

HUMID

Climatic Conditions by Dominic Molon

"Surfaces tended to dissolve here. Clear nights ended less so." - Joan Didion, Miami

Moods and impressions change with the weather. Extended periods of rain or extreme heat, for example, can alter the disposition of a place and its populace. Many places become uniquely identified with their climatic conditions, acquiring a personality or a demeanor based on their intrinsic meteorological traits. Miami's constant state of sweltering humidity, its uncomfortably moist sense of concentration, exacerbates the inherent sensuality and tension of the metropolis. Its dense and complex mix of ethnicities- a result of its position as the American gateway to the Caribbean and Latin America- has produced a complicated political history that heightens the sense of pressure permeating throughout the city. A humid, languorous sexuality is palpable in the luxury hotel glamour, booming booty bass, and barely clothed beachgoers of Miami's South Beach as well. Joan Didion's observation above regarding the hazy, capricious temperament of the city describes its elusive feverishness and seductiveness and its ever-present potential to simply evaporate into a thick, viscous, and chaotic air. Her sentiments are echoed by artist Mark Handforth's statement that "Miami is a truly entropic city: it is at the mercy of its nature, and that's why it changes all the time. When you put something down and go back to it two or three weeks later, you're never really sure where it's going to be or what it's going to look like."

The recent work of young and emerging Miami-based artists reflects the broadly defined "humidity" of the city, varying from the slyly subversive, to the latently aggressive, to the obliquely carnal. HUMID, an exhibition featuring the work of 26 artists from Miami, Barcelona, Chicago, Copenhagen, London, Los Angeles, and Pittsburgh, was inspired both by the anxious volatility of this work and by the dominant climatic condition of Miami. The exhibition was originally conceived for a then-unfinished addition to the home of collectors Rosa and Carlos de la Cruz in Key Biscayne. It was then relocated to a more accessible site for the general public: a sprawling temporary space in the Moore Building in Miami's Design District. This unusual space--once intended for a now-defunct dot.com business--lent itself naturally to an exhibition in which sound and video installations, slide projections, works-on-paper, and photographs were installed in an often unpredictable and surreptitious manner. HUMID's concentration of various experiences within the space reflected humidity's elusive presence, one that perpetually oscillates between the sensual and the unsettling.

M.W. Burns' *Posing Phrases* (2001), features a bank of speakers issuing directions such as "turn left... OK, look natural, look VERY natural, OK hold it!" The text is composed of fragmented instructions from a fashion photographer to a model that have been disassociated from their original source. Burns' work unnerves casual passers-by through its alternately seductive and coercive use of the spoken word. **Camille Norment** and **Ann Lislegaard's** sound-based sculptural installations also employ the human voice yet privilege nonverbal communication. The stainless steel structures in Norment's *Zero Divide* (2001) project from the wall like weird extensions from a robot or a spaceship in a science fiction film. A repetitious sound of male and female voices sighing emanates from the metallic orbs on the ends of the structures. The transmission of primal utterances through sleekly inhuman sculptural forms suggests both the bizarre and mundane daily interactions between humans and technology. Lislegaard's installation *!* (2000) presents a slowly pulsating red light placed on a large square of deep blue and set to the sound of a woman's voice catching her breath repeatedly, as if overtaken by a particular scene. Though not necessarily sexually initiated, the implications of eroticism and rapture call to mind romantic sunsets and the

"red light" districts of large cities where illicit sexual activities are often transacted.

Elizabeth Withstandley's *Fans Part 2* (2001) and **Mike Dee's** video *Cover-Up* (1999) both draw upon covert histories and effects of popular culture. Withstandley's work features a painstakingly rendered video projection in which everything but Brad Pitt's image is digitally extracted from the trailer for the 1998 film *Fight Club*. The video is combined with the sound of the artist being interviewed about the process of creating the video and photographs that appear to document this discussion. A dissonance develops between the dry analysis of the interview and the hyperadrenalized soundtrack of the altered trailer. Withstandley uses this tension to contrast mainstream cinema's sensationalistic sexuality (in terms of identification and objectification) and the more cognitive and theoretical approach of art making. Dee's work cleverly evokes postwar racial tensions by layering archival footage of ultraconservative white singer Pat Boone and the once-radical black pop star Little Richard both singing versions of "Tutti Frutti." *Cover-Up*, like *Fans Part 2*, creates a conflict between two separate sources, with Richards' tight, supercool performance contrasting starkly with Boone's flailing attempt to "rock out." Dee subtly alludes to the racial tensions and violence that gripped the United States in the 1950s and 1960s with this presentation of two performers of different races (and one would imagine political viewpoints) laying claim to the same song during this politically fraught time.

John White Cerasulo's *Flight Simulator* (2000) also appropriates a form of popular culture in its reconstruction of a video game that simulates the effect of flying a private luxury airplane. This work presented a G4 Apple notebook to evoke the technofetishism that defines current youth culture. The strangely picturesque landscapes that form the backdrop of the game's action are distilled and placed into a continuous slideshow. Cerasulo's friends' names often accompany the images as do references to the location a scene--Düsseldorf, for example--and odd phrases such as "Keri is flying in comfort," to create a weirdly disconnected travelogue. **Natalia Benedetti's** video *Untitled* (2001) documents a drastically different travel experience: a view of the Miami sky seen from a car windshield through the narrow aperture of cupped hands. These images are combined with the unsettling sound of a child's toy being played backwards. A sense of placelessness arises--highway signs flash by intermittently--resulting in the disturbing sensation of being lost. Benedetti's video also prompts sinister voyeuristic associations, such as the use of one's hand gain a more focused and covert look at a given person, object, or situation.

Sexuality and desire inform **Hernan Bas'** recent drawings featuring attractive young men like those in fashion advertisements for Jil Sander, Helmut Lang, or Prada placed within antural settings. *Wildfire* (2000) is both sinister and campily ironic in its suggestion that the "hot" models in front of a raging forest fire are somehow responsible for the blaze. Bas' deft draftmanship lends an unusual delicacy his rendering of these romantic fantasies, capturing the awkward grace of these waifed-out young men. **D'neil Larson** provides and more obsessively minimalist perspective on erotic intensity. *100 Miles for You (in Caribbean Blue)* (2000) is, as its title suggests, a pile of 100 miles of curled blue ribbon, formed to make a mound that resembles a shiny blue gumdrop. Larson's rote activity of methodically curling this enormous length of ribbon subtly suggests the literal and figurative distances that many people will profess to cross to prove their love for another. Another sculpture, *Untitled* (2001) is a low barrier of opalescent pink bricks formed by the laborious crushing of candy valentine hearts with messages like "Be Mine" or "Hot Date" into dust to form a "pigment" which was then combined with cast resin. This sweetly colored "Humpty Dumpty wall" (to use the artist's phrase) belies the destructive nature of its manufacture, alluding to the hidden stress and tension that exist within even the happiest romantic relationships.

Norberto Rodriguez's wall is a more seemingly straightforward one at first glance. His installation, *A Wall I Built With My Father* (2001) is exactly what the title describes: an

approximately 9 foot high by 11 foot wall that he constructed with his father. Rodriguez applies a deadpan conceptual logic to both the simple labor involved in building the wall and a reflection upon the less tangible complexities of his paternal relationship. Just as one might see the wall as the product of a father and son's collaborative enterprise, it also comes to symbolize the emotional barriers between them. **Jason Hedges'** installation, *Untitled Aesthetic Experience* (2001), asserts an architectural presence charged with violence rather than personal sentiment. Hedges placed a large stainless steel cutting table with a wood block to match and a simple heating element within a translucent white fabric room. Upon entering the room, one is confronted by the amplified sounds of a meal being prepared. Disassociated from their source, the sounds become ominous and threatening, transforming Hedges' minimal cooking setup into a clinical theater of cruel imagination.

Maria Martinez-Cañas' installation, *Impermanent Evidence* (2001) intriguingly transforms paper usually used for architectural blueprints into a construction site itself. Responding to the atmospheric condition inferred by the exhibition's title, Cañas made negatives using saliva and transferred them to the paper to create a miasmatic series of shapes and forms. The resulting images were presented with the blue light that Cañas uses as a developing agent, lightboxes displaying the negatives themselves, and a series of trays in which a series of images slowly dissolved in water. The transitory nature of the images, the willful dissolution of them as part of the installation, and the use of a bodily fluid as the content/subject matter prompted considerations of the fleeting nature of our earthly existence. **Corey McCorkle's** *Untitled* fluorescent lights sheather in various wood veneers were installed in existing fixtures within a circular recessed space above the lounge area of the exhibition. Their low, warm glow was a barely noticeable presence and evoked mood lighting of the late-1960s and early-1970s. The lights were also intriguingly camouflaged amidst the patterns of the wood ceiling of the space.

Nature and culture also play a strong role in photographs by **Naomi Fisher** such as *Topless Boy* (2000), in which a young man lies prone amid lush, tropical foliage. The boy could be a murdered victim or a lover awaiting a potential tryst. Locating this scene of violence and/or desire within dense greenery, Fisher presents nature as either an erotic shelter or as a locus for evil. This tension between nature and culture feeds into her drawings as well. The two works featured in HUMID are portraits of young women desperately rendered in a red that suggests either lipstick or blood. Fisher follows in the expressionist tradition of accessing a primal "nature" within culture through a gestural treatment of the human figure. **Dave Muller/Three Day Weekend's** focus on "greenery" privileges culture over nature in his site-specific installation *How Did I Get Here?* (2001). This work combined wood shelving and lamps by the Los Angeles-based design group 100X Better, photographs of verdant scenes by Anne Collier, a video of a palm tree by John Pearson, and his own small drawings placed within the shelving unit. Muller took advantage of the unique opportunities that the space offered by placing the monitor for Pearson's video on one of the many wood support pillars to echo the palm tree "column" being depicted onscreen. He also used the window behind the false wall (installed to keep light out of the space) and made two viewing holes to focus on a palm tree across the street to create a relationship between the exhibition space and the world outside.

Kevin Arrow brought a sonic element specific to Miami--a pirate radio broadcast by local DJ Chico the Leo--into the space of the exhibition in his work *Lost and Found, I Love My Mama Check-In* (2001). The sound of various people "checking-in" to say that they "love their mama" (accompanied by various soul music tracks) alternately contrasts and complements three continuous slide projections of found and original slides that dissolve into one another. His unique "portrait" of Miami through mostly appropriated sounds and images is alternately humorous and poignant, capturing an unconscious "soul" of the city. **Nick Relph and Oliver Payne** focus in a

highly personal and at times polemical manner on London, its suburbs, and other locations in England in their three films *Driftwood* (1998), *House & Garage* (1999), and *Jungle* (2001). The first film looks at the protracted relationship between the young (particularly skateboarding) denizens of London and various forms of architecture which have emerged in the city in recent years. *House & Garage* offers a poetic look at the mundane activities, pastoral backgrounds, and often funny sights and sounds of the areas surrounding London such as a group of middle-aged line dancers or cell phones playing Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" or Bach's "Tocatta and Fugue." *Jungle* meditates on the English countryside by presenting footage of UFO sightings, protests, festivals, and contemporary re-imaginings of the "medieval."

Tao Rey's photographs document his clever interruptions of the Miami cityscape with fake street signs bearing comically irreverent statements such as "Enjoy Life" His three-painting project *Blah* (2001) makes a similarly mischievous use of language, transferring the quickly rendered style of graffiti tagging (rather than its more calligraphic form) into the more precious realm of painting. The simple, dull word, "blah" is rendered in a lacquered sheen that seems to float against the rough asphalt-like background of paintings and is repeated from canvas to canvas. Rey's presentation of the works in a small room with intense fluorescent lights heightens the contrast of the paintings' surface, turning the comically mundane into something more aesthetically transcendent. **Jeremy Boyle's** *Untitled (Conversation)* 2001 also makes ironic use of language, comprising three microcomputers reprogrammed to conduct a strange dialogue between themselves. The random bits of vocabulary that the separate voices use to speak to one another fluctuate from streaming non-sequiturs to occasionally coordinated conversation. Boyle's ultra-low-tech connection between three computer elements humorously evokes the highly developed cybernetworks that dominate contemporary life and the frustrations that result when these networks slip up or break down.

Luis Gispert's photograph *Goalie* (2000), depicts a soccer goalkeeper's lunge made violent by the jarring presence of semiautomatic weapons in his hands. The work focuses on the similarities between sports photography and action films in their aestheticized emphasis on moments of intense physicality. Gispert converts the defensive act of the goalkeeper--whose role is to diffuse the offensive attack of striking forwards attempting to score a goal--into one of extreme aggression. **Sergio Prego's** *Tetsuo Bound To Fail* (1998) also references the "extreme" visuals of action films, taking half of its title from the 1988 Japanese film *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*. The video shows changing views of explosions, a levitating male figure, and bursts of yellow paint hovering in air, using a weird form of stop action. These choppy visions are actually the result of building the various scenes from numerous photographs. Prego's laborious handcrafting of cinematic special effects prompts consideration of the unsettling efficacy with which Hollywood films fashion simulated worlds and situations. **Cooper's** dangling movie-machine *GREEN SCREEN* (2001) requires the viewer to physically enter a wood construction to watch a video depicting a figure running relentlessly into a wall. The crash gear that the figure wears, the use of a surveillance-like green screen (like the sinister night-vision goggles worn by the killer in the film *Silence of the Lambs*), and the helmet-like container "worn" by the viewer combine to form a weird, post-apocalyptic visual experience.

John Espinosa's works *Zzzp!* and *Froze-Up* (both 2001) employ cartoon-like imagery in Day-Glo colors to represent fantastic situations--respectively, a man being struck by lightning and two deer locking one another in their sights. Rendering a violent natural phenomenon or a humorously imagined stand-off between two animals in such a cartoonish fashion suggests the similar ways that extreme emotional situations are packaged and sugar-coated in the mass media. **William Cordova's** *Gimme Shelter* (2001) similarly presents cartoon-like imagery, focusing instead on a scene from the world of rock and roll culture with its depiction of a stage with a massive bank of

speakers. His provocatively titled black column of vinyl records, *I Want You to Cum in my Ass* (2001) is a wry meditation on both the inherent machismo of rock music and the male-oriented (and fetishistic) "hobby" of amassing enormous record collections. **Mark Handforth's** sculpture *Cosmic Dancer* (1998/2001) takes its title from a song by the glam-rock band T. Rex to suggest the celestial sense of vertigo one might feel sitting on its seat placed on wobbly long legs. The work combines two disparate experiences of Handforth's on a trip to India--an adventurous rickshaw ride and visits to various markets. The sculpture's fusion of the chairs used by many of the vendors in the Indian markets with the wild motion of the ride provides the work with equal amounts of whimsy and tension.

Cosmic Dancer teetered precipitously above the visitor in the atrium of the Moore Building, serving as an intimation of the off-kilter expressions ahead as one approached HUMID and as a final displacing gesture as one departed. Like the other works in the exhibition, it echoes the discomforting sense of saturation, apprehension, and flux that defines the present moment. HUMID visually, sonically, and psychologically invaded its space with works expressing a wide range of emotions and ideas. Displays of restrained aggression, calculated edginess, and subdued desire slid around corners, hid in closets, or quietly stood in plain view. The concentrated presentation of the works, the alternating sensations and perspectives that they revealed, and the variety of responses that they illicit contributed to a febrile atmosphere that was both an extension and an abstraction of the truly "humid" world outside.

Statement by Rosa de la Cruz

Last August I telephoned my friend Dominic Molon, Associate Curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, to discuss the possibility that he would curate an exhibition in Miami during the inaugural of Art Basel Miami Beach. My husband, Carlos, and I felt the fair deserved a warm welcome from our community. Coming at a time when we were building additional space for exhibition in our home made us ponder the possibility of transforming the construction site into a space that would be prematurely activated by a group of young artists. I was thrilled when Dominic liked the idea and agreed to curate this exhibition.

When Art Basel was postponed to December 2002 due to the aftermath of the horrible tragedy of September 11th, I decided not to call the show off. Dominic had already contacted all the artists and spent a lot of time putting things together, and so I felt strongly committed to them as well. I called my friend Craig Robins, a real estate developer and fellow collector and asked him if he could give us a space for two months with the purpose that the exhibition would last a longer period of time and would be more accessible to the public. I cannot thank Craig and his wife Ivelin enough for their generosity towards the artists and all of us in the community for providing us with a great space in the Design District.

I would like also to thank all the persons that were involved and helped so much to put this show together. To Jason, Natalia, Pedro, Aguila, Alicia and the rest of the crew, my sincere thanks. To Dominic, thanks for believing in this community from beginning to the end. Your exhibition, HUMID, marks a new beginning. Miami is a city with a cultural mix that provides an excellent opportunity for doing exhibitions that transcend one specific cultural identity, and HUMID rounds up the experience of living in a time where the options are limitless and the many fantasies we each have are but some of these options.

I would also like to thank the 26 artists who participated in HUMID for accepting this challenge and

for lending their time and works to this exhibition.

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