

Art in America



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PERFORMA 0

HIROSHI
SUGIMOTO

SPIRIT
PHOTOGRAPH

LYON
BIENNIAL

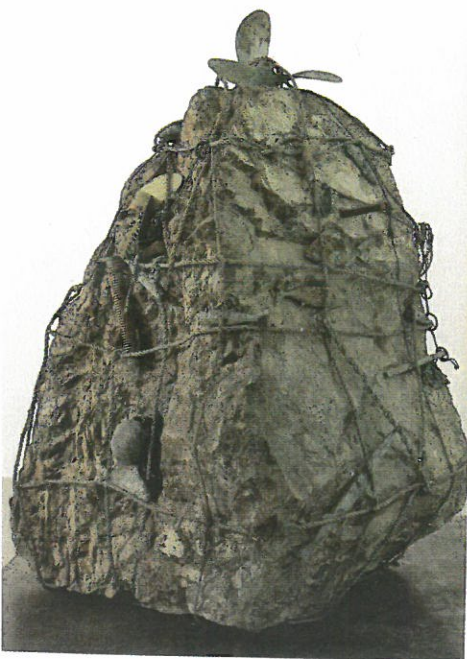
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Agnès Thurnauer's lubricious text detailing a woman's orgasm was written on top of the artist's hand-painted rendition of Manet's "Bar at the Folies-Bergère," to clearly singular effect.

age of Mekas's wife and kids cooking and making art projects at home, among many other scenes, is an exhilarating cacophony of dailiness, though by now that immediacy seems to have become encapsulated as valedictory time, a historical fragment. (Wasn't that a shot of Giorgio DeLuca in the good old days when he still owned Dean & DeLuca in SoHo?) Mekas and Warhol's concern with dailiness was reflected and brought up to date in a more static format by *The Middle of the Day*, John Miller's large wall installation of little color photos, all printed the same size and identically framed, depicting urban subjects he has been photographing, since 1994, all around the world between 12 and 2 P.M. Workers on lunch break and gay-pride marchers in hot pants and chaps are equally present in Miller's enormous cycle, as are many other impromptu subjects.

Duration—and endurance—were also emblemized in this Biennial by pigs, turtles and puppets. One of the best works on view conveyed a seemingly endless ebb and flow in the span of a film about seven minutes long. Its unlikely stars are six anonymous turtles, sitting on a log in a river in the midst of some tropical city. Made by the New York- and Puerto Rico-based pair Jennifer Allora

Erik Dietman: Pierre aux Poissons (Pierre with Fish), 2001, bronze, porphyry, 7 3/4 feet high.

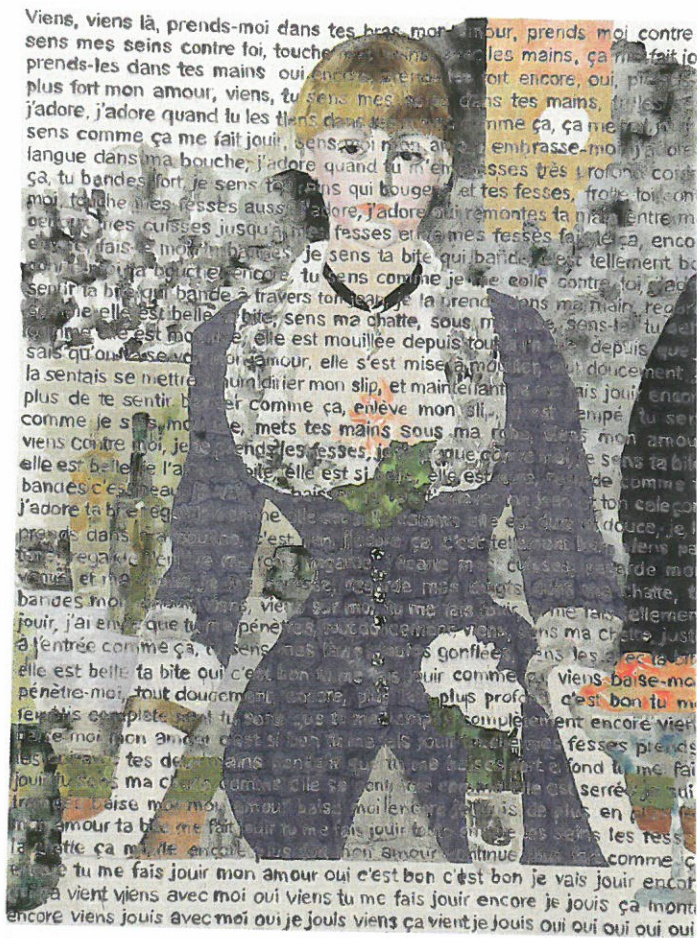


(born 1974 in Philadelphia) and Guillermo Calzadilla (born 1970 in Puerto Rico), the film, with its lazy rhythm in which the camera pans slowly downstream, nonchalantly documents freighters and tugboats, storage containers, new housing and recent shanties, boys swimming by day and factories blasting by night. And all the while those turtles sit it out on that log.

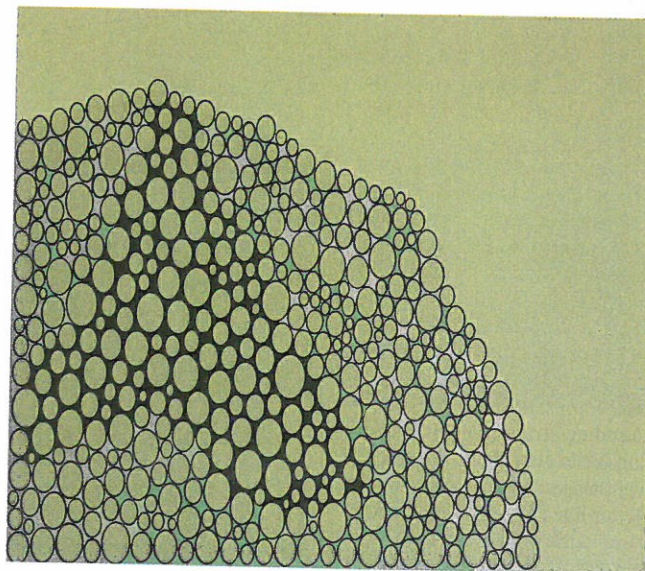
Long duration can also encompass the time-space coordinates of architecture and theater; the film *This Is Not a Time for Dreaming* by Pierre Huyghe (born 1962, lives in Paris and New York) somehow manages to convey the entire construction process and afterlife of a building, Le Corbusier's Carpenter Center at Harvard. Puppets play roles that include the building itself, Corbu, Huyghe, and (as I learned from the catalogue) the curators of Huyghe's project, Linda Norden and Scott Rothkopf, as well as a scary black monster called Monsieur Harvard. The film is a tour-de-force of unlikeliness, a brilliant send-up of, among other things, the politics and difficulties of such exalted commissions. It includes additional live footage of the architectural historian Edward Sekler lecturing on Corbu, and a puppet performance in a translucent pod structure (reminiscent of Eliasson's kaleidoscope) specially built by Huyghe at the Carpenter Center, which commissioned the piece from him. Somehow the whole agonistic process of French-American cultural relations, for both Le Corbusier and Huyghe, is suggested in this film, which manages to be both touching and funny. (For the record, Le Corbusier's architecture was also evoked in the design of a freestanding music room by Surasi Kusolwong, the Thai artist [born 1965, lives in Bangkok], who populated a neo-International Style shed with unlikely totems, such as a statue of a Thai goddess lounging on a black piano that is missing its legs.)

At the Institut d'Art Contemporain, some telling juxtapositions emerged between old and new, politically correct, incorrect and even post-political work. There you found a whole room of R. Crumb's unregenerate drawings installed on top of General Idea's AIDS wallpaper (1989); an unlikely combo, but it sparked a new synthesis. (Crumb, born in 1943 and

living in Carpentras in the South of France, may by now qualify as an honorary Frenchman.) The wallpapered corridor led into a darkened room where you encountered one of the strongest works by a young artist. *My birds . . . trash . . . the future* by Paul Chan (born 1973 in Hong Kong, lives in New York) was shown on a two-sided screen. As I learned from the



Agnès Thurnauer: The Origin of the World (Folies-Bergère), 2005, acrylic on canvas, 95 by 75 inches.



John Tremblay: What Isn't Nature?, 2003, acrylic and marker on fabric, 36 by 42 inches.

catalogue, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and the Book of Apocalypse were among the inspirations for Chan's novel vision of figures and birds convening, an orgy ensuing and then a dying off under a solitary tree. This is a spellbinding work, fresh yet art historically resonant (particularly of Goya), and it had me going around and around the wide, freestanding screen, trying to absorb both sides at once.

Painting as a process of *longue durée* was only hinted at in this Biennial. Philip Taaffe's work was seen in combination with Allen Ruppersberg's, as if the two artists were getting at similar content through different means. Unfortunately, there was no big new painting by Taaffe (born in 1955, lives in New York) but rather six marbled works on paper from 2004, which amply lay out the experimental process the artist has been mastering over the last few years. These worked quite well with a whole wall of printed psychedelic posters by Ruppersberg (born 1944, lives in New York) across the corridor. The connective tissue was not only a shared interest in psychedelia and hands-on printing techniques, but dueling obsessions with Allen Ginsberg. As I learned from the catalogue, the poet's "Howl" is quoted phonetically in Ruppersberg's posters; what the catalogue doesn't mention is that Ginsberg's late-life friendship with Taaffe was important to the artist, who has also been much inspired by the sort of experimental '60s films that were on view in profusion at the Biennial.

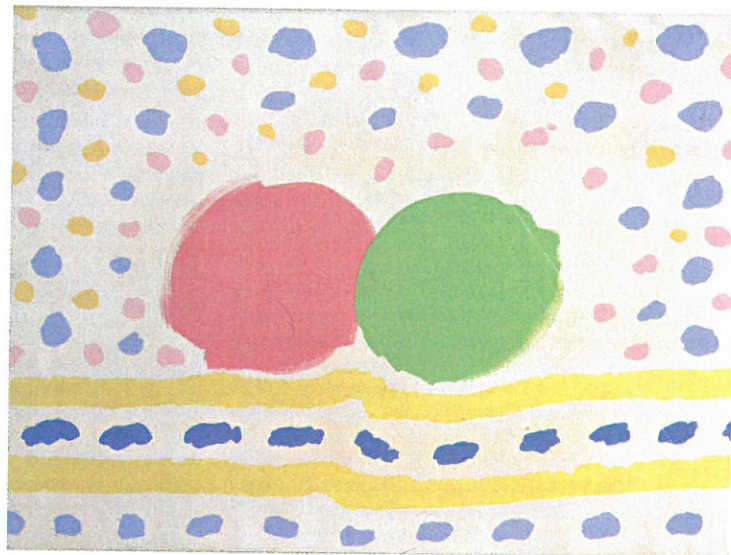
Within the context of painting, sexist and feminist works could stand side by side at Lyon without fighting. Kendell Geers's colossal, messy photo-derived prints of female cheesecake, stenciled directly on the wall, alternated with equally scrappy red-and-white taped sculptural idols. These struck a bad-boy note, exceptional in a show where YBA-style pranks were otherwise missing. Geers (born in 1968 in Johannesburg, lives in London and Brussels) also showed his black-and-white "Fuck Off" wallpaper at the Sucrière, installed near Gordon Matta-Clark's '70s films documenting his intervention in a demolished building next to the Centre Pompidou, then being built.

Next to Geers's almost satanic earth goddesses were Agnès Thurnauer's wryly humorous feminist wall paintings and word-and-image works. These make visible and legible the long-neglected possibilities and hidden subtexts of all those women artists and women subjects whose voices—and names—were never heard until now. "Marcelle Duchamp, Renée Magritte, Fernande Léger, Francine Picabia," reads a list in one of Thurnauer's wall paintings. Another more complex and slower-to-read work on canvas bears a lubricious text detailing a woman's orgasm, written on top of Thurnauer's hand-painted rendition of Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. Thurnauer (born 1962, lives in Paris) is a French painter whose work I admire; hers was certainly a singular voice in this male-dominated show.

Among the German artists represented, there were no Leipzig School painters, but also no Kai Althoff, Albert Oehlen or Franz Gertsch. Carsten Höller's installations are often controversial, but his corridor piece—a string of little rooms in some of which a film of a forest was playing—was partially broken, and still there was a line of kids to see it the day I visited. As for painters, the German art star in evidence was Franz Ackermann (born 1963, lives in Berlin), whose mural installation wrapped around a specially built room which in turn enclosed a metal, cagelike sculptural structure. The whole ensemble, including a grainy black-and-white photo of a circular cut in a building (recalling Matta-Clark's), looked

exceptionally refined, especially when understood as an act of extended painting; I'd never seen so much spidery draftsmanship in graphite from Ackermann before.

As for American painters, there were few of the emerging crop to be seen in Lyon. Paramount among them, though, was John Tremblay, whose hard-edge neo-Op abstractions look at first to be painted collages with aggregates of stickers, but in fact are labor-intensive and slow accretions of ink marker and acrylic paint. As we learn in the catalogue, Tremblay (born 1966, lives in Brooklyn) claims to be influenced



Robert Malaval: *Fraise et pistache (Strawberry and Pistachio)*, 1973, acrylic on canvas, 38½ by 51 inches. Collection Galerie Daniel-Gervis, Paris. © 2005 ADAGP, Paris.

by Bridget Riley. (That makes at least two generations of Riley appropriators, if you pause to remember what Taaffe did in the mid-'80s.) A more unpredictable inclusion was that of Verne Dawson (born in Alabama in 1961, lives in New York), whose paintings the French seem to like. (I've seen them both at the Palais de Tokyo and the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.) Dawson's smallish canvases depict cosmic continuities as well as big bangs; the series of seven exhibited comprises panels named after the days of the week. *Tuesday* shows masklike goblins' faces emerging from galactic whorls; in *Friday*, a strange pregnant Eve figure clutches herself in what appears to be an incarnation of the Eternal Feminine (or is that the Eternal Post-Feminist?).

Perhaps the most valuable historical resuscitation in the show was that of the French painter Robert Malaval (1937-80), whose glittery and pastel-hued paintings from the '70s were given a big room at the Sucrière, while an important body of early '60s work plus more from the '70s was shown at the Palais de Tokyo. Malaval's lexicon of soft cross shapes, chevrons, stars and dots partakes both of a Conceptual and a proto-Pattern and Decoration esthetic. One framed drawing with only the word "Happy" on it was especially affecting, given that the artist committed suicide in 1980. Another welcome rediscovery was the finely tuned, eccentric production of Erik Dietman (1937-2002), a Swede who lived in Paris and who was involved with Fluxus. At Villeurbanne Diet-

View of Kendell Geers's mixed-medium installation *On the Declamation and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 2005.

