travels in the Western Kingdom, each painted with the distinctively dancing line and quirky, tertiary palette with which Scolli handsomely colors his paintings and wardrobes. The pictures on the faces of these tambourines are patterns culled from the streets and houses of Morocco, signature styles by anonymous craftsman, amplified here.

These drums, the pentagonal monochromes, the literary wanderings, the poetics serendipitously plucked from the morass of quotidian, all coalesce into a small cosmology, unique to Scolli, a universe of meaning crafted with humor and grace, invested in odd situations, paintings, objects, actions and all things in between.

Far from the Tangier highway, in the city of Los Angeles, wafting off the lotus blossoms around the slow curve of the Echo Park Lake, on certain street corners and in storefronts that have resonated with his performances, fingering oddly colored clothes and bright socks at thrift stores, I can feel the warmth of his presence, the song of his footfalls and the rhythm of his stories. When he wanders out into the wide world to collect quotations and trail stories to their whimsical ends, his spirit joyfully lingers. He always reappears with instruments and images, mesmerizing stories told in mesmerizing ways, exhibitions and objects culled from a nomadic life lived extraordinarily.

Opposite - "Music of Morocco" exhibition view, 2013
 Courtesy: Gallery Laurent Godin. © Grégory Copitet
 Below - "Elementalsthmus" exhibition view, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, 2013.
 Courtesy: Galerie Laurent Godin, Paris



PERCUSSIVE PAINTINGS AND QUIXOTIC CADENCES: THE TRAVELS AND TRAVAILS OF SCOLI ACOSTA

di Andrew Berardini

C'è un artista che insegue uno scrittore. Lo insegue con in mano la stessa mappa che lui disegnò 63 anni prima, sul suo stesso itinerario, lungo autostrade polverose e attraverso suk profumati di spezie e polli allo spiedo. Era il 1959 e Paul Bowles, a bordo del suo maggiolino, raccolse le melodie, le cantilene e i ritmi del suo amato Marocco, dove avrebbe vissuto per il resto della vita. Scoli Acosta lo insegue, raccogliendo nuove melodie (o forse antiche) e producendone di proprie. Andrew Berardini narra di questa ricerca e dei suoi esiti.

Sulla via che parte da Tangeri, alla ricerca dello spirito di Paul Bowles.

Lungo quell'autostrada polverosa, lo spirito di Paul Bowles segue con occhi invisibili le geometrie cosmiche di tessuti e piastrelle, le loro energie astrazioni – le uniche ammissibili. Infesta i suk dei villaggi, sfiora i sacchi di legumi e di granaglie che frusciano e tintinnano, s'inebria dell'odore di menta e benzina, sorpassando gli spiedi di pecore e polli speziati. Sfiora, poi, i lunghi corpi flessuosi dei giovani uomini, forse sbircia sotto le loro ampie *djellaba*, l'orecchio sempre attento ai cambiamenti e al ritmo di questo posto, di questa gente, al cigolio di antiche porte, allo scoppietto roco di vecchi veicoli, all'imbonimento aggressivo dei venditori, all'incedere sacro dell'arabo misto alla scivolosa morbidezza dei brandelli di francese, alle preghiere intermittenti che il muezzin grida al di sopra di archi incrinati e cupole ossidate, tetti di carta caramata e antenne paraboliche mezze arrugginite, vernici screpolate color zafferano e salmone che rivelano mattoni levigati dal tempo. Lo spirito di Paul Bowles non bada alla calura di mezzogiorno, eppure si muove furtivo tra le schegge d'ombra. Da vivo aveva di certo il buonsenso di riposare lontano dal sole inclemente, anche se la maggior parte delle creature del deserto si sforza di ignorarne il castigo. Le sue storie spigolose e surreali sono pervase di questa luce, come lo è la gente del Marocco.

Nel 1956, dopo i protratti abusi di patiti del colonialismo, sedicenti protettori e possessori gelosi, il Marocco dichiarò l'indipendenza e l'anno seguente il sultano Mohammed fu incoronato reggente di Al-mamlaka Al-maghribiya, il “Regno d'Occidente”. Nel 1959, in disparte ma attento, e armato del suo amore per la gente del Marocco, Bowles ricevette una borsa dalla Fondazione Rockefeller e dalla Library of Congress per girare in lungo e in largo e documentare il nuovo regno a bordo di un Maggiolino Volkswagen. Poiché usava un registratore a bobine che per funzionare aveva bisogno della corrente, il suo viaggio seguì la rete di distribuzio-ne elettrica dell'epoca.

“Al posto di cronisti e poeti sono comparsi strumentisti e cantanti, e persino durante il capitolo più recente dell'evoluzione del paese – la guerra per l'indipendenza e l'istituzione dell'attuale regime – ogni fase della battaglia è stata celebrata in musica” scrisse Paul Bowles.

Professionisti di città e membri di tribù nomadi, artisti di strada e cantanti occasionali – con strumenti e voci, in arabo, francese e berbero – eseguirono, nel microfono di Bowles, canzoni ballabili e canzoni per le feste, querule cantilene e cupe melodie per il Ramadan e altri riti islamici assortiti nonché alcuni canti per vari residui di animismo (le religioni orientali, dalla cristianità all'Islam, non riescono quasi mai a disfarsi del tutto delle antiche usanze pagane della brava gente di campagna).

Bowles rincorreva lo spirito della gente e noi rincorriamo il suo. Come lui, anche tu viaggi in auto con due amici usando la sua cartina, seguendo passo passo il suo viaggio lungo il Marocco e registrando quello che trovi.

Ovviamente la ricerca di uno spirito è, di per sé, una caccia insolita.

Lo spirito non lo troverai. Magari un alito del suo passaggio, il lontano barlume delle sue visioni, ma poco più. Troverai una mera citazione che aleggia nell'aria, come i semi di tarassaco soffiati in cambio di un desiderio. Però troverai altro. Troverai case in mattoni di cemento colme di incantevoli tappetini a disegni colorati su cui dilettanti con la

passione per la musica canteranno qualche canzone, ti offriranno una tazza di tè e racconteranno storie. Troverai fabbriche piene di signore in pausa pranzo, oppresse dalle tuniche, che sanno ritmare un canto a più voci con tamburi scorticati e tesi. Troverai un'infinità di venditori disperati, instancabili nelle loro suppliche acute e aggressive che mascherano una pressante povertà. Troverai disegni che cantano, tamburi che guardano, al posto delle vecchie leggende ne troverai di nuove, intessute dal tuo stesso macinino che traccia un reticolo attraverso un paese in cerca di musica e di Bowles, per trovare nell'avventura quello che si trova sempre nella ricerca: l'arte.

Questo, ovviamente, se sei Scoli Acosta.

Ricerca è una parola donchisciottesca. E Scoli, lettore di libri, camminatore esperto e sognatore incallito, lo è, senz'altro, anche lui. Pervaso di storie, insegue gli spiriti e trova, nelle sue ricerche tortuose e saghe epiche una straordinaria bellezza nelle cose quotidiane. A differenza del deliziosamente illuso Don, però, Scoli capisce che un mulino a vento è un mulino a vento, eppure sa che, se lo desideriamo, può anche essere un gigante predatore. L'immaginario e la realtà si fondono, si adulterano, ballano il tango. Un siffatto cammino, cominciato in un libro, rincorso in vari paesi con una visione in mente, traccia i viaggi e i travagli di Scoli Acosta.

Non è la prima caccia di Scoli sulle orme dello scrittore ostinato, dello scribacchino mitico così legato a un luogo che, per lettori e sognatori, era un tutt'uno con quello. Più di dieci anni fa andò in cerca di Gérard de Nerval, il poeta romantico che, in una notte in bianco e nero, s'impiccò a un lampione, il cappello in testa, l'ultima fatica infilata in tasca. Di lui Charles Baudelaire scrisse: “Rese l'anima nella strada più buia che riuscì a trovare”. Era il poeta delle fantasticherie a metà e dei desideri persistenti, dei sogni caliginosi in una tenera alleanza con la logica dell'assurdità. Nei giardini del Palais-Royal, Nerval portava a spasso la sua aragosta Thibault legata all'estremità di un nastro di seta blu.

Secondo la logica onirica di Scoli, il modo migliore per capire Nerval (e forse anche Parigi e la Francia, attraverso questo spiraglio) è portare a spasso un'aragosta nei giardini. La citazione è il mezzo per orientarsi, per trovare un minuscolo indizio nelle pagine di un libro e seguirne le tracce, attraverso l'organico e il dissociativo, gli incontri casuali e le coincidenze insolite (per lo studioso di zen R.H. Blyth alcuni buddisti definiscono coincidenze “la compenetrazione di realtà diverse”).

Gli spiriti di Nerval e di Bowles, di tutti i poeti peripatetici, si lasciano dietro un barlume delle loro visioni che, come direbbe Scoli, somiglia al calore di una sedia appena liberata da qualcuno. Non ci sono, ma la loro presenza si percepisce. C'è qualcosa di occulto in queste pratiche? Senza dubbio. Siamo sempre alla ricerca di significato nei misteri, fissiamo il vuoto cercando di dare un senso a ciò che non ne ha, di intuire un qualche segreto nel riflesso dello specchio d'ossidiana, nel disegno delle foglie del tè. Vorremmo tanto sentire una scintilla di fratellanza, di ispirazione spettrale, portare fino a qualunque compimento lo strano momento d'estasi fugace donatoci dall'ignoto.

È un poeta che ne cerca un altro. Se Allen Ginsberg riesce a vedere Walt Whitman nel corridoio della frutta del supermercato, illuminato al neon, perché non possiamo farlo anche noi? Perché Scoli con il suo amico e collaboratore Andreas Oskar Hirsch e la sua ragazza, l'artista Alison O'Daniel, non può trovare lo spirito di Paul Bowles ancora con l'orecchio teso ai canti del Marocco, mentre mormora ritmi a bocca chiusa, batte il piede, strimpella l'aria con le sue ombre, tentando di catturare le canzoni di un popolo che sta cambiando, che cerca la sua strada attraverso i secoli, e lui e Scoli, separati da cinquant'anni, non sono altro che angeli custodi, come forse tutti i poeti?

Scoli non è un poeta con le parole, ma con le immagini. Eppure, quando recita le storie, quando pronuncia le parole, queste assumono un ritmo soporifero, narcotico, sognante, e sono declamate in modo tale che, ascoltando le sue visioni troppo

attentamente, si rischia di cominciare a enunciare i propri recitativi con la stessa cadenza ipnotica.

Poeta con le immagini, musicista con le cose, ho sentito Scoli suonare i suoi tamburelli pentagonali monocromatici, decine e decine di tappi di bottiglia che tintinnavano negli oggetti più potenti in assoluto eppure realizzati dal sognatore itinerante. La purezza del monocromo (oscillante fra invettive alla Reinhardt e proiezioni pittoriche) diventa oggetto quotidiano, immagine e strumento, la cui disposizione sembra, e forse è, occulta, e quale strumento migliore del tamburello per un rituale, il tintinnio del metallo e la percussione della mano sulla pelle tesa e rigida. Accenni del libro di Chris Marker *The Sixth Side of the Pentagon* [Il sesto lato del Pentagono] e del tentativo di Abbie Hoffman di far levitare il Pentagono saltano fuori nel conversare con Scoli (non potendo fermarla, l'unica reazione appropriata alla follia della politica estera americana è l'assurdità dell'arte, sperando che la seconda smascheri la psicosi della prima), ma il pentagono sembra essenzialmente ciò che è, immagine, numero, mistero alchemico così potente e occulto da non avere neppure bisogno di quei riferimenti. Gli oggetti essenziali hanno il potere di burlarsi di ogni sorta di significato loro attribuito e, nell'arco della sua carriera, Scoli intesse con perizia, come per magia, tutte queste strane storie, come un flauto che incanta i serpenti fino a farli danzare.

In un campo in Francia gli animali del circo legati alle catene mangiano cerchi d'erba, formano *moiré* di brama – muschiati e stravaganti. Lanciando in aria una macchina fotografica se ne potrebbe catturare la bellezza dall'alto, nella rotazione confusa della macchina si formano nuovi *moiré*, emergono e si creano disegni in materiali improbabili. Motivi capaci di far sfarfallare le cose ferme alla vista, i *moiré* sono i disegni increspatisi di una goccia di pioggia nell'acqua, e se la macchina fotografica è impermeabile si potranno vedere le onde impercettibili volteggiare da sotto, il firmamento ondeggiante dei pesci. L'acqua, tanto amata per i suoi ritmi umidi e le sue maree, implora nelle increspature che un dipinto tutto suo galleggi in superficie, un viso dipinto rivolto al cielo, tenuto in alto da bottiglie di plastica fissate alla cornice. Il titolo, ovviamente, è *Orange Floating Moiré Effect*, 2011.

Storie e visioni si propagano, si fondono, si rincorrono e si citano, finché il lavoro d'indagine psichica si compone in una forma. Scoli non si limita a dar la caccia ai mulini a vento e a citare l'essenziale, è anche un creatore di cose, dal momento che la creazione riserva i suoi piaceri e le sue bizzarre scoperte, la pittura e il disegno, l'immediato parallelo imagista con la poesia verbosa, gli umili oggetti cimeli di avventure. La sua mostra più recente alla Galerie Laurent Godin di Parigi presenta strumenti a percussione, il *bendir*, un tamburello tradizionale marocchino scoperto durante i viaggi nel Regno d'Occidente, ciascuno decorato con il caratteristico tratteggio danzante e i particolari colori terziari che Scoli usa magnificamente per dipinti e costumi. Le immagini su questi tamburelli sono tratte dalle strade e dalle case del Marocco, che qui amplificano lo stile tipico di anonimi artigiani.

Tutti insieme questi tamburi, i monocromi pentagonali, le peregrinazioni letterarie, la poetica strappata con serendipità dal groviglio del quotidiano si fondono in una piccola cosmologia, tutta di Scoli, un universo di significato creato con grazia e umorismo, impiegato in insolite situazioni, dipinti, oggetti, azioni e tutto ciò che sta nel mezzo.

Lontano dall'autostrada di Tangeri, nella città di Los Angeles, nel profumo dei fiori di loto intorno alla curva lenta dell'Echo Park Lake, a certi angoli di strada e facciate di negozi che hanno risuonato delle sue performance, mentre tocco abiti dai colori bizzarri e calzini vivaci nei negozi dell'usato, sento il calore della sua presenza, il canto dei suoi passi e il ritmo delle sue storie. Quando si avventura nel mondo per raccogliere citazioni e seguire i racconti fino al loro stravagante compimento, il suo spirito indugia gioioso. Ritorna sempre con strumenti e immagini, storie affascinanti raccontate in modi affascinanti, mostre e oggetti ricavati da una vita nomade vissuta straordinariamente.



White Pentagonal Monochrome (Tambourine), 2009.
Courtesy: Galerie Laurent Godin, Paris

Los Angeles Times/ 2011

Los Angeles Times

June 11th, 2011

Everyday objects turn to art in Scoli Acosta's hands

The artist's sculpture, installation, drawing, painting and photography alter the recognizable into the whimsical.



Scoli Acosta outside his apartment in Echo Park with a "Copper Pentagonal Monochrome (tambourine)" he created from a series called "Levitating the Pentagon", inspired by the 1967 March on the Pentagon in Washington D.C and an interest in painting. (Barbara Davidson, Los Angeles Times / June 12, 2011)

By Holly Myers, Special to the Los Angeles Times

June 12, 2011

"The aesthetics of resourcefulness" is a phrase that Scoli Acosta has often used to describe his wide-ranging artwork, which includes sculpture, installation, drawing, painting, photography, video and performance. It is equally applicable to the Echo Park apartment that doubles as his studio.

The stairs and landing outside his door are lined with small, potted cotton plants, from which he hopes to gather enough cotton to one day make a T-shirt (after going to India to learn how to make a spinning wheel). His furniture is gently refurbished secondhand fare; his curtains a lovely hand-stitched patchwork. The kitchen table is dotted with flowerpots he's made by hollowing out found bricks. "I enjoy using my hands," he says. "I like to see how things are made and to accentuate the handmade."

Thirty-eight years old and slight of frame, Acosta has a sheepish but subtly theatrical demeanor that gives every conversation the feel of a performance. Though he grew up in Lincoln Heights and Baldwin Hills, he lived in Europe on and off through his 20s, speaks French, some German and some Spanish, and maintains a somewhat self-conscious relationship to English, his diction intermittently formal and colloquial. He is fond of reciting poems from memory and does a wonderful reading of "As Above, So Below," a children's book (yet unpublished) that he made in collaboration with writer Joseph Mosconi.

In discussing his work, however, he is tentative and occasionally uneasy, as if hesitant to craft a verbal narrative for what is a highly organic and associative process. His installations — tidy arrangements of lovingly crafted, often

colorful objects, many of them vaguely recognizable (a floral chandelier, a shopping bag, a brick) but cast in odd, illogical arrangements — feel like rooms transported from some other world, where the rules are similar but different from ours. Whimsical and elegant, they seem to set their own terms, deflecting interpretation.

"I think about the work more as poetry," he says. "I like it to have this room to breathe." His process is one of meandering absorption, his work the outgrowth, in many cases, of his interactions with a particular place. The photographs, videos and sculptures that appear in "Rippling: An Earnest Moire Effect," for instance, a recent small solo exhibition at the Armory Center for the Arts in Pasadena, were conceived on a residency last fall in Carquefou, France. (Though not currently represented by a gallery in L.A. — most of his shows here have been in museums and nonprofit spaces — he's shown extensively in Europe.) "I enjoy going into specific situations and putting together the information around me," he says. "Finding my place inside of that environment, creating these small cosmologies out of really specific elements that are attractive to me for some reason."

The effect of this particular environment was strikingly evident in an email he sent midway through the two-month residency. When he spoke shortly before his departure, he'd been painting on canvas for the first time since high school and had just completed a series of 10 small monochrome paintings, each in the shape of a pentagonal tambourine. He'd pointed out the details of the paintings' craftsmanship with pride, from the handmade stretcher bars to the flattened bottle cap jingles, but sounded oddly unconvinced by his account of the work's conceptual underpinnings.

In the email, however, his excitement was palpable. He'd been at a crossroads, he wrote, with the pentagonal paintings, "poking around in some weird formalist stuff I'm not accustomed to thinking about and don't really have a grip on either." He was enchanted, however, by the French countryside. He'd never seen so many wild mushrooms. A circus had come to a nearby field. "The hoot of the owl was replaced by the lion's roar," he wrote. "The animals were on chains staked to a central point and would eat circles out of the fields. The circles multiplied every day as they were moved to new spots. It was beautiful. I started tracing the circles in flour and taking photos from above by throwing my camera in the air."

He did continue to paint but abandoned the weighty mantle of the monochrome for the looser, more playful figurative style of his drawings. He also wandered the landscape, taking photographs and videos. He photographed the circles that the animals formed in the grass, then the circling ripples in a puddle. He sank his camera to the floor of a tide pool on the beach, threw pebbles across the surface and recorded the ripples from below. He cut huge, concentric circles from a roll of black carpet that had been left in his studio, dragged them onto the grass and took aerial photographs by spinning his camera over his head. He cut circles out of canvas, then tossed them into the air and photographed them from below.

The charm and vitality of the work that resulted, like that of Acosta's other memorable installations in recent years — in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's "Phantom Sightings" in 2008 or "Bountiful," his solo show at LAX Art the same year — stem in part from his insistence on maintaining transparency, on laying bare both the craft and the enchantment.

"It's about bringing attention to the mechanics of the piece," he says. "Normally, something is considered well made when you can't see how it's done. I think the way that I work flips that idea around. Even though you can see how it's made, the mechanics of it, it still has a beauty and a magic to it. I love that. Everything is such junk these days, it's really depressing. There's a real exchange that happens when you make something, when you use your hands. You create the world."

Scoli Acosta: ELEMENTALISTHMUS
MCASD Downtown, San Diego, CA
February 3, 2013 - June 23, 2013

Artist: Scoli Acosta



Article by Amy Galpin
April 1, 2013

The Los Angeles Times published an article on Sunday, June 12, 2011, praising the work of Scoli Acosta. What was once quiet conversation in Southern California had become high profile accolades for this important artist. The article mentioned that although Acosta had gallery representation in Paris, L.A. galleries had been slow to notice the artist. Moreover, a small show of his work at the Armory Center for the Arts in Pasadena (2011) marked his only one-man exhibition in the region. It seemed that The Los Angeles Times was pointing out to Southern California that it was time to appreciate this artist more fully. Enter the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego. Curated by Jill Dawsey, the most recent addition to the Museum's curatorial staff, this exhibition is a reminder of how often the Museum has worked with significant artists at pivotal moments in their careers. For example, John Baldessari and William Kentridge both showed work at the MCASD early on and are linked to the institution's legacy. Indeed, the MCASD has a history of encouraging curators to show artists who are on the verge of enhanced success.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Acosta has lived in Paris and Cologne, and he recently completed a stint in Morocco at the Dar al-Ma'mûn International Residency Center for Artists. He currently resides in Los Angeles. Acosta's solo exhibition ELEMENTALISTHMUS includes a combination of new and old work in diverse media: sculpture, painting, drawing, photography, and video.

After seeing Chris Marker's film *The Sixth Side of the Pentagon*, which documents the 1967 March on the Pentagon in protest of the war in Vietnam and includes Abbie Hoffman's performance in which he attempts to levitate the complex, Acosta became interested in the incorporation of pentagonal shapes in his work. During *The Sixth Side of the Pentagon*, Hoffman asserted that levitation of the Pentagon can occur by concentrating psychic powers on the building until it turned orange and began to vibrate. *Levitating the Pentagon* (C-print, 2012), a small photograph included in the exhibition, depicts Acosta in Washington D.C. with an orange pentagon painting in his arms and raised above his head evoking Hoffman's proposition.

Acosta's pentagon paintings are highlighted in the MCASD exhibition with works such as *Ten Pentagonal Monochromes (tambourines)* (mixed media, 2009) and *Mars Triptych* (mixed media, 2012). There is elegance and calmness to the pentagon shapes and their arrangement, but the loose strings that daintily hang from the canvases are welcome reminders that an emphasis on perfect finishes remains absent here. The edges of the pentagon paintings are embellished with flattened bottle caps that give the works the appearance of tambourines. This playful approach to Minimalism arrests the viewer. The paintings are whimsical, but they also challenge audiences to consider how recognizable materials like bottle caps and basic geometric shapes have a tremendous capacity to be reinvented.

The exhibition text includes this apt description of Acosta's work: "The artist favors humble materials, economic gestures, and transparency with respect to craft. His installations emerge as poetic constellations that reveal traces of his research and production processes, as well as his movements throughout various landscapes." Highly professional museum preparators and installation teams often make exhibition presentations appear seamless; they hide wiring and imperfections. Here, Acosta pulls back the veil of immaculate museum installation. In collaboration with MCASD staff, Acosta reveals to his viewers the wires that connect the television sets that present video work in the installation and brightly colored electrical tape is used to secure the visible wires.

While electrical tape is visible and a few strands of string droop from his paintings, a balance exists in the exhibition. Although these things are exposed, they do not create chaos. Instead there is a harmony in the presentation and in the work displayed. This sensitive equilibrium appears in some of the artist's new work created as a result of his time in Morocco. On his drum form, *Self-Portrait (Morocco)* (mixed media, 2012), a simple and graceful rendering mimics the shape of the object. By creating the musical instrument the artist evokes cultural tradition, but the economy of line used in the gentle rendering of a form reinforces the elegiac balance witnessed in other works included in the exhibition.

Just as John Baldessari's and William Kentridge's projects at MCASD were signals of great and different things to come, so the art world will continue to hear from Acosta. *Soli Acosta: ELEMENTALISTHMUS* proves that his work has developed significantly since the groundbreaking 2006 exhibition *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement*, in which several strong pieces by the artist were included. Naturally the opportunity of a solo exhibition allows the artist to expand upon the work presented in group shows like *Phantom Sightings* and, more recently, the 2012 exhibition *Made in LA* at the Hammer Museum. Ultimately, *ELEMENTALISTHMUS* indicates that there are more places to travel to, more materials to reexamine, and ultimately more challenging work to be created by Acosta.

A l'Ac(c)ostage !

Scoli Acosta au Frac Basse-Normandie

L'artiste américain Scoli Acosta expose deux installations et une série de dessins au Frac Basse-Normandie. Une plongée dans l'univers de l'artiste, aux confins d'un monde imaginaire et réaliste fait d'objets trouvés, de références historiques et de réflexions sur la société d'aujourd'hui.

« *Mon travail ne se réduit pas à un médium particulier. Il se construit à la façon d'un roman quotidien, qui s'équilibre entre les éléments essentiels de l'idée et le hasard des trouvailles parmi des matériaux qui sont à portée de main...* », énonce l'artiste pluridisciplinaire Scoli Acosta. Ces différents aspects de son travail sont parfaitement mis en avant dans l'exposition envoiante *Drawings and Projects* qui lui est consacrée au Frac Basse-Normandie à Caen. Comme l'indique le titre, l'exposition caennaise insiste sur la pluralité des médiums utilisés par l'artiste. Les dessins, issus de son carnet de croquis, illustrent son environnement et sont, dans un même temps, le produit de son imagination. Fondamentaux, ils servent de répertoire et de sources à ses projets, vidéos et installations qui sont toutes elles-mêmes composites, assemblages de peintures, sculptures, photographies, vidéos... Le tout restant néanmoins très organisé. Cette exposition nous plonge ainsi dans l'univers de l'artiste, un univers fascinant composé d'influences diverses, mexicaines, américaines et intimes, ancestrales et contemporaines, d'objets trouvés et d'autres créés par l'artiste, un univers fait de jeux – de mots, d'associations, souvent inattendus et fortuits. C'est ainsi que Scoli Acosta mêle des objets trouvés mexicains, petites mains remplies qu'il a fondues en bronze et reproduites en plusieurs exemplaires disséminés dans l'installation *Founded*, à des vidéos d'Agnès Varda, ou encore à ses *Pentagonal Monochrome* – monochromes-tambourins pentagonaux qui font à la fois référence à la Marche vers le Pentagone de 1967, manifestation contre la guerre du Vietnam, et à des peaux tendues. Comme pour revenir à une sorte d'archaïsme de la peinture, tout en proposant une nouvelle composante plastique à l'œuvre, le son. Dans ses inventions, l'artiste a le besoin, comme il aime à le préciser, de « *réduire, réutiliser et recycler (pour le bien de la planète)* » tout en cherchant à « *isoler et sublimer la poésie du quotidien* », créant ainsi un monde burlesque, lyrique et onirique, tout à la fois empreint de réalités.

L'installation *Big Well II*, par exemple, fait référence à l'histoire de la ville de Greensburg, au Kansas, qui a particulièrement marqué l'artiste lors de son voyage au cœur des Etats-Unis en 2000, en raison des divers événements qui ont bouleversé la ville, de manière presque acharnée. Le hasard a voulu que la ville soit pourvue de deux gros trous : elle abrite le plus grand puits du monde creusé de la main de l'homme et fut victime de la chute d'une météorite qui a laissé un impact profond dans la terre. De plus, en 2007, une violente tornade a détruit la majorité de la ville qui fut reconstruite selon la « *green attitude* », puisqu'elle est devenue une « *Communauté Verte Modèle* ». Ces hasards et les nouvelles préoccupations écologiques de la Greensburg – préoccupations très importantes pour l'artiste – l'ont poussé à s'inspirer des mythes et histoires qui ont marqué la population. Ainsi, le motif des panneaux solaires – grilles remplies de rectangles dans un camaïeu de bleus qui ne sont pas sans évoquer les *Couleurs* de Gerhard Richter – est décliné dans toute la salle, à la fois sur des peintures, sur des socles et sur les bouquets d'œillets. Les bouquets d'œillets eux-mêmes sont démultipliés dans l'installation. Deux sont suspendus, d'autres sont représentés dans les peintures. Il étend encore le motif des œillets de manière plus subtile en jouant sur le nom anglais « *carnation* » qu'il décompose en « *car nation* », métaphore de la société états-unienne. Ainsi, on retrouve également des jantes de voitures dans l'installation et la photographie d'une Coccinelle (Volkswagen) happée par la végétation – qui prend à peu de choses près les dimensions d'une coccinelle-insecte – exposée discrètement sur un mur au ras du sol, à peine visible. Tout le travail de Scoli Acosta fonctionne ainsi, par associations d'idées. L'œuvre devient inépuisable, la visite interminable si l'on se prend au jeu de l'artiste et si l'on part à la recherche – comme une chasse au trésor – de tous les détails, de toutes les concordances entre les œuvres. Ainsi, les dessins servent de passerelles dans le couloir entre les installations. Les motifs présents dans ceux-ci se retrouvent dans la vidéo *Drawing From The Lady of The Lake* (2011) qui, comme une balise, indique le chemin de l'exposition. Ces mêmes motifs sont encore repris dans les installations et les performances de l'artiste. Ils sont comme des fils conducteurs, et c'est bien de fil conducteur qu'il s'agit. En effet, dans tout le lieu de l'exposition, Scoli Acosta laisse apparents les fils électriques – à

la plus grande joie des régisseurs – et les souligne par des morceaux de scotch colorés, pour insister sur leur présence, sur la dangereuse présence de l'électricité pour la planète, devenue pourtant invisible à nos yeux.

Sans poursuivre la description de l'exposition du Frac et pour conserver une part de mystère, s'il est une chose à retenir, c'est bien l'idée que, malgré le mélange des disciplines et la grande variété des formes et des médiums, l'œuvre du plasticien polyvalent est construite de manière très cohérente. Il travaille à partir d'un répertoire de formes et de son univers pour proposer une œuvre organique, en évolution constante, continue et cyclique, où tout se répond, tout dialogue et concorde, pour le plus grand plaisir des visiteurs explorateurs. A la fois narrative, tout en étant parvenue à garder une grande liberté d'expression et d'imagination et à laisser une place au hasard des rencontres et des découvertes, réaliste et sur-réaliste, l'œuvre de Scoli Acosta, qui s'inspire à la fois de son histoire – américaine et mexicaine – et de sa propre vie, est belle, engagée et poétique, drôle et passionnante.

Difficile de s'en défaire !

> **Scoli Acosta, *Drawings and Projects***, du 26 février au 13 avril au Frac Basse-Normandie, Caen.

Crédits photos :

Une : Scoli Acosta, « 24 Compositions Composition (elements) », 2011. © Marc Damage.

Article : Scoli Acosta, *Drawings and Projects*, « Big Well II », 2011. © Marc Damage.

(Lire sur notre site : <http://www.mouvement.net/index.php?idStarter=217733>)

Artiste(s) :

Scoli Acosta artiste

Gerhard Richter artiste

Claire Kueny rédacteur

Publié le 28/03/2011 00:00

Les éditions du mouvement

(<http://www.mouvement.net>)

Galeries

Le monde éphémère de Scolli Acosta

Première exposition parisienne du Californien qui travaille entre autres la poussière

L'écologie a son discours, ses aficionados, son impérieuse nécessité. Mais elle manque d'un regard, d'une conscience plastique : l'œuvre du jeune Américain Scolli Acosta pourrait être une étape dans le soulèvement de cette question au sein du monde de l'art. Nourri de culture française, ce Californien n'appartient pas à la mouvance des artistes qui tentent aujourd'hui d'éveiller les consciences politiques à cette problématique.

Mais, pour sa première exposition dans une galerie parisienne, il met en scène un micromonde où tout se recycle, pris dans une grande boucle où souffle une douce énergie. La moindre des modestes pièces présentées ici est née d'objets récupérés, usés, investis par le temps. Pour les lire, il faut comprendre le titre : « Empreinte carbone », qui dit la trace que tout homme laisse sur terre au fil de ses dépenses énergétiques.

Tout part d'une brique découverte sur une plage de Los Angeles : arrondie par les flots, elle est devenue galet, comme retournée à ses origines minérales. S'inspirant d'elle, l'artiste a conçu une série de sculptures et de toiles où vibrent les énergies du vent et du soleil. A partir de la poussière qu'il a obtenue en creusant ces pavés de pavés rouges, il a sculpté



« Carbon Footprint », l'exposition de Scolli Acosta à la galerie Laurent Godin. UWE WALTER

des cornes d'abondance. A partir de bois arrachés à des maisons californiennes, vieux de cent ans, il a construit des meubles. Dans l'un d'eux, en forme de O, un ventilateur souffle à perpétuité dans un harmonica : c'est lui, par son sifflement, qui donne son tempo vibratile à cette exposition. Comme pour souligner ces flux d'énergie, des Scotch de couleur viennent rythmer le parcours du fil électrique, de sa source jusqu'à la sculpture.

Sur une toile, un mur de brique est enlacé de formes vaporeuses, nuages et liserons sur ciel rose. Une autre, peinte en partie avec du sable, mêle des profils investis du motif de panneaux solaires, des queues de baleine, et de véritables algues, échouées là. Nourri au « hasard objectif » élevé par le surréaliste André Breton au rang d'art de vivre, Scolli Acosta lui donne par ses trouvailles recyclées une nouvelle valeur contemporaine. Elevé dans l'art de la perfor-

mance, porté par l'éducation de son grand-oncle Al Hansen à la poésie modeste développée au sein du mouvement Fluxus dans les années 1960, il travaille désormais l'éphémère comme une nouvelle éthique. ■

EMMANUELLE LEQUEUX

« Carbon Footprint », Scolli Acosta, galerie Laurent Godin, 5, rue du Grenier-Saint-Lazare, Paris-3^e. M^o Rambuteau. Tél. : 01-42-71-10-66. Du mardi au samedi, de 14 à 19 heures. Jusqu'au 5 avril.



Five years ago, Scolli Acosta went to Paris, intending to stay only long enough to perform a brief homage to the 19th-century symbolist writer Gérard de Nerval. He wanted to recreate the legend that Nerval had once walked a lobster along the Palais Royal. Instead, Acosta stayed four years, producing Nerval-inspired performances, installations and sculptures. A contemporary of Nerval described the writer's habit of wandering the streets of Paris, "lost in a state of supernatural reverie." While Nerval is no longer Acosta's primary inspiration, the description seems fitting for the daydream worlds he constructs.

Acosta now lives in Los Angeles, and his latest drawings, paintings and sculptures are inspired by two themes relating to the American Midwest: Badlands and Big Well. The projects represent metaphorical as well as real places. The catalyst for the first is the Terrence Malick film *Badlands* (1973), a story of young lovers on a killing spree through South Dakota. It's not the plot, but rather the film's qualities of dawn, dusk and wistful sadness that Acosta's art evokes. By referencing the region's bloody history and his own visit to the Badlands, his work transcends the movie's influence.

Despite the diversity of Acosta's subject matter and media, his art reflects a consistent,

personalized iconography. Hands often encroach upon landscapes, hinting at the physical and emotional states of a collective human body. Symbolic elements such as stars, flowers, gemstones or Silly Putty-like figures float in space to suggest "closing your eyes and seeing phosphores," as Acosta describes the effect. In addition, his drawings and paintings often share compositional constructs, such as a binocular shape filled with a landscape and floating elements, or paint drips that might connote a flow of tears, water, blood or words.

Acosta's latest creative springboard is the Big Well, "the world's largest hand-dug well" in Greensburg, Kansas. A masterpiece of pioneer engineering, the pit has always compelled tourists to toss things into its depths, which are periodically dredged up and presented in a gift shop next to a meteorite that was found nearby. Acosta's *Big Well*, an installation that includes a mural-sized painting, smaller works on paper, a video and sculptural objects, was recently shown at the Liste art fair in Basel. Recurring visual motifs leave interpretation open, such as overlapping spirals that read as ripples in water, energy fields or cobwebs. Large signage promoting the attraction plus a collection of souvenir-like objects — squished pennies, bottle caps and other artifacts attached to the paintings —

address how any locale can be manipulated to draw crowds. But there's also potential magic to such non-places, because so much depends upon the imagination. Acosta's interpretation infuses this one with mystery and beauty.

What's compelling about Acosta's latest work is it portrays America as a dark, fairy-tale place, evoking dueling thoughts of awe and trepidation. But the main thing is that he leaves room for viewers to imagine the universe as extensively as he does.

Anne Martens is an art critic based in Los Angeles.

Scolli Acosta was born in Los Angeles in 1973. He lives and works in Los Angeles.

Selected solo shows: 2005: Daniel Reich Gallery (in November); Daniel Reich, Liste art fair, Basel, 2003; Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts, Lyon, 2001; Public, Paris.

Selected group shows: 2005: "Follow Me a Fantasy," Arena 1 Gallery, Santa Monica, 2004: "California Earthquakes," Daniel Reich, New York, 2003: "Kulturhauptstadt," Ultimate Akademie, Cologne, 2002: "Promotion," Espace Paul Ricard, Paris; "Sans commune mesure," Centre National de la Photographie, Paris, 2001: "Moly-Sabata," Musée des Beaux Arts, Lyon; "Two Friends and So On," Marc Foxx, Los Angeles.

Big Well, 2005. View of the installation, mixed media. Courtesy of Daniel Reich Gallery, New York.