

Fernando Prats' "Gran Sur" Project at the 54th Venice Biennial

Fernando Prats installed his Project "Gran Sur" (Great South) in the Arsenals of the ancient city, the most visited place during the 54th Biennial di Venezia (Venice Biennial) that will be extended until November 27th, 2011. The montage is composed of three pieces: an intervention around the impact of the volcanic eruption in Chaitén (2008); a series of pieces that allude to the earthquake in the central south of Chile (2010); and an installation with neon letters that rescues the announcement that the Irish explorer Ernest Shackleton would have published, around 1911, while recruiting men for his expedition to Antarctica.



Prats produces images with smoke, through which he manages to sediment natural phenomena with the water that is driven by a geyser or the surface of a giant glacier. His technique has been praised by figures of the stature of the French theorist Paul Ardenne, who recently included Fernando Prats' work in

the current exposition at *the Espace Louis Vuitton* in Paris, admiring him for beginning “an unprecedented way of painting.”

Fernando Prats worked with the Spanish theorist Fernando Castro Flórez as a curator and with the Chilean theorist and poet Antonio Arévalo as a commissary. With this aesthetic proposal inspired by the geography and the telluric conditions of Chile, Fernando Prats wants to highlight the person capable of assuming a heroic position. The “Great South” project invites people to reflect on the role that geography has on the identity of the country.

A vertebral element of his presentation in Venice is the expedition that Prats himself made during March to the Antarctic territory on the border of Rompehielos de la Armada, Almirante Viel. Commemorating the centennial of the mythical announcement that would have been published in *The Times* by the Irish explorer Ernest Shackleton, Prats installed the text in *the Isla Elefante* (Elephant Island): “*Looking for men for a dangerous journey, low pay, extreme cold, long months of total darkness, constant danger, unlikely to return safe, honor and praise if success.*” The text, which anticipates the heroism as well as the eventual shipwreck, was placed at the front of the National Chilean Pavilion in the Venetian Biennial.

In the first window there are steam irons that Prats uses to make registries. In the second, there are the bed sheets that Prats rescued from the southern zone of Chile, affected by the earthquake on February 27th, 2010, which surprised millions of sleeping Chileans (it happened at 03Ñ34Ñ17 a.m., an hour which the exhibition is named after). In the photograph *033417 Dichato* (2010) shows how the artist walks among the remains of the Dichato bath house, which was destroyed by the earthquake and the ensuing tsunami. Prats carries the sooty irons, which he presses against different surfaces, “marking” them.

The Chilean Pavilion in the Venetian Biennial is a determinant element within the politics of internationalizing Chilean visual arts. In the previous edition in 2009, the presentation of the piece by Iván Navarro in the first Chilean pavilion stood out in the Arsenals.



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