

"SouthXeast".

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"SOUTHXEAST"

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With this second version of "southXeast: Contemporary Southeastern Art" (the first took place in 2005), we seem to have what is becoming a staple in the programming at Florida Atlantic University's Ritter and Schmidt Center galleries. And this is a good thing considering that the organizers again stayed away from the same old artists making a splash in Miami and Atlanta. What we get here, instead, are some new or rarely heard voices. While for a long time the idea of "regional art" exhibitions has been laughable at anything but a global scale, in which impossibly large swaths of geopolitically unstable land (Africa, the Middle East, Latin America) are represented, there is something to be said for a quaint show that tries to cut against the grain, particularly in light of the homogeneity and repetition that increasingly dominate shows that promise the new and the next. There is always the remote chance that here, so far off the radar, one can run into truly odd and disturbing things.

Unfortunately, the show doesn't deliver on this promise very often. A strangely empty formalism seems to be the dominant motif. Whether it's Christopher McNulty cutting logs into slivers and stapling them back together (*Ramifications*, 2004-05) or Avantika Bawa's design-y painting-cum-path markings (they mark a route through the campus between the two galleries) or Dan Tague photographing individuals wearing cardboard masks, juxtaposing different representational vocabularies (*I am the revolution*, 2007)--one gets the feeling that commentary on the medium used is the end of the line for most of these artists. And this abandons much of the work to a kind of emptiness.

But it is at this hollowed core that strange things sometimes happen. **Danielle Roney's three-channel video *Friday, August 3rd: Sao Paulo, Brazil* (2007)** starts off by playing with formal aspects of video--we get a distant shot of Sao Paulo, a midrange take of a building in the city, and a close-up of individuals (presumably on one of the building's terraces). Each view is presented differently: the long-distance shot inside a mirrored box, the mid-range on a regular screen, and the close-up in a series of small Plexiglas sheets hanging from the ceiling (almost like an Helio Oiticica painting/installation) that fragments the image. While we can spend days on how framing determines meaning, and how any phenomenological interaction with a projected image is modulated by the shape of the screen used, what happens in Roney's mid-range shot of the building is almost too simple to have any significance: a uniformed guard walks into the frame. While this could be shoved aside as a mere eventuality that the camera picked up, it has a different kind of force. It destabilizes the formal discourse against which these videos had until then been unfolding. The real of power just strolls right into the symbolic structures of aesthetic production. All of a sudden, these videos are charged in a different way. The blurred and fragmented close-up, for instance, starts to feel like surveillance footage. Things are no longer cleanly--or emptily--formal. The traces of neo-liberal social realities insinuate themselves into everything. Seeking out the protection of formal investigation, Roney has, instead, fallen through a rabbit hole that places her right at the center of the political. It is in these unexpected--and maybe even accidental--switches in register where flat-lining formal investigations all of a sudden spike into strangely interesting projects.