

Liset Castillo

Black & White

In this playful show of large-scale photographs, Liset Castillo enacted the birth and death of civilization in the most childlike of mediums: the sand castle. Using wet sand and a little glue, the Cuban-born artist built a model city filled with famous historical and cultural iconography—the pyramids, the Taj Mahal, the Great Wall of China, the Hollywood sign—and then gradually destroyed it.

Looking like stills from a disaster movie shot in a sandbox, the photographs document each stage of the metacity's demise; new structures occasionally sprout from the rubble, but ultimately everything returns to dust.

To counter the increasing bleakness of the landscapes (underscored by the show's title, "Pain Is Universal but So Is Hope"), Castillo used a different color for the background of each picture, beginning with white and moving through the rainbow. She reprised this motif in an accompanying sculpture, a neat plywood

rainbow made of stacked cubes—like a Sol LeWitt made for Rainbow Brite.

Castillo plays a prankish, mixed-up god who builds and destroys without regard to geography or chronology. In her creation myth, the Guggenheim is there from the beginning, right next to the Tower of Babel, but then disappears behind a felled Empire State Building in the next frame. The artist also topples Rio's monumental Jesus the Redeemer onto a Castro slogan, caps the Colosseum with McDonald's arches (the architectural equivalent of bunny ears), and reduces the Hollywood sign to a goofy yet portentous "Holy oo."

Castillo handles the theme of doomsday with plenty of levity, but her formal decisions are a bit over the top: her rainbow-tinted chaos marches forward with an almost Panglossian determination. This extra push toward optimism tipped an otherwise lighthearted show toward the heavy-handed. —Lamar Clarkson



Liset Castillo, *Pain Is Universal but So Is Hope (White)*, 2007, C-print on aluminum, 70" x 92".
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