



2011—, the same bright and blurry colors illumining their brown-linen grounds. Here the color assumed the form of cloudlike stains, hovering and blossoming from the canvases' centers. It was as if paintings by Paul Klee and Marc Chagall had been distilled of both figure and form until just color—ever so subtle, without gesture—remained, gorgeously spectral yet oddly specific.

This channeling of European modernism through a contemporary Cuban mentality continued with “Crystal Clear,” 2011, a series of white pedestals situated in the gallery’s center, whose classicism was complicated by the objects they supported. Each contained a niche that held a heavy crystal decanter filled with candy-colored water, suggesting green, orange, or yellow liquor. Emerging from a hole in the top of the pedestals were rolled-up book pages torn from a catalogue of bronze figures by early-twentieth-century German sculptor Georg Kolbe. This strange plumage and the pedestals themselves were lovely and autonomous, despite the assembly. Like Hernández’s watercolors come to life, they took their simulacral status seriously. Meanwhile, slightly shabbier, more provisional works filled the back room. In *Studio Monument*, an old brown couch turned vertically against a wall revealed a lightbulb inside it shining through the worn velveteen like a stain (an echo of the paintings on linen). *My Bottle of Rum*, an old-fashioned record player also turned sideways, was topped with a piece of illuminated crystal, perhaps a device for seeing the future (or the past).

The exhibition’s backstory is pertinent: It involves the flooding of Cuban artist Florencio Gelabert’s studio, and a water-damaged drawing that Hernández bought some years later. But this story—like the too-pointed titles of numerous works on view (*After raining*, *Muddy floor* and the series “Humid memories,”) and the show’s title itself, “Crystal Clear”—seemed reductive, given that a less literal kind of watery transformation and slipperiness of meaning, event, and material was perceptible throughout. Why wash the works of their mystery? Hernández says the “found object” as an art-historical concept does not exist where he was raised. In Cuba, each object is by necessity “provisional,” on its way to its second or third act. Water, steam, ice.

—Quinn Latimer

MILAN

Flavio Favelli

CARDI BLACK BOX

Entering the gallery, one came across a series of three-dimensional collages, assemblages of found furniture, dismantled and reassembled lamps, old majolica, glassware, and memorabilia of the recent past,

including gadgets and posters. Flavio Favelli drew upon an extensive range of materials for this solo show, but most common were home furnishings identifiable as belonging to a style widespread in Italy from the latter half of the 1920s to the late '40s and still present in the homes of Italian grandmothers at least through the 1970s. The style is known as *Novecento*—twentieth century—because the designers and artists who conceived it thought of themselves as interpreters of the century’s spirit, which they believed demanded a return to order, formal purity, and compositional harmony; the style has a lot in common with Art Deco and its volumetrically aerodynamic, turgid, and opulent forms. Favelli seems to have a preference for the kitsch mannerisms of *Novecento*, as evident in the image of luxury he presents: one that is false but imbued with memories, ready to be activated by the complicit viewer. He proceeds through an accumulation of objects, which he then sorts and reassembles according to a method that is emotional rather than philological, as he reconstructs past visual experiences that were almost always shared by his contemporaries (he was born in 1967) or by anyone who experienced Italy in the 1960s and '70s.

From a visual standpoint, Italy, during this period, was host to a mix of eras and styles that managed to coexist in tension. As this was the era of Favelli’s childhood, it is no accident that his compositions bring together rationalist furniture with orientaling friezes and modernist fonts; the show even included a family-size glass bottle of Fanta orange soda—a Futurist if not futuristic design. There was a neon crown, an elliptical table, and internally illuminated furniture, all immersed in an atmosphere resembling that of the lobby of an old theater or an abandoned cinema, reopened after years of neglect. At times one felt as if a performance were taking place or a film being projected, but this was not the case; there was the odor of a closed-in space, and the enormous, eggplant-colored velvet curtains looked worn and sun-bleached. *Luci Rosse (Blue)* (Red Lights [Blue]), 2011, is a sculpture made from dismantled and reassembled bedside tables; its interior, painted a bright-red enamel, holds pieces of white and China-blue ceramics and neon lights. *Sandokan (Garage)*, 2011, as one can infer from the title, consists of

the name “Sandokan” inscribed on a garage door in characters that evoke the popular TV series about a fictional pirate that debuted in 1976. As the artist explains in an interview published in the small catalogue that accompanied the show, Sandokan “is a paper hero, a myth like Maradona,” referring to the great Argentinean soccer player. This continuous oscillation between myth and squalor is perhaps all too familiar in Italy. “If you are in Palermo,” Favelli has said, “and you ask about Sandokan surely somebody will point out a man who, holding a plastic sword, stands next to an ice-cream shop singing the Sandokan theme without remembering the exact words.” The very title of the exhibition, “Manatthan Club,” is an oneiric reference to the misspelled sign of a club along one of the bleakest roads in Italy, between Licata and Gela, in southern Sicily. Broadway it ain’t.

—Marco Tagliafierro

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

Flavio Favelli, *Sandokan (Garage)*, 2011, enamel on iron garage door, 98 x 76”.

