

# ARTFORUM

## Milena Bonilla

THE MISTAKE ROOM

1811 E. 20th Street

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The specialization of "social insects," such as bees and ants, is a tempting parallel with Communism in action; the difference, though, per Karl Marx, is that humans have free will. What ant, for example, would film itself crawling over the cracked ex-grave of Marx—a monument that now points toward his current monument in England? Leave it to artist Milena Bonilla to do so—her *Stone Deaf*, 2009–10, puts the insects' segmented bodies to work as symbolic capital.

The installation *An Enchanted Forest*, 2014, traces another poignant anamorphosis prompted by twentieth-century Communist states. A video tells the story of red deer on the Bavaria-Czechoslovakia border that were divided by the Iron Curtain, differentiating over decades into two distinct populations. Even after the fall of the wall, the two sets of does refuse to cross no-man's-land. An accompanying wall work draws the paths of the animals in string, reproducing a mystic-looking sigil taken from the cover of a book on the subject (included near the exhibition's start). Bonilla's piece offers a striking metaphor for how the lines of the Cold War still mark scars, divides, and ties.

Elsewhere, the artist's symbolism is more heavy-handed. In *Third*, 2015, two large balls of black thread, resting on low plywood plinths, represent the lengths of the Iron Curtain and the US/Mexico border—a display whose formal elegance negates whatever sympathies exist between these two infamous fences. The video *Monologue of a Dizzy Beast*, 2013, pairs footage of animal-themed monuments from Versailles to Vatican City with extremely loud scenes of coins spinning to a stop. Quotes about the fearsomeness of beasts appear over the images, didactic despite their reduced context: "power" crudely figured by "money." More productive to unpack the Iron Curtain fairy tale of *Enchanted Forest* than to read oppression written plainly.



View of "Milena Bonilla: Low Intensity Operations," 2015.

— Travis Diehl

<http://bit.ly/1dJGlzb>

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