

## Angel Delgado: *Límite continuo/Continuous Limit*

Couturier Gallery, 166 N. La Brea Avenue, Los Angeles  
Through March 7

**In the United States freedom of speech** is nearly an inalienable right, perhaps ad nauseam given the accessibility of the Internet and its myriad avenues in which to voice said expressions. Most of us would be hard-pressed to fathom having this right revoked, let alone suffer consequences for communicating adverse opinions. Granted, we are not total strangers to artistic curtailing or censorship, thank you Newt Gingrich and Rudy Giuliani, but in the big picture, our hindrances are mild.

In 1990, Cuban-born artist Angel Delgado was imprisoned for a performance art piece in which he defecated on a Cuban Communist newspaper. Although expressed in a private gallery, word of his act traveled beyond the white walls, which led to his incarceration. Despite the despicable penalty of this act, Delgado's incarceration was not entirely bereft of personal achievement.

Prisoners are stripped of individual identity, and their limited amenities and provisions are reminders of eradicated freedom. While imprisoned, Delgado was permitted only the most basic items: soap, sheets, handkerchiefs, and requisite clothing. However dismal this array of accouterments was, under the tutelage of fellow prisoners Delgado adapted by making the most of what was given to him and transformed these objects into a newfound artistic idiom. Delgado repurposed their form and function into artworks and imagery that served as autobiographical statements while encompassing wider issues of self-determination and subjugation.

*Límite continuo/Continuous Limit*, Delgado's first solo show in the United States, is a continuum of the work forged in prison and maintains the angst of confinement and thwarted rebellion against



Angel Delgado, *Untitled 3* (from the horizontal series), color pencil and cold cream on sheet, 78.7" x 59", 2002



Angel Delgado, *Serie Memorias acumuladas*, (above: screws) (below: nuts), wood, soap, and various objects, 28 1/4" x 6" x 2 3/8" (each), 2004

oppression. Comprised of soap sculptures and mixed-media drawings rendered on prison bed sheets and handkerchiefs, the body of work asserts the personal pathos of his predicament yet extends beyond the private. There is an overarching fastidiousness and stoicism to Delgado's art that fortifies its effectiveness; perhaps it is an extension of mandated orderliness and absence of personal control in prison and under a restrictive regime, or an assertion of regained dominion.

Delgado's *Continuous Limit* series on handkerchiefs depict the outlines of a generic any-man, or perhaps no-man, against a clear blue sky crossed by razor wire or engaged in a futile battle against icons of detention. They are voiceless vehicles and hollow silhouettes — Citizens X, Y, or Z — and their only distinguishing characteristics are their costumes — prison garb, suits, or street clothes. If allowed to supersede the established boundaries of their compact presentation, there is a sense that these images would be suited for large-scale, political graffiti art that could fully exploit their intention.

By comparison, the drawings on sheets offer a more disquieting intimacy. The sheets have been used by the prisoners, and the stains and discolorations — the only tangible evidence of a human being — work in fluid tandem with Delgado's distilled imagery to create an eerie energy that is an integral aspect of the work's success and complexity. In *Untitled 3* (from the horizontal series), the sum total of an individual is relegated to a careful arrangement of items of clothing and presages the show's most poignant display of the metaphoric dismemberment of personage.

The leitmotif of separation is also evident in his *Serie Memorias acumuladas* soap sculptures in which naturally mated objects become estranged. Individually cast and confined in bars of generic soap, car keys (access to mobility) are divided from their key chains and screws are released from their attending nuts. Only the literal act of cleansing will release their stymied utility and allow them to serve their original purpose. As with the handkerchiefs, they are arranged in rows and grids, and the quality of repetition again emphasizes a lack of distinction resulting from oppressive order.

While the work is engendered by the artist's personal circumstances, inferences to general life are present. When scrutinized for its obligatory minutia, life can inadvertently possess aspects of perfunctory repetition and in turn hinder individualization. Delgado's work begs the comparison of acquiescence or compliance and subjugation under regulation.

— Ashley McLean Emenegger