



# Reflecting life's brief moments

## WILLIAM YEOMAN

It seems to be a newspaper, but the text and images have been burned through the paper with repeated thrusts of a hot pin. As you turn the pages, filigree piercings, together with their sepia haloes, gradually disappear, leaving you with a blank page.

Welcome to the evanescent world of acclaimed Colombian artist Oscar Munoz, whose first Australian exhibition, *Mirror Image*, has opened at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts. Already a smash hit overseas — London critics hailed it as one of the 10 best exhibitions of last year — *Mirror Image* deals with themes of memory and loss.

Leading international curator Sebastian Lopez, who is in Perth to curate the exhibition, says Munoz's work reflects the political situation in Colombia.

"In a way, Colombia has been in a state of war for more than half a

century," he says. "We normally remember what has happened more recently with the war on drugs. But there has been a climate of unrest and insecurity since the late 40s. With such a history, it is not strange to find many artists in Colombia who address certain questions relating to death and disappearance in their work."

Munoz, who was born in Popayan and now lives in Cali, Colombia, often uses a combination of traditional media and new technology to comment on the impermanence of the so-called fixed image and, by implication, life itself.

In *Memorial*, for example, five video projections show the artist's hand drawing portraits, based on photographs culled from obituaries in Colombian newspapers, with water on a hot pavement. Because the water evaporates so quickly, the portraits are never finished. But Munoz simply begins to draw them again.

"Works like this speak clearly about

the relationship we have with photography and with the dead, in which we cannot completely grasp who the person was," Lopez says. "The photograph itself becomes a sort of vacuum into which our feelings are sucked. But it does not give us anything back."

Some of the other works in *Mirror Image* are disturbingly interactive. Like *Aliento*, in which one breathes on to mirrored discs to reveal ghostly images, again based on obituary photographs. The images disappear with the breath, replaced by the viewer's own reflection.

Also on display with *Mirror Image* is a selection of video animation, documentaries and performance works from young Colombian artists. Each of the works has been shown at Lugar a Dudas, a cultural centre in Cali.

**Mirror Image is at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts until April 5.**



Fleeting image: Oscar Munoz with Aliento (Breath).