



Dario Robleto ***Setlists for a Setting Sun (The Crystal Palace)***, 2014

Cyanotypes, prints, watercolor paper, butterflies, butterfly antennae made from stretched audiotape of the earliest live recording of music (The Crystal Palace Recordings of Handel's "Israel in Egypt," 1888), various cave minerals and crystals, homemade crystals, black swan vertebrae, lapis lazuli, coral, sea urchin shells, sea urchin teeth, various seashells, ocean water, pigments, cut paper, mica flakes, glitter, feathers, colored mirrors, plastic and glass domes, audio recording, digital player, headphones, wood, polyurethane, 60 x 45-1/2 x 45-1/2 inches (including vitrine)

As Dario Robleto pursues his interests along their own winding paths, traversing major historical events and nearly forgotten footnotes, discovering unlikely intersections and parallels, his practice centers less and less on single subjects and more on areas of convergence. NASA's Golden Record, an ambitious blend of art, anthropology and astronomy, is Robleto's lodestar for this kind of scholarly overlap. Likewise, Dr. Bud Frasier's recent invention of a beatless heart intrigues him not just for its medical implications, but also for its auditory and poetic resonances. It's not surprising that these multivalent, transitional areas appeal to Robleto: his alchemical approach to artmaking, with powdered bone and melted vinyl, is itself an exercise in transformation and layered meaning. A bullet can be a relic and a painkiller and a song, and also the silence that song leaves behind. A consideration of silence leads back to the Christmas Truce on the Western Front, or out to a lost satellite, or down to the fossilized ear-bones of whales. His pieces don't follow one after the next; they interlock in complex networks, filling in blanks and pressing out to new territories.

London's Crystal Palace, built around the heyday of the British Empire to host an exhaustive survey of culture and industry, makes a fitting analogue to Robleto's practice. The building itself was an engineering marvel with an appropriately circuitous backstory. Joseph Paxton, head gardener for the Duke of Devonshire, had taken on the cultivation of an enormous Amazonian lily, the *Victoria regia*. As the flower outgrew its confines, it also inspired a solution: its broad ribbed leaves, strong enough to support Paxton's daughter, served as a model for new greenhouse designs, the culmination of which was the Crystal Palace. The palace later played host to several other advancements: its gardens held the first dinosaur sculptures and, perhaps most importantly for Robleto, it was the site of Thomas Edison's live recording of Handel's "Israel in Egypt," one of the first of its kind.

***Setlists for a Setting Sun (The Crystal Palace)*** pays tribute to the Palace, not only through overt references (cyanotypes of contemporaneous news articles and pictures, butterflies with antennae made from recordings of "Israel in Egypt"), but also by emulating the expansive, inquisitive spirit the building encompassed. More than simply housing curiosities, The Crystal Palace provided access to far-flung discoveries from a multitude of cultures and disciplines. And though Robleto's sculpture glasses its artifacts in, it too radiates outward, following themes as far back as prehistory and forward to implications (like the Golden Record) the Victorians might not have imagined.

The tabletop format of *Setlists* is in keeping with Robleto's increasingly excursive method. Though his works have always been densely layered, his specifically designed boxes, frames and cabinets often favor particular views. But the twining narratives of *The Crystal Palace* are poorly suited to a single perspective. Arranged in the round, accessible from any number of angles, *Setlists'* individual elements are in a perpetual state of recombination. Connections, reflections and obstructions come and go with only small shifts of sightline. It's a configuration that encourages repeated viewing and the sort of synthesizing, serendipitous thinking that so appeals to Robleto.

As wide-ranging as Robleto's interests become, as many perspectives as he incorporates into his work, his scale and focus remain consistently personal. His goal is never simply to know or understand his subjects, but to feel them. Every chaotic battlefield, remote satellite or bygone era, however inaccessible it may first appear, has a guide, some human point of contact by which to approach. The Golden Record, 20 billion kilometers away, is carrying a human heartbeat in its grooves. Before the Crystal Palace was 770,000 square feet encased in iron and glass, it was a girl in her father's garden, standing on a lily pad. Robleto is instinctively drawn to stories that anchor overwhelming events in lived experience, and the effect of this compression, instead of trivializing the extraordinary, monumentalizes the intimate.



Dario Robleto (b. 1972, San Antonio, TX) lives and works in Houston, TX. The artist has exhibited his work extensively since 1997, with recent solo museum shows at the **Baltimore Museum of Art** (November 2014- April 2015), and the **Menil Collection**, Houston in the fall of 2014. Additional recent solo museum exhibitions include the **Des Moines Art Center** (2011); the **Museum of Contemporary Art**, Denver (2011) and **New Orleans Museum of Art** (2012). Robleto was recently appointed 2016 Texas State Artist Laureate.

His work is included in numerous permanent collections, including The Whitney Museum of American Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Baltimore Museum of Art, and many others.

Detail from *Setlists For a Setting Sun*  
(*The Crystal Palace*)