

# ARTFORUM

## Dario Robleto

D'AMELIO TERRAS

For an “abstract” medium composed of invisible sound waves traveling through air, music generates a considerable number of fetish objects. The idea of performing can itself become a substitute for direct experience: Even the shyest individual may harbor secret fantasies of rock-star success, of driving countless fans to a near frenzy of adulation and identification. But as Houston-based artist Dario Robleto’s recent show, using records, audio tapes, posters, show flyers, and handwritten lyrics demonstrates, it doesn’t take a psychotherapist (or a semiologist) to explain that any projective aspirations on the part of the fan say more about fantasy and possibly fanaticism than about the tangible satisfaction of desires. For *Candles Un-burn, Suns Un-shine, Death Un-dies*, 2010, Robleto digitally removed the bodies of now-deceased performers from their live-concert album covers, and created a composite from the residual constellation of stage lights and tiny pinpricks of lighters held aloft by fans. The piece is an eerie portrait of absence: Once the gravitational pull of a star is removed, the light flares appear like so much brilliant but evanescent intergalactic dandruff. Robleto attempts to capture the ineffability of stardom, the way in which the reflected light of the star inevitably comes to us as a parallax of some distant and mysterious event.

Indeed, even as we try to possess a little piece of the star through the consumer objects the music industry sells us, a central fetish object of twentieth-century music—the LP—has receded into obsolescence and is now an antiquarian artifact. Much of Robleto’s work has used the materiality of this and other music-related ephemera to test the way in which the idea of collecting is always charged with a kind of temporal delay, imbued with an elegaic sense of the outmoded. His diminutive sculpture *How to Resist Nothingness? (I Don’t Wanna Let You Go)*, 2010, incorporates another technological relic from pop music’s past—magnetic audiotape, which he unspools and re-forms into tiny leaves wrapped around willow twigs. Suspended in clusters inside of a mason jar surrounded by mirrors, the handcrafted leaves are precious, vulnerable, and anthropomorphized, though endlessly duplicated in reflection. The audiotape from which they are fashioned contains transfers from 45 rpm singles whose titles feature women’s names—Dion’s “Run-around Sue,” Ritchie Valens’s “Donna,” Roy Orbison’s “Leah,” for example—which makes the leaves a strangely recursive *mise en abyme*: Their spindly veins are formed by yards of tightly wound magnetic tape that we cannot hear, and contain fifty-year-old proclamations of love for



Dario Robleto,  
*Candles Un-burn,  
Suns Un-shine, Death  
Un-dies*, 2010,  
digital composite on  
photographic paper  
mounted on Sintra,  
46 x 65½ x 2”.

unseen women who were just girls when the recordings were made, if the women ever existed at all. It is particularly poignant that the source records for this piece belonged to Robleto’s mother, she who most likely saw herself interpellated by these pop stars’ love songs. Fandom’s obsession with presence is revealed as the ambition to suture time and space in an impossible dream of immediacy, always tempered, however, by the passing of time, by the aging of the star, by the aging of the fan.

Robleto’s meticulous labor parallels a fundamental asymmetry of pop music—the way audiences spend far more time and energy parsing details of the star’s life than the star will ever return to them in kind. A pair of text pieces proclaim the one-name monikers of soloists “Dusty” and “Muddy” (as in Springfield and Waters)—spelled out in cursive script with thousands of minuscule pale pink clamshells. But *ceci n’est pas une pipe*: These adjectival nicknames do not describe what they depict—the nacreous seashells are neither dusty nor muddy (though the singers’ last names both refer to water). The intricate collectivity of the shells hints at the complex affective bonds of the crowd; though the members of the group are joined laterally to one another, they ultimately exist in a hierarchy, fused together beneath the larger-than-life, highly cathected star.

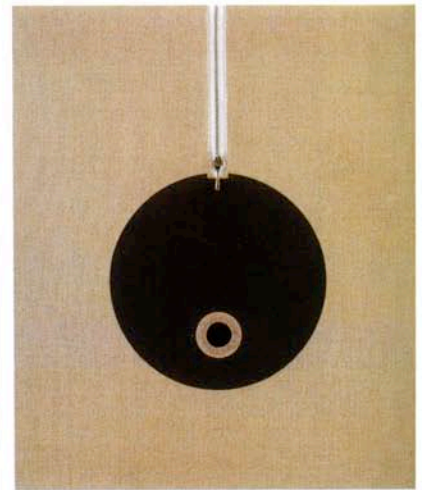
—Eva Díaz

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PREVIEWS



From left: Clay Geerdes, *Cockettes Photo*, 1972, color photograph, 32 x 24". From "West of Center," MCA Denver. Dario Robleto, *Candles Un-burn, Suns Un-shine, Death Un-dies* (detail), 2011, wallpaper composed of stage light images taken from the covers of live performance albums by now deceased musicians, 10' x 21' 6". Donald Moffett, *Lot 081907 (10o)*, 2007, oil, cotton, aluminum, rabbit-skin glue, and polyvinyl acetate on linen, 24 x 20".



### DES MOINES

**"DARIO ROBLETO: SURVIVAL DOES NOT LIE IN THE HEAVENS"**  
DES MOINES ART CENTER • September 23, 2011–January 15, 2012 • Curated by Gilbert Vicario • Known for redeploying obsolete technologies and precious artifacts in his elaborate sculptures and collages, Dario Robleto will reach far beyond the human memory bank in his upcoming show to address the extinction of various flora and fauna in global ice melts and other prehistoric natural disasters. "Survival Does Not Lie in the Heavens" will feature thirteen works (all completed within the past four years) that use Robleto's signature stretched audiotape and relics as varied as dinosaur fossils, volcanic ash, and a million-year-old raindrop as sculptural material. In Robleto's work, sound recordings and pop music often function as emotionally charged time capsules. Here, the combination of recently past and distantly imagined histories will add a sense of the immensity of time to the poignant tug of private longings. Expect to be moved by the allegorical power of Robleto's newest work made with old things.  
—Eva Diaz

### HOUSTON

**"DONALD MOFFETT: THE EXTRAVAGANT VEIN"**  
CONTEMPORARY ARTS MUSEUM HOUSTON • October 1, 2011–January 8, 2012 • Curated by Valerie Cassel Oliver Oh, to feel the fury of Gran Fury again. Well, now perhaps you can—at least for a museal moment. More crucially, in this survey of nearly seventy works by Donald Moffett, you can see how a founding member of that AIDS activist agitprop group began to lean toward subtler concerns after the mid-1990s, using canvases as projection sites for elegant landscape videos and constructing Arte Povera-esque "paintings" using rayon and zippers. The fact that some of those videos depict Central Park's cruising ground the Ramble, and that some of those paintings recall glory holes and bondage masks, only positions Moffett's deft art-historical musings more resolutely within a continuous political critique. The show's catalogue is a must-read, proffering an interview with the artist by Douglas Crimp and essays by Bill Arning, Russell Ferguson, and the curator. *Travels to the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, Saratoga Springs, NY, Feb. 18–June 3, 2012; Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, June 23–Sept. 9, 2012.*  
—David Velasco

### DENVER

**"WEST OF CENTER: ART AND THE COUNTERCULTURE EXPERIMENT IN AMERICA, 1965–1977"**  
MCA DENVER • November 10, 2011–February 19, 2012 • Curated by Adam Lerner and Elissa Auther The Happenings and Coalitions of the New York avant-garde are well known; less so their counterparts from the western US. In a concerted effort to redress this imbalance, "West of Center" assembles more than 130 artworks and artifacts from this highly experimental moment, investigating the extension of aesthetic thought outside of its comfort zone via hybridized modes of social, political, and ecological intervention by collective groups working left of the Continental Divide. Moving between the workshops of Anna and Lawrence Halprin, the media events of Ant Farm, and the agitprop posters of Black Panther Emory Douglas, with stops along the way for Drop City eco-aesthetics and psychedelic light shows, this exhibition (and its catalogue with two dozen contributors) will fill in some blanks in this era's cultural history while also serving as a timely reminder of what artists can do in the absence of a viable market for art. *Travels to the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, AZ, Sept. 29, 2012–Jan. 6, 2013.*  
—Jan Tumlir

### SAN FRANCISCO

**FRANCESCA WOODMAN**  
SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART • November 5, 2011–February 20, 2012 • Curated by Corey Keller • Thirty years after Francesca Woodman's suicide at the age of twenty-two, her oeuvre is being comprehensively presented in its first American exhibition in twenty years. Woodman's photographs—with their reframing of the relationship between the body and space, and their hybridization of photography and performance—have helped to redefine parameters of feminist art history as well as lead the medium of photography into an expanded field. This retrospective will free Woodman's work from its habitual imprisonment in agenda-driven discourse by exposing it to a broader viewership, posing new interpretive possibilities. Comprising short video pieces, two artist's books, and more than 170 photographs, many drawn from the Woodman family collection and some seen for the first time, the exhibition will be complemented by a catalogue with essays by curator Corey Keller, Julia Bryan-Wilson, and Jennifer Blessing. *Travels to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Mar. 15–June 16, 2012.*  
—Jaleb Mansoor