

contemporary

no 90
2007 arts

Inside the gallery, Pitarch's work was presented with show-stopping flair and brilliance. Simultaneously whimsical and aggressive, full of virtuoso turns and inversions, the gallery resembled nothing so much as a particularly excellent cabinet of curiosities. Ranging from minute installations to soaring sculptural constructions, each of the self-contained pieces worked like a perfectly crafted joke.

One-inch steel letters propped against the gallery wall spelled out 'LEAN' (*Lean*, 2006). An electric guitar rested on the floor, neck warped and twisted into a graceful arc, presenting another perfect visual pun. Pitarch's titles are almost as significant as the physical works themselves; the guitar sculpture was tellingly titled *Play Hard* (2006), while an empty box of bird food, carefully sliced into slivers, was called *Nest* (2006).

Pitarch's work contains multiple layers of jokes, both visual and linguistic. Its core, however, lies not in the artist's use of whimsy or wit, but rather in the palpable strangeness of the objects he creates. Deconstructing everyday objects – from desks and chairs to the meticulously shredded food boxes – Pitarch cunningly transforms the domestic universe into a world of subtle menace and oppression. While the exhibition's small-scale sculptures (from the food boxes to the metal letter pieces) retained an overall tone of gentle wit, the larger scale sculptures and installations achieved a marked ferocity and force.

Pitarch is clearly interested in the aesthetics of physics – in the interplay between velocity and force, in the rhythm created by balance and counterbalance. In *Meter* (2006), a tape measure was stretched and knotted into a soaring work of sculpture. And in his 'Momentum' series – a set of works that functioned like minor miracles of physical measure and balance, presenting such improbable structures as a deconstructed chair resting along the rim of a coffee cup (*Momentum #14*, 2006) – Pitarch mixed visual audacity with technical precision.

Suspended in the arid space of the gallery, the sculptures seemed like tricks achieved with wire and glue, mere visual sleights of hand. In reality, these pieces were precisely what they appeared to be – arduous feats of construction and balance. Meticulously arranged, the perilous fragility of each was unfeigned – hence, presumably, the underlying tone of sincerity behind the rule against touching, posted at the door.

Equally striking was *From Nowhere to Nowhere #2* (2006), a work parlaying a physical durability that provided a nice counter to the delicacy presiding elsewhere in the gallery. Here, a wooden door was deconstructed and then reconstructed again in the form of a solid, impermeable plinth. Stripped of function (a recurring motif in Pitarch's work, from the bent guitar to the knotted tape measure), the construction also stood as a menacing rebuttal to the symbolic significance of the door, a kind of visual articulation of the Sartrean phrase, 'No Exit'.

The exhibition's undercurrent of menace was most obvious in *The Velocity of Freefall* (2006), undoubtedly the 'dangerous condition' referred to in the notice at the door. Though it perhaps lacked the wonderfully subtle menace of *From Nowhere to Nowhere #2*, the installation was shiveringly effective nonetheless. Above the corridor leading into the gallery, dozens of kitchen knives were suspended, their blade points jammed into the plaster ceiling. The piece worked best in dialogue with the whole of the exhibition; recollecting the sign posting at the door, recalling the knife-edge fragility of the 'Momentum' works, it was impossible to stand beneath the installation without succumbing to a feeling of distinct unease, and moving quickly on.

KATIE KITAMURA



Jaime Pitarch, *Play Hard*, 2006. Courtesy: Spencer Brownstone Gallery, New York

NEW YORK: SPENCER BROWNSTONE GALLERY

JAIME PITARCH: SOME ALMOST BROKEN THINGS . . .
10 November - 22 December 2006
www.spencerbrownstonegallery.com

Two notices were posted at the entrance of Jaime Pitarch's recent exhibition at Spencer Brownstone. The first warned visitors that they entered the gallery at their own risk, informing them that 'a dangerous condition exists inside'. The second counselled against touching the sculptures, invoking the Pottery Barn rule - if you break it, you buy it. Effecting a

tone that laced tongue-in-cheek with an underlying sobriety, the notices also indicated two of the central qualities of Pitarch's work: danger and fragility. Signalling the vein of trickery and humour that runs through his practice, they provided something of a partial preview to the exhibition within.