

...m

...might be good



[about](#)

[archives](#)

[contact](#)

[credits](#)

[subscribe](#)

[links](#)

[testsite](#)

[fluent-collab](#)

Issue #196

Hearty Welcomes and Humble Pleas

September 14, 2012



Ester Partegàs

Images of artist's studio

2012

Images courtesy of the artist, Foxy Production, NY and Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica, CA

[View Gallery](#)

Ester Partegàs
Chinati Foundation, Marfa
In residence June-September 2012
by Tanja Baudoin

On the concrete floor of the Locker Plant building in downtown Marfa, a number of low formations are spread out. In the shape of rocks, they are made from crumpled paper and appear surprisingly sturdy. Printed in black and white, the blow-ups of photographed pebbles loom somewhat ominously in the front room. Slices of bread cast out of plaster are scattered and stacked near them in pink, green, blue and grey. The pastel shades lend a quality of softness to the fossilized bread slices and make them look like they are transposed from an Alice in Wonderland tea party. But this is not a cute work. What is going on here is a play with soft and hard textures, with organic and processed matter, in an unassuming and bold installation. As a product normally circumscribed by its expiration date, the bread has been granted a durable lifespan by the plaster at the cost of its organic essence. Next to it, the material properties of the stone-speckled paper formations reduce the rocks they depict to an expendable image that can be easily manipulated into new shapes. Ester Partegàs' sculptures provoke a perspective on some of the objects and products we encounter daily, revealing them as simultaneously volatile and monumental thanks to her treatment of materials.

This is a room in the studio space of Partegàs in Marfa. For a period of two and a half months, Partegàs worked here as part of the Chinati Foundation's Artist-in-Residence program. Her work can be viewed the coming weeks on appointment and all through the Chinati Weekend of 5-7 October.

In one of the rooms, work-in-progress is presented alongside her research. There are two arrangements of found objects placed on a table that include tamarind pods, pine cones and paper scraps. The work is an act of salvaging waste materials in the tradition of Arte Povera and assemblage. This type of work is also suggestive of a fetishistic approach to organizing ordinary items, a practice that an artist like Mark Dion has mastered. The main attraction of such work typically lies in the aestheticization of the humble object that reveals its potential as extraordinary and beautiful. In this respect, the work is certainly successful, yet it lacks a distinctiveness that would make it stand apart from other practices of this kind.

Partegàs' paintings are more provocative and mystifying. They lean against the wall and jump out at you with their brightly colored beams, appearing like background illustrations for candy wrappers. They fit well with printed images of food products based on bizarre concepts such as "grapples —apples with the natural and artificial flavor of grapes." It is precisely the awkward combination of nature and artifice that seems to have captured Partegàs' fascination for such foods. Along with a collection of product labels stuck to a pedestal in the center of the room, these works explore the degree of artificiality that consumer products employ to foster a kind of fantasy-experience, apparently necessary to appeal to us as consumers. Instead of critically dismissing the mechanisms of consumerism, Partegàs exercises an inquisitive attitude that produces work that is considerably more interesting thanks to its flirtations with such mechanisms.

Another work involving a food product again takes the form of an arrangement of items, but this time of a single product, potato chips. They bring to mind Partegàs' earlier work, *Organized Fries* (2007-2010). As in these previous photographs, the placement of each chip next to the other scrutinizes their individual color, form and curvature, highlighting the differences contained in the mass-produced snack.

The final room consolidates the foregrounding of the disposable object in Partegàs' work. A collection of paper coffee cups, flower pots and buckets have been petrified in plaster, forever disengaged from their function as containers. They sit in constellations on the floor with one or two paper cigarette butts around them at three times their usual size. A couple of delicate small wooden growths are placed on top of the cups. They are spray-painted as if covered in radioactive moss, the fluorescent colors belying their natural origins. In the context of the plaster cups and pots, these strangely incongruous natural shapes introduce an esoteric element to the scene. This installation, more than the others, appears as what we typically consider 'finished' or 'installed work,' and yet is hardest to probe, making it most attractive for open readings and further projections.

Tanja Baudoin is a researcher-in-residence at Fieldwork: Marfa, and works at If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

