



BALTIC, exterior view. Elliott Young / John Riddy, 2002. Courtesy BALTIC.

baltic **the art factory**

Interview with Sune Nordgren
Director, BALTIC,
The Centre for Contemporary
Art, Gateshead



Sune Nordgren.

BALTIC centre for contemporary art is situated on the South bank of the river Tyne in Gateshead, in the north of England. Housed in a 1950s grain warehouse (part of the former Baltic Flour Mills), BALTIC is a site for the production, presentation and experience of contemporary art.

With no permanent collection, a programme that places a heavy emphasis on commissions, invitations to artists and the work of artists-in-residence, BALTIC is a new breed of public art space, an art factory.

How did you become involved with BALTIC?

I was appointed the director in November 1997 and was involved in the final re-design of the old building, together with the young architect Dominic Williams. We also invited artist Julian Opie to work closely with us, to get an artist's view on the spaces and facilities. For over four years we were running a pre-opening programme (called B4B) to show people here what we wanted to do, to establish an institution and work like one even though we were homeless, and finally to train the growing staff.

Why Gateshead? How was the Baltic Flour Mill chosen for the site?

Gateshead council has some visionary politicians and they have cleverly used their "underdog" position to challenge the regional capital, Newcastle, but also the national capital, London. It is also a part of the regeneration strategy for the whole area, which suffered a lot in the 1970s and 80s with all the old, heavy industry closing down and high unemployment (25% in 1980). Culture is now being used as a flag and it brings optimism and new energy to the region. The Baltic Flour Mill closed down in 1980 and stood derelict for more than 10 years before the idea of using it for an art centre was conceived. It was a remarkable building, and with the new appreciation for the industrial heritage, with old brick buildings along the rivers, a wish to use it grew with the years.

How does BALTIC work with the community to create a dialogue?

Our education and public programme is at the heart of our organisation. We know we are building a new audience for our region, establishing an institution for contemporary art, which the region has



Installation by Julian Opie, July 2002. Courtesy BALTIC.

never had before. We are trying hard to make BALTIC a meeting place, a place that people can trust, feeling confident and “safe” about the centre so they can come back even if they do not know about the art or the artists being shown. A trust in BALTIC to “guarantee” quality, but also its being a familiar place where you can feel “at home” and take on the challenge of the new and “difficult” art. The old well-known building is of course a great help in this process—and an attraction in itself.

How does the architecture of the building influence the work carried out inside?

The idea of an art factory came out of the fact that it was an old industrial building, but of course also out of the context. The fact that we are in Gateshead, in the northeast of England and not in a central capital. We knew we had to invite artists and others from all over to stimulate the community here, and to link with creative people already established in the region. The well-known landmark building has, of course, also contributed to our success. People feel comfortable here, they have enjoyed seeing the transformation of the derelict mill, and they have taken the project to their hearts. People are actually proud of BALTIC, and it is a region with very strong self-confidence (far from London!).

How does BALTIC function as an “art factory”?

The art factory idea is based on our strong focus on commissions and on our artists-in-residence programme. But also the fact that visitors can follow exhibitions being installed and art being created (open studios). The new commission with Antony Gormley, *The Domain Field*, which changed our Level 4 art space into a workshop for several months, accessible and possible to view from the Level 5 balcony, but also directly involving hundreds of volunteers, has been a brilliant way of manifesting our idea of a place where art is not just shown, it is actually being created.

Baltic is a new breed of public art space, an Art Factory

What kind of work is coming out of BALTIC at the moment?

BALTIC is a commissioning body, working very close with the artists. For the moment we are showing new work by Chad McCail, who spent nine months as one of our artists-in-residence (AiR), and his work was completely generated while working in one of our studios, closely with our technicians and crew. Next week we will open an extensive exhibition with Antony Gormley, where one floor is a new commission, *The Domain Field*, a field of 250 full size steel bar sculptures, welded after casts of people from the region, from small children to adults. More and more the AiR and commissioning programme will feed into our exhibitions and event programme, with unique art works, created by artists, invited to work site-specific for our different art spaces and galleries.

What are some of the centres upcoming programs?

After Antony Gormley, this summer, the rest of the year will be dominated by a new commission by Jane & Louise Wilson and Eva Grubinger (AiR). The main exhibitions will be with Martin Puryear, about artists’ books, and late in December, Nancy Spero and Kiki Smith together. The Spero/Smith show is again, like the Gormley project, occupying three of our main galleries. We are now looking for other venues in Europe to collaborate on these exhibitions. Jane & Louise will be travelling to Finland, Puryear to Dublin.

How does BALTIC parallel, intersect, overlap, and diverge from the contemporary European and global art scene?

BALTIC is building a partnership with similar institutions and projects in Europe and elsewhere. There are no real models for what we want to do—the combination we represent is pretty unique—but there are, of course, places we want to collaborate with. I brought my network from Malmö Konsthall and IASPIS in Stockholm to start with, and now we are expanding into other collaborations on exhibitions, projects, exchange of know-how and staff, etc. ☺



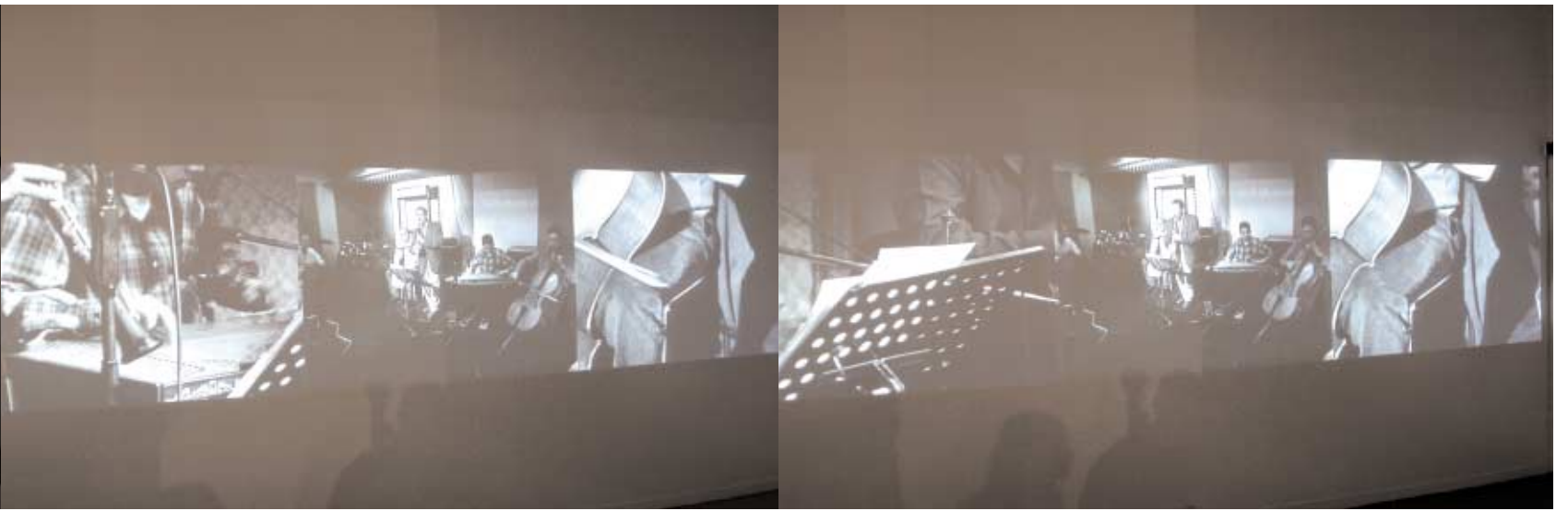
fundación arco **recent** **acquisitions**

New media and photography,
dominate the 2003 selections

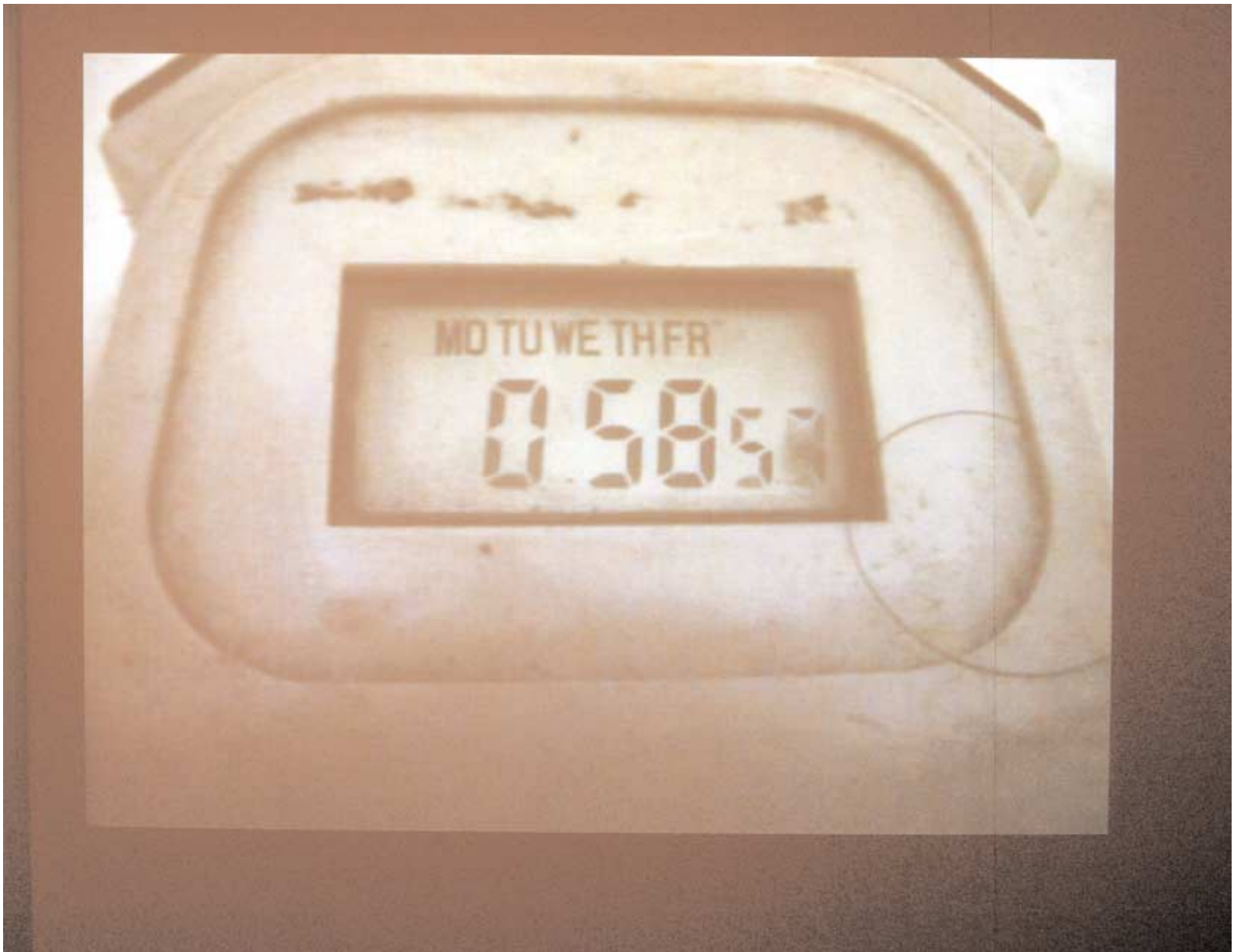
Some maximalists like to say, perhaps only half in jest, that the world can be divided into collectors and non-collectors. The Fundación ARCO is forging ahead with its goal of acquiring new work for its collection, currently comprising 157 pieces by 133 artists from Spain and around the world, all of them acquired during ARCO, from 1987-2003, from a total of 103 galleries. Those responsible for making this year's selection were the same curators as in 2002—Dan Cameron, Senior Curator of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, and María de Corral, curator of the Caixa de Pensions contemporary art collection—indicating ARCO's commitment to forming a collection articulated by an integrated eye, avoiding a dispersion of criteria, for the sake of a coherent collection free of asymmetric accumulations. The ARCO collection is weighted towards installation and sculpture based on today's new media: video installations, digital videos on DVD, photography, ➤➤

**Filipa Cesar,
Berlin Zoo,
Part 2, 2003.
Colour video with
sound, 5' 15".**





Bojan Sarcevic, *Cover Versions*, 2001. Digital video on DVD. Edition 3/4.



Hassan Khan, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2002. (See pages 48-49). DVD (6 works). Video with sound, 22' 25".





Mauro Restiffe,
Untitled, Series
"Roebling & North 4th", 2002.
 B/w Photo,
 136 x 195 x 5 cm.

Yoshua Okon,
Berlin Zoo, Part 2, 2003.
 Colour video with sound 5' 15".



limited C-print editions... which has not been an obstacle to acquiring, at ARCO'03, an oil painting, an acrylic, and a conceptual tapestry of hand-woven wool. The Fundación ARCO Collection also has a markedly international slant—it could be no other way, since it follows in the footsteps of today's art.

A look at the statistics shows that not many artists' names are repeated, nor those of their galleries, and that during the 16 years of the collection's existence, an average of 10 pieces has been acquired annually. Here are the numbers for the recent acquisitions at ARCO'03: 17 pieces, by 14 artists, from nine countries, represented by 13 galleries from eight cities in six countries. None of the artists this year were Spaniards. Except for two pieces from 2001 and two from 2003, all of the others were signed in 2002. The total investment in 2003: 148,650 euros (or approximately the same amount in US dollars). The most expensive piece: *Jay's Garden, Malibu*, by Mark Lewis. The least expensive were by Zilla Leutenegger, and one of the three works by Melanie Smith.

Now let us go on to analyse the pieces themselves: Two works by Wille Doherty (Derry, Northern Ireland, 1959), were acquired: *Unknown Male Subject (VI)*, 2002,



**Mark Lewis,
Jay's Garden,
Malibu, 2002.
35 mm
transferred
to DVD,
5' 31".**



**Melanie Smith,
Photo for Spiral City,
Series "3-II", 2002.
Silver on gelatine,
127 x 152 cm.**



**Willie Doherty,
Unknown Male
Subject (VI), 2002.
Digital print
mounted on plexiglass,
114 x 152 cm.**

**Left:
Unknown Male
Subject (III), 2002.
Digital print
mounted on plexiglass,
114 x 152 cm.**

C-print on Plexiglas, number 2/3, 114 x 152 cm; and *Unknown Male Subject (II)*, 2002, same medium and measurements. Both pieces were acquired from the Alexander and Bonin Gallery, New York. In both of them, we see the enigmatic face of a young man, with an arrogant, absent air, ignoring whoever is looking at him. Anonymity and the identity of the other are offered to us as something both worthy of contemplation and somewhat disturbing at the same time.

Bojan Sarcevic (Belgrade, 1974) created *Cover Versions*, 2001, digital video on DVD, number 3/4, from earlier | gebauer galerie, Berlin. The piece shows a sequence of musicians playing different instruments, ending with the final image turning into an album cover.

Six pieces by Hassan Khan (London, 1975) on DVD, from Galerie Chantal Crousel (Paris), were acquired, including *Tabla Dubb*, n° 9, 2002; *This is THE Political Film*, 1998; *The Eye Struck Me and the Lord of the Throne Saved Me*, 1997; *Sometime / Somewhere Else*, 2001; and *Six Questions to the Lebanese*, 2001. A very evocative piece filled with varied faces, proceeding from many lands, superimposed on the global, open image of the great metropolis, followed by huge subterranean corridors, solitary and menacing. The presence of ➤➤➤



Hassan Khan,
Tabla Dubb, n° 9, 2002. 3' 40".
This is THE Political Film, 1998. 1'.
The Eye Struck Me and the Lord
of the Throne Saved Me, 1997. 4'.
Sometime / Somewhere Else, 2001. 1' 45".
Six Questions to the Lebanese, 2001. 1'.
100 Portraits, 2001. 12'.
DVD. Video with sound.

drugs, of power; the innocent gaze; graffiti in Arabic (the artist's native tongue); ending with the security barrier of a condom. Its multicultural and urban narrative provides keys for understanding our times.

Sean Snyder's (Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA, 1972), *Script for Dallas Southfork in Hermes Land, Slobozia, Romania*, 2001, is an installation involving five photographs, two DVDs, two models, and documentation, 136 x 195 x 5 cm, from Casa Triângulo (São Paulo). The installation features a worktable in an interior architecture livened up with photographs of emotional landscapes and a video that imposes its voice and its presence in the room.

Mauro Restiffe (São José do Rio Pardo, Brazil, 1970) created an untitled black-and-white photograph, from the series *Roebling & North 4*, acquired at Casa Triângulo (São Paulo). The image shows a desolate nocturne, featuring a fenced-off urban construction site.

Filipa Cesar's (Oporto, Portugal, 1975), *Berlin Zoo, Part 2* (2003), a colour video, with soundtrack, 5' 15", from Galeria Cristina Guerra (Lisbon), features a sequence of faces, looking up attentively, with different degrees of intensity in their eyes. The camera's lens captures their differing reactions to something, presumably animals in the Berlin Zoo.

A singular, conceptual "tapestry" by Gabriel

Kuri (Mexico City, 1971) in hand-woven wool, bears the inscription "Work from home. Earn \$3700. Call 55-76-92-49". An ironic reflection on labour relations in our times. The piece was acquired from Galeria Kurimanzuto (Mexico City).

Architecture and interior design are also the stylistic theme of the work by Oliver Boberg (Herten-Kreis Recklinghausen, Germany, 1965), titled *Rohbau*, 2003, C-print, ed. 5. A four-storey building, under construction, is open to the possibilities of how it will be finished, of presences yet to arrive, of possible meetings, and an uncertain destiny.

Green, refreshing visions of a well-kept garden, with the ambiguous presence of a couple passing



Hassan Khan,
Tabla Dubb, n° 9, 2002. 3' 40".
This is THE Political Film, 1998. 1'.
The Eye Struck Me and the Lord
of the Throne Saved Me, 1997. 4'.
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100 Portraits, 2001. 12'.
DVD. Video with sound.

through, can be seen in the piece by Mark Lewis (Hamilton, Canada, 1967), *Jay's Garden, Malibu, 2002*, on DVD, 5' 31", ed. 3/3. It was acquired at Cent8-Serge Le Borgne (Paris).

Another DVD piece, by Zilla Leutenegger (Zurich, 1968) shows a long sequence featuring the silhouette of a woman sliding down from a chair to the floor, playing with her breasts, titled *Lessons I learned from Rocky I to Rocky III, 2002*. This DVD, from an edition of 10, came from the Zurich gallery Peter Kilchmann.

Melanie Smith (Poole, England, 1965) presented a splendid, panoramic urban vision in her *Photo for Spiral City, Serie "3.II", 2002*, a silver gelatine print, ed. 1/3, from OMR (Mexico City).

In this piece, the cityscape becomes a kind of abstraction of colour and pigment.

Vasco Araujo (Lisbon, 1975) plays with the characters from Greek myth, Hippolyte, Theseus, and Artemis, in the phrases superimposed on the images in his video installation *Hippolyte, 2000*, acquired from Filomena Soares (Lisbon).

As to painting, *Land of Lakes, 2002*, by Sue Williams (Chicago Heights, 1954), an oil on acrylic on canvas, is a composition with harmonious, almost automatic graphics, which take up the entire picture. The allusions to and insinuations involving masculine and feminine genitals play with the dynamics of the title. Another piece by Melanie Smith, *Painting for*

Spiral City 5, 2002, uses the city as a suggestive, inspiring motif. This acrylic on Plexiglas was acquired from OMR.

In sum, the photo-documentary, and photographic and video images, have become the principal language, coming on with the same force that colour did for the Fauvists, in their day. The city, architecture, and interior design have become the principle vehicle for representing life, and therefore, art. Photography, as a medium, remains full of energy and vitality amongst established figures and emerging artists alike, and the Fundación ARCO Collection's holdings come precisely from these two sources. ■■

elective affinities

selective

CUENCA, OR HOW TO LOOK AT WAR

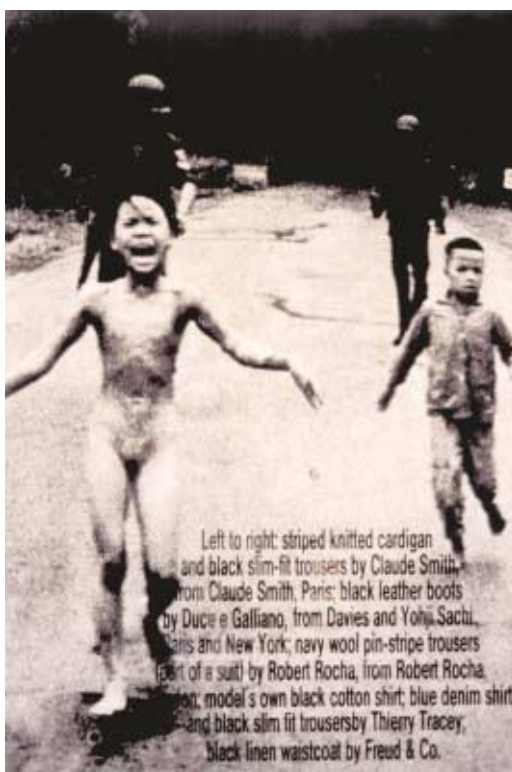
Agnès de Gouvion Saint-Cyr, head of Contemporary Photography Collections, Department of Fine Arts, Ministry of Culture, France

In 1918, it was called “the war to end all wars”, as if the entire world were praying for that First World War to be the last.

In 1945, newspapers around the globe had the same headline: “Never again...”. But from Vietnam to Algeria, from the civil wars in Lebanon to the Balkan conflicts, and now with the “liberation” of Iraq, war, or rather, *wars*, have made a comeback again and again, and we are forced to look at them unflinchingly in order to try to fight them.

With his piece *Left to Right*, Rogelio López Cuenca addresses the question of how and why to photograph war. As a poet, he understands the weight of words; as an artist, he knows how much emotion an image can evoke. However, because he has done so much work for magazines, he is also very familiar with the difficulty of making an impression on the feelings of the reader, who is often inundated, overloaded, and just plain sick and tired of this profusion of images offered on television, in the press, and in advertising.

During these very special times, when photographic genres are running into each other head-on—Toscani becomes a celebrity by using images from Kosovo in his campaign for the clothing firm Benetton; Ines van Lamsweerde finds herself an international art market star, showing works originally conceived for fashion magazines at leading galleries—how can anyone create truly antiwar work?



Rogelio López Cuenca, *Left to Right*, 1996.
Photo on canvas,
100 x 70 cm.
Courtesy Juana
de Aizpuru Gallery.

Left to right: striped knitted cardigan and black slim-fit trousers by Claude Smith, from Claude Smith, Paris; black leather boots by Ducci e Galliano, from Davies and Yohji Sacki, Paris and New York; navy wool pin-stripe trousers (part of a suit) by Robert Rocha, from Robert Rocha, London; model's own black cotton shirt; blue denim shirt and black slim fit trousers by Thierry Tracey, and black linen waistcoat by Freud & Co.

Of course, one could get on top of an American tank to photograph whatever the army commanders will let us see in Iraq, or work independently and risk one's life, as Capa or Caron did. In any case, what for? Magazines, for budgetary reasons, barely publish any images by photoreporters, preferring the cartoony graphics used by the big television stations.

Rogelio López Cuenca offers, in counterpoint, his creative force. Using as a starting point the photograph of a naked Vietnamese girl fleeing in terror from a napalm bombsite, an image that has become an icon burned into our collective memory, the artist, like the art director of a magazine, has inserted a caption, which takes on the descriptive tone typical of fashion photography—“From left to right”; shouldn't we take that as an allusion to the fact that the entire political spectrum should feel involved here?—and describes the designer clothing that the model, undoubtedly chosen after an exhaustive casting, is supposedly wearing: trousers by Claude Smith, boots by Galliano, and so on.

With this juxtaposition, the result is very disturbing, with an impact that seems terrifyingly effective.

In future, we should pay more attention to images.

ons '03

Experts pick
their favourite works
from ARCO 03

POETICS OF THE EYE

Virginia Villaplana,
media essayist and filmmaker.
Professor of Audiovisual
Communication (UCH), Valencia

"The idea of the body is overvalued as a consequence of advanced capitalism. It is the basis of all commercial operations. The very concept of the individual is limited by its physiology as a unit of production and consumption. The body is the product's target; for the individual, it is his tool for enjoyment. The relevance of the physical image entered recently into the same structure. It has become the empirical principle of our society." (Sergio Prego, in a dialogue with Franck Larcade. *Zehar* magazine, nº 38, winter 1998.)

Jean Paul Sartre advanced one of the ideas that Postmodern art, with its use of mass media, would take up: the concept of writing with a social or political finality, to give pride of place to the close connection between body and word, between the individual, society, and writing.

In this sense, the artistic practices conceived using hypermedia writing have involved a performative exploration of the capacity of the enunciative act belonging to the condition of the individual in post-contemporary societies. The work of Sergio Prego explores a wide range of technological equipment for recording and reproducing movement (video, photography, and installation), transgressing the relationships between body-machine, action-structure, and the defragmentation of the body. These relationships conceptualise space as an area for the production, process, and hagiographic context of the eye. Given this techno-



Sergio Prego,
Home, 2001.
Video, 5' 30".
Courtesy Soledad
Lorenzo Gallery,
Madrid.

politicisation of the body, the premises underlying the activation of this equipment, its recording and its writing elaborate a conflict between the individual and the serialisation of the object-body-eye, its production and consumption. Pieces on the body's intervention in the context of space through movement, such as *Mister pequeño abandona toda esperanza* (Mr Little Abandons All Hope), *Tesuo*, *Bound to fail*, *Yesland*, *I'm here to stay* and *Home*, therefore represent a revision of the positioning of the spectator's eye via ideas such as enunciative superimposition, point of view, action-story in continuity, material, and visual suture.

Home infers the stance of the index through the treatment of the body as a visual sign. An index of the body, like a trace that unmakes the

unity of time and space from which its material detaches itself. *Home* acts as a kind of transformation in the treatment of the body in relation to the first recorded performances for video, by artists such as Bruce Nauman or Vito Acconci, in which physicality was displaced to the treatment of the visual sign as the icon of an action. Both in the case of the index as in that of the icon, it is clear that there are interpretative codes, codes of recognition in the construction of this image, based on the temporal duration of the action and the transformation of space as the object of this process. In this sense, *Home* alludes to the co-ordinates that the body image acquires by taking on a processual character that paralyses the idea of a temporality subsumed in the moment. This means that the formation of »»

meaning and its structure can be found more within the repeated sequencing of a continuity that is processed through the actions brought about through the body. That is, meaning is not the actualisation of a structure (the medium), but rather the performative execution that uses the temporal bases of that structure as a starting point.

Questioning the objectification that the representation of the body has developed through mechanical and electronic media and new digital technologies, creating a (technical) illusion of continuity, finds, in *Home*, a scanned image of a territory of activity and resistance. Exploring critically the characteristics of the construction of the body as an object of pleasure and displeasure. Thus, there is no disassociation nor disconnection of meaning and medium, since the representation of the body in *Home* is generated through the movement defined with its iconic density (no front or back, no beyond), and the flow that redefines the landscape of intervention of the post-contemporary image.

TOPOGRAPHIC FIELDS AND RENDITIONS

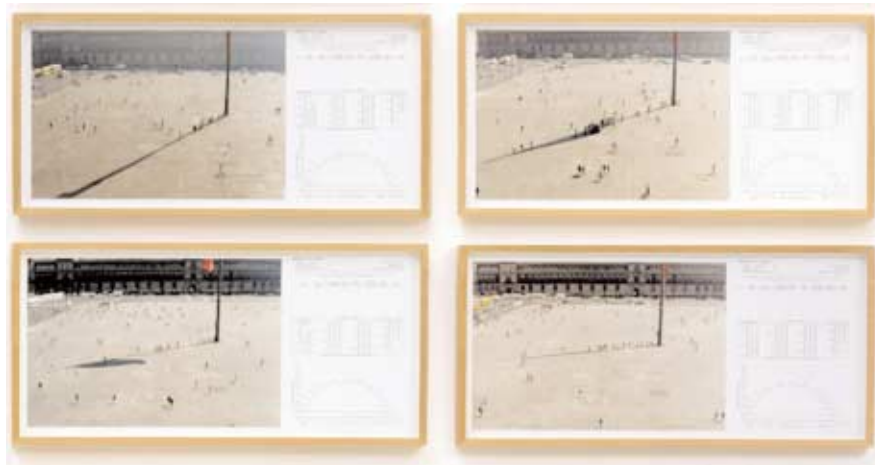
Key Portilla-Kawamura, Space Search Engine, London and Oviedo (Spain)

Fields

We could say that the difference between the vectorial field and that of minimalism is that the former not only uses its constitutional elements, but also involves them, transforming a setting of mere representation into one of simulation. A field configuration is the aggregate result of individual relationships and decisions, so that its way of transcending them is not through objects, but rather how they interdevelop. The work of the Mexican-Belgian artist Francis Aljys uses this overcoming of the minimalist grid's hermeticism and static determinism to seek fields of higher operativity and uncertainty and figurative dematerialisation. The artist eloquently sums it up with these words: "In my city, everything is ephemeral."

Time Lapse, shown at ARCO'03 by London's Lisson Gallery, comprises a series of 16 photographs of Mexico City's Zócalo Plaza at different times of day, which Aljys depicts through the erratic movement of pedestrians beneath the slowly rotating, enormous shadow thrown by a central flagpole. Developed within the matricial space of minimalist appearances (a monumental, rectangular esplanade), *Time Lapse* goes beyond formal minimalist relationships, depicting a totally vectorial field susceptible to temporal phenomena (the changing impact of sunlight), to social processes outside any kind of hierarchical control (the random flow of pedestrians, not subjected to the strict grid of the plaza's pavement lines), and to individual decisions which, altogether, generate overall behaviour patterns (the passers-by lined up spontaneously beneath the flagpole).

An ambivalent perceptive uncertainty runs through *Time Lapse*, so that it is sometimes unclear whether one is following the evolution of a shadow, of people standing around waiting, or of a bustling plaza. Other examples of Aljys's interventions—such as *Cuando la fe mueve montañas* (When Faith Moves Mountains), in which 500 volunteers lined up, shovels in their hands, and moved forward, infinitesimally, a



Francis Aljys, *Time Lapse*, 2001. 16 framed photos-sunpaths. 31.2 x 64.3 cm each. Courtesy Lisson Gallery, London.

sand dune on the outskirts of Lima during the city's Bienalle in April 2002—show an analogous choreographic tension among place, object, subject, activity, and passivity.

Topologies

Although the concept of the vectorial field describes the relationships, vortices, and functions of its constituent elements, also intrinsic to these relationships is the nature of the medium (or its basis) which determines, to a large extent, the operativity of these components. In other words, the squares on the chessboard are themselves the source of its *raison d'être*, and the reference point for the pieces' movements. In its widest sense, Aljys's work explores the idea of this kind of field, in different media.

Perhaps it is his Belgian origins and his architectural training which induced him to take such an interest in the huge square known as the Zócalo, a public space of spectacular dimensions which follows the model of the European tradition, that of the colonial Plaza de Armas. The classical Greek agora is topologically characterised by its flatness, and programmatically by offering a passive receptacle for events, a place for catharsis, where homogeneity can be broken by superimposed phenomena, such as a flagpole's moving shadow.

On the other hand, in contrast with the Zócalo project, in *Cuando la fe mueve montañas*, the dune is presented as a challenge to be overcome, a topological obstacle loaded with gravitational connotations. Due to its accidental nature, the terrain itself becomes an agent (not a patient one) generating catalysis. The strength of this other model of public space which Aljys is using lies in its ability to generate social cohesion through suffering, and the collective empathy of the 500 stoic volunteers who subtly *retouched* the dune's sandy peaks.

Surrender

Adhering to the minimalist precept of doing hardly anything, understood here not in a figurative sense (as in Judd, LeWitt, and company) but in an operative one, Aljys's mediation in *Time Lapse* is almost nil. Taking the evocative title of

another of his pieces, *Paradoxes of Praxis I: Sometimes making something leads to nothing* (1997), one could say that the contradiction in its title is equally on target, at least within the context of Aljys's oeuvre. This attitude is exemplified by the nonmaterial nature of his art, which, far from being the product of ostracism, represents a discourse on the verge of a hopeful surrender to the cumulative entropy of the megalopolis.

The truth is that no component of *Time Lapse* was generated or choreographed by the artist, whose sculptural skill was limited to carrying out a simple observation of a curious event (e.g., the spontaneous formation of passers-by into a straight line) which, due to its subtlety, tends to go unnoticed within the codified superlative chaos of Mexico City. Precisely this aspect of non-planning confers on the event the category of an urban semi-miracle, and its unknowing actors the category of demi-heroes within the profane mythology of the city.

Thanks to Justina Niewiara and Lynne Gentle of Lisson Gallery London, Cuauhtémoc Medina (curator, México City), and Maite Cambor Portilla (Georgetown University).

THE HANDS OF TIME AND COLLECTIVENESS

José Luis Brea. Professor of Aesthetics and Art Theory at Castilla-La Mancha University. Freelance art critic and curator, editor of *arts.zin* magazine and the website <http://aleph-arts.org>.

What this piece depicts is not-only-time, its passage measured by light. In fact, here, time is like a first-person narrator, the one producing what is happening and at the same time the one recording it. *Time is the author*, let us say, operating as a productive machine. And the question is, then, what is being written—or what mobilises it.

Capturing both the process and *its duration* has been, from the beginning, a constant in the work of Aljys. But here, in a certain way, the function of *time in the piece* goes beyond anything else.

From operating as a merely metaphorical element, it becomes a productive agent, an element of activation. *Zócalo Plaza* is itself—along with the path, a signature of time, that sunlight traces through the movements of people reflecting its intensity—the implacable foreman of the project, representing a policy of the *happening* more than of representation (and whoever doubts this should not forget that the “phototropisms” that it is recording “happen” every day). If we had to find some kind of ancestor to this project, it could be that video by David Lamelas titled *Time as Activity*, which in the 1970s originated a certain concept of art as a way of managing the purest, most immediate form of “being there”.

In *Paradox of Praxis*, the celebrated performance in which Alÿs pushed a block of ice through the streets of Mexico City until it was completely melted, the *passing of time* was already operating as a symbolic centre (i.e., it was what made manifest all of Alÿs’s distrust of the “posterity” of artworks after their very moment of production, of historical occurrence). But this piece was not, yet, a pure time-machine, producing only time (rather, perhaps, *counter-time*): surely there was too much self-referentiality, too much self-reflection about the question of the artwork itself and its unstable meaning.

Here, on the other hand, nothing is produced—or recorded—other than the passing of time itself. One could say that this piece is, in itself, a clock—a true *sundial*—but not primarily a regulating machine, one marking off a measurement. Rather, it is a machine able to reconvert a continuous energy and its intensity—that of the blinding, implacable sun—into an analogical definer of lines of entropy, whose ultimate result is the articulation of modes of relationships between the subjects of experience, the induction of formations—spontaneous and provisional—of microcommunity among human beings (who, seen from a distance, like ants, are depicted frenetically coming and going from one place to another within the plaza, as if it represented history, or the entire world).

In this sense, it can be said that this piece approaches, with exquisite precision, one of the questions that make the project *Faith Moves Mountains* (created for the Lima Biennale) so captivating. Here, there is also a mobilisation of an *art work*, which not only produces a physical transformation of earth, form, or material, but also—and above all—mobilises a practice that results in a social movement, in the interaction of a collective. Here, this tension of a microcommunity’s formation—without any external object or shared project—is produced solely by the passing of time itself, by the movement of the light that induces it.

The small, but very powerful metaphor that irradiates from it depends on its almost literal immediateness: it is the passing of light across the earth that writes the historical time which pushes human beings—like a destiny in their path—into each other, next to each other, so that they meet and mutually relate within the lines traced by time. In the concise density of each fleeting *Jetztzeit* (Walter Benjamin’s rich concept of *now-time*) the feverish intertwining of these *fortuitous but necessary* encounters forges that exciting destiny which is the undecipherable and enigmatic nature of *the human condition* as an indefinable and unpredictable cartography of *the common*, of *us*). One whose time this piece metaphorises sweetly and subtly...

Washington Barcala, Landscape with Architect and My Winter-Grey Left Hand. Mixed media on canvas, 108 x 168 cm. Courtesy Guillermo de Osma, Madrid.



BARCALA: PAINTING AS A JOB, LIVING AS A JOB

Ángel Kalenberg, director of the National Museum of Visual Arts, Montevideo

Until I saw the fabulous ARCO’03, I was convinced that I was very familiar with the entire oeuvre of my countryman—and long-time friend—Washington Barcala, perhaps the leading Uruguayan artist of his generation. I even knew well the work he had produced after 1974, when he moved to Madrid, either because I had visited his studio there, or had seen him during his occasional trips to Montevideo, or through our correspondence. But it turns out that, in the middle of a galaxy of thousands of paintings, sculptures, videos, and installations, ARCO also displayed a picture by Barcala that I had never seen: *Paisaje con arquitecto y mi mano izquierda gris de invierno* (Landscape with Architect and My Winter-Grey Left Hand), which is, I have no doubt, a sort of culmination. And also a key to understanding many other Barcala pieces.

In spite of being mixed media, there is a draughtsman-like quality about it; the forms are high-definition (in the photographic sense), and the drawing always appears to be in conflict with the other languages that the artist uses in this work. Here, Barcala draws linear shapes (a composition of triangles, squares or rectangles along the lower right corner and the upper left corner), superimposing a material counterpart, let us say, a fragment of cloth sewn onto the background, which hides something covered, or a cross on the body of the right-hand

figure, which blots out what is beneath it, or makes it reverberate. The black in both figures could appear burnt, just as this effect was used by Alberto Burri.

The picture also includes the façade of a postmodern architectural design (perhaps by Aldo Rossi) which Barcala deconstructs. In the lower left corner he formulates a kind of analysis of the ground/figure relationship of this façade; here, the figure of a maze recomposes its hollow centre. But there is more. Above the black triangle he has drawn a hopscotch figure, which is a way of spatially relating a succession of rectangles, composed by adding one to another, in order to reach a transcendent state, since the last spot on the hopscotch represents heaven, and Barcala symbolises this as a sun. As to the rest, two architectural columns rest on one arm of the human figure on the left (not in vain, the title seems to propose a revisionist allusion to postmodernism). By the same token, the *winter-grey left hand* is represented by a glove, i.e. the absence of the hand, of humanness, in another critical allusion to postmodernism, empty of humanism, of classicism.

In sum, this picture proposes a reflection on the postmodern spatiality of architecture. As Barcala puts it: “My piece is an attempt to create spaces for visual relationships, for establishing proportions where the form expresses, through its general ➤➤

appearance or identity, the diverse realities of the physical or spiritual world.” That is Barcala’s aesthetics in a nutshell, his particular version of the collage aesthetic, which tends to blur the limits between genres, between rationality and chaos, between art and life.

Of course, this is a collage. And Barcala knows that the impact of a collage lies not in its power of representation, but in its capacity to propose “all of the possible virtualities” intrinsic to its materials, which is why he himself has said that “the material I use gives off a powerful force, and later it is difficult to let go of that.” However, how does the artist manage his confrontation with the materials, or his work with objects? It seems as if Barcala is suggesting to us that painters are no longer windows on the world, because they have become pieces of that world.

Barcala creates a noteworthy tension between two systems: one is that of material forms, which in traditional terminology could be the equivalent to ground, brought to fruition on the basis of fragments of flat materials and painting, and transmitted in a frankly informalist language. Another is the system of bits of wood (toothpicks, little sticks), which could be seen as the figure, created based on impoverished three-dimensional elements, through which he brings about a strange geometry, a certain constructivism that he superimposes onto the ground of his pictures, defining their expressiveness. The forms that sail about this background are sometimes subordinated to the structure of the sticks (for example, a fabric circle within a triangle made with bits of wood), whilst others are in counterpoint to them, and yet others provide contrast, but there are always highly significant resonances between them.

Over the course of half a century, Barcala has built up a highly personal oeuvre, coherent and rigorous; avoiding stridence, he took refuge in a stripped-down language, intimate, almost hermetic—and at the same time, oozing sensitivity. Because for Barcala (converging with the model of Rafael Barradas, who also lived, studied, created, and showed in Spain) this artist *lives* being a painter to the point of inhabiting a (spiritual?) identity somewhere between the job of painting and the job of living.

Since Barcala’s language is not only that of painting, but also spills over into other disciplines, it could be said that he is a *painter of limits, of frontiers*. Now these boundaries overflow their channels, they invade each others’ space, they erode each other, and it is at the remaining interstices *between* genres, where new art must be produced—an art that does not fit into any of the previous codes established for each genre, but which cuts across all of them, catalysing new artists’ viewpoints about their surroundings, and themselves.

All of Barcala’s works are hidden metaphors, whose access is very difficult. As it happens, language now increases the distance between beings and entities, so the ready-made proposes a short-circuit: by symbolising itself, it cuts off any possibility of representation. Therefore, when Barcala uses triangles (as he nearly always does), perhaps he is thinking about the trinity, whether in its theological version or not. And when he incorporates the number one, surely this symbolises unity. The search for it, or its impossibility? His work of deconstruction and reconstruction could throw up ambiguous indices: sometimes the achievement of unity seems an impossible task, and others it seems to be within the artist’s reach. Perhaps the hope that this unity can indeed be reached is the prime mover behind every artist’s work?



Vargas-Suárez
Universal,
Virus Americanus.
Installation,
variable dimensions.
Courtesy Thomas
Erben Gallery,
New York.

VIRUS AMERICANUS

Julieta González,
curator at the Caracas
Museum of Fine Art

“Tourism, human circulation considered as consumption, a by-product of the circulation of commodities, is fundamentally nothing more than the leisure of going to see what has become banal. The economic organisation of visits to different places is already in itself the guarantee of their equivalence. The same modernisation that removed time from the voyage also removed from it the reality of space.” (Guy Ernest Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*).

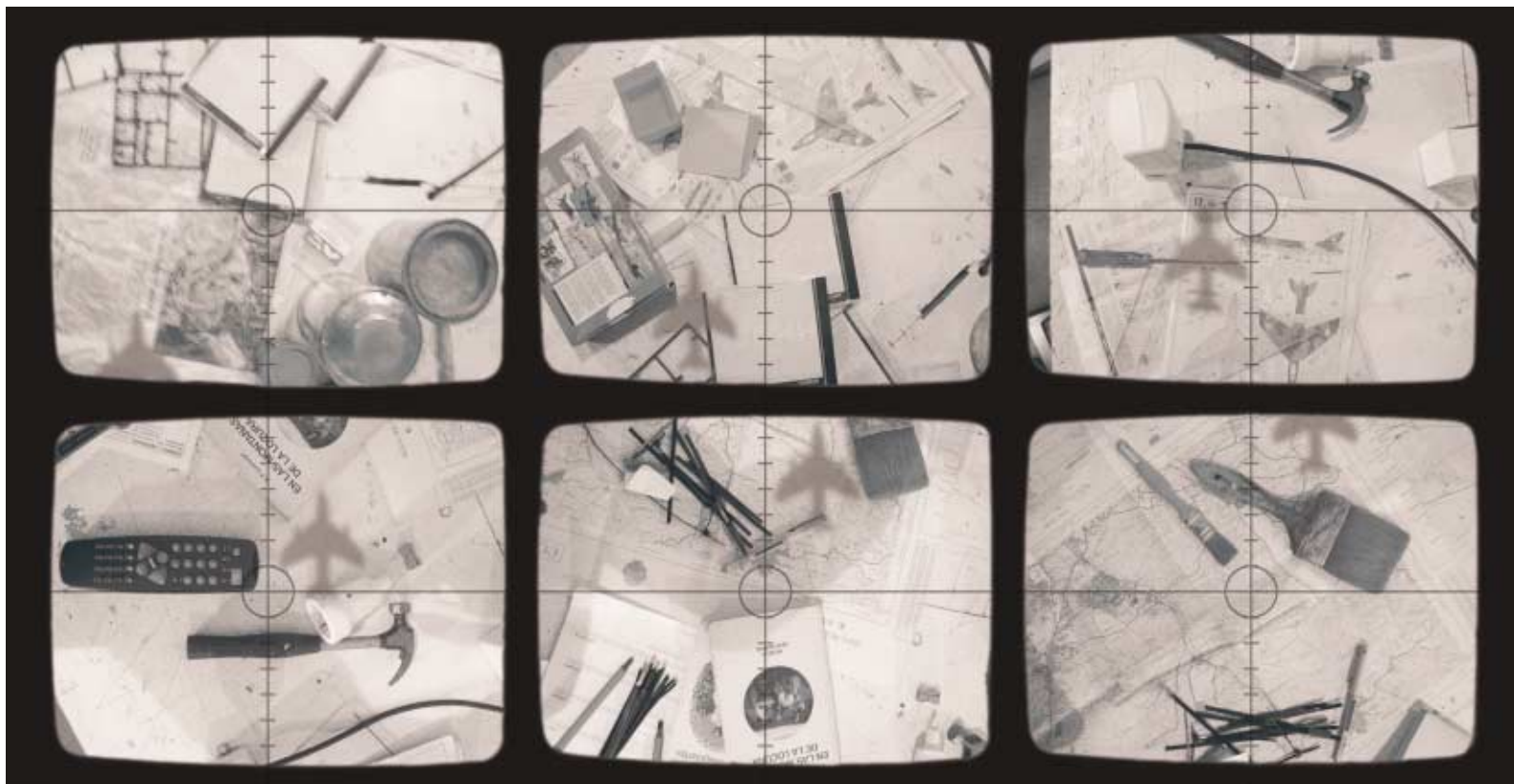
Airport, museum and exhibition centre; seemingly disparate and disconnected places, which today are part of the greater public sphere. Vargas-Suárez Universal’s images seem to speak of these spaces, some of which make up the visual, material and spatial support of his work. Walking around the ARCO’03 exhibition centre, the work stood out strikingly against the standard backdrop of gallery stands displaying, for the greater part, the usual “bill of fare”. The booth was intervened in its totality by a sprawling painting in red and white which upon closer inspection revealed intricate structures, reminiscent of machines, air and spacecraft designs, but also of the architecture of public space.

This installation is part of a series of recent works by Vargas-Suárez Universal in which he intervenes the exhibition space with these “wall-drawings”. Fresco painting and murals, as well as site-specific installations, are references in VSU’s works which are painted directly onto the wall. But the wall is not only the physical support of the painting, it is the white empty space of VSU’s uncanny structures. Architectures of the void, of the empty public space, of the virtual space of electronic circuits, all come together in a formless and chaotic accumulation of

structures which resonates with the Situationist critique of the spectacle and the role that public space plays in this “spectacularisation” as an important agent in the alienation of the individual in contemporary society.

The Situationist references I found in the work were not only in terms of the image and the ideas to which it relates, but were also clearly inscribed within the artist’s own operative strategies.

Automation—described by Asger Jorn and Debord as akin to the concepts of *dérive* and *détournement*—is the operation through which the artist executed the painting, creating the images through blind-drawing, with felt-tip markers. Even though this work was not executed directly onto the wall—ARCO’s duration and logistics impeded its labour-intensive and time consuming production—its overpowering presence annulled the space of the booth and turned it into something else, an element of subversion in the clearly demarcated architecture of the exhibition centre. The conceptual strength of the work and its open invasion of space articulated a critique of the homogenisation that these spaces produce with whatever they display even though they constitute a primary and necessary vehicle for the circulation and distribution of art. But more importantly, it was a reminder that the work can retain its critical and subversive potential even when inscribed within the context and spatial dynamics of an art fair, where art is not always transformed into commodity or spectacle.



FLYING OVER ONE'S OWN TO PUT AN END TO "ALL THAT"

Javier Fuentes Feo, art critic, Madrid

It is true that the choice of a single piece as the artwork that most caught one's eye among thousands on display always turns out to be a disconcerting decision, if not a questionable act of excessively determinist exclusion—above all because, at the end of an art fair, the anxious feeling always lingers that, no matter how many times one has roamed the aisles, and no matter how well these "tours" are organised (map and checklist constantly in hand) it is possible that some piece, some little drawing, or some work hung after the vernissage, has not been seen, and has therefore lost, without the possibility of an appeal, its right to be considered. In the end, one would have to be able to write that there was not a single work that exercised an absolute "attraction", but rather that the eye itself—and whenever possible, the intellect as well—had fixed on different propositions, many of them, sometimes, both conceptually and formally, far apart from each other.

One should, therefore, be able to write—and indeed, one is doing so—that it was hard not to spend at least an hour in front of *Observance* (2002), by Bill Viola, a video that continues to make manifest—although now only in our memory—the complex relationship between the one who is watching and the one—or the what—who is being watched within the configuration of any work of art, and in which some of the ultimate keys to what it means to be human are exalted (even though I have yet to be accused of being an apologist for the metaphysical): these include pain, death, contact with the other, and, in a very special way, the composition and formal structuring of time, all of this expressed with a deep sense of the painterly, which has characterised this artist's work from the beginning.

One could also refer to the work on paper that Jorge Macchi presented at Ruth Benzacar, *Fuegos de artificio* (Fireworks, 2002), in which a shoeprint left behind on the white background seemed to dissolve—opening up and out and therefore losing its identity as a print—as another step forward was taken; it was as if the artist were making a clear reference to time as a form of dissolution. Not a time in which memory is dissolved—what is left behind and lost—but the passing that, with the increasing nearness of

death, loses any option of maintaining a longed-for identity.

However, the present text has been headed by a title and an image, not because "this", as should be clear by now, is "the best" or "my favourite", but rather because it is very interesting and because, in the end, some piece had to take on—evading, precisely, my own responsibility—(pardon the reiteration) this responsibility. And Mateo Maté can carry the weight, because, in my opinion, he appears, without a doubt, as one of the most interesting Spanish artists of his generation. Compared with the exhaustive exaltation of a recent current in Spanish art, a radically banalised trend that has emphasised barely thought-out or barely critical anecdotes—in the real sense that such a concept should entail—over the ultimate responsibility that every artist owes his own times, Mateo Maté has kept up a coherent discourse in which the personal, the poetic, and the ironic have been present as components that are not exclusively critical, but also charged with a deep cognitive strength; it is a way of poeticising through art, with great austerity and simplicity, about the fragmented and unstable configuration of contemporary thought. This has been evident, for example, in the entire series of objects collected under the title *Cuadros de una exposición* (Pictures at an Exhibition): objects of broken glass (pitchers, vases, windows...) put back together piece by piece, exalting the nostalgia of a lost unity of meaning.

Linked to previous pieces from the same series, in which a toy train equipped with a camera "travels" around an unmade bed, or around a table strewn with the remains of an intimate dinner party, the piece presented at ARCO, ➤➤



Mateo Maté, *I Travel to Get to Know my Geography (V)*, 2003. Installation, drafting table, chair and monitor. Mixed media. Courtesy Oliva Arauna Gallery, Madrid.

Viajo para conocer mi geografía V (I Travel to Get to Know My Geography V), features a model fighter plane flying in circles over a table where—in a clearly tautological gesture—the materials used by the artist to make it are still lying. This airplane, which has a little black-and-white camera underneath, sends images to a television monitor next to the chair where the artist sat whilst making the piece, thus simultaneously simulating a kind of combat station—because the television screen has a target on it, so that the image looks like something from a bombing mission. This plane, which flies over a landscape composed of the things that have made it (and which hark back to the artist as its assembler), seeking a target at which it will never shoot, refers, indisputably, to the almost parodic way in which war is presented in our contemporary “image societies”. Videogame wars—as has been said innumerable times—in which destruction is only part of a “mission impossible” heroically won, and in which the television stations of “all the world”—perhaps aware that, as Paul Virilio pointed out, Vietnam was lost by a true visual, media democracy—accept a sinister and shameful self-imposed censorship.

This piece by Maté, therefore, leaves in its wake, beyond the tautological way in which it refers to how a finished piece usually hides its constituent process (where the artist objectifies himself), an air of nostalgia or political tragedy: the fact that art, just like serious political thought or citizens “vindicating” their right to be represented (and not just oriented), is no more than a slightly pathetic, vindictive attempt. Maté’s piece reminds us, with its ironic, nostalgic connotations, which are perhaps more Freudian than they would seem at first glance, that art is merely a continuation, in the adult age, of the pleasure that a child feels at play; it is completely incapable of altering in an effective way the ever more aberrant “social order”.

NEW VISIONS OF CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE

Stefano Caldana and Roberta Bosco, journalists for CiberP@is (the computer supplement of the Spanish daily *El País*), specialised in digital art and culture, Barcelona

My growing interest in the development of art linked to new technologies, and especially to the non-material artistic expressions that exist exclusively on the Internet, kept me away, for awhile, from artists who still use canvas and brushes. However, the arrival on the scene of a new generation, one juxtaposing traditional and digital art techniques, has awoken in me a new curiosity, due to their capacity to mix techniques, concepts, and eras. Among these youngsters, I would highlight an Italian artist who, although he works with new technologies, is still faithful to the secular tradition of a country where Art with a capital A means *painting*. Carlo Zanni has chosen to take advantage of the intrinsic characteristics of a medium like the Internet to carry out projects that can be enjoyed only on-line. Moreover, his mastery of computer tools has had an impact on his artistic sensibility,



Carlo Zanni, *Roby Baggio Kicks the Ball.tiff* (alias), 2002. Oil on canvas, 128 x 140 cm.

and on all of his work, including those in painting and other traditional formats.

ARCO 2003 was an opportunity to see *Thumbnail Questions*, a series of oil paintings done by hand with the help of vectorial software and a cutting plotter. Each painting is a precise, hyperrealist reproduction of computer icons, logos for computer programs, and other elements that the artist considers part of the contemporary landscape *par excellence*: the computer screen and the desktop. The *Thumbnail Questions* are canvases that reproduce unavailable files, colloquially called an “undownloaded image”, that is, empty icons with a little white cross on them which, in computer iconography, indicate the impossibility of visualising an image. Zanni conceived them as “unavailable answers” to questions that reflect the state of anxiety in which Western society is submerged: “Where is the safest place to sit on an airplane?, How do I delete my account?, Does Al-Qaeda have cyberterrorist capabilities?, Does mustard gas have anything to do with mustard?, What should I do if I receive a

suspicious letter?” Each question gives the title to a painting, but the answer is inaccessible, it cannot be found on the canvas. The only answer that appears on the canvas is the word *touchit* followed by a number—a word that usually appears on the icons known as *thumbnails* on webpages that invite the user to click on them so that they will be enlarged, and a clear reference to an interaction that is only apparently at odds with the contemplative nature of painting.

Thumbnail Questions, presented at ARCO’03 in the stand of the Geneva gallery Analix Forever, form part of the series *New Contemporary Landscapes*, which includes, among others, *Desktop Icons*. All of these are oil paintings on linen, with a format of 128 x 140 cm, depicting icons of the most common types of graphics files (JPEG, TIF, and so on) to be found on any computer. In this case, their titles are the names of the images supposedly in the files, which can only be “seen” on a computer. *Self Portrait, 5th July in Silicon Valley* or *Roby Baggio Kicks the Ball*, are some of the names referring to the subject which are imagined to be depicted therein, hidden in a computer file.

The canvases of this *New Contemporary Landscapes* series propose a materialisation of what we are seeing all around us: the confrontation, even the conflict, between tradition and contemporaneity. In Carlo Zanni’s words: “The subjects of my investigation of the new contemporary landscape are linked as much to the events and society of our times as they are to technology.”





COVER VERSIONS

Wilfried and Yannicke Cooreman,
art collectors - Belgium

It was thanks to dealers in ancient Greece that people were first given the opportunity to adorn their homes with art. Originally the state was the only patron; this changed during the 4th century B.C., when Alexander the Great personally commissioned work.

There was also a flourishing art trade in Roman times. Soldiers acted as the dealers, and brought back works of art from the territories ruled by Rome.

The Renaissance was another important period in the growth of the art trade. The Church was the principal patron, but wealthy Italian families such as the Medici and the Strozzi bought works and regularly made commissions. It was through the rich Medici collection that Michelangelo came to know the art of Greece and Rome.

In the 16th and 17th centuries the great collectors employed middlemen to seek out and acquire the works they wanted. There was fierce rivalry among these middlemen. At the sale of a private collection in the 18th century, a dealer named Rossi wore a silk mask to deceive his rivals (Stuart-Penrose, *The Art Scene*).

Around 1800, dealers in England began to open their own shops instead of relying on commissions from collectors. The Industrial Revolution produced a new aristocracy of nouveaux riches. They did not generally come from a cultured background, and they asked dealers to help them create a cultural ambience appropriate to their new status.

In the 19th century, artists' work was shown at the Salons as well as at dealers' shops. Apart from providing exhibition space, the galleries of that time were meeting places for artists and collectors. Vollard, a leading Paris dealer, gave a series of now legendary dinners in his cellar, inviting artists, collectors and writers. The exchange of ideas and fierce discussions during these evenings were stimulating and fruitful influence on the development of art.

Today, the gallery is still one of the main meeting places for artists and other people in

the art world. The gallery can be seen as complementing the museum, which may neglect certain areas in contemporary art on the grounds that works are not yet ready for a museum collection.

Ours is a time of international art fairs, a venue where one can visit many galleries at the same time. A very important fair is ARCO, in Madrid, which is considered by the Latin American countries as the gateway to Europe. What makes ARCO so interesting is that it is a meeting point for different cultures. ►►

Bojan Sarcevic,
Cover Versions, 2001.
Digital video on DVD.
Edition 3/4.
Courtesy
cartier | gebauer
galerie, Berlin.





Bojan Sarcevic,
Cover Versions, 2001.
Digital video on DVD.
Edition 3/4.
Courtesy
carlier | gebauer
galerie, Berlin.

As a visitor at ARCO'03, our "elective affinity" vote was captured by a video installation by Bojan Sarcevic (carlier | gebauer galerie), *Cover Versions*, a piece of research on musical language. A group of Turkish Gypsy musicians was filmed in a studio, recording various cult songs from Western pop music. They play traditional Ottoman instruments, interpreting a repertoire ranging from Nirvana's *Come as You Are* through Marvin Gaye's *I Heard It Through the Grapevine* and Bob Marley's *Could You Be Loved* to Block Rockin' Beats by the Chemical Brothers.

Re-transporting pop music that is already based on a multiple citation of pop music into a still relatively clearly culturally-embedded musical language reverses the usual cultural transfer, making it visible, whilst creating a new identity at the same time.

Another remarkable artist for us was Yael Bartana (Annet Gelink Gallery). She is searching for alternative stories which disappeared or still

exist under the surface of everyday life. Her work deals with the rituals of social training and the individual's role of assimilation within geopolitical contexts. "My work," says Bartana, "investigates the dynamics of the relation between the individual and the state. As a soldier, it is difficult to keep your personal sovereignty without actively resisting commands."

These works are still on our minds, and we want to make a statement to promote *looking*. Looking with more patience and more time. Time determines collections. Experiencing a work of art is contemplative, solitary and very slow. It develops inside the viewer in a private, highly charged and sensual world of memory and re-experience. It is

potentially nameable but certainly not consumable. An artwork's perfection lies in its uniqueness.

Art galleries should not promote art talk, categorisation and consumption; this influences artists to make unflawed, more consumable, less genuine work. Let's stop talking and start looking. Look out for ARCO'04.

Art galleries should not promote art talk, categorisation and consumption; this influences artists to make unflawed, more consumable, less genuine work

THE WAREHOUSE

Cecilia Fajardo Hill,
art historian, contemporary art critic
and curator, Caracas

Within the context of ARCO'03, you feel pulled into the work of Nelson Leirner, in a way very different from the eclectic variety found in other pieces at the fair. This could seem rather paradoxical, since this artist's work is, by definition, extremely eclectic—an aspect that could almost camouflage it—since it is constructed on the basis of an unbiased and overabundant presence of elements from popular culture, from mass-market culture, and from art history, aspects that are also the source of so much of today's art; art that, consequently, is also at the fair.

How, then, is Leirner's work different, if its raw material can be generalised under the label of "common"? The difference lies in the artist's cultural specificity and idiosyncrasy, which do not fit into generic definitions.

There are different aspects that make his work different. First, the artist's unbridled, baroque pleasure in accumulating, combining, and creating interpretations of contradictory elements from contemporary and traditional material culture. Second, the use of an iconography from the visual culture of Brazil and, in general, Christian popular culture, specifically from the Latin world (Latin America, Spain, Italy, and Portugal). Third, his adherence to an openly kitsch culture, at a time when kitsch is usually incorporated into works that are non-political, but rather cool, without irony. Fourth, his political attitude, which is radically critical and transgressive, using (tragicomic) humour and irony, sometimes seemingly on the verge of cynicism, but avoiding stepping over that line due to the contradictorily encyclopaedic and messianic traits underlying his work.

At ARCO'03, Leirner presented *The Warehouse*, a site-specific installation that unfolds like a theatrical set which simultaneously presents a cacophony of different and incongruent stories. It is impossible to understand the totality of these narratives (or of the installation), since they do not unfold in sequence, and also because they really are not narratives, anyway. On the other hand, each element invites us to look at it individually, and the viewer gets lost in a maze of details and fragments of the whole. Perhaps we can imagine our own narratives, because we recognise the iconography that Leirner is using, just as we can identify with how each element bears the weight of a political history, a reality, a context.

For example, at the beginning of a wall—looking from left to right—we find a gorilla head, next to a cage filled with yellow parrots, and then two more cages, one with monkeys, and underneath another with elements alluding to Halloween, followed by tiles depicting Christian icons of the Virgin Mary and the saints. Horizontally, like a table, a shelf runs along the length of the installation's wall. Parallel to the gorilla on the wall—one after another—we find a little boat with more gorillas, followed by Mickey Mouse as the Statue of Liberty and a limousine. Then there are icons like Saint Sebastian, Christ giving a sermon, and a Victory of Samothrace in cobalt blue, a reference to Yves Klein.

What are we to make of this ironic, subversive, incoherent combination of cultural



Nelson Leirner, *The Warehouse*, 1998.
Installation (detail), mixed media, variable dimensions.
Courtesy Brito Cimino Gallery, São Paulo.

elements? We have a stereotypical representation of the tropics with gorillas, monkeys, and parrots (“the primitive”); of Christian iconography in its multiple facets: evangelising, fetishist, popular, banal, and so on; of mass culture, with its alienating materialism and entertainment culture; and of “high-brow” art, whether ancient or modern—two worlds united in Klein’s *Victory of Samothrace*. Is this a way to deconstruct and ironically rewrite the history of Western culture—its colonising and colonialist power, its fetishism, its naiveté and its infinite capacity for contradiction and eclecticism?

What are they doing here, together, Duchamp’s urinal and a kitsch reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper*? Is it a subversion and simultaneously an affirmation of multiplicity, of cultural validity, between popular culture, avant-garde art, kitsch, transgression, the co-existence of “high” and “low” culture in the context of the alienating contemporary mass culture?

For example, responding to a much more direct and narrative political discourse, Leirner presented, parallel to his installation *The Warehouse*, a new series of “political maps” of today’s world, which he covered with images of popular—that is, mass—culture, such as a map on which all of the continents were emblazoned with American flags; or a map of North and South America covered with Mickey Mouse faces and skulls. On these maps—a direct criticism of the cultural processes of globalisation and current politics—kitsch manifests itself as form and content, making the sign and the signified indissoluble.

It is unavoidable, and important, that Nelson Leirner’s work responds to an incessant (since the 1960s, in Brazil) political project of transgression of the artistic institution and its art/institution canons, and as a critical reflection of the world’s material and political culture.

THE KINGS OF THE HILL

Michelle Marxuach,
founding director of M&M proyectos,
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Presently, or maybe just today, I feel as if Conceptual dead ends have died. Maybe they were temporary system errors, or commodities that in space/time have blurred our vision.

Although not much interested in assuming the role of selecting THE work that I liked most within the panorama of ARCO’03 (as requested for this article), I do like the specific connotation implied by this section of the magazine’s name: *Elective Affinities*. Affinity is a word that I think I can easily incorporate more often, especially if it is disassociated from connotations regarding social structures (economic strata, professional counterparts, or geographical conglomerates, among others). As of today, individuals’ possibilities for inhabiting their own space and doing something with it is a relevant discourse in this elastic but controlling world. Art (to some of us at the moment, a meeting place) works as a means of detonating alternative routes for encounters that go beyond the passiveness of being in the same place. The potential, imbedded in some projects, to implement, act on, or simply re-articulate is a strong element worth mentioning. What matters is the possibility of some action and some consequences; meeting counterparts with particular affinities and igniting further action.

To begin, then, this specific task of searching for some works (or artists) that I think have ➤➤



Building my allotment garden. Rotterdam, 1999-2000.

An allotment garden is a piece of ground, usually close to the train tracks or the highway, where the citizens can plant and cultivate their vegetables, and flowers. In a situation in which the living, working, and leisure spaces have been heavily planned, the allotment gardens appear like an opposition to this state of affairs because they are one of the very few places in the city that were built by their users and not by urban planners or architects.

In order to deepen my studies of the allotment gardens and to reflect upon my position as an artist, I decided to become part of the allotment garden community. This project is an experiment carried out in real time and in a particular place (three years working in a garden of an association of vegetable gardens of Rotterdam). My goal is to make a garden, build a shed, and spend hours working there, with all the implications this might have.



Demolitions: opening the interior gardens. Rotterdam, 1999.
Every demolition creates a new empty lot. But in Rotterdam, each time that part of a block of houses disappears, their interior gardens become visible. These interior gardens are one of the most significant green areas in the center of town and, although secret, they are carefully protected. For my project I announced where demolitions would take place and invited the public to visit the opening of a new green area.

common affinities with our specific task, I would like to share some of Ramón Tío Bellido's considerations in his essay *Lara al Mar, Lara al Campo, Lara el Pueblo* (Lara at Sea. Lara in the Country, Lara in Town): "This is not the first time, and probably won't be the last, where a daily activity has become the object of an activity that claims to be artistic. To briefly defend the relevance of that claim we need only to reverse the question and consider whether art isn't itself intrinsically a day-to-day activity, however identifiable or distinguishable it might be."

The day-to-day activity barometer is often forgotten, making it harder to build up a case for a specific task. It's fair, then, to share my specific task, and thus help the reader to know where I stand today as I search. At M&M proyectos and at the residency programme in Fortaleza 302 (San Juan, Puerto Rico), I work to facilitate encounters among individuals who have some affinities, common interests and concerns.

Two common interests that will serve in today's exercise:

1. The Potential for re-invention, re-constitution, re-activation and, among others, re-mapping of ideas by specific situations detonated by the artist's signalisation, action or intervention.

2. The Uncovering of the innate poetic of our everyday life's drama or irony, revealing their specific rhythms.

Some data [info] to take into account:

My stay in Madrid was three days long, mainly centred on the round tables of ARCO'03. During two afternoons I visited the stands, but because of the Fair's size I could not get to see it all. The path that I happened to take was random and what I found a coincidence; elements that I think are always relevant in our day-to-day activity.

Honestly, never mind the above, let's start:

How many of us have jumped into a car in a moment of desperation when frustration arises? A friend, "seriously joking" re-reads the statistics of Puerto Rico's auto population as follows: in Puerto Rico, all its inhabitants can fit in the two front seats of the existing cars, leaving two million back seats for unexpected guests.

The Kings of the Hill, a Yael Bartana video that I saw at one of Annet Gelink's stands, was a great relief that took us directly to the everyday drama/irony of social practices or cultural outlets understood as futile actions (for example, jumping into a car to drive aimlessly as frustration arises). Yael Bartana tapes a meeting of all sorts of cars as they collide with dunes and roll over. The video portrays and reveals the specific rhythms of these actions, thus the beauty/ awareness of the geographical specificity, particular context and situation, graceful in bringing the complexity/ but simplicity of questioning and documenting the collective moment.

My immediate connection (affinity) with a set of slides automatically running in Marta Cervera's stand not only left me with less time to visit other places, but made me articulate an immediate invitation to Lara Almarcegui to be one of the artists next season at Fortaleza 302, M&M proyectos' residency programme. In the past year I've been so involved in the coordination and production of a project called *El Cerro* (The Mountain), by Chemi Rosado Seijo, that it just made me feel I'd be sick if I couldn't get these two individuals together.

In *El Cerro*, Chemi Rosado Seijo talks with a community about the possibility of painting their houses the same color as the mountain where they are located (i.e., different shades of green). Lara located people who had built homes with gardens at intersections and similar places not intended for living and worked with them to redo their living space and green areas.

Lara's work has not only been able to put to use places waiting for a purpose, but has also successfully and actively raised the question of the "value of artistic axiology with regard to the social sphere". In *Allotments*, as well as in *El Cerro*, both Lara and Chemi open up a new temporary dimension, creating awareness that promotes action and change without seeking to gain converts to some cause or forcing the future regarding whatever is to become of them.

MASBEDO'S OVERWHELMING BEAUTY (11.22.03)

**Américo Castilla, independent curator,
Buenos Aires**

Literature and the visual arts have a long history together. In the past, literature was an indispensable source of inspiration for painting, drawing, or engraving. Poetry, especially, has been able to propose the most varied forms of contact with imagery. Therefore, this history, with its alliances and disputes, between art and letters provides us with a centuries-old chronicle of poetic inspiration and realisation.

The new electronic media and the breakdown in limits between artistic specialities provide a new and unexpected opportunity for this encounter. Arguments over the risk of "literalness" in the visual arts can now be considered obsolete; on the other hand, it has been amply shown how imagery is enriched by hybridisation with other artistic genres.

The piece *11.22.03*, by Masbedo, was, to me, the most moving artwork at ARCO'03, a strange piece at an art fair which, whether we like it or not, tends to make us look at the work on display as if it were merchandise of variable artistic importance. This multimedia installation's title demands 11 minutes, 22.03 seconds of the spectator's time, in exchange for the promise of a deep shock. In a dark setting, three simple video players project images onto three of its four walls. The fourth is reserved for the spectators, who observe a close-up of a man's head on the right, a woman's on the left, and some PVC overalls, onto which evanescent forms are projected (microscopic cells, snowflakes, galactic stars, mere abstractions?), in the centre.

Masbedo is the name of the artist, or rather the acronym of the Milanese duo of Nicoló Massazza and Jacopo Bedogni. They worked with Michel Houellebecq on their adaptation of the text "*Rester vivant*" (*Staying Alive*) a selection from which is quoted at the beginning of this article by this paradigmatic writer of European modernity. Over the dramatic resonances of this text, they compose a highly subtle conjunction of images and music. An electronic composer, Sergio Carnevale, and his group *Quite* created the original soundtrack that imbues with meaning the piece's visual and aural images, without recurring to accidental sound, so frequent in installations today. The production's participants also include the actors Ramón Tarés, who brings with him the dramatic connotations of the avant-garde theatre group to which he belongs, La Fura dels Baus, and Patricia Zappa Mulas, an actress who, although she comes from the Italian independent theatre scene, enunciates her lines in impeccable Spanish and with great sensitivity.

Here, there are no elements of chance, nor of interactivity. The text has a beginning, a middle, and an end which is prolonged with slow, sarcastic applause. There is no dead time, nor drawn-out time, nor slow-motion, nor special effects. Only scenic tension, coming from projected images of lips that barely move whilst pronouncing deeply moving words about death, love and life; close-ups of eyes that stay closed for a few moments due to an overload of meaning; or nostrils that breathe to the pulse-rate to those emitting these phrases. Eleven-and-a-half

minutes, almost, of a proposition that combines these raw elements of theatre, music, film, and literature, melding them into a highly emotional visual event.

The daring use of elements so charged with connotations ran the risk of letting them predominate over the artists' intentions, but they more than met the challenge. Just as the echoes that resound from the mountaintops do not depend on the volume of the sound but on the simultaneous presence of environmental

elements, Masbedo's *11.22.03* engulfs the viewer with an overwhelming experience without recurring to stridency. It reflects on the usual themes, but it renovates the use—discreet and efficient—of the resources of contemporaneity.

Masbedo, 11.22.03.

**Video-Audio Installation: 3 simultaneous DVD projections,
6 headphones, 6 elastic PVC overalls,
11 minutes, 22 seconds, 3 tenths.
Courtesy LipanjePuntin artecontemporanea, Trieste.**



Begoña Muñoz,
Blind, 2000.
Performance.
Courtesy Ellen de Bruijne
Project, Amsterdam.

THE EYES OF LOVE ARE BLIND

Ali Akay, art critic and curator.
Professor of Sociology, University of Mimar,
Sinan, Istanbul

This piece by Begoña Muñoz, created in 2000, based on a performance about blindness—or rather, a simulation of blindness—evokes myriad thoughts in the viewer, some of which refer back to art history or the Bible, whereas others highlight the situation of today’s art, as well as the thought processes through which we shall still go on trying to think.

The fact that this piece refers to a performance which falls within the category of the ephemeral further incites us to consider the current situation of art. And what is a situation? The artist, it seems to me, creates an amusingly serious situation here, in which blind people are shown. But what does it mean, “to show blind people”? It means not being able to see, but being able to feel and hear. The fact of not being able to see something means to be, curiously, outside of the visual field. It means being completely outside of the visual arts, but still within a performance, of which photographs can be taken. But what is the point of a photograph of a performance that is considered ephemeral and fleeting? Perhaps to preserve the trace or the memory of this action, called a *performance*? Or to represent, or present once again, an action, called a *performance*? To depict an action in order to make it last is, we know, a vain enterprise. But isn’t filling the void of what no longer exists the act of the very first drawing? The memory of perception leads us back to the origins of drawing, origins that go back to the era of Dibutades of Sicyon. It is making a multiplicity, as we say today, for the multiple-faced people defined by Negri and Hardt in their book *Empire*, an idea going back to Spinoza’s *multitudo*. What did Dibutades’s daughter do when she no longer had her young Corinthian lover by her side, or rather, when her lover had gone far away? The girl, with the help of the god Cupid, traced the outline of her lover’s shadow on the wall, since she could no longer see him. The fact of not seeing constitutes the very act of drawing. She depicted him in his absence; in this way, his presence and absence were not so contradictory, since one took the place of the other. Absence constituted the very act of drawing in order to substitute the absent man on the wall through a shadow that depicted him: the depiction of blindness. It is the memory of understanding, which does not see, but which is felt in the heart itself, which makes us go on feeling it *ad infinitum* throughout life. Memory constitutes the very act



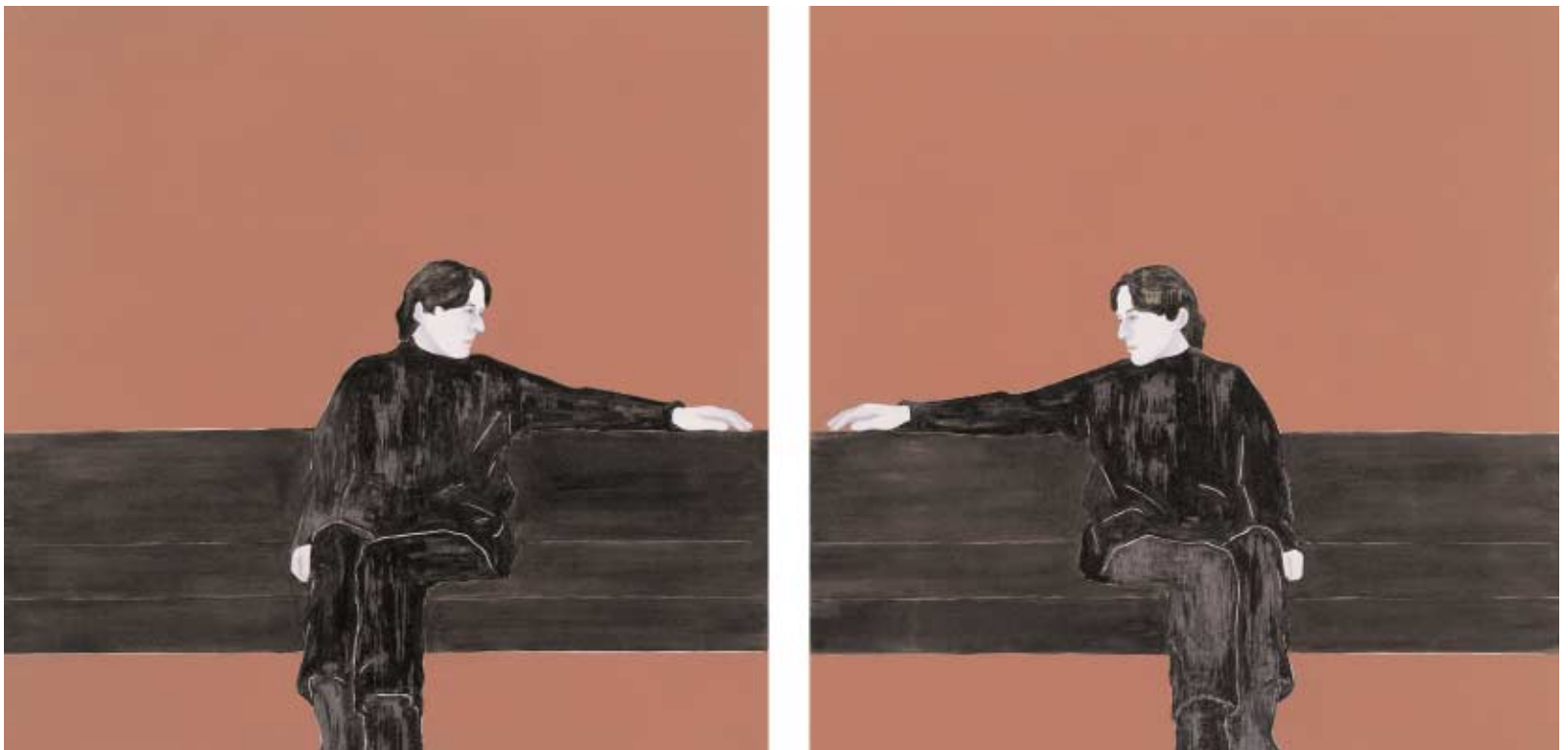
of making the lover live on during his absence. Dibutades’s daughter could not see her lover, whether, as Jacques Derrida wrote, it was “because he had gone away or because, for some reason, their eyes could not meet.” It was the hand of Cupid that helped her to draw. The action of drawing has been a blind act from the very first. This act could do nothing but depict what the two lovers had experienced. But what does Cupid, who can see, do? Undoubtedly, this god can see. He has a love whose eyes are not blindfolded. He is forbidden from seeing bad things. One must love without seeing a single defect. *The Eyes of Love Are Blind* is the title of a Turkish song. Love is directed at the invisible, like a drawing. One does not make a drawing because one sees perfectly the silhouette of the beloved, but because one does *not* see him. The hands of Dibutades’s daughter traced the contours of her young lover’s shadow. Perception belongs to the category of memories, not of sightlessness. Perception, shadow writing, evidence of the absence of sight, which is the origin of drawing. The reed with which

Dibutades’s daughter drew is like the blind man’s white cane.

All of this brings us to the 2001 Venice Biennale, to the performance in the Japanese Pavilion in the Giardini di Castello: young people bearing French baguettes on their heads entering into the temple of McDonald’s. Is this not the cultural blindness of the Japanese today?

Begoña Muñoz, in a similar manner, repeats to us that the performance shown in the photograph constitutes the very act of creating a community of lovers, if they are not lovers already. Cupid, a woman dressed in a man’s suit, follows the actions and movements of these blindfolded people. They seem to be having fun, and it is as if they were drawing on the floor, with their canes, the outlines of their stroll around the room. This is their shadow, the traces they leave behind them. The Cupid-woman follows them with her eyes, because she sees them without them seeing her, although they can feel her presence. All of them together make up a community of lovers. The eyes of love are always blind.

**Djamel Tatah,
Untitled, 2001.**
Oil and wax on
canvas. Diptych.
200 x 200 cm each.
Courtesy Salvador
Diaz, Madrid.



DJAMEL TATAH

**Alberto Martín Expósito,
director of the Salamanca Art Centre**

The work of Djamel Tatah plunges us into the process of redefining painting that has been ongoing during recent years.

The artist's *modus operandi* uses as its starting point a photographic archive that he has been building up for a number of years, recording different poses and compositions of his own. After manipulating these photographs with a computer, transforming them into purely linear compositions that he projects onto a canvas, Tatah has developed a strictly pictorial oeuvre in which the treatment of colour becomes the true protagonist of his paintings.

Although the result may look like a palette of monochromatic tones, these are not, in fact, actually present. The dark-to-black tonality of the clothing, white skin, and some other colour for the background are never homogenous, thus structuring the complex treatment of colour that defines his work.

Tatah eliminates all narrative or documentary elements from his painting, and when they do appear—such as the

bench on which the two figures in this piece are sitting—he treats them as volumetric elements.

The human figure is present in all of his canvases. The scale of these paintings and how they were hung, close to the floor, provide a closer encounter between the spectator and the piece, affirming the presence of his characters, awaiting a dialogue.

Because his painting refers us back to the human condition, stripped of referents and approached from the viewpoint of solitude and social co-existence. A shared solitude that brings us closer to the idea of man as a common being, any being at all, who is defined in his individuality but is open to encounters and able to take on any relationship at any time. The image of a man in community, who clearly defines the reality of the human condition in an urban society. Tatah's figures are generic: their individual traits have been wiped out, their expressions simplified, their clothes have no social or cultural features; and they are contrasted with an abstract setting, defined

only by colour, that highlights individuality, particularity, the generic and the social, all at the same time.

His canvases are a space in which he constructs the possibility of a social dialogue, a dialogue between individualities which, in the end, is what defines the boundaries of our identity.

Within the process of redefining painting, one approach, that of Djamel Tatah's oeuvre, involves the paradoxical presence of photography, in which the image is submitted to a process of abstraction through which it loses its status as a reflection of reality to become a contrast or a confrontation with its own mimetic nature. A double play on recognition of the referent and on distancing, which heightens our perception of the world.



sergio belinchón

de-urbanised

Photographic Glimpses
ARCO'03 through the lens
of Sergio Belinchón





cities

Sergio Belinchón (1971) belongs to a generation of artists who have distanced themselves from the documentalist style focussing on formulations primarily underscoring subjective features as a way of privileging the expression of feeling, a movement whose exploration into the city and architecture has centred first and foremost on effects of light. On the contrary, the work of this artist is more concerned with an investigation and interpretation of the contemporary world through a kind of language more critically engaged with the style of information and expressions currently reflected in advertising, also coupled with an iconography borrowed from cinema. In a certain fashion, the influence of new German objectivity, grounded in the teaching of Bernd & Hilla Becher, is where we ought to locate the parameters within which the work of Sergio Belinchón moves, yet in a highly personal way.

A critical distance is the element he uses as his starting point: distance in the sense that it excludes from the image any element that might reveal a subjective photographer's reading and individual portraits of occasional characters, all of which have been virtually erased; critical

because the choice of subjects opens up a debate questioning landscape as simulacra of a system of iconic values, focusing his attention on urban and suburban phenomena.

The series *Metrópolis* (1998) offers a gaze over the city, imbued with updated references from film noir. Here he has controlled and balanced the objectivity: the appearance of shadowlike persons in a night-time view of La Défense in Paris, a fragment of a city-type, triggers off a certain narrative and theatrical tension.

Ephemeral Cities (2001), taken during the off-season in holiday resorts along the East coast of Spain, marks a substantial transformation in Belinchón's line of investigation. First of all, the critical distance is well defined; on the other hand, he casts a rigorous and poetic glance over the trash architecture of our coasts.

Suburbia (2002) takes a caustic look at the landscape gradually being created by new urban developments on the periphery of our cities, where the countryside is razed into a mesh of asphalted streets under construction. They are still only projects on the maps of city planners, but the fields have already vanished under the wheels of bulldozers and excavators. This work

bears a certain relation with *Atacama*, another series he worked on in Northern Chile during 2002, in which he maps out a tour where the oneiric and the absurd are seen as an essential part of reality. Nonetheless, this series is one of the most abstract the artist has produced, for the architectural elements defining and delimitating the landscape are dissolved in a nonsensical structure.

Paradise (2003) returns again to tourism and the artificial landscapes of theme parks as fictionalisations of representation.

All these projects now seem to converge in the photographs taken for ARCO's Photographic Glimpses.

The art fair appears, in the distance of the landscape, as architecture, like a new urban development on the periphery, surrounded by car parks, levelled areas, spaces under construction and new building sites. Inside, the fair is a space seen from above, with the stands forming an ephemeral maze of enclosures, like the map or the gigantic model of a new city. In this distanced view the visitor's direct experience remains out of focus to further underscore the spatial and urban quality of the fair. ■■