

Carlos Ginzburg: 'The Forgotten Vintage'

By HOLLAND COTTER SEPT. 11, 2014



"Le Dentier Occidental à Fes" (Maroc, 1980), from Carlos Ginzburg's Voyages series, at Henrique Faria Fine Art. Credit 2014 Carlos Ginzburg Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York and Henrique Faria, New York

The early days of Conceptual Art seem long ago and far away. But you get a sense of the movement's mix of politics, perversity and humor in this survey of early work by Carlos Ginzburg, an artist and theoretician — were the two ever really separable in Conceptualism? — who was born in Argentina in 1946 and has lived in Paris since 1972.

Almost everything involves some kind of site-specific performance or action documented in photographs and texts. For one of the earliest pieces, done for the Museum of Modern Art in Buenos Aires in 1971, Mr. Ginzburg fenced in a vacant lot near the museum with tall wooden hoardings and put up signs advertising an "unexpected aesthetic experience" behind the walls.

To have the experience, however, visitors were required to enter the museum, which was on the ninth floor of a high-rise, locate a particular window and look out, only to find the single word "Tierra" — "Earth" — written large on the ground in the lot below. Amused, bemused or annoyed, people were at least given a new definition of "art" to wrestle with, and art that took them back where they came from, the street.

That piece now exists as a series of photographs, as do several others based on Mr. Ginzburg's trips to different parts of Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas between 1972 and 1982. Calling himself simply Traveling Artist in various Asian cities (the capitals of Thailand, Bangladesh and Indonesia) in 1979, he had local people pose in cartoonish portrait masks of President Jimmy Carter.

A year later, he took pictures of tourist sites in and around Mexico City, pairing the images with travel guide descriptions of the sites, the words (mostly in French) making the places sound far more charismatic than they appear in the bland black-and-white images. In short, before today's global tourist industry had fully set in, he was rehearsing its big-footing presence and misrepresentations.

A version of this review appears in print on September 12, 2014, on page C27 of the New York edition with the headline: Carlos Ginzburg: 'The Forgotten Vintage'.