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Art review: 'Paraíso' at ltd los angeles



With Puerto Rican duo Allora and Calzadilla representing the United States at the Venice Biennale this year, a growing interest in art from the island is to be expected. Organized by ltd los angeles and San Juan gallery Roberto Paradise, “Paraíso” features five Puerto Rican artists exhibiting in L.A. for the first time. Loosely organized around the notion of “paradise” — there are palm trees, papayas and rum — the works are united less by subject matter or regional aesthetic than by their use of the global lingua franca of conceptual art, with a slight Caribbean flair.

Michael D. Linares’ full-size hammock hangs uselessly between two tiny palm tree buds. Patently absurd, it also conjures as-yet-unrealized potential. Also playing with scale, Charles Juhasz-Alvarado’s painstakingly crafted teak wood model of a construction excavator features a wildly outsized arm, suggesting a voracious grasp far beyond one’s need.

Other artists are more polemical. Ignacio Lang has fashioned a giant rosary out of baseballs studded with syringes and topped with a Dodgers cap. It’s timely but heavy-handed. And Radamés “Juni” Figueroa, the only artist to address gender in this all-male affair, paints himself as Manet’s Olympia, reclining on a field of sliced papayas.

Yet the most affecting piece is a video by Jesús “Bubu” Negrón, who, after dropping his disabled mother off at the airport, walked the streets with her folded wheelchair, stopping at every bar on the way. As the walk wears on, Negrón becomes increasingly intoxicated, eventually dragging the chair across the pavement with a horrible scraping sound. Intended as a homage to his art heroes, such as On Kawara and Francis Alÿs, it ends up feeling like an ugly stunt: one can’t shake the impression that the wheelchair is a stand-in for his mother, or perhaps his own body, and the abuse it suffers in the name of art feels bitterly gratuitous. -- Sharon Mizota

ltd los angeles, 7561 W. Sunset Blvd. #103, (323) 378-6842, through Aug. 13. 11am – 5pm. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

Photo: Charles Juhasz-Alvarado "Del Brazo a la Garganta: (mimus polyglottos)," 2011. Credit: Robert Wedemeyer. Courtesy ltd los angeles.