

ART IN REVIEW

Luis Molina-Pantin: ‘Modus Operandi’

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By [Holland Cotter](#)
July 25, 2013

Henrique Faria Fine Art
35 East 67th Street, Manhattan
Through Aug. 17

Luis Molina-Pantin’s photographs of Disney-esque drug-baron mansions in Colombia are standouts at the [International Center of Photography’s](#) 2013 triennial, and it’s good to get a larger context for that work in his solo at [Henrique Faria](#). Born in Geneva in 1969, and living in Caracas, Venezuela, Mr. Molina-Pantin specializes in images that simultaneously project and undercut illusions of confident power.

A series of more than two dozen color still-life photos consists of images of piggy banks handed out by Venezuelan banks. Each is cleverly designed to advertise a corporate logo, yet by the time Mr. Molina-Pantin finished the series in 2011, the logos were obsolete: most of the banks had failed. In a 1997 series, “Immobilia,” what look like art-crammed luxury apartments are in reality television soap-opera sets. And a mural-like image of a tropical paradise that covers one of Henrique Faria’s walls is largely pieced together from home-and-garden magazine covers.

In an interview with the art historian Gabriela Rangel in the exhibition brochure, Mr. Molina-Pantin says his work is in some ways an attempt to turn the tables on a standard documentary fixation on South American violence and poverty. Instead, in an adventurous photojournalist mode, he takes clandestine pictures of the rich.

To shoot the heavily guarded Colombian narco-architecture he posed as a real estate worker. And he used a hidden camera to photograph the back offices of some of New York City’s leading art galleries, Gagosian and Mary Boone among them. With their pristine look-alike décor — floor-to-ceiling shelves of black-bound artist files; young workers glued to computers — the offices look like a combination of accounting firms and high-concept mortuaries, with no art in sight.

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