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Schwabsky, Barry. "Sandra Vásquez de la Horra" at Sprovieri Progetti Artforum March 2008.

Sandra Vásquez de la Horra

SPROVIERI PROGETTI

Alighiero e Boetti used to say that writing with the left hand is drawing. William Blake depicted Urizen, the Zoa (or emanation of the fallen primal man) representing repressive reason and authority, as an old man writing with both hands. In Sandra Vásquez de la Horra's video *Hemispherios: Eine politische Biografie im Kontext der Chilenischen Diktaturzeit* (*Hemispherios: A Political Biography in the Context of the Chilean Dictatorship*), 2002, the camera looks down from behind the Chilean artist, who, like an allegory of Justice, is blindfolded, and writes page after page with both hands in a large volume, each hand mirroring the other so that the letters on each left-hand page are reversed. As she leans forward to write, her body blocks our view, making it impossible to read her words; but as each spread is filled, she sits back, revealing its content for a moment before she flips the page and goes on. Her life story is inscribed in a litany of phrases, names, sometimes just detached words—not a narrative or even a chronicle, yet eloquent enough for the viewer to discern the artist's sense of incapacity in the face of murder, disappearances, torture, exile, and mourning, but also of solidarity and hope.

I wonder which hand Vásquez de la Horra uses to make her pencil drawings, of which this exhibition presented thirty-nine, dating from 2003 through 2007. They seem to preserve some of the facility of the favored hand even as they emphasize the gauche or sinister quality of its inauspicious sister. I wonder, though, whether Vásquez de la Horra really needs to finish the drawings, as she does, with a coat of wax, which perhaps too easily gives them a fleshy and somewhat aged appearance; her mark making already has enormous physicality. Like *Hemispherios*, the drawings are haunted by Chile's history, but their more immediate concerns are carnal and psychological. And while the video conveys an earnest pathos, the drawings transcend moralizing to explore a world in which sides are harder to discern—in which a human being is in himself a jungle, sex is an acrobatic turn, a skeleton has something to celebrate, and (as the inscription on one drawing has it, with charming linguistic disorder) ALL OF YOUR PERCEPTION IS WRONG (Vásquez de la Horra has lived in Dusseldorf on and off since her arrival as a student at the Kunstakademie in 1995, and German or the modern-day lingua franca, English, are as likely to show up in her drawings' titles and inscriptions as her native Spanish).

It is easy to see Vásquez de la Horra as one of a multitude of younger artists influenced by the patented combination of informality and symbolic charge in the drawings of Louise Bourgeois, but unlike so many others, Vásquez de la Horra really shares Bourgeois's richly conflicted sense of how social reality and the dream world express each other. She links desire and violence in ever-changing ways, adopting a sardonic perspective on human folly. The recurrence of the skull as an image to mock the pretensions of the living recalls the engravings of Mexican folk artist José Guadalupe Posada. And the girl in *Underworld II*, 2004, who encounters a ghostly face of what at first appears to be a pool but could equally be a hole in the ground, has a face seemingly modeled on Edvard Munch's *The Scream*—a reference that most artists could use only as a visual joke. Vásquez de la Horra's ability to quote the image in an effectively understated way shows that her visual imagination is subtler than it might at first appear, but also that her affinity with her Norwegian predecessor is deeper than one would expect. Like all true expressionists, she is profoundly an ironist.

Sandra Vásquez de la Horra, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 2004, pencil on paper, wax, 12% x 9%.



—Barry Schwabsky