

LEAN

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Las puertas, 2004 (detail)
[The Doors]
2 wooden doors and fluorescent light
Overall dimensions variable, doors
208 x 105 cm each

IT IS THE SPECTATOR, AND NOT LIFE, THAT ART REALLY MIRRORS.

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY. OSCAR WILDE

KATRIN STEFFEN: You call yourself an “architect of the uncertain” and are considered a master of illusions. In your installations you transform everyday situations and familiar spaces into settings that are at once disconcerting and disorienting. Defying the viewer’s perception, you blur the limits between the apparent and the real, between reality and illusion. The creation of illusion is a constant in your work. Where does this particular impact come from?

LEANDRO ERLICH: I think that understanding the world and its affairs have formed a part of our existence from distant times. Ever since we lived in caves, we have asked questions, reflected, and discovered multiple truths. Science and philosophy have given reality a rational and logic sense. However, over and above conveyable knowledge, there is obviously an individual need to experience an understanding of the order and meaning of things. In other words, regardless of historical experience, we feel the urge to substantiate events and draw personal conclusions. My work provides an experience in which the impact is related to a discovery.

KS: Broadly speaking, you give viewers a glimpse of what goes on backstage, revealing the “tricks”, the workings of the illusionist machine. What is the purpose of this transparency?

LE: Demonstrating the trick is a way of playing down the importance of the phenomenological and welcoming a conceptual interpretation of the work.

KS: In *Cambiadores (Changing Rooms)* (2008) you build a whole series of rooms that reveal themselves to be a unique labyrinth of mirrors. Visitors are confronted with endless perspectives and reflections of themselves, generating questions on consumerism, self-knowledge, identity, and existence, to name but a few of the concepts you use to weave a network of meanings. What experiences do you hope to trigger?

LE: My oeuvre has a polysemic sense I find interesting. All the concepts you mention form a part of my work and my quest.

KS: The installation entitled *Las puertas* (The Doors, 2004) plays with the expectations of the audience. Viewers find themselves before closed doors; a light shines through the cracks to suggest that a mystery lies in wait on the other side—a disturbing scenario with a huge capacity for suggestion that evokes memories of nightmares and horror movies. In the end, the doors in the installation lead nowhere. How important is the medium of film/cinema in your work? What role does the spectator play?



Cambiadores (Changing Rooms), 2008 (detail)
Walls, golden frames, mirrors, stools, lights,
and curtains
24 cabins, 210 x 120 x 120 cm each
Overall dimensions 220 x 640 x 790 cm

LE: There is a collective memory in everyday life that is found in ordinary experiences. Cinema has influenced our imagination in multiple ways and has also managed to generate a collective memory. The existence of film gives way to the possibility of relating events and images of the world to those in a movie. There are even times when we may feel that we are living a fiction and identify that fiction as film. Oscar Wilde's idea of life imitating art was never more apropos. In my work the dynamic action of the audience grants the viewer an acting role, but what is unique is that it does so without the audience giving up its role as spectator.

Interview conducted by e-mail, July 2014.

Translated by Josephine Watson

Born in 1973 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Lives and works in Montevideo, Uruguay, and Buenos Aires.