

ART & DESIGN

Rainer Ganahl: ‘El Mundo’

Art in Review

By MARTHA SCHWENDENER MAY 1, 2014

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153 ½ Stanton Street, between Suffolk and Clinton Streets, Lower East Side

Through May 24

Following an ambitious fashion show, “Comme des Marxists,” staged at White Columns during Performa last fall, and a 2010 exhibition of videos featuring old German-speaking Jewish New Yorkers talking about their experiences in Europe during World War II, Rainer Ganahl returns with a smaller but no less powerful project at this new microspace on the Lower East Side.

“El Mundo” (2013) is both the title of the project and the name of a discount department store in East Harlem — originally a grand cinema theater — where Mr. Ganahl rented a concert piano, hired musicians and staged a performance of works by Bizet, Schubert and Puccini. A two-channel video documents the performance and the audience wrapped in coats and scarves standing among metal shelves stacked with cheap products and signs screaming “Lost our lease — everything on sale!!!” and “You pay less than we paid!!!”

The accompanying photographs recall Mr. Ganahl’s long-running “S/L (Seminars/Lectures)” series featuring rock-star intellectuals and their reverent audiences, but also Andreas Gursky’s photographs celebrating the surge and flow of global capitalism. Only, Mr. Ganahl’s gaze is turned elsewhere. “El

Mundo” is the stage for high European culture, but also a site where racial politics and economic policies have real consequences. (Unlike Thomas Hirschhorn, who was criticized for colonizing a Bronx housing project for his “Gramsci Monument” last summer, Mr. Ganahl has lived not far from El Mundo for many years.)

Complementing “El Mundo” is the exhibition space itself. Briefly a clothing store selling hip-hop merchandise, a magic-marker tag by Wu-Tang Clan member Mathematics is still on the wall. It is yet another reminder of the shifting cultures and economies of New York.

A version of this review appears in print on May 2, 2014, on page C27 of the New York edition with the headline: Rainer Ganahl: ‘El Mundo’.