



Above: Vik Muniz, *Verso (Starry Night)*, 2008. Mixed media, 74 x 92 cm. Right: Vik Muniz, *Verso (La Gioconda)*, 2012. Mixed media, 103 x 75 cm.



color, a bronze back supports fluorescent Plexiglas. The light emanating from the undulating strips is a deep, nearly rose, gold, and the beauty of the composition outstrips, or rather exceeds, the limits of words to describe the experience.

The “Cellular” works are composed of etched Plexiglas plates in fluorescent colors (orange, yellow, and green), placed over each other. As might be imagined, the resulting depth is unusual for its intricacies of motif and translucency. The imagery itself seems to spring from microscopic images, reminding viewers that cellular activity and light are closely joined. In *Cellular 121*, holes and patterns of debris, outlined and filled in a yellow-orange color, bridge a passage of the same color on the upper right of the composition, while in the center, a kind of orange river makes its way from end to end. In *Cellular 122* (2012), yellow-orange dots and lines build the mass in the center of the work, thus developing a natural form, much like a mountain or a town seen from a plane. While such imagery justifies the title “Stratifications,” these interpretations may not be entirely accurate from Papatzanaki’s point of view. However, they underscore her continuing exploration of the relation between light and form, abstraction and figuration. Papatzanaki’s treatment of light as both emanation and physical structure makes her work ethereal as well as marvelously substantive—a transformation of light’s usual terms.

—Jonathan Goodman

THE HAGUE

Vik Muniz Mauritshuis

In 2008, the same year that Vik Muniz produced his first *Versos*, Gerard Byrne took some black and white photographs of the backs of historical paintings and interspersed them with other pictures and a film installation in an exhibition that explored uncertainties linked to time. These images prompted consternation for how they blended past and present, contrasted image production technologies, and elicited a range of inherent contradictions—particularly in their titles. The expected images—*A Young Woman Contemplating a Skull*, for instance—were ultimately withheld from viewers. Muniz also photographs the backs of paintings, but he uses those images as templates for highly detailed replicas built at true scale. Though the contradictions inherent in these sculptures are less compelling than those raised by Byrne’s work, which also happens to be imbued with wry wit, Muniz’s works are stunning evocations of the actual objects.

The number of *Versos* shown in this exhibition totaled 15. Five of them, made especially for the Mauritshuis, were based on works in the collection, including Vermeer’s *View of Delft* and *Girl with the Pearl Earring*,

as well as Rembrandt’s *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*. Grant Wood’s *American Gothic*, Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*, and Leonardo’s *La Gioconda* accompanied them. The works were set on the floor, leaning against the wall, which caused the room to resemble a temporary storage space or a gallery under preparation. This initial impression was strong, but it didn’t hold. The absence of museum personnel and equipment confirming the temporary or transitional nature of the space provided one reason. The second pertained to the choice of works—that such a fabled selection of paintings would share the same space was simply too good to be true.

The *Versos* tease viewers—I, for one, would have liked to get a good look at both sides of each sculpture—and serve an educational purpose by offering glimpses into the technical and, in some cases, the exhibition histories of the works. They present a compendium of restoration and conservation materials and processes—ranging from low-tech materials, such as wax and

fishing line, to the electronic device that monitors dimensional changes in *La Gioconda*’s wooden panel—all of which helps viewers realize that the effort to preserve these unique and very complex physical objects has been a collaborative venture spanning centuries. The true-to-life scale was also revelatory. Seeing Muniz’s version of *La Gioconda* sandwiched between the much larger *Les Femmes d’Alger* and Matisse’s *Red Studio* scuppered the homogenizing effect of postcards, art history books, and other reproductions, which cause us to forget about differences in size.

The fact that Muniz trades on the status of his choices flawed the exhibition somewhat, primarily because less celebrated works might have made for more interesting *versos*. It can also be argued that showing the *Versos* as a group diminishes their impact. Placing particular pieces in alternate contexts could produce new dialogues, heighten their profundity, and still assert how a painting’s back can seem to have nothing to do with its front.

—John Gayer