

# Flash Art

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From top: To From From At Across To In From. The Centerless Feeling, 2001. Installation view; Samestation, 2002. Installation view. Courtesy Helga de Alvear, Madrid.



### O U V E R T U R E

## ESTER PARTEGÀS

JUAN ANTONIO ÁLVAREZ REYES

WE ARE WHAT we eat, as nutritionists like to say. The work of Ester Partegàs seems to suggest that we are also what we consume. The two ideas are closely linked, of course. Since late capitalism shifted the emphasis from production to consumption, we dwell in a cardboard society whose structures and frameworks are brittle and flimsy; as in a fairy tale, nothing seems quite real. For Ester Partegàs, this issue lies at the heart of her artistic preoccupations. She treats it in an apparently casual manner and from an almost childlike perspective, but one that is thoroughly immersed in the implications of individual and collective development in this consumerist society.

The analogy between food and consumption, regarded as constitutive of social and personal identity, is clearly operative in two of her serial works: "Shopping Heads" and "Polylumpious Tetraflacidontics." The first is comprised of a series of drawings of people walking with shopping bags emblazoned with various logos over their heads. The idea appears almost as simple as the mode chosen by the author. In the second she opts for the medium of acrylic in order to make the drawings more

realistic, focusing her attention this time on the ingredients on a product's packaging. She has deformed parts of this information to highlight a number of synthetic ingredients whose names do not bode well for their ingestion by humans. What are they feeding us with? What are we putting into our bodies, our minds? Irony — the last tool of resistance this society allows itself — infuses this and other apparently straightforward pieces, such as the altered receipts of purchase that say things like, "I've had a terrible day," or the urban landscapes in which the billboard spaces have been overlaid with personal rather than commercial messages. Besides this set of works, governed by simplicity of form and clarity of ideas, Partegàs has created others that betray a more 'sculptural' character and deal with spatial notions, with 'non-places' equally associated with the world of consumption, such as her airport lounge made of cardboard on a modified scale in which, instead of people, we observe traces of their presence in the form of shopping bags and suitcases. A pair of site-specific works was organized around two vending machines smothered by potted plants: *Yo recuerdo* and

*Samestation*, conceived and located in those uncanny, theatrical spaces designed for the public. The dislocated world we inhabit is a function of consumerism, and everything revolves around this activity. There is little we can do to remedy the situation, for all that we have left, as Gilles Lipovetsky once put it, is the magnification of restricted choices.

(Translated from Spanish by Lorna Scott-Fox)

Juan Antonio Álvarez Reyes is director of the Centro Párraga in Murcia.

**Ester Partegàs** was born in 1972 in La Garriga (Barcelona). She lives and works in New York. Selected solo shows: 2004: Centre d'Art Santa Mónica, Barcelona; Foxy Production, New York; Ciocca Arte Contemporanea, Milan; 2003: Casas-Riegner, Miami Beach; Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Buffalo, NY; 2002: Rice University Art Gallery, Houston, Texas; 2001: Helga de Alvear, Madrid; De Chiara/Stewart, New York. Selected group shows: 2003: *Arte y Naturaleza*, NMAC, Vejer de la Frontera; *The Paper Sculpture Show*, SculptureCenter, New York; 2002: *Outer City/Inner Space*, Whitney Museum at Philip Morris, New York; *Narrando espacios, tiempos, historias...*, Viewfinder, Arnolfini, Bristol; *The Passions of the Good Citizen*, Apexart, New York; *Surplus*, Centro Cultural de España, Lima; 2001: *Brooklyn!*, ICA, Palm Beach; *Paper*, The Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, CT; *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: a Spaghetti Western*, MoCA, Denver.

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