Francis Alÿs, *Something and Nothing*
March 4 to April 8, 2011
Opening Reception: Friday, March 4, 5 until 9pm

The Crisp-Ellert Art Museum at Flagler College will present a selection of videos by internationally-recognized Belgian artist Francis Alÿs. Alÿs, who has lived and worked in Mexico City for over 20 years, is known for working with a variety of media, from painting and sculpture to photography and video. The four videos included in the exhibition, *Paradox of the Praxis I (Sometimes Doing Something Leads to Nothing)*, 1997, *The Leak*, 2003, *When Faith Moves Mountains (Making of)*, 2002, and *Barrenderos*, 2004, are records of actions taken by the artist or groups of individuals. Each video confronts a recurring theme in Alÿs’ body of work – “sometimes doing something leads to nothing” and vice-versa, “sometimes doing nothing leads to something.” At times the actions result in something tangible and sometimes they do not. Regardless of outcome, the artist’s gesture resonates.

Though Alÿs’ works can be read as critiques of social, political, economic, or even aesthetic condition, they are each imbued with a sense of poeticism. Both *Paradox of the Praxis I (Sometimes Doing Something Leads to Nothing)* and *The Leak* record the artist during a walk, an act that has become something of an artistic methodology for Alÿs. In *Paradox of the Praxis I*, the artist spends 9 hours pushing a block of ice through the streets of Mexico City until it melts into nothing. A prime example of “maximum effort and minimum effect,” this piece relates to the rituals of daily life in Latin America, but as Alÿs claims is also “a reflection on the struggle against the pressures of being productive.” Revisiting a previous video documentation of one of Alÿs’ actions in Belgium and Brazil, *The Leak* records the artist as he wanders through Paris with
an open can of paint. His path begins at the Musee d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, and ends where he began, hanging the can of paint on the gallery wall. Here the artist turns “nothing into something.” The paint leak transforms the act of walking into something concrete but the empty can of paint, as another vestige of the action becomes a work of art for display.

In 2000, in collaboration with filmmaker Rafael Ortega and Cuauhtemoc Medina, Alÿs filmed *When Faith Moves Mountains (Making of)*, 2002, on the outskirts of Lima, Peru. Outfitted with shovels, several hundred volunteers shift a huge sand dune a few inches. Again, the effort to move the mountain is huge, and does not result in a significant change in the landscape, but the gesture lives on by way of allegory about the possibility of change (however minimal). In *Barrenderos*, 2004, another group was armed with brooms and instructed to sweep garbage in the streets of Mexico City, resulting in a mountain of garbage so big that it’s sheer mass prevented the volunteers from going any further. In this case doing very little, sweeping some trash, results in a mountain of garbage. Although it might be difficult to distinguish between the poetic gesture and what the mounds of trash signify, Alÿs captures the spirit of the moment when at the end of the sequence he claims, “it’s much more beautiful than I could have imagined.” Once underway one of the artist’s walks or proposed action, whether undertaken by him or others, can result in something quite wonderful and unexpected.

Francis Alÿs has been the focus of many solo exhibitions, including *Francis Alÿs, The Story of Deception*, at Tate Modern, London, Wiels Centre d’Arte Contemporain, Brussels, Belgium and the The Museum of Modern Art, New York and *Francis Alÿs: The Politics of Rehearsal*, at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and Museo de Arte del Banco de la República, Bogotà, Colombia, among others. His works are included in major museum collections worldwide.

The exhibition will be on view from March 4 through April 8, 2011. Please join us for an opening reception on Friday, March 4 from 5 to 9 p.m. For further information about the exhibition, please contact Julie Dickover at 904-826-8530 or jdickover@flagler.edu.