

CHAREST-WEINBERG

ARTFORUM

January, 2011

Fernando Mastrangelo

CHAREST-WEINBERG

250 NW 23rd Street #408

November 29–February 29

Fernando Mastrangelo has spent the past few years condensing powders into bricks of social critique. He pressed corn meal pressed into an Aztec calendar criticizing NAFTA. Human ash became MS-13 gang tattoos in a blend of violence and religious iconography. Seventy thousand dollars' worth of cocaine became a sculpture of life-size Colombian coca farmer *Felix*, 2009. All of these represent an exact pairing of content and meaning, and a direct relationship between the piece and how it should be understood. Now, in a look back at the cold war's existential dread and ideological infighting, Mastrangelo presents "Black Sculpture"—three-dimensional renderings of work by Frank Stella and Ad Reinhardt cast from compressed gunpowder.

The sculptures aren't a precise chromatic black. A close look reveals subtle gradation and crystallization in the gunpowder, itself on the precipice of a bright flash and cloud of smoke. As such, Mastrangelo's black hues primarily relate to their cultural connotation: negation. While not overly necrotic, they do present the act of painting today as a destructive, or at least disruptive, process. Is black the lack of information, as in a blackout, or is it the product of every piece of information ever, printed line upon line until the paper becomes a solid textual wall (everything) and a void (nothing)? Whereas with Wade Guyton, for instance, the black of an Epson printer is both painterly information and our ability to communicate it, Mastrangelo's monochrome, in turn, connotes the height of modernist dogma—a complete flow of Greenbergian thought and the seizure of contrary opinion. His use of incendiary material only increases the tension between something and nothing.

One can easily compare the warring camps of modernity and cold war diplomacy, especially when one considers the role of CIA patronage in that chapter of American artmaking. As such, gunpowder is an apt medium to reflect this tumultuous period. If black signifies both everything and nothing, information and its transmission, it also represents historical lineage and its abdication. These sculptures are both in line with midcentury heroics (a virtue often found on the battlefield) and combatively at odds with the summoned past.

— Hunter Braithwaite



Fernando Mastrangelo, *Stella (2)*, 2011,
gunpowder, 10' 1 1/2" x 7' 1" x 2".