



THE PERIPATETIC SCHOOL
LONDON

Today's artists have to be schizophrenic. They are required to be internationally mobile and visible; they have to be in many places at once. In both residencies and exhibitions, artists are somehow expected to create a "genuine" engagement with the space and context where they are showing, while they also uphold a unique, rooted identity that reflects their background. As Boris Groys states in *Art Power*, 2008, "All active participants in today's cultural world are now expected to offer their productive output to a global audience, to be prepared to be constantly on the move from one venue to the next, and to present their work with equal persuasion; regardless of where they are." Or as Sis Cunningham puts it in "How Can You Keep On Movin' (Unless You Migrate Too)," her Dust Bowl-era song about the "Okies" trying to escape the storms: "They tell you to keep on movin' but migrate you must not do... Can't stay, can't go back, can't migrate, so where the hell am I?"

Invited by curator Tanya Barson, the nine participants in *The Peripatetic School: Itinerant Drawing from Latin America* provide a few enigmatic responses to this question [The Drawing Room; September 22—November 12, 2011]. In José Tony Cruz's short black-and-white animation *La Yola*, 2007, a small boat floats on a blank screen. It bobs slowly, seemingly drifting freely, as we imagine the surrounding sea. Soon, however, its circling reveals that it is attached to an invisible anchor. Likewise in *Distance Drawing San Juan/London, an attempt to draw the distance from San Juan to London (6,751,2362m). Realized only 0.0031890 percent (2,153m)*, 2011, which enacts a particular, seemingly aimless type of movement while relying on a fixed starting point. This square wall drawing is a cross-hatching of hundreds of thin straight lines. Some are marked with small numbers adding up the centimeters that his pencil has traveled. The drawing conspires with the nearby floor piece *Untitled (Floor from Sertão)*, 2008, by Brazilian artist Brígida Baltar, an intricate floral tiling pattern made from the rich red clay of Brazil. It spreads out from the corner

and quickly disperses to give way to the gallery's gray floors, a ghostly hint at Brazil's colonial history. With Cruz's *Distance Drawing*, it both suggests some sort of ornate imaginary palace and proposes that by retracing displacements, even with slight actions such as these, we can produce an entirely new space.

The works on view all enlist the act of drawing to come to grips with place, sharing a sense of openness and unease in their attempts. In Nicolas Paris' whimsical series of drawings *Harry Slowly*, 2007–present, a template outline of the artist running is modified based on the object he found on his daily run. Ishmael Randall Weeks' installation *Fragments*, 2011, provides a more sustained study as it examines the overlap of modernist and indigenous architecture in Peru. An architect's desk is covered with sketches and miniature bricks. Spread across the wall are cutouts of geodesic domes, interspersed with model bunkers made of pressed paper. This diversity of approaches, responding to particular sets of circumstances, allows a geographically thematic show such as *The Peripatetic School* to escape casting its participants as exotic emblems. While European theory would position itinerant drawing along a path following Baudelaire's *fâneur* to the Situationists' *dérive*, the humble wanderings on view here feel more mundanely and explicitly political. These explorations are a response to the sprawling constructions in the megalopolis of São Paulo, travel restrictions resulting from political violence in Colombia, and the threatened terrain of the Amazon jungle. It may not be so much a question of "topophilia," a concept posited by curator Guy Brett in response to Baltar's work, which has gained some primacy in interpretations of Latin American art, but rather something much simpler: place is always both a particularity and an imagined, contested reality.

A wooden standing screen blocks off one corner of the gallery's front room. There, one encounters Colombian artist Mateo López's installation *Nowhere Man*, 2011, an impromptu live and work space, crammed

with a desk, a bed, notebooks, drawing tools, and odds and ends. Eventually, you grasp that the apple sitting on the desk is made of paper. You realize that the shoes on the floor, the rolls of tape on the desktop, the plant in a small mound of dirt in a plastic bag on the windowsill are all meticulously crafted paper replicas of the real things. But the crux of the whole exhibition seems to lie at the bottom of a small brown paper bag sitting on the bed. Peering in, you see a ping-pong ball couched in a swath of deep black velvet. Half of it has been painted black, the other half has been carefully inscribed with the craters of the far side of the moon. López's installation takes us from his temporary occupation of the gallery to the possibility that artists can make entirely other planets their home.

—Chris Fire-Wassilak

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Ishmael Randall Weeks, detail of *Fragments*, 2011, mixed-media installation, 201 x 315 x 187 cm [courtesy of the artist, Galeria Federica Schiavo, Rome, and Eleven Rivington, New York]; Mateo López, detail of *Nowhere Man*, 2011 mixed-media installation, 190 x 320 x 281 cm [courtesy of the artist and Galeria Casas Riegner, Bogotá, and Galeria Luisa Strina, São Paulo]