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Jones, Ronald, "Spencer Finch," *Artforum* December 2012: 296-297

Milan Mölzer, *Amphibolin Relief*, 1976. Amphibolin paint on Plexiglas, 63 x 47 ¼".

Mölzer would often begin a work by dripping white oil paint over a black primer, then painting thick stripes. Chance effects are clearly visible, yet, structured by the stripes, the regularly spaced drips of downward-flowing color form a relieflike grid, as in *Černo-bílá struktura* (Black and White Structure), 1974. Even more relieflike is *Modrá struktura* (Blue Structure), also from 1974. Here, he used a screwdriver to bore rows of small holes in a square, blue-painted panel of thick, flexible paper, so that the brown paper under the paint shows through.

In the two years that followed, the experimental impulses evident in these two works led to an explosion in Mölzer's production. In some works, he cut overlapping pieces of paper, applied white Amphibolin paint (used mostly for building exteriors) to canvas, and scratched and cut into the canvas so that it began to curve and buckle. Or he used white paint on a yellow background, then sliced the paper into strips so that the yellow became visible again. He stuck multiple layers of printed parchment paper on a white panel, cutting them into horizontal bands that began to roll into spirals; he called such works "scores." The results of his experimentation were always surprising, sometimes radical. There is something at once minimalistic and poetic about these works. The rhythmical structures of his paintings react sensitively to light, suggesting movement and a delicately organic, even erotic tactility: Some are reminiscent of skin, others of fur.

In 1975, Mölzer began his "*Reisezeichnungen*," or "Travel Drawings." While on a train or streetcar, he would draw densely spaced horizontal lines with a pen, which reacted to the jolts of the train. These lines became seismographs of his travels, and would be combined with train tickets and itineraries that he glued onto the paper. In 1976, Mölzer traveled with his friends the artists Alex Kayser, George Brecht, and André Thomkins from Düsseldorf to Amsterdam. He documented this trip in a publication including photos and stories. At that point, his work was gaining popularity and critical acclaim. In 1977 his Travel Drawings were included in Documenta 6. But by then, his brief journey had already come to an end: In 1976, at the age of thirty-nine, Mölzer had taken his own life, leaving a legacy of fascinating experimentation cut short before it could have—perhaps—changed the course of history.

—*Noemi Smolik*

Translated from German by Anne Posten.

STOCKHOLM

Spencer Finch

GALERIE NORDENHAKE

Emily Dickinson sought the sacred in nature rather than in church. In one buoyant but sacrilegious poem, she "*détourned*" the Trinitarian blessing, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," making it: "In the name of the bee / And of the butterfly / And of the breeze, amen!" American artist Spencer Finch shares this spiritual reverence for nature, endlessly attempting to capture those ethereal moments in which nature overawes. Embracing paradox, his titles grasp at literal descriptions of ineffable natural experiences. He describes *The Moment When Three Dimensions Become Two Dimensions (Apple Tree, 3 July, 2010, 9:38 p.m.)* as "a photographic document of the precise moment at twilight when the eye can no longer discern depth in the landscape." Finch's words, like the poet's, are only shadowy approximations of experience; the same could be said for this nocturnal photograph of a tree. The photograph captures the twinkling instant when the color of the massive tree is so close to that of the darkening and expansive sky that they seem to disappear into each other. Rather than faithfully evoke experience, words and images are more likely to trigger perceptual memories whose authenticity to the original experience is everlastingly elusive. In *Cloud Study (Giverny) 0484* and *0684*, both 2012, in which cloud images formed from Scotch tape display the essence of the clouds themselves, the original experience of the clouds remains just out of reach for Finch, as for Monet before him. Whether focusing on twilight's mysterious ambiguities or entrancing diaphanous clouds, exploring these dissonances between experience and representation leaves one at a permanent loss for the experience itself; in this way, Finch's work is equally poignant, tender, and innocent.

But Finch is at his most achingly earnest when he takes Dickinson as his subject. Among the works in his recent exhibition "I'll tell you how the Sun rose" was a work called *Wind (through Emily Dickinson's window, August 14, 2012, 3:22p.m.)*, consisting of a humble window fan sitting on a pedestal; modified to turn itself on and then off, it aims to re-create a breeze that might have been felt a century and a half ago. Rather than prompt our memories, this simple movement of air seems designed to transport us into identification with Dickinson's own experience, as if in the hope that it could stir us as nature inspired her. It does refresh. And of the breeze, amen!

In a series of collages based on Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Colour*, Finch appeared to turn from sensory approximations of natural phenomena toward a theoretical opticality, but this was not entirely the case. An unfinished manuscript, comprising notes on Goethe's *Theory of Colours* (1810), was found on Wittgenstein's desk after his death in 1951; he had worked on it for the last eighteen months of his life. The book is largely a study in uncertainty, an expression of its author's indecision and vagueness about the relationship between the sensory experience of color and the language that describes it. He wonders, "Couldn't there be people who didn't understand our way of speaking when we say that orange is a reddish-yellow?" Finch's collages attempt to illustrate this conundrum, and fourteen others, resulting

Spencer Finch, *The Moment When Three Dimensions Become Two Dimensions (Apple Tree, 3 July, 2010, 9:38 p.m.)*, ink-jet print, 22 x 30".

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in evocations of doubt, ambiguity, and haziness—approximating Wittgenstein's experience just as the breeze from the fan approximates what Dickinson might have felt coming through her bedroom window on a summer's day.

—*Ronald Jones*

MADRID

Jacobo Castellano

GALERÍA FÚCARES

Jacobo Castellano emerged on the Spanish art scene a decade ago with works that vividly retrace the memory of his early years in the southern region of his native Andalusia. Ever since, the distinctive environment in which Castellano spent his childhood has shaped a powerfully unnerving discourse that unfolds across sculpture, installation, photography, and collage. While not unaffected by international influences, such as that of the austere and metaphorically charged objects of Arte Povera, Castellano's work always bears the weight of his own ambivalent cultural heritage: a gloomy worldview, shaped by the oppressive fear and guilt woven into the dominant religious attitude, which is closer to the morbid contemplation of death than to the joy of living. This sensibility had a profound impact on twentieth-century Spanish art—it can be found in Picasso's early work, both in the crepuscular portraits and interiors of his Blue Period and in the brighter though melancholy scenes of circus characters and street life of his Rose Period. It can also be seen in the dark society depicted in José Gutiérrez Solana's expressionist images and in a myriad of midcentury Spanish

Jacobo Castellano, *Malos tiempos* (Bad Times), 2009, cardboard, papier-mâché, plaster, glass, milk, 10¼ x 32 x 27½".

writing, and it echoes through Buñuel's rebellious recapturing of the real. We ineluctably return to it every year in our macabre Easter rituals, and it prompted Castellano to create the ghastly atmospheres he cultivates today.

Childhood and toys have always played a key role in Castellano's aesthetic universe. But instead of examining the nostalgia that such subjects might be expected to evoke, he uses them to explore our uneasy relationship with objects. A typical example was *Casa*, 2004, a huge, awkwardly built, old-fashioned wooden carousel stripped of its seats and ornamentation. Exhibited in Castellano's first show at Galería Fúcares in 2005, it packed the main space, suggesting not a cheerful playtime but a disconcerting experience that probed deep into the realm of the uncanny. In the artist's most recent exhibition, "*Dos de pino*" (Two of Pine), one of the strongest works was *Malos tiempos* (Bad Times), 2009. Here a cardboard horse, which has been ripped open and partially spread out on the floor, supports a tray, also cardboard, on which a glass of milk rests: a strange conflation of violent effort with anodyne normality. In this piece, Castellano hints at his fascination with the piñata, a common feature of kids' parties in Spain. The memory of this toy also reverberates in *Pelele 01* (The Straw Man 01), 2012, a photograph he recently found and reproduced, in which a stuffed doll is thrown up in the air, evoking the aerial figure of Goya's *El Pelele*, 1771–72.

The body, in Castellano's recent works, is an elusive presence, deeply connected to the domestic props and old pieces of furniture he has worked with in the past. The influence of those Surrealists and Dadaists who shared his morbid obsessions is clearer than ever, particularly in his strategy of deploying fragments so as to contradict their original meanings. In *Bebedor 4* (Drinker 4), 2012, for example, the leg from a statue of Jesus Christ stands upside down on a wooden base, crowned by a metal cup. This weird and imbalanced arrangement dramatically transforms a devotional icon into the souvenir of an unhappy world in which things are left stranded in their latent solitude.

—*Javier Hontoria*

HEALESVILLE, AUSTRALIA

TarraWarra Biennial 2012

TARRAWARRA MUSEUM OF ART

For this carefully modest and constantly thoughtful biennial, titled "Sonic Spheres," a focus on sound art means more than audio booths and noise spill. Exhibited work by twenty individual artists and one collaboration includes scores, drawings on top of scores, aural reinterpretations, and invented musical instruments. Indicating the conflicted and coveted currency of contemporary sound art, catalogue essayist and Sydney-based sound theorist Caleb Kelly disputes the terms of the art world's current preoccupation with sound art altogether, questioning the very value of such a category and noting that its implicit division between the senses promotes the idea that an artwork carrying an audio component is only a novelty.

The exhibition's other catalogue essayist and the biennial's curator, TarraWarra Museum of Art director Victoria Lynn, on the other hand, emphasizes the longevity and durability of all the artists' sonic predilections, dividing sound artists into two broad categories. According to Lynn, the first group experiments with disharmony, noise, and everyday sounds, resulting in forms grounded in chance, asymmetry, and discord. Their work reflects an avant-garde genealogy with which many of the artists in the biennial explicitly identify. In *Mass Black Implosion (Mikrokosmos: From the Diary of a Fly, Béla Bartók)*, 2012, Marco Fusinato draws over a facsimile score by Bartók, tracing a line from every note toward a central point. Nathan Gray works from Cornelius Cardew's notorious *Treatise*, 1963–67, a 193-page graphic score that resembles a sequence of minimal drawings more than musical notations, creating *Treatise (Pages 131 and 78)*, 2012, a suite of sculptural modules and objects that were slowly, studiously, and memorably "played" at the biennial's opening by Gray's own group, A Scratch Ensemble.

Lynn writes that the biennial's second type of artist is "more specifically interested in cultural and linguistic memory—the ways in which music or sound acts as a method of communication across space, through cultures and over time." This approach is exemplified in Tom Nicholson and Andrew Byrne's *Music for an imaginary launch (Monument for the flooding of Royal Park)*, 2010, a sparse score for eight hands on prepared piano and a recorded female voice. With Nicholson's accompanying videos and a stack of double-sided giveaway posters the work memorializes the layers of indigenous dispossession and white cupidity underlying the pastoral idyll of expansive Royal Park, in inner-city Melbourne.