Cocido y crudo

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One of the main reasons this show needed to be done at this particular moment in time is that the point had finally been reached a few years ago when too many people whose points of view I respect had begun to voice the opinion that among other contextual pretenses characteristic of the international art scene of the 1980s, the independently organized group show had finally reached the point of outliving its usefulness. At the beginning, it was not difficult to understand why they had come to this conclusion. In the waning months of the '80s, the exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* had tossed a bomb into the village square of the international art community, proposing to define something known as 'global art' within a curatorial framework which sought to explore a pan cultural clustering in which the most 'advanced' Western art was contrasted with work created by artists working in societies that are defined by the West in terms of its 'other' ness. Although the projected common bond between the two groupings was the implicit quality of shamanism implied by the title, the show's ultimate failing seemed to reside in its being unable to resist the pull towards locating the rhetoric of identity in a dialectic construction involving the 'self' and an 'other.' In other words, in order to show case an 'authentic' experience of art, all creative process was reduced to a kind of vague celebration of the human spirit, with the hyper inflected Western artists doing their best to keep up with its more 'genuine' [read: primitive] brethren, while managing to bear its self imposed limit of spirit with aplomb.

By shattering certain precedents, and thereby setting it self beyond any set of pre-existing criteria for success or failure on philosophical or aesthetic grounds, *Magiciens de la terre*'s impact extended far beyond its ability to manage (or even participate in) the discourse which it initiated, primarily because it also ruptured any of the West's cherished myths about its inherent ability to objectively describe a future for art in which serving its own interests would no longer be the dominant goal. But in its act of establishing geographic simultaneity of artistic practice as a central issue around which the art of the 1990s continues to gravitate, *Magiciens* does bear primary responsibility for having rendered certain approaches to making international exhibitions obsolete. Previously sacrosanct institutions of late 20th century art consciousness, such as Documenta and the Venice Biennale, have become unwieldy and largely ineffectual in their half hearted attempts to juggle the interests of powerful countries, galleries and artists with the stated goal of supporting the work of emerging or lesser known artists. The chief reason for the failure of this formula to work is that it is based on certain neocolonial/Cold War precepts that continue to codify non Western cultural meanings in terms of their authors' presumed desire to assimilate with, or otherwise be incorporated into, the Occident's system of values. However, because so much of the interesting artistic practice of the last five years is grounded in the hope of re-evaluating and re-negotiating precisely those values, any halfway attempt to contextualize this work within a framework of continuity with the past – even the recent past of the 1960s or '70s – is bound to result in the confusing, self contradictory spectacle of one hand literally not knowing what the other is doing.

Setting aside for a moment the question of whether this stagnation of the curatorial mandate is due more to a half hearted defense of intellectual territory, or whether it is simple moral cowardice, one is strongly tempted to ask what would happen if international survey exhibitions were not grounded in the presumed hegemony of Western sensibilities, but took as a primary point of departure the inability of the Occident to sustain its goal of self enrichment through culture without sacrificing its historical role as the global arbitrator of artistic values. In other words, were the cultural community to become convinced of the need to relinquish its

constant diet of pre-digested codes of collective experience re-channeled through the medium of exhibitions, and began instead to support the notion of the group exhibition as a site of contact between diverse cultural situations, a different model of artistic meaning might begin to makes its presence felt.

However, it is at just this juncture where the fears and hesitations of the artistic community have begun to converge around the not surprising flash point of politics. Because the most well known defense of the need to broaden social definitions of artistic expression has tended to emerge from the center left's debate on diversity and the far left's debate on social justice, a marked confusion has arisen as to whether or not the development of artistic practice has become hostage to ideological conflicts in which the primacy of the creative act is anything but sacrosanct. If we are to judge strictly from such evidence as the 1993 Whitney Biennial of American Art, which espoused an unusually pious form of unreconstructed liberalism, or the XXIX Biennale di Venezia, in which the curatorial dictum to de nationalize art quickly dissolved into populist meanderings, perhaps these fears are grounded in some unclear but nonetheless present danger.

However, if we opt not to join the fashionable backlash against 'multi-culturalism' and 'political correctness' – a position which in its herdlike fervor has become much more problematic than the merely banal conformity of the latter –, we can begin to appreciate that the paradigm shift represented by *Magiciens de la terre* is in fact structurally unrelated to root political causes, except in the obvious sense that the curators, who chose to see two worlds, one of their making and the other not, were in herently unable to transcend their own incipient neocolonialism, and that the 'content' of the exhibition (whatever the organizers' intentions) was thereby altered dramatically. The possibility, for example, that non Western artists might be stimulated by the possibility of making work that incorporates the First World's desire to ascribe its values onto them as part of its meaning, seems not have been available as a curatorial option at the time. For reasons that might be more apparent today, any depiction of non Western artists as acutely aware of and responsive to the West's coopting gaze would have been tantamount at that moment to undermining certain vital illusions about the legitimacy of the claim to possession made by those who 'own' that gaze – i.e., the cultural institutions of the EC member nations as well as those of the USA. And, seeing as the invitation to present one's work to a large public does not materialize without the cooperation of these same institutions, it is hard to imagine them willing participants in a process that takes as one of its primary goals the vigorous dismantling of their own role as repositories of unquestionable cultural 'truths.' But there is another truth which seems even more fundamental than that of maintaining damage control for the sake of national self image: the fact that art in these places seems already headed towards a complete renovation of its own definitions, and not just in regard to traditional questions of form, style and content. Ever since the collapse of the era of art making which is usually referred to as 'modern' – that is, beginning roughly in the late1960s/ early 1970s – the forward momentum of art has been increasingly characterized by a constant self scrutiny in regard to underlying issues of authorship, theory, production, distribution, meaning and context of the work, so much so that the physical manifestation of the work takes place within a network of mediating circumstances, in which meaning appears not so much as part of a fixed result, but as a for of mutual consideration of the conditions that led to its coming into existence. This gradual doing away with the trappings of art's unconditionality indicates a marked shift from the avantgarde spirit of the first two thirds of the century, during which the only absolute truth was that art's manifestation would be in the form of a visual argument in support of its unique cultural status, whether as a great leveler or a great accumulator. Today, the challenge is not one of justifying the practice of art by making comparisons to that which is not art, but rather of using art's conditional status as a way of referring to the fate of everything (and everybody) else.

Considered from this perspective, the most positive issue addressed by the dilemma of *Magiciens de la terre* – that of the simultaneity of creative behavior across differing cultural lines – can only be applied to our current situation if presented in tandem with the development of a social critique that does not permit questions of difference to be so easily converted into a black and white situation. In other words, it is only by refusing to define the artist's authorial voice in terms of his personal sociocultural origins, and by resisting the relativization of all forms of artistic practice as part of an endless chain of examples of difference, that we can also learn to stop penalizing artists who belong to ethnic, religious or sexual minorities, or whose gender is female, or whose primary points of cultural reference lie in situations that do not form part of the Western European or North American alliances. If this seems to raise the paradoxical notion of our trying not to be conscious of something in order to be more conscious of it, that is because the 20th century has made us too complacent in our acceptance of the notion that our needs are coterminus with those around us, despite the seemingly overwhelming amount of evidence to the contrary. For starters, the very history of art over the past 95 years, looked at as a conventional narrative of conquest and territorialization, shows no sign of awareness of its own self confined state as it is tugged reluctantly from one side of the Atlantic to the other, like a prisoner of its over determined status in the eyes of a culture desperate to retain its vitality, even while locked in corruption's tight embrace.

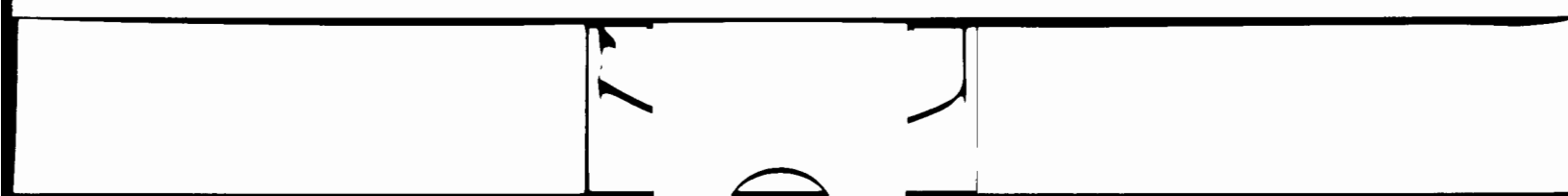
If there are other signs that emerge from the trajectory of this waning century – those, for example, that might enable us to take a fresh

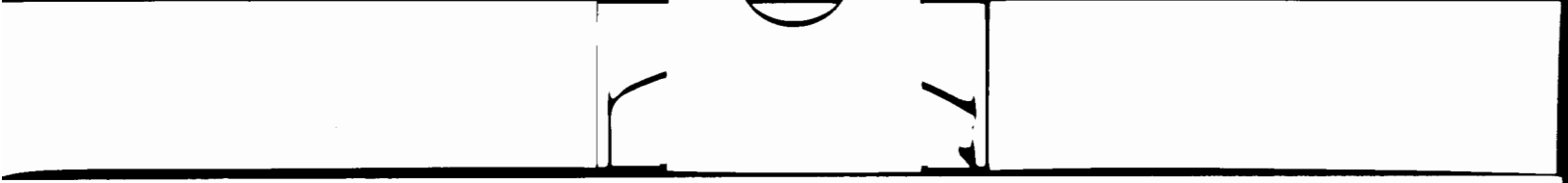
look at what has been excluded from the telling of its story –, they are to be found more as a reflection of our present predicament than in some brash collective impetus towards historical revisionism. Today, art stands on the brink of being pulled apart into a multitude of co-existing languages, activities and attitudes, each with its accompanying baggage of critique and cultural reference that binds it to other disciplines whose practitioners are only marginally involved (if it all) in the debate over the future of art. At the same time, it is also being invaded by the sometimes conflicting needs of a growing audience which has been encouraged to believe, and justifiably so, that many of the purely human aspirations that had once been identified with the pursuit of meaning within other, now endangered, social belief structures – the church, scientific progress, the revolution – might now be appropriately directed towards the contemplation of the mortal predicament as this has been articulated by artists throughout the centuries. The humanistic vision of the human spirit, which has largely replaced the theological one in our societies, maintains that the struggle for articulation of spiritual needs is what caused art to come into being in the first place. One might extrapolate from this premise that the subsequent placement of art at the service of institutions, followed by its use as an argument for the promotion of Western individualism, are both innately suspect due to their having subjected creative expression to the achievement of a predetermined goal. The only permissible definition of art at present is one which envisions and celebrates a goal that lies outside the capacity of both the individual and the institution to contain it, and which seeks to describe a level of humanity that is fundamentally incapable of excluding anyone's aspirations towards fulfillment.

When this discussion is distanced momentarily from the context of art, it is possible to appreciate that the end of the 20th century seems to be providing us with a fresh vantage-point from which to appreciate anew the extent to which the much heralded Age of the Individual has degenerated into an era of isolation, selfishness, intolerance and inhumanity. An ever increasing proportion of our evolution as techno literate beings seems to be invested into either finding ways to lure others into parting with their money, or else lulling ourselves into a self induced, electro digitalized stupor. When held up against the rest of the world's struggle to live out of harm's way, work with a modicum of dignity, or simply keep itself fed and clothed, our own indulgence repels us by exuding a string whiff of decadence, as if marked by the requirement of a certain minimum level of material wealth in order to maintain its auspicious degree of disaffection. In truth, however, the use of our electronic meta environment to seal ourselves off from our fellows may be more integrally linked than we realize to a nagging, half conscious awareness that their suffering is very real. By feeling more deeply as individuals, it seems, we also run the risk of feeling greater empathy towards those who are not as fortunate as ourselves, unless of course we avail ourselves of a world view that permits us to see our self involvement as somehow perpetuating a system that, in the final analysis, knows better how to solve the rest of the world's problems than we do.

Returning to the discussion to the special problems posed by art in the articulation of a core set of collectively held values, the need appears to present itself for establishing a parallel between the marked isolation of the individual and the intense formalism demonstrated by much of the art created during the 1980s. As if they were intent on holding off art's integration with the rest of the world for as long as possible, many of the best known artists of that decade reveled in a return to the 'traditional' values of art's materialist side, even as they espoused a belief in rooting through social issues for the germ of their ideas. The very prefix 'neo,' which could not be separated from the names of the schools themselves, indicated a movement backward towards the past, as if something had been left behind the first time through, and needed to be recovered before further progress could be made. In retrospect, the work itself seems to argue more for a syncretist aesthetic, one that argues for the complex layering of multiple stylistic tendencies, especially if these had previously existed in opposition to one another. Ironically, it almost seems as if this plurality of individual voices during the '80s were what led to the current situation, in which the call for re-defining art does not ring true until we have seen to it that it is grounded in the bringing together of the most diverse assembly of creative possibilities possible while probing the limits of a single imagination's capacity for identifying all of it together as 'art.'

It is from within the context of this discussion that the name for this project might be best understood. When Claude Lévi-Strauss first devised the title, *The Raw and the Cooked* for his treatise on structural anthropology and its role in documenting Indian groups in Brazil, he was actually establishing a dialectical pairing out of two highly opposed forces: the unfortunate tendency on the part of the 'advanced' societies of the West to define themselves in comparison with an other who is not permitted to negotiate any of the terms of the comparison, and the still nascent momentum towards a state of interactive exchange of cultural situations, in which both sides participate in negotiating the conditions under which each one's respective perception of reality is represented to those who don't already share it. Although there can be no doubt of our desire to see ourselves as holding up the latter side of this trajectory, such eagerness must be tempered by an awareness of the degree to which some of us are not entirely willing to dispense with all of the privileges implied by the former. This last point is crucial because it helps to differentiate between trying to understand the vagaries of Lévi-Strauss' relationship to trends in





anthropological theory over the past forty years (within which *The Raw and the Cooked* no longer provides a key reference), and the way in which certain intellectual motifs tend to become mutated through social usage to the point where their assumed meanings are quite different from those originally intended. By this reasoning, it would be hard to imagine a more apt candidate for free play than *The Raw and the Cooked*, since it also invariably conjurs up the unavoidable state of mis translation that take place when one cultural group's study of another is unable to compensate for the fact that such investigations are invariably swayed by the self image that the first group is attempting to project through its conclusions. Once it became clear that the interchange between multiple cultural positions was in fact the primary topic of this exhibition, it was necessary to indicate as clearly as possible that an alternative was being proposed to the West's dichotomy of raw *vs.* cooked, and that this alternative could be signaled through an attempt at dehierarchizing the point of view of the speaker. In other words, although reversing the order of the variables might assist in signaling our awareness of the dilemma created once any form of culture is relativised, it was not enough to indicate our wish that the contrast become defused, or that the variables actually be brought together. To achieve this, it has been necessary to eliminate the ingredient that has been cooked or left raw from the proposition, and concentrate instead on the activity involved – or, to be more precise, the current state in which we encounter the elements of our investigation. Last but not least, by maintaining the culinary metaphor within the title, a certain ambiguity is created for the role of the artist as one who discovers and then re-contextualizes found materials, images, sources and situations. Is this a shamanist figure we are speaking of, or a kind of grand chef to the public? Or perhaps it means that the artist is the one who prefers to keep the distinction between the one who acts upon situations, and the one who records and interprets those actions, as deliberately blurred as possible. Either way, the title seems apt for incorporating a breadth of interpretive possibilities within its scope, and not limiting the viewer's imagination to a finite number of meanings.

One of the most important functions served by the title *Cooked & Raw* is that it permits us to shift our focus away from the fact of an artist's country of origin, gender, race, ethnic ties or sexual preferences as being central to the meaning of their work, and onto the idea that interesting art somehow always manages to be both local and universal at the same time. Perhaps it is a cliche to point out that all of us are coming from some point of view or situation that intensifies in meaning upon being shared with the community in which we happen to find ourselves, but that is precisely one of the universal particulars that contemporary art seems to be trying hardest to address. As opposed to the title on which it is based, *Cooked & Raw* seems to refer to the likelihood that such categories need to spill over into one another, that one concept cannot exist without the other's proximity. It argues for the vitality of complex, yet personal meaning in art, which in turn helps affirm the awkward predicament of the viewer who is trying to extrapolate meaning from encounters that seem inextricably bound up in carefully arranged layers of deliberate ambiguity. In much of the work on view here, the hazards and pitfalls of transmitting concepts and impressions from one human being to another provides a powerful subtext to the act of adapting work to the confines of a given architectural environment. And yet, through the very riddles posed by their works, it seems these artists are developing a new way to affirm that even the most unpromising chapters in the history of human interaction are filled to overflowing with examples of how, in one form or another, contact really did take place.

Once the basic parameters of *Cooked & Raw* became established, it became crucial to ensure that the selection of artists would be consistent with the principles involved. As this process had begun in earnest in 1992, an in escapable point of reference were the sesquicentennial celebrations in Spain, which sought to re-contextualize historical issues of cultural domination into a rite of passage that was ultimately directed at retooling the country's international image after the cultural rebirth that began 17 years before with the death of Franco. Although not all of the activities that fell under the umbrella of the 500 year observances were free of a critical perspective concerning historical and contemporary reality – exhibitions like José Luis Brea's *The Last Days* and Mar Villaespesa's *Plus Ultra* were important exceptions to the rule of gratutitous nationalism –, none were as determined to cut through centuries of delusion in an attempt to make some present day sense of the Conquest as the exhibition, *America, Bride of the Sun*, at the Royal Museum of Art in Antwerp. Although the exhibition's freewheeling manner with historical sequence and priority surely won it no admirers amongst orthodox cultural historians, the constant emphasis on past and present as twin faces to the same phenomenon, and the curatorial insistence on interactivity as a more fruitful model than domination, made it a remarkable showcase for recent Latin American artists.

Because their investigations were no longer placed at the margins of the Euro-American cultural nexus, but could suddenly be understood as part of a complex process that invoked key beliefs in the identities of both sides, the work of such artists as Alicia Barney, José Bedia, Luis Camnitzer, Carlos Capelán, Lygia Clark, Juan Dávila, Eugenio Dittborn, Jimmie Durham, Victor Grippo, Cildo Meireles, Ana Mendieta and Gabriel Orozco could be seen by European audiences as coming from a context of greater cultural urgency than had previously been assumed. This dynamic was in quite marked contrast to *Latin-American Art of the 20th Century*, an unabashedly neocolonialist

survey organized for Expo 92 in Sevilla, in which the presumed interest on the part of the viewer in this material was as a supplement to the history of modern art in Europe and the U.S., the superiority of which was not to be doubted for a moment.

In *America, Bride of the Sun*, certain key works stood out as exemplifying how a reconsideration of Latin American art is crucial to understanding how and why the theoretical underpinnings of much recent art from Western Europe and the U.S. entail a systematic exclusion of cultural concerns that are quite vital to the rest of the world. Durham's *Ama*, (1988-92) is a mixed media installation whose central image is a polychrome sculpture depicting La Malinche, the Aztec woman given to Cortés by the Mayans as a gift. For Durham, a Cherokee writer and artist who lives and works in a state of exile, the idea of a gift is central to depicting certain paradoxes inherent to colonial interracial exchange, because it encapsulizes the European's inability to grasp what Jean Fisher has called in her catalog notes the «symbolic systems of the Americas». Fisher goes on to note that «The Spaniards, like those who are to follow, cannot comprehend the nature of the native gift, which lies outside their systems of exchange, and repay it with the theft and mutilization of the Other's body». The unreciprocated gift as it is rendered in Durham's work becomes transformed into an open wound in Juan Dávila's *Portrait of Bungaree* (1991), wherein the warrior pose cannot deflect our attention from the multiple mutilations which the subject – an Aborigine well known in early 19th century Sydney society for dressing up and behaving like the white rulers – appears to have inflicted upon himself. As a Chilean transplanted to Australia in 1974, Dávila has frequently used his work to extend the category of self degrading behavior to incorporate any act of emulating one's oppressor, whether the ostensible subject is Pop Art or sadomasochistic sex. While this pathological loss of identity can also be seen in political terms – as a case-study for what Nelly Richard's refers to as «the problem of dependence existing between principal culture and secondary culture» – Dávila forces us to consider the grisly particulars of cultural inscription in the form of an absurd compounding of wounds which stops just short of being comic.

This cathartic moment in the struggle between cultures, in which the victim is revealed through the mark left by his or her conqueror, was also depicted in *America, Bride of the Sun* in noticeably less clearcut ways. To make his airmail paintings, for example, Eugenio Dittborn gradually accumulates material that enables him to disclose lost or overlooked realities through photographic images retrieved from non artistic contexts: news paper images, crime reports, holiday snapshots.

On the one hand the air mail paintings, which are literally folded, placed within an envelope and mailed to their destinations, seem at first to have sprung wholly from the necessity of maintaining his investigations as an artist in Chile at the same time as he established a dialogue with the rest of the world. However, by focusing his installations on a larger theme – what he refers to as 'The History of the Human Face' – Dittborn's practice comes to link the perishability of the individual life with geographic problems of mutual separation and with the political repercussions of clandestine activity in a society that until recently did not brook opposition of any kind.

By combining the two principal themes introduced by these three artists – that is, the body as a site of inscription and the body as currency – it becomes possible to transplant these motifs back to art being made in Western Europe, the U.S. and Canada, and reveal points of connection between the two differing cultural contexts. Although the co-opting of the individual through social structures did not form a central discourse in European art of the 1980s, its presence can be found in the work of certain key individuals like Aligheiro e Boetti, Guillaume Bijl, Christian Boltanski, Tony Cragg, Marlene Dumas, Rebecca Horn, Martin Kippenberger, Juan Muñoz, Marcel Odenbach, Michelangelo Pistoletto and Thomas Schutte, to name some. Dutch artist Dumas, who was born in South Africa, has tried to evoke something of the fragility of human transaction in her paintings of individuals who are engaged, however tacitly, in a struggle to avoid being overwhelmed by their environment. Perhaps to remind us that the human presence is not always as appetizing as its idealization, Dumas always manages to invest something pathetic in her figures. But they also have the unforgettable look of people who continue to be haunted by their aspirations to become more than what they are already, and it is this compound openness which brings us back to the realization that we are, in fact, looking at ourselves without social defenses. A parallel concern exists in the work of Marcel Odenbach, whose video installations over the past decade have explored a number of variations dealing with the ramifications of society's refusal to assert that one's fellow humans must be treated as extensions of oneself. However, by implicitly inviting us, through his use of seductive imagery and editing, to identify with both the perpetrator and the victim, Odenbach is not so interested in showing vulnerability on the part of his subjects as in exploring the daily undercurrents of violence that seem to erode our ability to see each aspect of the human dilemma as being connected with the conflicts that each of us carries around inside himself.

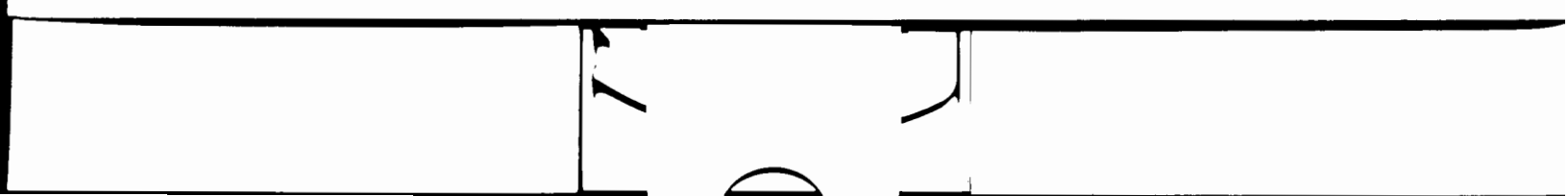
The work of Belgian sculptor Lili Dujourie exemplifies an alternative to those premises of formalist art which insist on a continuous relationship among discrete parts. Although it is not immediately clear that the discontinuity which characterizes the abstract elements of her work is meant to be read as a metaphor for human interaction, it is hard to mistake the pieces' near theatrical ambience for an example of modernism done the 'right' way. In fact, the subtle interplay of materials in Dujourie's table sculptures – fragile, flowing plaster against hard metal surfaces – even appears to codify a methodical rejection of the easy solution,

articulating in its place that moment of uncertainty when it is far from clear whether both sides will merge into one, or continue to embrace a suspended state of mutual resistance. While also laying itself open to charges of theatricality, the work of Martin Kippenberger has long been associated with a point of view that is less aestheticized than aggressively pedestrian. For this reason, and because of his inexhaustibly playful rendering of conceptual positions through the fabrication and/or deployment of objects, paintings and environments, Kippenberger's art is easy to misinterpret as a kind of highly evolved anti art position. And yet, as disconcerting as his refusal to stay confined to a single language of forms or styles may be, Kippenberger's sly humor and disruptive sense of self offer a thread of continuity which enables us to comfortably locate his work within the art/life dialectic forged by Joseph Beuys.

Although the art most discussed in the U.S. and Canada during the '80s appeared to play with social issues as an extension of their interest in the system within which the work circulated, the urgency factor in this depiction of the social increased as the decade move towards a close. Artists as diverse as Judith Barry, Geneviève Cadieux, General Idea, Robert Gober, Félix González-Torres, Ann Hamilton, David Hammons, Mike Kelley, Barbara Kruger, Ken Lum, Paul McCarthy, Adrian Piper, Charles Ray, Faith Ringgold, Erika Rothenberg, Kiki Smith, Kristof Wodiczko and David Wojnarowicz seemed to be united by their mutual interest in shifting their subject away from the exigencies of social or institutional structures, and back onto the question of why the state was unable to support or even recognize the needs of the individual. For most of these artists, however, even the predicament of the individual was addressed as a metaphor for those who were not as well off as oneself, especially in an era when the growing threat of AIDS began to take an ever larger toll among the creative community. For Kiki Smith, a sculptor whose ongoing focus on the body's points of vulnerability and exposure became a factor in her own largely marginal public status during that decade, the role of the artist in society seemed very much under question during the early'80s movement of alternative spaces, graffiti and small storefront galleries, only to be abandoned during the fervent rush towards assimilation with other cultural stereotypes representing power and success. The subsequent emergence of a quasi countercultural momentum in the art establishment has caused the importance of artists like Smith to surge noticeably, while her sculptural practice remains as introspective and anti-formalist as it was a decade ago.

However, to reduce the North American art world's internal metamorphosis since the late '80s down to something as literal as stylistic concerns is to ignore the fact that the change reads across all technical and critical lines at once. In the cae of Montreal based photo artist Geneviève Cadieux, for example, the use of the body to produce art that functions on the scale of landscape began as part of a critical enterprise to recognize and act upon the subversive potential of intimate or personal representations. Although certain series, such as those based on her family, seem at first to exclude the interest of anyone who is not directly related to her, prolonged viewing allows us to enter Cadieux's work with a temporarily suspended sense of trespass, as if the image of domestic archetypes invariably connects with our own desire to get at the issues of personal content that must emerge sooner or later in any discussion of identity. A similar relationship is achieved in the work of Allen Ruppersberg, who is primarily interested in exposing the way in which marginalized media, literature and other forms of cultural expression tend to reveal unwanted information about the society that wishes to perceive them as peripheral. For example, his personal archives of American educational films from the 1940s and '50s have provided Ruppersberg with a perfect source material for seeing how cultural misunderstandings and misreadings tend to become formed through their effect on impressionable minds into a new primary text, which is then inevitably miscontrued by others, and so on into a chain of increasingly ambivalent meanings.

Ultimately, it appears that we cannot prevent society from inscribing its values onto the individual's sense of self until we are able to reconstruct the historical background against which that individual's identity must be discerned. For artists of African-American heritage, claiming a stylistic identity has tended to also involve a process of fictionalizing the received sense of history so that a more directed version of the story can emerge. In the quilts made by Faith Ringgold as part of the series known as 'The French Collection,' the patchwork composition of the works lends itself to a narrative text demonstrating the way in which her personal history and those of other black women artists must be continually re-inserted into the flow of cultural history so as not to be erased or otherwise overlooked. In her works portraying the lives of Josphine Baker or Gertrude Stein, for example, Ringgold uncovers an idealized representation of history that is nevertheless based on real people who actually were part of the sequence of events, but whose recognition has required that one examine the evidence with completely new eyes. In Fred Wilson's installations of 'fake' museum artifacts, the line between fiction and authenticity is crossed and recrossed so many times that the viewer is forced to accept everything at face value, as either a possible truth or an equally plausible falsehood. In his recent 'excavations' of various U.S. museums' historical collections, Wilson has used the format of the ethnographic display to parody and critique the degree to which various histories continue to be excluded from the official telling, and a patriarchal system is allowed to perpetuate its ultimately corrosive habits of self representation. By instructing us not to believe everything we see or read within the museum context, Wilson also makes it clear that critical thought must begin at the center



of this structure, with our designation of certain objects and readings as permissible and others not.

In this rearrangement and reorientation of the flow of received history, an important connection can be established between the art of the late 1980s and the '90s. Artists who have begun to emerge in what we might refer to as the post-*Magiciens* era have made a critical approach towards history one of the most important tools in their quest to balance innovation with awareness. Pushing this revisionist spirit towards the past into the same arena as their exhibiting colleagues, young critics have increasingly been championing the work of mid career or older artists who have long been neglected by the mainstream, demonstrating not only that official history is as unreliable in retrospect as it is in affecting current taste, but also that any tinkering with the past will invariably affect how we see ourselves today. Last but not least, the format of international group exhibitions, while remaining essentially unchanged, has started to reflect an interest in addressing concerns that fall far outside the generally rarefied atmosphere of artistic discussion in the four or five major art capitals. A number of exhibitions organized between 1991 and 1993 – *Places with a Past* (Spoleto Festival, Charleston, 1991); *Double-Take* (Hayward Gallery, London, 1992); *Molteplici Culturi* (Folklore Museum, Rome, 1992); *Ante América* (Biblioteca Arango, Bogotá, 1992); *Sonsbeek '93* (Arnhem); *On Taking a Normal Situation...* (MUHKA, Antwerp, 1993); and Aperto/Emergency (Biennale di Venezia, 1993) – seem to take the challenge of forming a new critical paradigm seriously, even as most of the institutions involved found themselves unable to locate the necessary balance between sharing this process with the spectator, and keeping the premises of the exhibition firmly tied to critical principles.

Addressing social institutions indirectly through art was for decades one of the principal mean by which 'unauthorized' artists who worked in the former Soviet Union and other countries forming part of the Warsaw Pact were able to develop and sustain a notion of a community which shared values that were potentially in conflict with those of the cultural forces surrounding them. In the hands of the generation of artists who emerged during the Glasnost period, these strategies became more explicit at the same time as they based themselves on codes of representation which were quickly becoming obsolete. In the work of Svetlana Kopystiansky, for example, the use of literature as the foundation for a conceptually based practice entails that the process of reading become secondary to the recognition that our encounter with the literary component of her work takes place through intrinsically visual means. Converted to objects, to neutralized signs that are repeated across a visual field, Kopystianski's books lose their meaning as vehicles for absorbing culture through the specific medium of shared language, but gain their presence as containers of the *id*ea of literature, which are in turn filled by the distinct expectations of each individual viewer. Her practice is markedly different from that of St. Petersburg artist Afrika, who has aligned himself with forms of representation which are directly linked to the Communist era. In the case of the work being presented on the occasion of this exhibition, the usurpation of the last official statues of Vladimir Lenin to come out of the Soviet state foundry extends far beyond EuroAmerican strategies of appropriation. On the contrary, it permits the artist to continue exploring the territory of 'forbidden' imagery at the same time as it raises the question of how far social forces will go to be able to continue projecting cultural meanings onto devalued sculptural forms whose mass desecration constituted one of the most striking chapters of iconoclastic behavior in our time.

In the sculptural tableaux of Polish artist Mariusz Kruk, the vocabulary of everyday objects is lent a dreamlike, sometimes theatrical twist by the use of simple juxtapositions that are rooted in the dramatized contrast between public and private gestures. The plight of the individual occupying a small, predetermined cog within the social machinery is a humanist concern that has reappeared with particular relevance as the countries of eastern Europe struggle to reinvent the social pact between their citizens, at the same time as they rebuild their industrial infrastructure based on new models of production and distribution. In his choice of pedestrian forms that have been altered or interfered with, Kruk's work both acknowledges but is wary of the cliches of 'authenticity' that invariably become projected from the outside onto very real situations of collective deprivation. With a somewhat wittier approach, Czech artist Petr Lysáček's installations based on industrial design processes address concerns of the use function of the artwork itself, as seen in relation to social patterns of movement, consumption and leisure. His *Universal Information*, for example, is universal only in the sense that nearly anyone is guaranteed to be made uncomfortable by trying to use it – a dig, perhaps, at the differences in standards represented by demand side versus supply side economies. But there is no sense of animosity or even drama in Lysáček's lighthearted approach; rather, one gets a sense that by acting out certain paradoxes in ironic terms, the artist is able to reformulate his approach everytime he confronts a new subject.

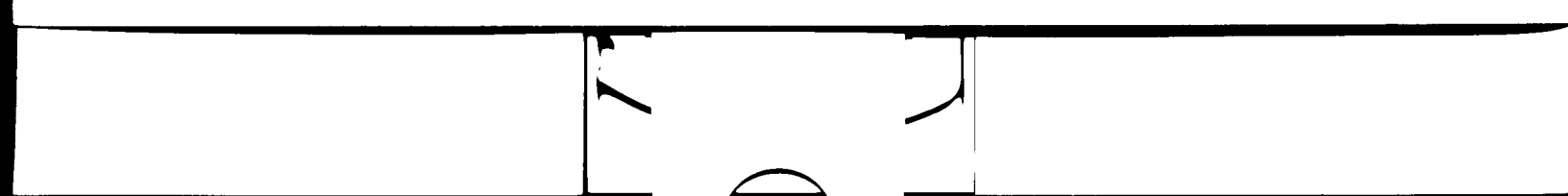
Addressing cultural issues through a critique of social meta structures is a process which can take many different forms. In terms of urban culture, the planning, design and distribution of buildings tends not to occupy a major place in the repertoire of most artists, including those who recognize the process as a microcosm of rules and restrictions that may also be applied to the rest of society. But in the case of Zairean sculptor/architect Bodys Isek Kingelez, the elaboration of futuristic building designs for the city of Kinshasa represents the attempt to envision *a* world in which questions of housing, distribution and environmental

impact are all approached with a general equanimity of purpose. The point is not so much that Kingelez plans someday to be able to build these structures, but rather that the act of imagining them and bringing them into existence, albeit through maquettes, represents an almost fervent idealism which over time will invariably have its impact on the types of visions that other, less poetic city planners may bring to bear on the future of other African cities. Although the work of Japanese sculptor Tatsuo Miyajima is based on the principle of temporary interventions within enclosed areas, the reduction of this space to a field of randomly picked numbers that seem to float through space as they careen into infinity reflects a desire on the artist's part to see the hidden numerical codings of science or engineering revealed in an almost mystic light. In his act of running a toy electric train in an endless circle, Miyajima reminds us that even the formula of historical validation which surrounds the museum's activities is in turn a fiction based upon the denial of time. By contrasting the randomness of this 'counting' procedure with the illusion of permanence, the artist undercuts certain hidden relationships between tradition and innovation, as they are in turn revealed within the museological structure.

The points at which civilization finds itself in direct contact with nature entails the institution of mapping to lend a sense of site and proportion to the points of interaction between manmade and natural forces. With his earlier depictions of the map and flag of his country through the seemingly rustic medium of tree branches, the Cuban artist KCHO [Alexis Leiva] described a fictitious realm in which the deployment of nationalistic symbols appeared to be in utter harmony with the natural processes from which his materials were derived. While the ambiguity that comes out of this juxtaposition is intentional on the artist's part, it does not rely on emphasizing certain stock contrasts between the natural and the manmade so much as it depends on recognizing the state and its ideological myths as mere off shoots of larger natural processes. In his more recent works involving multiple forms of boats, KCHO indirectly addresses the problems of exile and migration that continue to plague a nation whose culture is increasingly defined in terms of its relative isolation to the rest of the world. Although to date the Swedish artist Eva Lofdahl's work has only incorporated a highly stylized form of mapping, her use of sculptural space to describe graphic relationships between abstract elements is determined by an acute sensitivity to the psychological tensions implied by those same elements. For example, each of the four components of her 1993 work *Coral Islands for the Thirty Years' War* are modeled on the same blockish format, but with differing configurations of features that seem determined as much by their intrinsic properties as by their interrelationship as separate entities. Seen as a model for economic mapping based on relative notions of territory, the work's diagrammatic aspects can also be seen to refer to the interaction of individual bodies in a much more intimate, psychologically contained space.

It is practically impossible to address the relationship of the individual to nature without entering the realm of sociocultural meanings characterized by the general principles of ecology. If we elect to define ecology in a fairly broad sense – i.e., in terms of an applied awareness of the limits of natural resources in relation to our species' consumption of them –, we can start to also appreciate the ways in which the system of manmade signs and artifacts that surrounds us can be defined in terms of its limited renewability. The postmodern tendencies towards recycling and pastiche seem to work both to support the ecological overview, in terms of deriving maximum use from pre-existing styles, images and techniques; and to refute it, by accelerating the rate at which sources and materials are processed and consumed by the artists as well as their public. Although he is one of the American artists whose work has most been identified with ecological concerns in recent years, Mark Dion's investigation is more engaged by the ways in which these subjects are represented within the context of popular culture and education. For example, his well known collaboration a few years ago with the municipal zoo of Belize City consisted of an intensive program to investigate, design and produce the public signage for the zoo, in the belief that this would serve as one of the primary ways in which concepts of man/nature interaction were conveyed to a general public. His Madrid project, which involves an investigation into the historic Expedición al Pacífico (1862-1866), will address the question of how cultures relate to each other by focusing on the somewhat archaic patterns of intercultural relations from a century ago.

Damien Hirst's work to date has been centered on the phenomenon of death, particularly in its manifestation as a form of social spectacle in which questions of denial and acceptance are played out on a grandiose scale. His well known sculptures consisting of large animal cadavers suspended in formaldehyde within plexiglas boxes may not seem at first to deal with ecology as such, but they are concerned with addressing concerns that are dealt with haphazardly in a cultural context, when they are dealt with at all. From Hirst's point of view, the traditional feelings of awe that once accompanied the collective and individual experience of death form an important part of the artist's realm of subject matter – even when the most effective means of depicting that awe today is through the suspension of one's feelings of will power in the face of society's endless array of self destructive tools. By contrast, in the paradoxical balance evoked by Spanish artist Pedro Mora's work, one senses an almost science-fiction rendering of the natural world as it reimposes its order on manmade structures and designs. One of Mora's best known works is *Sueño No. 25*, which consists of a clinical laboratory like wall across which an advancing line of mushrooms



seem to be reasserting their primacy in the natural scheme of things. Partly, the work is striking for its evocative use of time as a visual element, although Mora seems to be evenly divided as to whether to use his work to represent certain processes, or simply allow them to take place through their own devices. Either way, he has developed a potentially vital niche to explore in the future, in which artistic and ecological concerns can be brought together by functioning within the broad space where science and what we might call 'pure' imagination invariably come together.

Unfortunately, our ability to talk about such interactions is deeply affected by the transformation of contemporary society into a place where a startling number of human contacts are mediated by some form of computer or other high technology device. Not surprisingly, the ominpresent effects of the machine can be felt in work made by scores of contemporary artists, with shades of difference in meaning determined largely by the degree to which our ability to identify with the human element is threatened by the contrast between our belief that we can control machines, and our deep seated fear that they are controlling us. At one of the spectrum is the interactive work of New York artist Julia Scher, who has targeted the individual's sense of security within his/her body as the site where that threat is most acutely integrated. Her disarmingly real looking surveillence systems, which literally 'catch' the spectator in an invasive procedure of purported identification and analysis, is an apt microcosm for a society that is constantly monitoring its citizens' ability to pass through the various checkpoints and barricades which have been set up to keep different classes and groups as separate as possible. In some of Scher's tableaux, an actor/performer is enlisted to guide the spectator through the process of mingling their personal space with that of the machine. At the other extreme of the range of ideas about the machine's engagement of the body, we find the art of Seattle artist Gary Hill, who has for many years worked at the forefront of technological developments and perceptual innovation in video art. In Hill's physically enveloping installation pieces, technology is nearly always at the service of an explicitly humanist reflection on the elusive nature of life. The only threat to the human organism implicit in Hill's work comes with a built in rejoinder: if technology is partly responsible for our having become insensitive to the reality of one another's existence, then technology must play an integral role in the process of learning to recognize all over again what those values are.

Much of the installation work presented to date by Lebanese born artist Mona Hatoum manifests a performance like approach to the role of the spectator within the enclosed or mediated spaces that she prefers. Although machines have played a primary role in these installations, Hatoum's approach has tended to favor attaining the maximum effect from devices that appear much more technologically intimidating than they really are. This strategy has altered somewhat for the work being presented on the present occasion, insofar as the artist has made use of the most recent developments in medical technology to create a movie of the internal passages of her body, to be presented within a cubicle like space that attempts to recreate the atmosphere of being contained inside of a structure, whether it is organic or not. The theme of advancements in medical science can also be found in the art of José Antonio Hernández-Diez, a Venezuelan video artist who has contrasted religious and scientific vocabularies in such works as his 1991 *Sagrado Corazón*: a large transparent cross, at the center of which is a video monitor showing the first open heart sugery performed in Caracas. By prodding our faith in the miracles that the last hundred years have achieved, Hernández-Diez tries to point out the invariable rift which occurs when that belief system tries to mesh with the even older tradition of Catholic iconography, as well as draw our attention to the failure of our societies to offer even the most basic services to some of its inhabitants. In his most recent works, Hernández-Diez has chosen to underscore the more social concerns of his art by carrying out extensive research and interaction into condition of the *gamines*, poor children who live from begging and petty theft in the streets and sewers of Bogotá.

The range of possible responses to the technological usurpation of our world image is as varied as the number of artists who have chosen to confront the situation in their work. For this reason, differentiations between them sometimes tend to fall along the lines of the media which they employ – not because this point automatically connects them to other practitioners in that field, but because the initial choice of medium is often based on a response to the same set of cultural conditions. Pierre et Gilles, the Paris based photo artists, have since the beginning of their practice attempted to blur the line between serious, 'artistic' photography, and its more commercial or popular expression in the advertising or fashion industries. Their hand painted photos of friends in hyper stylized poses, draped in elaborate costumes and surrounded by faux exotic scenery, make a point of not presenting themselves as legitimate art rooted in the avantgarde tradition at all, but rather as essays on taste and sensibility with a strong homoerotic bent. On examining the body of work being presented at the present occasion, however, it seems clear that the juxtaposition of the theme of sexuality with those of race and incarceration reveals Pierre et Gilles' art to be deeply engaged in the using their position as a vehicle for transforming public perceptions of the 'other' at a time when the very real threat of AIDS seems to have placed everyone in society at risk of not seeing the even larger danger in emphasizing the difference between those who are infected and those who are not. Brazilian artist Rosângela Rennó uses very different images and techniques to arrive at similar ends, in the sense that she appropriates the tools of institutionalized photography (print media, police files, employment records,

etc.) to explore the ways in which the subject becomes stripped of identity in the process of being documented. In a piece entitled *The Great Game of Memory*, Rennó created a powerful emotional engagement with the viewer by combining the popular card game in which the player must remember the locations of previously seen cards, with 'anonymous' photo images of dozens of ordinary persons, the camera's impersonal treatment of whom lends them the aura of people who have somehow disappeared. In contrast to this stylized institutionality, Rennó's frequent use of texts as part of her work addresses the ways in which language acts to restore our connection with the essential humanity of the subject.

In his staged and often computer manipulated photographs of himself impersonating styles and personages from the history of art, as well as in his self portraits in disguise as pop idols Madonna and Michael Jackson, Japanese artist Yasumasa Morimura appropriates entire modes of representation as a way of making clear the central thesis of his work: that all such systems are inherently equal, and thereby equally available to the kind of wholesale plundering that his practice has reveled in. Whether in the form of a Spanish *bodegón*, space age crucifixion, or the circle of friends immortalized in Man Ray's Paris photos of the 1920s, Morimura's photos emphasize the essential disposability of archetypes and identities in the post-modern era, and in so doing help to liberate his viewer from certain inherited ideas about separateness and integrity in style, in favor of a free floating sense of continuity among all forms of visual expression. In a very different way, the slide projections and objects of Italian artist Stefano Arienti point to a parallel type of imbalance between the realm of photographic representation and that of the handmade gesture. In his earlier, pre-media works Arienti became involved in the seemingly quixotic quest to define the act of erasure as a positive gesture within the system of representation, or by reconstructing painterly images from art historical sources using some other media (i.e., colored modeling clay) besides paint. By utilizing slides that he has taken himself and scratching on the surface emulsion in an almost painterly way, Arienti's current slide projection works create an ambivalent perceptual zone in which the unmanipulated image appears as somehow less real than the ghostly after image which the artist's touch has left behind.

The state of exaggerated subjectivity signalled by the work of Pierre et Gilles, Morimura and Arienti is not attained by their appropriation of official modes of representation so much as by their deliberate mis-appropriation of the ends to which these modes are generally applied. In the work of Willie Doherty, who is from Derry in Northern Ireland, the face of the centuries-old sectarian conflict that has wracked his community makes itself felt in the form of an applied disavowal of any application of guilt, thus demarcating the partial view of subjectivity as the only view that the highly volatile situation permits. By addressing the culturally sanctioned violence of the conflict through images that are not by themselves violent or even threatening, Doherty tries to bring us back to the fact that any interpretation of another's actions can be understood in turn as an aggressive act. The only side Doherty is interested in taking is that of the individual who, in getting caught up in the collective myths and half truths that inflame such conflicts, is compelled both to dehumanize the person whom he perceives to be the enemy, and to invalidate his own aspirations to be recognized as human. While at first glance it may seem problematic to link this program with the nearly childlike atmosphere of Sadie Benning's grainy video-images, a similar struggle is acted out in the artist's assertion of subjectivity as a first step on the road to self definition. In the riveting images from the 1993 *It Wasn't Love*, Benning uses such devices as female transvestism and the writing of words on her body to accentuate the proximity of these issues to the struggles going on within herself. Beginning with the initial artistic gesture of locking herself in a closed room to document the process of declaring her sexual identity as a lesbian, Benning has transformed the pixelated images of the child's toy camera she often uses into a mirror of the psyche trying to locate its own center against a back drop of constantly shifting potential identities.

The question of how our experience of violence swings between the manifestation of specific acts against specific persons, and the more generalized violence of the individual venting his rage upon society at large, comes up in the recent work of a number of American artists, who have channelled the excess of violence found in popular culture into a gesture of defiance over the way the human subject is distorted through the process of being depicted as a victim. In a tongue-in-cheek use of Minimalist strategies, Marlene McCarty's first 'paintings' consisted of heat transfer letters on raw linen, spelling out sexually charged phrases in which the 'beloved' is explicitly described using only automotive metaphors. A 1992 exhibition at NGBK in Berlin was centered on several installation works and a number of 'giveaway' pieces using the artist's firsthand research in the local pornography industry. For McCarty, the reappropriation of dehumanizing language, in which the violation of the (female) subject is almost always a given, permits both her and her audience the opportunity to reclaim the territory of profanity as an appropriate site for their own displaced anger against the same social forces. Like McCarty's work, Sue Williams' comic influenced paintings are also explicit in their use of crude sexual puns and images to act out the ritual of woman's debasement within social structures; but there are several differences between their approaches. In Williams' canvases, the use of smudges, painterly flourishes and a meandering, mischievous line to show the human body at its most unappealing stems from a long tradition of male painters using similar means to depict a more existentially based form of social malaise. Using parody as

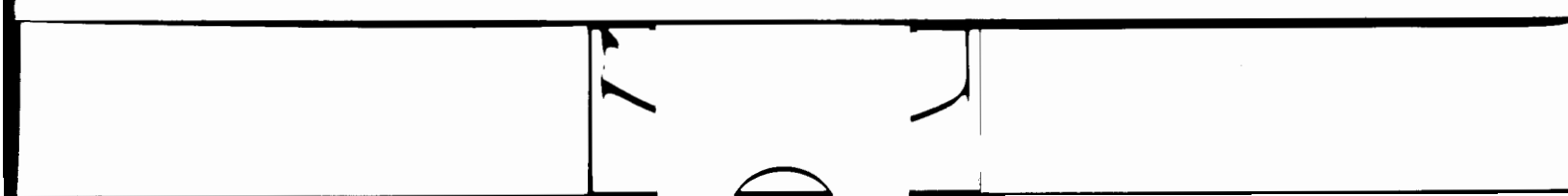
its main thrust, Williams' theater of abuse finds an entirely different target in the late 20th century propensity to cloak the human body in circumscribed, restrictive values which are ultimately grounded in fear.

The active deployment of the artist's body within a performance based genre has returned as a fertile issue for American art of the '90s, although the use of unstaged gestures based on openended social situations partly distinguishes these activities from the first performance art movement of the early '70s. The work of Los Angeles artist Paul McCarthy has acted as a point of departure for a number of younger video and performance artists, despite the fact that his typically grotesque 'live' personae seem to be drawn from the deeper recesses of one's presensate memories. What sets him apart from most of the other artists of his generation is the constant return in McCarthy's art to themes of food, genitalia, deformation and incest, exposing a harsh sexual tension that instead of becoming resolved merely continues on its relentless spiral towards a private catharsis from which we are all but excluded. In McCarthy's work *Pinocchio's House*, the subtext of dread and mutilation lying beneath the surface of the popular children's tale emerges in the form of a strangely anthropomorphized, overturned hut that both beckons the viewer to enter and then shows a violent end as the inescapable fate of the half human, half toy. At the other range of the emotional spectrum, Janine Antoni's performance based works suggest a kind of recycled energy, in which the process of articulating a previously overlooked detail or pattern becomes expanded upon to produce a permanent work. Her best known piece, 1992's *Gnaw*, is based on the activity of shaping solid blocks of chocolate and lard with her teeth, leaving behind a rounded form that conjures up ironic suggestions of the work of Rodin or Rosso. Antoni's newest work, *Slumber*, begins with the artist's sleeping in the exhibition space, while her dreams are being 'recorded' by a polysomnograph machine; upon waking, she uses a loom and 316 spools of wool yarn to gradually weave the pattern of the dream into a blanket that gets longer with each version of the piece.

A linguistic dilemma seems to arise in relation to the expanding use of the term 'real art' to describe work that explores a panoply of concerns, processes and materials that are taken directly from the experience of every day life. Considered as a generic description, the phrase is actually useful to designate the wide variety of approaches taken by artists who might be entirely unaware of each other's production. However, because it sets up the notion of 'real' in a simplistic opposition to the presumed artificiality of 'art,' such a description runs the greater risk of being applied to everything at once without ever getting arond to defining itself. Because of his interest in fundamental activities like eating and sleeping, and his adaptations of the exhibition space into a tableau of social relations, Rirkrit Tiravanija is one of the artists who has most recently been handed this epithet. In Tiravanija's 1992 303 Gallery installation entitled *Free*, the main event consisted of the transformation – a literal turning inside out – of the gallery's exhibition and storage spaces, so that the art being stored was placed on display in the center of the space, while the racks, supply closet and bathroom were literally put on display as a kind of distorted mirror image of the suddenly functional white cube outside. In conjunction with such investigations, the artist also creates events or extended situations which are centered on the act of preparing and distributing a simple food or beverage refreshment to large groups of people.

Marked by her insight into the museum as a site bound more by social than purely artistic considerations, Maria Eichhorn's interventions into the problematic of the group show represent a consistent effort to reveal relationships which are generally concealed or taken for granted. Her contribution to the 1992 *Metropolis* exhibition in her native city of Berlin consisted of researching the original Martin Gropius wall decoration designs for the Gropius-Bau, and then transferring them onto the wall of one of the interior rooms. A more recent installation for MUHKA in Antwerp involved building a Duchamp inspired French window into one of the walls of the exhibition space, allowing the spectator a look onto the street outside, from which the passing visitor in turn noticed the vast, uniform length of wall, broken only by Eichhorn's tiny, unexpected peek inside. Her Madrid project involves the use of documentary material related to the production of exhibitions within the Centro Reina Sofía space. Although at times equally elusive in terms of format, Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco's work stresses a physical intimacy that is based on recording the enigmatic passage of his body through the physical world. This emphasis on the particularity of his – and by extension, the viewer's – experience represents an attempt on Orozco's part to restore a sense of one's active participation in the arena of life, and to reject the procession of simulated cultural identities that acts as a collective unconscious for members of the extended late 20th century metropolis. In his 1993 work, *The D.S. (The Godness)*, Orozco has applied an elaborated process of recycling to a French cultural artifact, the Citroen DS car, quartering it lengthwise and then reassembling the two outer halves to form a futuristic needle shaped vehicle that is in fact the idealization of the same car, but in a non-functional incarnation.

Just as the Citroen DS has come to symbolize elegance of design on a mass production scale, so the adaptation of systems of commercial exchange is a strategy that continues to attract artists whose primary interest is in breaking down the received meanings of objects and reconstructing new ones. In his paintings, videos, posters and actions, Rogelio López Cuenca has successfully exploited the resemblance gap between commercial images and messages that tend to be associated with revolutionary or at least avantgarde thinking.

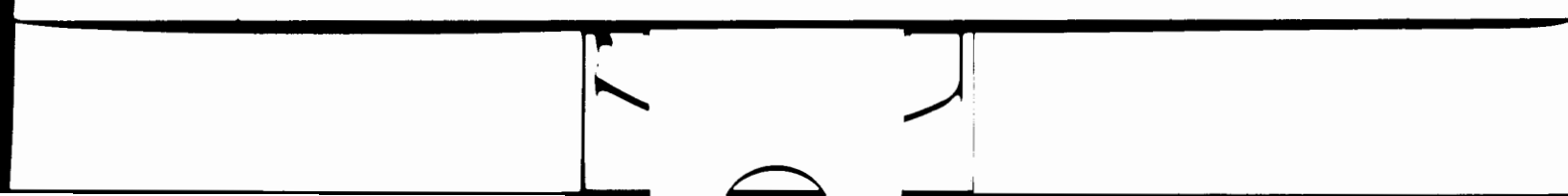


Although a poetic sensibility clearly underlies his choice of sourcetexts, López Cuenca is also deeply immersed in the problem of stimulating poetic experience at a moment in cultural history when the constant bombardment of images seems to preclude the possibility of a meaningful attachment to any one of them. A case in point is provided by the book and video-work *Home Swept Hole*, which contrast the language of real estate with images of homelessness to point up the disparity between middle class aspirations towards material stability and comfort, and the much starker needs of those who have somehow been allowed to fall through the cracks. While the work of Swiss artist Sylvie Fleury is even more physically engaged with drawing the viewer's attention to certain aspects of the metasystem of circulating and accumulating luxury objects, her moral position vis-a-vis the side effects of this system is more pointedly neutral. Fleury's gallery installations of accumulated beauty products, plush pink carpeting and multiple exercise videos do not simply revel in the idea of the goodlife, but assume a defiantly carefree stance regarding the seriousness with which they take that system's claims about itself. In contrast to Orozco's more painstaking automobile work, for example, Fleury's installation of a model sports car describes a social tableau in which nearly obsolete gestures of glamour and romance are acted out with a critical abandon that is soun-critical as to border on the transgressive.

Throughout the current century, global systems of commercial exchange and those that facilitate the flow of capital have been so closely interrelated as to be nearly inseparable. And yet, the artistic investigation into money as a locus of social values which transcend its mere spending power has only begun to show its full potential in recent years. In the work of Cameroonian sculptor Jean Baptiste Ngnetchopa, for example, the production of carved wooden reliefs based on the paper currency of the country which is commissioning the work certainly reflects colonial practices of imposing outside cultures over local ones, but with a particular sense of irony that incorporates the non-African's palpable discomfort with lingering historical issues of exploitation. If on the one hand Ngnetchopa's representations do not pretend to deliver any essential information regarding the cultural context from which they emerge, neither do they allow us to exoticize that situation as a way of simplifying our own position. Even in recent works in which different Cameroonian dynasties are represented, Ngnetchopa spells out the parallels to European monarchies in such a way as to make clear that the recognition and depiction of states of cultural estrangement can also be a two way street. In Australian artist Narelle Jubelin's work, the actual circulation of money within society, and from one culture to another, forms a parallel to the use of 'representative' images as a secondary, albeit critical, mechanism of exchange. By employing needlepoint as her primary technique, Jubelin also signals an interest in women's handiwork – as opposed to the more heroic expenditure of hours practiced by the modern artist – as yet another, albeit mostly invisible, system of exchange. In the work *Look to my eyes* being proposed for the present occasion, she has extended the notion of invisibility to include the invariable layering of different identities upon one another: the early Australian coins on which this work is based began existence as 50,000 Spanish piastre coins bought by the British government, who then cut out the centers and stamped «New South Wales» on them, beginning a process of metamorphosis that encompasses both their near disappearance as well as their current revivial as historical curiosities.

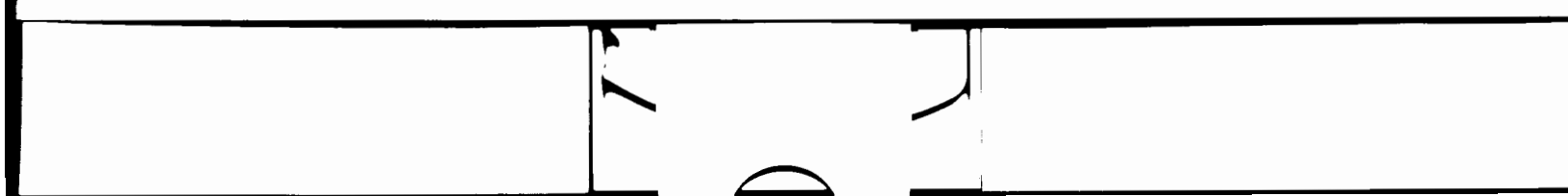
In its transformation of the language of domestic labor into currency, Jubelin's work strikes a chord that reverberates in the work of many artists working today, particularly those who have grounded their work in the everyday ambience reflected in the home. For Spanish artist Victoria Civera, whose work as a painter has for many years reflected an interest in bringing the viewer's experience of scale down to an unusual level of intimacy, her first foray into sculpture in 1993 involved the construction of an openended structure on stilts titled *Anonymous Room*. Reflecting the artist's precision and care in choosing and arranging materials and objects to create an evocative presence, the 'room' in fact functioned more as a tableau than architecture, and was anonymous only to the extent that the very particular presence evoked by the work could not be pinned down to a single identifiable entity. In the piece being developed for the present exhibition, the physical structure involved is even more openended, with the only hints of domestic tranquility provided by Civera's selection of coverings; patterns and textures that describe an idealized locale without specifying to what use it might be dedicated. In the somber environments created by Colombian artist Doris Salcedo, the organic presence of one's passage through the world is indicated through references and materials that are at once more elusive and more blatantly organic than those found in the work of Civera. In particular, the representation of time through the articulation of a space or object which is transformed by the person who has spent time in or with it, has been a recurring issue in Salcedo's work. With *La Casa Viuda*, the notion that a human presence continues to linger in such an abode is affirmed through Salcedo's use of battered furniture and unassuming architectural fragments to contrast with the stark white of the gallery setting. In this work – In Colombia, the phrase is used to denote a situation in which the inhabitants of a house have been taken away and/or killed – Salcedo seems to make a strong argument in favor of the position that we can no longer pretend that the one who has suffered loss is any different than ourselves.

As contemporary installation based sculpture moves closer towards spatial approximations of everyday life, the language of formal



innovation becomes charged with a built in content that is triggered by the pre-existing tension between those conventions that are determined by historically sanctioned forms, and those which have been grounded in the social practice of everyday rituals. While never failing to reflect the pedestrian values inherent to his mostly found materials, Pedro Cabrita Reis' ability to create a spectacle from the accumulation of these objects and materials depends on his technique of contrasting and blending forms that are just out of context enough to make their contraposition unsettling without us being certain as to why. In this Portugese artist's work, a general feeling of uncertainty is engendered by the suspended identity of the materials as simultaneously themselves and the thing they seem on the verge of becoming. Aside from returning us to the implicit problem of internal narrative, such frictions indicate that Cabrita Reis is ultimately more interested in the code of approximation than in the measure of exact meanings, and thereby in the role that intuition plays in extracting concrete meanings from the realm of the inexact. Partially thanks to his ongoing pedagogical investigation into the historical significance of the pedastal in modern sculpture, Basque sculptor Juan Luis Moraza's work has been centered on a highly personal view of the interrelationship between form and support. The reason why his 1993 Madrid installation *MA (non e) DONNA* was able to address so many variations on the themes suggested by its subtitle, «Images of Creation, Procreation and Anti-conception», was due to the artist's elaborately conceived display of hundreds of individual parts, whose accumulation produced a numbing saturation effect in which intricately related elements seemd to merge through relationships that appeared more arbitrary the more one tried to interpret them. This deliberate obstruction of literal meaning provides Moraza with a way to point towards metaphysical concerns without sacrificing his interest in the way these questions become manifested through the most unassuming of physical phenomena. While the work of Cabrita Reis and Moraza continues to incorporate a relativized implicit standard of nature that is grounded in the flow of perceptual events, this development is contemporaneous with the emergence of an international group of artists who have committed themselves to the task of addressing the complex overlap of culturally specific signifiers, occurring with increasing density in the major metropolitan centers of the world. For example, the work of Russian artist Igor Kopystiansky, which is primarily engaged with the exploration of art as a system of cultural artifice, makes use of varying periods and styles of painting, recreated within the confines of his 'interiors,' to form an uninterrupted wall of multiple artistic identities. However, because Kopystiansky produces all of the images himself, the labor-intensive aspects of his process result in a type of homage to the idea of art as an historically based form. The implicit message in the interiors is that we can no more easily escape from the conventions of our time than artists of previous centuries could from theirs, so that the gesture of matching contemporary installation techniques with highly traditional paintings resounds with the awareness that someday the resistance which is inevitably encountered by our most complex artistic permutations will also appear to be nothing short of quaint. In British artist Keith Piper's equally dense installations of video, slide projections and sound, the subject of the body is stated and restated through a nearly hypnotic repetition of changing sounds and images. In a work created in the city of Arnhem's redlight districht for the 1993 *Sonsbeek* exhibition, Piper implicitly addressed the issue of the cultural origins of many of the women employed by the prostitution industry, and their disenfranchised status in relation to the rest of society. The work being planned for the present occasion uses similar impressions to explore the themes of colonial exploration, the 'mapping' of geography and the body, and the relationship between these two ideas and that of the 'uncharted' or remythified body, which belongs to the indigenous person who neither leaves his place nor is able to be brought under the controlling gaze of the West.

Speaking in the simplest terms, cultural complexity seems to be present whenever there is both the awareness that the materials one chooses are linked to a specific time and place, as well as an appreciation for the range of difference represented by the audience for most forms of artistic expression today. In the same way that there exist 'traditional' forms for both export and local consumption, so the use of art to traverse cultural barriers depends on a precarious blend of factors related to the audience's expectations of an experience of 'authenticity.' Perhaps as a way of coming to terms with his place within the British art establishment, the work of Laotian born sculptor Vong Phaophanit strives toward a mix of sculptural elements that owe as much to such Western trends like Minimalism as to the often Asian identified elements that he prefers. *Neon Rice Field*, perhaps his best known work, takes the issue directly in hand by focusing on two materials that are both loaded with cultural significance: rice, the primary food staple in most Southeast Asian countries; and neon, which became a signature element in the work of such major artists as Flavin, Nauman and Merz. The work proposed for Madrid involves the presentation of multiple layers of Laotian script rendered in varying shades of blue neon, all of whch are placed at the 'summit' of a raised platform that directs the viewer to look down once they have attained the optimum height. At the opposite end of the spectrum, in iconographic terms, one can find Belgian artist Wim Delvoye's use of a localized decorative arts vocabulary to transform everyday objects and situations into encounters with a clichéd Flemish sensibility that nevertheless achieves a near-surrealist intensity. His *Porteria*, made especially for Spain, is the first outdoor-scaled rendition of a theme that has preoccupied him for several years: the



sports goal as the modern equivalent of a sacred site. With Delvoye's work, complexity exists in the form of a possible marriage of symbolic content from divergent areas of public meaning.

In somewhat parallel manner, Chinese artist Xu Bing's work *A Book from the Sky* makes use of Dada principles in its elaboration of a scripted language that closely resembles ancient Chinese calligraphy, but is in fact a nonsensical accumulation of different characters from various periods, as well as some that are his own invention. Although the architectural forms that can be constructed from the hundreds of volumes of this work seem the picture of serenity, the artist's sensibility is equally well expressed by the work that he created recently as a one day performance in Beijing. Two pigs, covered respectively in Chinese and Roman calligraphy, enter a cordoned off pen layered with books, on which they slowly circle each other and begin a slow courtship dance, followed by a frenetic coupling. Perhaps an accelerated sense of time passing, played out across a surface that seems redolent with historical meaning, is the only backdrop appropriate for any of our gestures of signification today. This seemed to be one of the point of U.S. artist Renée Green's most recent New York project, *Taste Venue*. Even though it took place in her gallery, it would be hard to call the work an exhibition because the artist's main activity consisted of placing ads in newspapers like the weekly *Village Voice* that invited musicians, artists, poets and others to come and use the space as a cheap rehearsal or workshop setting. By creating encounters that defied the expectations of both the gallery goers and their temporary 'exhibits,' Green subtly calls into question the entire system by which people and things are defined in terms of their relation to the ritual – 'artist,' 'art,' and/or 'spectator'– rather than as subjects searching for cultural validation. In the same way, her investigations into the local manifestations of hip-hop culture are not so much refutations of high and low categories of culture as an acknowledgment of the invariable blending and transformation that seem to empower ever larger social groups to claim a part of the museum's territory. Whereas such directness may at first apear to strip away art's last claim to autonomy, both Renée Green's and Xu Bing's investigations strive to remind us that even the most meaningful intercultural contacts must be made with full awareness of the risk they run: that the moment may very well exhaust itself of significance before anyone is truly satisfied.