

John Espinosa

(b. 1966) Lives and works in Los Angeles, CA

John Espinosa received an MFA in Sculpture from Yale University's School of Art in 2001, and a BFA from The New World School of the Arts in Miami in 1998.

His work has been featured in exhibitions at venues including The Renaissance Society, Chicago; The New Museum of Contemporary Art, NY; Metro Pictures, NY; Marianne Boesky, NY; Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris; and Vilma Gold, London. He has had one-person exhibitions at Sandroni Rey Gallery, LA, Charest-Weinberg, Miami; Fredric Snitzer, Miami; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami. Recent exhibitions include *Lux et Veritas* at the NSU Art Museum, Ft Lauderdale; and *Light Play: Collection in Focus* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami.

John Espinosa's work is in numerous public and private collections including the Whitney Museum of Contemporary Art, NY; The Miami-Dade Public Library, Miami; The Perez Art Museum, Miami; The Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami; and The New Museum of Contemporary Art, NY.

---- Selected Texts:

Molecular Science

by Gean Moreno

Published on the occasion of The Glass Delusion, an exhibition of work by John Espinosa at Charest-Weinberg Gallery, Miami

John Espinosa's work has always been about the way that information can "disjoint" the object that transmits it. There is always an excess in his sculptures, but not in the sense that we can't pin down their meaning and have to capitulate to a logic of deferral or to symbolic indeterminacy. It's, rather, that the information used precedes the object and continues moving after it. Like the comic book cells of Pop art, it's material already circulating in the world when Espinosa sets his sights on it and it won't be depleted by "entering" his objects. But unlike Pop art, however, the translating machine here never manages to turn appropriated material into self-contained aesthetic object. In fact, it's the turbulence of translation--the transference of data and the way it perturbs the object--more than any completed conversion, that is important to the work. Espinosa's claim that Dennis Oppenheim's *Two Stage Transfer Drawing (Advancing to a Future State)*, 1971, was an important early encounter should generate little surprise. One imagines the conspiracy films of the 1970s no less significant an influence.



Dennis Oppenheim - Two Stage Transfer Drawing (Advancing to a Future State)

In Espinosa's work, the sculpture that one bumps into is merely a vector in the much longer trajectory of the information presented. Granted, it's an eccentric vector, a vector that as an art object, enmeshed in a history of self-aware and complexly-structured cultural artifacts, calls attention to itself, harbors various secondary motives, underscores and intensifies the very process it is engaged in, and often by its very

nature alters the data it routes. But an agent used to deliver information from one context to another nonetheless, the Espinosa “vector” takes on a kind of supplementary character in relation to the massive networks--those invisible materialities that increasingly structure our everyday worlds--in which the data it mines is enmeshed.

This may be a way to think about Espinosa’s sculptural practice: It’s about rerouting information and waiting to see how this rerouting “re-molecularizes” the object. Espinosa plugs into the massive networks in which data is moving and generates a detour in their flows by grafting an artificial vector (a sculpture) to them. But it’s weirder than this, because the vector itself, in a significant even if not in a complete way, is made from the data it channels. The data becomes part of the “molecular” structure of the object and the actual molecules that make up the physical artifact have to accommodate this data as an essential and irreducible part of it--and not simply as a disconnected semiotic layer loosely pegged to matter. Consequently, the object is “molecularly” bound to the data it drew on.

When we learn, for instance, that the hollow core of *An Infinite Collapse* (2005) is filled with fifty gallons of hermetically sealed saltwater harvested from the Bermuda Triangle we see a doubling, like an image splitting and “de-laminating” from itself, suddenly crystallized: the sculpture is there as a physical body, but the sculpture is also in the wild currents of information regarding the Bermuda Triangle that come rushing in. Neither side has priority over the other. And to obviate the second, immaterial (but very real) dimension of the work is to shortchange its complexity and to refuse to see the exercise in adjusting sculptural production to a world traversed by endless networks, overflowing with information, and shaped by invisible forces.

On the one hand, the object plugs and dissolves into the lore that has accrued around the Bermuda Triangle -- the anomalous phenomena registered in aircraft gages spinning wildly, the disappearance of Flight 19, the leftover technology of Atlantis, etc.. It taps that entire network of perhaps spurious, but not because of this any less real, information and becomes an interface with it--a real endpoint of the network. It is now part of its contents. More than referencing or alluding to an object of myth, *An Infinite Collapse* fuses with the Bigness of the Bermuda Triangle.¹ Seamed to a massive virtual archive, forever submerged in its flows, what is this sculpture? Where does it end? Where do we locate it? Does it become, like the Bermuda Triangle, something that splits itself between a very specific location in physical space and a virtual collection of data? In a very real sense, *An Infinite Collapse* is somehow *not there*.

On the other hand, of course *An Infinite Collapse* is undeniably *there*. Its dimensions are precise; its weight can easily be determined; a soft kick when the gallery attendants aren't looking will confirm its materiality. It engages in that "calibrated relationship" between object, viewer and architecture that has busied American sculpture since it internalized the lessons of Barnett Newman. Even if coated with an image of deep space that takes us elsewhere, *An Infinite Collapse's* flirtation with a recurrent minimalist gestalt while bending it just so, as if it's been distorted by an alien force or by the gravitational pull of a black hole, claims it as yield from the gene pool of that "something else" beyond sculpture that Donald Judd staked out in the mid-60s. One thinks, in particular, of how this object relates to Charles Ray's adherence to and challenge of minimalist forms in works like *Ink Box* (1986) and *Ink Line* (1987). (But one also thinks of the intertwining of data and form that is central to Ray's *Unpainted Sculpture* [1997] and more recent projects.) Like Ray's objects in general, *An Infinite Collapse* addresses the problem of scale. In taking on particular proportions, in addressing and ironically challenging formal protocols, in sitting in space in such a way as to participate in the triangular relationship of viewer-object-architecture, *An Infinite Collapse* manifests not only its undeniable *thereness* but its affiliation to a lineage of objects deeply concerned with their literal presence and behavior in physical space.

So, then, *An Infinite Collapse* splits in two--ontologically. A fault line opens up in it. It's surely in front of us. But then, it's also not *merely* that squat object that gravity anchors to the gallery floor, because it is swirling around us, transacting in our memory banks, digging into our (pop) cultural archives, taking up cheap real estate in cyberspace, inserting itself into other heads that may care less for sculpture than for the paranormal. It's the data channeled and the channel the data flows through. It's dispersed and it's contained, refusing synthetical tidiness. To put a down a short and precise formulation, here where precision comes undone: *An Infinite Collapse* is *there* completely and it's *not there* at all. This is the theorem that diagrams it's double structure. The infinite collapse is that of the bridge that we incessantly (reflexively) try to place over the gap at the center of the object.

This impossible bridge that would re-link things, that would return us to the object that is self-contained and autonomous, is what Espinosa refuses to deliver or what he is perhaps proposing as out of tune with a world stitched together by networks and structured by disembodied forces. What he offers, instead, is the split-object. And more recently, we've gotten the absent-object or the object that is a little like Fritz Lang's Dr. Mabuse in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933) -- a network that has swallowed its center; a series of "external" manifestations that retroactively postulate a cause or

center they can't quite confirm. In the film, Dr. Mabuse is a mastermind criminal who, after years of silence in an asylum, begins to write obsessively and produces a massive manual (the testament) intended to bring about the Reign of Crime. Sitting up in his bed the few times he is shown in the film, Mabuse is an empty shell and a writing machine--a senselessly productive body bereft of interiority and intentionality. And although the mad doctor is confined and dies halfway through the movie, the perfect crimes he has laid the program for are executed to the letter by a disconnected network of criminals led by a voice that emanates from behind a curtain in a secret room. Everything points back to Mabuse, but Mabuse is nowhere to be located.

In the end we find out that the "voice" who is unleashing chaos on the city belongs to Dr. Baum, Mabuse's psychiatrist. But of course, Baum is no more than a decoy. He is the voice behind the curtain that hides The Voice Behind the Curtain--the Absent Cause that generates concrete effects by putting out the urgent and implacable demand--as a manageable substitute to irresolvable social antagonisms--to be filled in. The Voice Behind the Curtain is the voice that is not there; the voice whose very absence we have to fill, whose missing message we are compelled to code. It's the voice that Mabuse's empty shell of a body and machine-like production serve as placeholders for.

Espinosa's most Mabusean project thus far is *Remote Viewing* (2010). He claims to have acquired a remote parcel of land somewhere in central Florida. It's exact location is secret. He constructed a sculpture on this property and left it there for people to bump into accidentally. There are no images of this artifact, except for a video that has been deposited somewhere on the Internet. It's exact location, like that of the sculpture, isn't being disclosed. There is the title, but it remains unclear whether this names the orphaned object or the process that the object's absence triggers--the need for those who hear about this "absent" sculpture to produce their own mental picture of it. It may be that the title names more than either of these.

We have to believe Espinosa regarding the existence of this abandoned artifact, I suppose, even in the absence of evidence, lest we risk this being only a hoax. (Though, in the end, it may not matter if it is a hoax, as the dam has already been opened and the effects generated demand we fill in the "absent cause" anyway.) So there is an object somewhere out there, its location is unknown, its morphology anyone's guess, its fate not only undetermined but unverifiable. And yet, even with this black hole at the center of the story, skepticism has no purchase here. Or rather, to doubt if any of this is true is to miss what is at stake: the entire economy of rumor has been activated. Calling up such a massive force, a tornado that moves only data while producing real physical

effects, in order to consider its productive possibilities, to see where it takes us, renders any potential lack of veracity in Espinosa's claim of little consequence. All we need to do is hear the story and follow its movements, track the spirals spinning out of an empty eye.

"While still under the shadow of negativity, rumor nonetheless acts as an *enabler*..."¹ Although Avital Ronell is busy deciphering Heidegger in that line, what is of interest here is the question of enabling, of setting the conditions, if not the obligations, for production. Rumor is generative; it fires things up. In our case, it enables or "teleguides" the fantasy production of a potentially infinite array of images of a sculpture, each determined by the idiosyncratic mental modulations or limitations of the conjurer. And we can go further: this rumor *compels*, like a mad hypnotist, the emergence of this endless parade of morphological variants, of this insubstantial and dispersed field of delirious incongruity. It induces a kind of cognitive mobilization. Aren't you, as you read this, already working on a mental picture of this object, already adding to the field of possible versions, even if, now that I've mentioned it, you fight against the impulse, refuse to be manipulated?

So, *where* do we locate the sculpture in this case? Is it the object abandoned in the woods? Is it the rumor that activates things? Is it in your head? Is it the endless flow of private images that form a kind of unbound archive? If we think that the latter is the case, then *Remote Viewing* will always be miscellaneous and unfinished. We'd be dealing with an "object" that has swelled beyond itself precisely by articulating itself as a flexible void, an open and unavoidable invitation, within the cognitive space of those whom the rumor catches up with. The sculpture can accommodate endless, heterogeneous iterations of "itself."

But, of course, Espinosa's understanding of the object as always double, always there and not there, always "de-laminated" from itself, paradoxically refuses to allow us to decouple things this easily and say that only these fantasy images constitute *Remote Viewing*. Whatever it is that triggered the production of these images, the "absent cause," insofar as Espinosa has folded it into the work by elaborating a story about it, is just as much a part of the sculpture. It's a structuring hole at the center of it. And if this is so, then the medium--rumor--that extends the process in time and space has to be incorporated as a fundamental aspect of the work as well. *Remote Viewing* may just be the entire network that is constructed between the missing causal agent or trigger (the black hole we feel compelled to fill), the medium of transmission (rumor), and the dispersed array of images that result. And one has to take things further, since rumors have a way of refusing to stay once we put them down: *the work is also in all the future*

images that will emerge. It's already in the non-existent locations that it will actualize by filling. The whole thing is like a flexible and expanding and multidimensional Mabusean web. The work is distributed and disconnected to the point where we can't see the end of it--its absent source is mirrored by its potential lack of finitude. We are not before a sculpture but *in* it somehow, in the field of all the incongruent versions that have been/will be imagined, even if we can't really survey this field. This is sculpture as exploded drawing, but with this difference: it's not exploded spatially, it's exploded in time. It's sculpture re-molecularized into a quasi-hyperobject,¹ a "machine" of effects that, like Dr. Mabuse, is nowhere and everywhere.

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Suspension of Disbelief

by Carlos Suarez de Jesus

Miami Herald review for the exhibition "Standing Still While We Move Across Land" MOCA, North Miami

Confronting John Espinosa's startling exhibit at MOCA, mythographer Joseph Campbell's saying, "the psychotic drowns in the same waters a mystic swims in" seemed to hum in the air like the dissonant pitch of a warped tuning fork. For his first solo museum show, Espinosa orchestrates a mysterious and quirky vision of animals, birds, and people caught in transformative moments of "revelation and delusion" that reference his upbringing as a Jehovah's Witness raised in the shadow of Disney World. He wryly channels an otherworldly sensibility into his pieces, teetering across those murky liminal spaces between the sacred and the profane with phenomenal results.

Standing Still While We Move Across Land, 2004, a large sculptural diorama that gives the one-man show its name, depicts a flock of birds frozen in mid-flight at contrasting heights, an arrangement that suggests the points of a star. The five birds project what appear to be light beams from their eyes, perhaps alluding to the forces of spirit struggling against those of darkness. The thin yellow rods jutting from their eyes converge in a geometric cat's cradle between the orbiting birds, seemingly hinting at the universe in expansion. The artist incorporates ultraviolet light and phosphorescent pigments in the structure, which appears to hover within three transecting grids, to diagram the flow of body heat exchanged between the avian entities.

In a small collage on paper titled *People With Eyes, 2004*, a concentric swirl of faces leer at the spectator with vacant yellow eyes and toothy grins. Arranged in a mandala-like pattern, the work is strikingly peopled by what made me think of a busload of tent revivalists in rapture or fugitive B-movie zombies from a George Romero nightmare. Other collages in the show, one featuring a ring of clasped hands at a Victorian seance, bespeak Espinosa's interest in metaphysical esoterica.

In another sculpture, *A Billion Years, 2004*, a chocolate-colored hare seems to melt atop a stack of rectangular and square blocks painted over to suggest deep galactic space. Black rods emerge from the animal's eyes and extend outward in linear folds brushed red at their tip. In ancient myth, the hare was considered to define the concept of being and elemental existence. It was also, appropriately, a symbol of fecundity, with this unusual body of work, Espinosa tips his hand as an inventive and peculiar talent.

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Q&A with Gean Moreno and John Espinosa on “*Remote Viewing (2007)*”

GM: Let's start with a description of the project.

JE: Remote Viewing is a sculptural object made of undisclosed materials and dimensions that I primarily made in my studio in Los Angeles, and then completed and installed it at an undisclosed remote location in the Florida wilderness.

GM: Disclosure, then, seems its theme.

JE: Disclosure was not necessarily the impetus, but it is a layer present in the work. But primarily, the lack of available descriptive information was a means to maximize the potential visualizations of the object.

GM: But I think that disclosure is more than a layer; it's fundamental, constitutive. It is by carefully staging the operations of disclosure, by controlling the lack of information, that you "maximize potential visualizations of the object." Not disclosing materials, forms and location are careful exercises in controlling disclosure, in testing what the deliberate withdrawal of data can produce.

JE: It's important for me that the project be as porous as possible, and anointing disclosure as the work's central theme concretizes it. You are absolutely correct that the managed dispersal of data was an essential methodology and is what holds the project together. But it is not the whole, only a dominant characteristic that functions like a hard reflective outer shell that is difficult to penetrate. Which is why I wanted to de-emphasize it (even if for just a moment) to allow for the less spectacular, but no less important, attributes to seep into the conversation.

GM: Which attributes?

JE: The image of the object delaminating off of its matter - leaving a void - so as to create a visually anarchic condition in which an object could exist with infinite potential visualizations

But let's go with your instinct and explore disclosure. The words you chose frame the project in the context of manipulation and power dynamics. To me fundamental to creating is the configuring of data; whether it be tangible data (matter) or intangible information. It can be by accrual or negation or as in this project, both.

GM: I find the project to be very much about "manipulation" and "power dynamics," however I think you are using the terms in a negative sense. I'm not. I considered it a project that employs certain historically specific conditions (immaterial production, for instance) and attempts to harness certain flows (rumor, for instance). It exploits the

current impetus for bottom-up, accumulative narrative building not only through a continuous introduction and configuration of data, but through a welcoming of emergent qualities that may appear along the way. In other words, what you manipulate is a series of conditions and in the process generate a space of narrative production, which remains active precisely because it is structured to accept and incorporate new data (i.e, new, imaginary versions of the sculpture). I think that the project is as much about establishing the ground that supports an "anarchic condition in which an object could exist with infinite potential visualizations" as it is about the visualizations themselves. And this ground, in this project, is produced by manipulating disclosure.

JE: Also, on the flipside of that condition created by the shaping of disclosure is the apparition of the actual physical object to whomever by remote chance encounters it. For that person the experience of the project is inverted, the data vacuum is reciprocated.

GM: But this figure is a double figure. Let's say the "real" person that finds the sculpture. And the person that we imagine finding the sculpture. This second one is a parallel or extension to the "object [that] could exist with infinite potential visualizations."

JE: Yes, I love that. And for the finder the maker is an "imagined figure" but also exists as a "real figure."

The object set in the Florida wilderness is a "real" object that for the non-finder is a placebo object that instigates potential realities, parallel to the actual "real" object. I think that is my favorite way to think about the project. For me, Remote Viewing's elastic properties allow for a possibility that the project's physics could be set in a quantum mechanics (multiverse) context. I know that is asking for a lot, but that is something that I love to imagine.

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Fantastic Adventures by Gean Moreno

Art Papers Exhibition Review, Fantastic Adventures, Fredric Snitzer Gallery, Miami (1999)

More appropriate than an invitation to “Fantastic Adventures,” John Espinosa’s first one person show (Fredric Snitzer Gallery, May 14 – June 19) would have been a one night courtesy pass, because one shouldn’t go see this show as much as go “live” it. One has to check into it’s reality the way one checks into Disney’s – swallowing the improbable narratives that serve as foundation, buying into it’s pseudo-utopia as if it were the real thing, enthralled by the manner in which it slips into the real seamlessly. In fact, the theme park metaphor is acutely insinuated everywhere through scale.

Forever and Ever (all works 1999) is a six by eight-foot lightbox that depicts a massive explosion. Bereft of depth, it is like an oversized poster that glows the way we’ve always wanted them to. We find ourselves engulfed in it’s cool inferno, unscathed.

Before *A Crowd in a Field of Grass*, a five by five foot surface on which a crowd of ceramic figurines (the sort used in architectural maquettes) have been gathered, and *The Garden*, a miniature orange grove, we are spectators overlooking what could be the climax scene of those odd UFO-encounter films. As one moves through the show, one’s role continually shifts between spectator and “participant,” between being tiny (belittled?) before the immense images and larger-than-life as we look down on the sculptures. The perspectives take advantage of that strange cognitive dimension theme parks and movies have given us.

Espinosa’s enthusiasm for contemporary American fantasy is candidly earnest. This is not a critique of spectacular culture. On the contrary, it is an unconditional embrace of it; it is what have left after we realize we have no place to stand outside the culture industry, after all the roads have been barricaded. Nowhere do we catch a whiff of the melancholy and longing that drives an antagonistic approach; nowhere do we find signs of that secret yearning to subvert everything. In fact, every work in this show proposes that everything is fantastically fine, better than perfect. The *Blue Bambi Series* is an effort to collapse even art into this exciting wonderland. A tiny plastic fawn has been placed next to well-known art pieces - on Judd's plexiglass-topped boxes, in Paul McCarthy's installations, on Beverly Semmes' translucent fabrics, next to the Nike's the Chapman Brothers fit their cunt-faced girls with - and documented like the most stringent of conceptual art with the vagaries of a children's story.

Empire, like it's Warhol namesake, is the interminable presence of a single image – in this case, the Cinderella Castle at Disney. Looking to out-pop Pop, the banality is all there but improbably bigger, made somehow impure by the delight we come to feel from the benign building depicted, from the memories it conjures up.

For the heavy burden of deadly-serious conceptual art that Espinosa gets beyond, he deprives us of something else – the idiosyncrasies of a subjectivity that we always come looking for in a work of art. He merely plugs in into pop-culture, Warhol-like, and flows with its fluctuations. What we miss, despite decades of trumpeting the death of the author, is an authorial presence that is not an absence, the mark of someone who, unlike the rest of us, is more than just carried by the tide of images and stories have, unresisted, become our shared narrative. Espinosa’s “absence” leaves the images he appropriates – Bambi, Spiderman, Magic Kingdom architecture, Hollywood explosions – feeling as anonymous, as soulless, as they they are outside the gallery. We can say of the theme park Espinosa has turned his show into what Gertrude Stein said of Oakland: “there is no there there.” It is impalpable spectacle. He has left us nowhere and feeling as selfless, as effaced collectively, as he poses. The work registers the opposite of crisis – a stone-hard platitude, the suspect peace of meadows by other means. It gives us the real as a never-never land that is, at once, ours and not ours, just there and forever beyond us. As we do everyday watching television, except in a more poignant way, before Espinosa’s work we continually oscillate roles: we are simultaneously conscious agents with critical faculties and inert image consumers. “Fantastic Adventures” poses coyly as an allegory of our Disneyfied contemporary world – and we cannot help but feel the only imperfections burdening its precise landscape.

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