Fernando Bryce Explores Midcentury Cultural Ideas

By MARTHA SCHWENDENER  DEC. 18, 2015

Fernando Bryce’s “Arte Nuevo I” (2015), Courtesy of the artist and Joerg Lohse, Alexander and Bonin, New York

The wars and conflicts of the 20th century yielded entities like Unesco, a United Nations agency dedicated to encouraging international peace and, according to its website, “universal respect for human rights.” In his current show, the Peruvian-born artist Fernando Bryce reproduces images and text printed in Unesco’s Courier magazine between 1948 and 1954, as well as other publications devoted to promoting new aesthetic or cultural ideas.

The largest work includes 81 ink-on-paper drawings — what Mr. Bryce calls “reconstructions” — made from the Unesco Courier. Among the selections here, writers argue against racism, call for better access to education and ask how art and technology might aid peace and unity. On the opposite wall are 31 ink-on-paper reconstructions of advertisements for gallery exhibitions published from 1944 to 1947 in ARTnews, the reigning English-language contemporary art magazine of that period. In the rear gallery are 28 silk-screen prints with reproductions of images from Parisian and Latin American art magazines.
Culled from museum and library archives, Mr. Bryce’s project hints at the complications between originals and the copies. After all, art during the midcentury was often experienced — particularly by people outside urban centers — through black-and-white reproductions in magazines. The rise of abstraction as an international language in art is another concern raised by this show, since it was seen as having the ability to erase cultural differences.

The gallery’s walls are filled with grand and wonderful ideas: foundations for a new and better world. The sobering fact is how familiar these problems of yesterday feel today.

_Fernando Bryce_

_Alexander and Bonin_

_132 10th Avenue, at 18th Street, Chelsea_

_Through Saturday_