

Bruno Fonseca at Salander-O'Reilly

Bruno Fonseca's 14 paintings, in his first New York solo show, are rooted in the defining moment of early modernism. The son of sculptor Gonzalo Fonseca (and brother of Caio, who recently showed at Charles Cowles), he trained with Joaquin Torres-Garcia's son Augusto, thereby inheriting the structural and philosophical principles of the original Uruguayan "Taller" group. Emerging from Analytical Cubism, especially the branch of the elder Torres-Garcia's symbolist inventions, Fonseca's paintings are in fact a dialogue with some of the many tributaries of Cubism. Nevertheless, his work does not look derivative, steeped though it is in a weighty tradition.

Fonseca's primary focus is architectural; in particular, he explores elaborate, geometric facades. The specific edifice that is the point of departure may remain recognizable, as in *Barcelona* (one of two works from '92 in the show; the others are '93), where a modern building is fragmented and reassembled. Or it may be reduced to a series of irregular vertical strokes, as in *Facade III with Blue Lines*, which approaches the simplification of a Diebenkorn painting. The forms of Romanesque or Gothic churches ideally serve Fonseca's penchant for complex geometries. His seemingly casual drawing style, smudged "corrections" and warm gray palette bring to mind Giacometti's use of paint and his tonal range.

The more somber *White Facade and Shadow* is a narrow vertical picture consisting of black lines on a stark white ground with a rudimentary figure lurking in the sepulchral darkness of a church doorway. The parallel structure functions like a grid, somewhat severe but not static. *The Factory* is a more playfully constructed painting; stacks of narrow boxes filled with geometric objects piled high like children's blocks. Coupled with the empty piazza and tapering towers of *Black Night Sky*, these works represent Fonseca's narrative impulse and are reminiscent of the metaphysical tableaux of de Chirico. Fonseca depicts structures that are both accessible and strangely remote, like incomplete notes from an encounter with a memorable locale.

Fonseca's deft handling of paint suggests a natural affinity for the medium. Transparent layers plus passages of scumbling applied with a knife or other tools add up to an impression of unself-conscious craftsmanship. Still, there are times when Fonseca's technique is an end in itself. *Trap* and *Linear Facade*, both less referential works, seem overwrought and finished off to a point of looking too premeditated. However, these examples are atypical, especially in view of such works as *Yellow Coffin* and *The Tomb of* . . ., both haunting, allusive pictures that show Fonseca at his best. One senses the artist's process of discovery without knowing how he arrived at these conclusions, which affords the viewer the pleasure of unsolved mysteries.

—Robert G. Edelman

Bruno Fonseca: *Linear Facade II*,
1993, oil on canvas, 59 by 27½
inches; at Salander-O'Reilly.
(Review on p. 110.)

