

<http://www.buenosairesherald.com/article/214188/shadows-of-ba%E2%80%99s-past-trapped-in-new-exhibition>

Thursday, May 12, 2016

## Shadows of BA's past trapped in new exhibition

Spanish artist Bernardí Roig poses with one of his drawings in Buenos Aires.

**By Silvia Rottenberg**

*For The Herald*

**A double show by Leandro Ehrlich and Bernardí Roig on display at Hotel de Inmigrantes**

The double exhibition of Argentine artist Leandro Ehrlich and Spanish artist Bernardí Roig opened yesterday at the Contemporary Art Centre of the Museum of the Tres de Febrero University (MUNTREF). It came along with a lot of champagne and seeing and being seen. Empty cups were placed on the marble table that is always there, in the central hall of the third floor of the Hotel de Inmigrantes. It is only now that a carving on that table, made by an unknown person who probably stayed at this temporary place of entry into a new homeland in the 1920s, is made apparent. Roig was so intrigued by the image of someone who has made a stop here, that he projects it onto the floor upon entering the exhibition. The visitor walks over what is an inherent part of the place, yet, by choosing to project it, the image alludes to a temporality, characteristic of the Hotel, the voyage and perhaps even life.

Ehrlich, with his installation called Port of Memories, also refers poetically to the fraught history of the museum's site. Five boats and their engulfed reflection in the water — that is not there — are gently moving while waiting in the harbour, with the paddles at rest. The work is an adaptation of the artist's 2014 Port of Reflections, which he made in Korea. Port of Memories refers to the harbour as a gateway where people leave and arrive, passing through on their way to new destinations in their lives. Ports form the static place of transit, where memories of places left behind float away like the gentle waves around the boat. While they always rock the boat, creating the circles in the water, they dissolve in its mirroring image. A beautifully-worked out metaphor, a strong image, skilfully executed and technically made possible with the help of the robotics department of the University of Tres de Febrero.

"Yes, we want to involve as many people as possible in the university," its director, Anibal Jozami, told the Herald. "The museum is a part of this. Our students give tours here, educating the schoolchildren about the past and also introducing them to contemporary art. The children have often worked as catalysts for their parents, who then also come to get to know the museum."

"We wanted to reopen the museum with a really big and important show. After having been closed for months for refurbishments, the first show had to be of the calibre of the first ever exhibit we had here — three years ago of Christian Boltanski. And I believe we have succeeded," Jozami added.

Without ranking artists, it could convincingly be argued that the two artists currently on display are not yet in Boltanski's league, specifically inciting curiosity about the choice for the Spanish artist. "He is of great importance ... has not been shown here before ... and I knew they would like him here." Why? "I was sure the people would connect with his emotions," Jozami explained.

The white sculptures of a bald well-fed man appear at unexpected places throughout the museum: in the elevator shaft, behind a pole, which is not holding up anything, and behind beams just lying across in a corner. "They are players that were waiting to be placed in a certain setting," the artist explained. "I don't consider them sculptures per se, more like actors in different scenes." It works really well in this place where one can still feel the shadows of a past.

Along with the site-specific placement of his "characters," disclosing the rarities of the building, there is almost another exhibit of Roig. Drawings found and selected by curator Diana Wechsler, which show the Roig's mastery in drawing. Often, the same actor appears in this drawing: the bold somewhat corpulent man. Upon asking him who this man is, aside from the replaceable actor, Roig, slightly taken aback, answers that it's his father. He confesses: "At first, he wasn't that pleased with me using him as a model. Later, he actually agreed to being casted." It is clearly a dual relationship the artist has with his father, a conservative catholic former military: "It's like that with fathers, isn't it? He shows you the world, but also breaks your desires."

In a beautiful series of sketches, in which the man is drawn with white on black paper, his face is kept invisible. This is also the case in many other drawings, such as in Smoking Head, a powerful work, where the head is smoked out. "You ask me why you can't see the face, but why don't you ask me why you see his body? In the drawings, there is always one part that is unclear, erased, scratched over, almost aggressively attacked." In one of the drawings, a self-portrait, white paint has been splashed over most of the image. "I am an iconoclast, if you will. I have a natural urge to draw, but then I also want to negate the image. It's construction and deconstruction in one."

This fascinating duality continues in a light piece specifically made for this exhibit, in the central hall: tube lights placed around a staircase leading nowhere. They are on for 15 minutes, harsh white light into the eyes of the visitors, and then off, leaving one with the shadowy traces of the nearly-blinding experience. Even though very different in style and form, both artists relate to the shadows of the past that are still floating around in the Hotel de Inmigrantes.

**when and where**

The exhibit is on view till September 18, from Tuesday to Sunday from 12pm to 8pm. At MUNTREF's site at Hotel de Inmigrantes (Av. Antartida Argentina, between Migraciones and Buquebus). Free admission. Today at 5pm there is a special guided tour with curator Diana Wechsler and Bernardí Roig.