Vik Muniz

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Number 77, 2007

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/20489ac

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Publisher(s)
Les Productions Ciel variable

ISSN
1711-7682 (print)
1923-8932 (digital)

Cite this document
Vik Muniz
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Vik Muniz is a Brazilian artist whose major retrospective exhibition Reflex will be on view at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal from October 4th 2007 to January 6th 2008. Now living and working in New York City, Muniz produces extremely rich and intricate photo works that are based on models made with an astonishing range of materials. These images, inspired by current events, art history or famous figures, are at once familiar and enigmatic. Initially perceived as generally ambiguous, witty visual statements, his works also question the way visual information is constructed and then presented and received by the viewer.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS BÉLISLE: Let’s start with the materials you use. They have been described as unconventional. Soil, chocolate, ashes, thread, sugar, wires, nails — you seem to have tried everything! How do you choose those materials, and what links them to the subject matter that you depict with them?

Vik Muniz: When you stop to think about what the word “material” means, the whole idea of what is conventional or unconventional collapses into a single, simple notion: Material is material, something that invariably has been extracted from the earth, has grown from the earth, or is taken from an animal that fed from the earth. Everything else is what our cognitive, creative, and cultural tools aggregate to material.

So, what is an unconventional material? Eighteenth-century painters used stuff like mummy powder to get deep brownish greys. What about rabbit glue, bee’s wax or banana oil? A former mayor of New York once made a trail of breadcrumbs behind. I chose to test the validity of illusions and expose their after effects, to build a very wobbly bridge between image and object.

Jean-François Bélisle is an independent critic and curator. He recently curated and wrote catalogue essays on Lynne Cohen, Denis Farley, and Jean McEwen, as well as articles on the Venice Biennale and the Whitney Biennial.

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