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art

## IT'S HOW, NOT WHAT

The content may be shocking. But this artist's more concerned about the form. Andrew Barsch finds out why the how overshadows the what in Nono Bandera's lurid exhibition, *This & That*



Imagine framed displays of nudity, drugs and blasphemous religious imagery on the walls of a conservative colonial mansion. Add a video of some wagging genitalia and some consciously post-modern Detroit garage rock, and you could quite easily chalk up creator Nono Bandera as another avant-garde multimedia artist in Madrid's ever-expanding gallery district.

What's so innovative about sex and drugs? We've accepted sex, in all its forms, in modern art for a good century now, so Nono's not forging new artistic paths there. But that's what the post-modern new century movement seems to be about. It's Nono's sense of style and ingenuity, more than any great appreciation for the content of his work that makes *This & That* one of Madrid's most imaginative gallery showings of 2003.

Two rooms on the upper level and a video viewing downstairs turn the Galería Espacio Mínimo into the work of art itself: Great rolls of white paper are nailed onto the walls and perspectives of what look like rooms from an early 20th-century house have been drawn in on the paper. It's all in perfect false perspective — a life-size black and white interior-design sketch from 1928. If you squint your eyes to blur your vision, you can almost believe you're at granny's house. On the walls of these drawn-in rooms are Bandera's paintings and photos. Their frames are shaped wider at one end to match the perspective of the sketched rooms. This is where the post-modern contrast comes in. The pieces on the walls of these classic colonial rooms are anything but pre-WWII. There are photos of a girl opening her button-fly jeans to show her pubic hair, a passed-out hipster in bed with pills and booze bottles strewn around the room, and the virgin Mary wearing an S & M gimp mask embracing a melting Christ. Let's not forget the painting of the vintage pin-up girls in nymph costumes spreading their glory to urinate on an egg floating in the air. And all on the walls at granny's house.

So what does all this shocking imagery mean? Does the contrast of eras represent a generational conflict of old accepting new? Is Bandera trying to question Christianity's role in sexual oppression? Or is he combining kinky sex and religion just for the fun of shaking up the conservative right? It's all too playful for any of that, and the shocking playfulness is what makes design-over-content the key factor in some otherwise pretty heavy imagery. Remember, in a post-modern art world, it's not the *what*, it's the *how*, and that's the only thing Nono Bandera wanted to talk about when he took the time to answer a few questions.

*In Madrid: Previously your paintings were crafted from "objets trouvés" (found objects) you came across in markets or old furniture shops. What made you go from doing that work to what we find in "This & That"?*

**Nono Bandera:** My work from previous exhibitions came from a pre-written word. It was the presence of one work inside another. I painted over a bought picture and then displayed the repainted version with my signature alongside the original. This approach confined me within the dimensions of the *objet trouvé* and it confined my interventions, which had to remain inside the means and the theme of the found object. In *This & That*, the painting grows. I felt as if my body had been asking for it. Here I transferred the limits of the frame and allowed it to overflow onto the walls of the gallery.



*Can you tell me about the backdrops — the rooms painted on the walls?*

The rooms of a parlour and a dining room, which form the background were drawn with black marker on continuous rolls of white paper. The pictures hang in the spaces of these simulated rooms and their frames' perspective adapts to the spaces made for them on the walls of the rooms in each drawing.



*And the paintings that are hanging in these simulated rooms?*

For this project, I crafted the "deformed" frames, custom-made for each space, and I asked my painter friends for images that I subsequently repainted.

*So it's similar to your previous work using "found objects"?*

Yes, but with *This & That* I've gone from the chance finding of a found object to the choice of a theme. These are images that I asked for, or "workshop images" to define it another way.

Not a single word about the heavy imagery. That settles it, Nono. It's craft and form over content and theme. I won't bother asking it all, not the racy images, that makes *This & That* really stand out.

*Nono Bandera's "This & That" is at Galería Espacio Mínimo, c/Doctor Forquet, 17, tel: 91 467 61 56 (Metro: Atocha). Until December 13. www.espaciominimo.com.*

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