



## WASHINGTON, DC

### Bernardi Roig

#### The Phillips Collection

The latest exhibition in the “Intersections” series at the Phillips Collection featured Bernardi Roig—one of the most intriguing artists working in Spain at present. In the spirit of the overall series, curator Vesela Sretenovic invited him to engage the museum both as an institution and as the former home of two remarkable art collectors, Duncan and Marjorie Phillips. This collaboration resulted in a smart, complex, and self-consciously fluid intervention that defied easy classification.

Roig is often described as a sculptor, a label that he finds misleading,

insisting that he creates pictorial tableaux or environments. Most of these tableaux involve life-size figures cast from pointedly “real,” imperfect human beings. Some stand upright; others are seated, slouched, prostrate, or suspended in the air. More often than not, however, these figurations of the everyman are engaged in baffling, obsessive actions involving light: they reach toward it, try to touch it or escape from it, carry it as a physical load. Light keeps them captive, pierces or pushes their bodies against walls, illuminates them, and leaves them blind, especially when they gaze directly at it.

The figures themselves are often based on specific people from Roig’s

life—his father, a friend, his gallery, even his dentist. Once they are translated into white sculptural forms, however, any anecdotal aspects become obscured. As if to underscore this process, Roig frequently uses the same cast in different situations, changing its appearance as he moves it from one installation to another. In other words, instead of works informed by history, he presents scenarios, knowable only as snippets of a narrative and contingent on exigencies of time, place, and audience.

In *The Man of the Light*, installed on a spiral staircase in the Phillips’ new building, a life-size figure hunches under a pile of fluorescent tubes, dragging more behind him.

**Bernardi Roig, *An Illuminated Head for Blinky P. (The Gun)* (detail), 2010. Polyester resin, marble dust, and fluorescent light, 70 x 25.5 x 11.88 in.**

Half-illuminated, half-obscured by his load, he calls to mind an entire history of discourse on seeing and blindness, purpose and futility, from Plato’s allegory of the cave to Camus’s existentialist Sisyphus.

Another figure, located at the entrance to a small gallery containing prints by the French master of social satire Honoré Daumier, prevented visitors from entering the space, or even seeing the works. In an added emphasis on the paradoxes of seeing—and understanding—Roig placed a long neon tube



Top: Bernardi Roig, *An Illuminated Head for Blinky P. (The Gun)*, 2010. Polyester resin, marble dust, and fluorescent light, 70 x 25.5 x 11.88 in. Above: Bernardi Roig, *The Man of the Light*, 2005. Polyester resin, marble dust, and fluorescent lights, 65 x 25.5 x 13.38 in.

in front of this “guard,” at mouth level, thereby sealing the doorway in the same way that the police close off the entrance to a crime scene with tape. The title of this tableau, *An Illuminated Head for Blinky P. (The Gun)*, is full of possible allusions, yet it remains as baffling as the artist to which it refers—the infamous German of the early ’70s whose free-for-all approach to art-

making felt like a cynical dismissal of all traditional values and a disillusioned cry for help.

One tableau—a cage in front of the original museum building—explicitly addressed Roig’s larger theme. A white, vertical contraption illuminated by a single fluorescent light, it was placed in the middle of a grassy patch, instantly conjuring solitary confinement. Yet for all its inviolable rigidity, this prison had been compromised: someone, at some point, had managed to bend a few of its steel bars and get out. The everyman was present again, through absence, leaving behind this cage as a vestige of his agency.

In *Insults to the Public*, another iteration of the everyman, this time

drastically diminished in size, leaned against an equally small video monitor. This insignificant little person watched the recorded speech of a prominent Spanish critic—or rather, a diatribe against the shallowness, conformity, and ignorance of museumgoers. Absurd as this attack of the “enlightened” on the “vulgar” may sound, it was also a deeply self-ironic comment on the difficulty of communication—even when we are most committed to that goal. We may never fully understand what Roig, the critic, or the tableau’s everyman is trying to tell us, but that does not mean that we should stop looking and asking questions.

—Aneta Georgievska-Shine

## LOS ANGELES

### Mie Olise

#### Samuel Freeman Gallery

“Noplacia,” the title of Danish artist Mie Olise’s recent exhibition, is taken from the opening line of the poem that introduces Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516). More invented both word and concept, basing his visualization of a perfect society on Plato’s *Republic*. Olise’s Noplacia, a locale distinguished by abandoned, dystopian, and desolated architectural spaces, opposes this Republic. Her structures embody the idea of “transrealism,” a literary form related to science fiction and based on the idea that reality is either constructed or nonexistent.

Working with both organic and geometric forms, Olise blends architecture, art, and psychology. Her objects are provisional, reducing the concept of sculpture to a few minimal precepts. The results resemble temporary structures that have inexplicably fallen in on themselves, becoming non-things in non-spaces. The work is so transitional, so contingent, that it challenges the idea of sculpture as stationary form. A stationary form would suggest a belief in the stable and eternal; this work implies the exact opposite, and a strong wind would completely erase it.

Aside from several fabric wall pieces, the most interesting sculptural work in “Noplacia” consisted of three structures installed in an open-air atrium; the reflective glass around the space, which multiplied the views, made the work appear more substantial than it was. The primary structural elements of all three works consisted of 16-foot lengths of white-painted wood, placed at various angles against the atrium walls. Each structure was draped with a fabric element held in place by nails driven into the wood. When unwrapped from the structures, the fabric is hammock-shaped, thus the titles: *Hammock*