

Catalina Parra, on Our Present Human Condition  
In Praise of Shadows  
Palmer Poroner  
Art News 1983

If there is an artist who is almost totally of the present, who employs technology (She is also a video artist) and reads the daily paper, is aware of the latest post-conceptual trends, it is the Chilean artist, Catalina Parra. One sees this in her X-ray works at Ivonne Seguy Gallery, 61 West 62 Street, November 15 to December 11.

There is however, a high price to pay for being immersed in the daily paper, for one reads a day by day catalog of the world's ills. One becomes entranced by "La Condition Humaine." Parra believes, on the contrary, that people are not aware enough of the intense suffering, of the human cost of wars and aggression, and she is driven to speak out and express this emotion. Not only express, but Parra wants to communicate with the viewer in such a fashion that the viewer may thereby participate more fully in her concerns, to comprehend her message with greater depth of understanding.

"In Praise of Shadows"

How does Catalina Parra go about communicating? For example, in a large vertical work, on paper, on the upper half is printed, ASK, in an area dominated by a large life size X-ray of a human chest. On this, down the center, is a series of horizontal strings, as though linking the two sides of the chest. Below the word ASK, itself, is an area that is bound together by a double string, tied in the form of a cross, with knots indicating that it is one side or top of a package. Below that is ME, superimposed over a photo of an area of Western Germany occupied still by American troops.

Catalina Parra has employed one of the simplest declarative sentences of the English language. It is (You) "ASK ME." It unites two people, the viewer and the artist, perfect communication. This reminds one of a famous Broadway comedy of some years back, "You touched me." of which one critic declared, "It has everything, you' and me' and the touch"! Parra apparently is thinking of more than the touch, for she announces a challenge. The anonymous (and assumed, as the 'you' is assumed) viewer is related to the artist.

An Intimate Universe

Indeed, the artist has been leading the viewer along a certain path, though simply placing the facts before him. In the totality of the few images of "In Praise of Shadows", an intimate universe has been rendered. The viewer is allowed, nay expected, to draw his own conclusions.

A Social Artist

This is an artist who deals with social problems which she tries to make personal in order to increase our awareness. Parra is attempting to heighten our awareness of what can do and does cause anguish. Today, we are all aware of certain injustices, such as sex or race. Nevertheless, there are other injustices

which we may have been acutely aware of at one time. They have continued, just as bad as ever, yet we have not been reminded of them and therefore, feel that they must have been corrected. However, they have simply lost their news value. A recent TV show does remind that there is a truce, or suspended state of war, at the DMZ between North and South Korea. The wounds of that war have never healed and people, obviously still suffer today because of separation from their loved ones.

#### A Warm Beauty

Without warm colors, there is warmth in these works. Using her own choice of materials, Catalina Parra somehow spreads and entire world out before us. She can seduce with beautiful hues and contrasts and perspectives. Her contrast created by superimposing a small color postcard landscape on a large blue X-ray, then including lines of perspective, reflects an unabashed talent and a lively intelligence. She employs pale to dark blues without mixing in warm colors. The trappings of conceptual art are here- stenciled lettering and handwritten, and boxes tied up with hemp packing string, inserts of photos etc. as a kind of commentary on the blueprint. Each means is employed by Parra with her specific purpose in mind.

#### Her General Message

Besides the specific message given by each work, there is also the general message which Catalina Parra believes will definitely come across at this exhibit. This is the only series of works in which Parra has employed X- rays of the human body in each and every work. (Otherwise, no human is depicted). Parra believes the metaphor of these X-rays will be understood, even in our modern world, unaccustomed to thinking in metaphors. "If a viewer comes into the gallery and sees 14 works, each with a large X-ray he must come to ask himself about the meaning, and will have to start thinking."