

## MADRID

## Bleda and Rosa

GALERÍA FÚCARES

Better than any of Bleda and Rosa's other endeavors, the "Origin" series (2003–) realizes the project underpinning their work as a whole. Interested in neither landscape nor ornament, this project is characterized by an impulse toward historiographical interrogation close in spirit to Walter Benjamin's "absolute materialism." As in Benjamin's meditations on Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, 1920, María Bleda and José María Rosa (who have been working together since 1992) take an approach to historical objects marked by the basic will to recover a lost or suppressed history in those objects. The "act of knowledge" befitting historical work has, for Benjamin, a certain "emancipatory" potential, freeing in the present that which originally had so much unfulfillable power and fullness that could not be fulfilled and hence was projected toward the future, to come to us now as a longing, as an exigency and, thereby, as *origin*.

It is in the work of art that the ability to effect this recovery shines forth—this possibility of salvaging *what cannot be seen* from *what is seen*. Hence, the photographs in Bleda and Rosa's series of "Battlegrounds" (1994–99) show places where certain epic incidents took place. In the heat of those battles, the histories of peoples have been drawn, leaving in the image an imperceptible trace that only the recall power of the work of art can rescue.

In their new series, the "Origin" being rescued is the one common to us all: our origin as a *species*. The photographs show the current state of some of the sites and excavations where, through the findings



Bleda and Rosa,  
*Craneo 5 (Skull 5)*,  
2003, C-print on  
Plexiglas, 48¾ x  
87½". From the series  
"Origin," 2003–.

of fossil remains, the traces and the memories of the appearance of *Homo sapiens* on earth have been registered, from the time of Darwin to the present. In some of the images we catch sight of archaeological work being done; in others, we see only the terrain itself.

Undoubtedly, some recent debates could give this interrogation a gleam of topicality, but any such turn would seem petty in the face of the knowledge of emancipation that is rescued in this work: Nature itself is messianic in its fleetingness. Man's advent in the history of the world is insignificant with respect to the historical force of nature, of mineral being. Perhaps the deep solemnity and sublime grandeur of these photos is grasped when one imagines them as the pure testimony of those forces, rather than as testimony of man's first shaky steps on earth.

What did those humans—we who now write and read this text in the present—come here to do? Why did they come to these places? Perhaps just to take some photographs that, in the end, attest to that unanswerable question and to the everlasting and inexorable need to ask it.

—José Luis Brea

Translated from Spanish by Jane Brodie.