

Curator's Statement



Though these three exhibitions (Ernesto Oroza: *Architecture of Necessity*, Matthew Girson: *Neither Plenitude Nor Vacancy*, and Jeanne Dunning: *Me Not Me*) are independent, they contain elements that resonate with each other. If there is a unifying theme, it might be described as 'seeing things otherwise.' In each case, well-known elements of our material environment (books with Girson, our own bodies with Dunning, household goods and buildings with Oroza) are presented as distant, vague, uncertain, unknown, unknowable, modified, reconfigured, recontextualized, or wholly re-thought.

It is fairly well-known that we do not see colors in dim light, but shades of grey even where bright colors exist. Girson exploits this disjuncture in his paintings of his personal library as seen in the dark. The content of the books is at some unapproachable distance; whatever inspiration to be drawn from their innards cannot be explained simply by reading their words, or talking about their effect, but can remain as elusive and mysterious as the night sky, in its eternal depths.

Dunning probes the discomfiting fact that we really don't know our own bodies so well. Most of us have (hopefully) never seen too deeply inside our own anatomies, or seen ourselves as others see us. In short, with the viruses, diseases, and inexplicable conditions that can invade and take us over without warning or explanation, at one level we are inescapably, unrelentingly unfamiliar to ourselves. This paradox appears most extreme in certain neurological disorders which render parts of our bodies literally unfamiliar, unrecognizable as the hand that belongs to us, as an arm that isn't some unwelcome invader, or even as our face that somehow doesn't appear to us as our own. Dunning's statement that "our sense of self is deeply tenuous and fragile" reveals our most commonly-shared tragedy, but one that is largely (and purposefully) overlooked.

Oroza's work is at once a celebration of ingenious ways of reimagining simple things, and a withering commentary on authoritarian political systems. A native of Havana, Cuba, Oroza has documented the various inventions and products of the mostly secret, private economy that fills the many glaring needs of that embargoed and isolated island dictatorship. With few new materials and goods coming into the country, and scant resources to repair existing infrastructure, appliances, household fixtures, vehicles, etc., citizens are forced by necessity to invent not only repairs and replacements, but the means of producing them. (Unlicensed private production is illegal in Cuba, thus Oroza's use of the term "technological disobedience" for such forms of invention and re-invention.) Oroza's cataloguing of these various practical inventions, interventions, recalculations and mini-revolutions celebrates the brilliantly effective imaginations of "ordinary" people in difficult circumstances, while suggesting that there are clear moral consequences built into economic decision-making by those in power. By individually reconfiguring social space, we might forge methods, paths and means of achieving ethical uses of our shared material wealth. Oroza's own methods of making something substantial out of next-to-nothing are well-represented by his paperweights, which are plaster casts of the insides of his own empty pockets.

Girson has generously lent Inova and Oroza the use of his designed typeface "Central Scotoma" for the Oroza-produced 12-page newsprint tabloid (which serves as the exhibition publication, free for the taking), and for our wall titles. The font, which addresses the medical condition 'scotoma,' a partial loss of vision or blind spot in an otherwise normal field of vision, expertly and comically sharpens our sense of character-recognition, in that though letters might appear unfamiliar and strange at first glance, once re-seen they become easily readable. Among other evocative subjects, Girson's work addresses gaps, elisions and lacunae in personal and historical memory; the scotomatic condition serves as an allegory for what we do not recognize when we are looking at something generally familiar, and what we are looking at when we cannot see. Girson's painting *September Sky*, 2009 itself represents an elision: two columns of spotlights illuminate the midnight darkness. (They can also be read simply as abstract stripes.) Derived from a photograph, Girson has cropped out the Nazi party rally (Nuremberg, c. 1937) going on underneath, the source of the spotlights.

— Nicholas Frank