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# Reena Spaulings

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# ARTFORUM



From left: Reena Spaulings, *Advisors* (detail), 2016, metal table; fourteen paintings in acrylic on Dibond, each 34 x 26". Reena Spaulings, *Latest Seascape #1*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 55 1/4 x 78 1/4". Reena Spaulings, *Bonjour! 1-3*, 2017, oil on Dibond and mixed media. Installation view. Photo: Britta Schlier.



## Reena Spaulings

MUSEUM LUDWIG, COLOGNE

Beau Rutland

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AFTER MORE THAN A DECADE of caustic yet playful teasing of the contemporary art apparatus, Reena Spaulings has been granted a retrospective—sort of. To offer some historical background for the uninitiated: In 2003, writer John Kelsey and artist Emily Sundblad opened Reena Spaulings, a gallery on New York's Lower East Side, which has since launched the careers of many influential artists. In 2004, artworks made by Kelsey and Sundblad under the moniker "Reena Spaulings" began appearing in group shows. Audiences then learned a great deal about Reena—as both artist and gallery are usually known—through the book *Reena Spaulings* (2005). Though officially authored by Bernadette Corporation—an already mythic '90s art/fashion collective of which Kelsey is a member—the narrative was infamously written by 150 individuals in B.C.'s circle. From time to time, other artists have helped contribute to Reena's artistic production.

Over the past decade, few artists or galleries in New York have continuously held the attention of the art world the way Reena Spaulings has. Blending cynicism and sincerity, Reena has offered timely responses to various issues that have long enlivened and/or bedeviled contemporary art: the artist-dealer, collaboration, self-reflexivity, market reflexivity, and the possibilities and limits of institutional critique, among others. Kelsey and Sundblad's fictional front woman has followed the path of Rose Sélavy and then forged ahead, finding new ways to deploy the artistic alter ego as provocation and diversion; as a

trickster whose position between creator and creation destabilizes both of those constructs and the systems in which they are embedded. Every aspect of Reena Spaulings is imbued with a mimetic quality, calling into question whether her iterations of things we know—an art gallery, an art career—should be considered authentic, although nothing they do feels simulacral enough to be comfortably called *inauthentic*, either.

This ambiguity was elegantly performed in "Reena Spaulings: Her and No," organized by Anna Czerlitzki. The exhibition—a smartly installed, concise showing of just four groups of paintings—belonged to the series "Here and Now," Museum Ludwig's effort to upend the formulaic institutional approach to presenting contemporary art. With the succinct removal of two letters, "Her and No" informed the visitor of the artist's core principles of wit and contradiction. Fittingly, the presentation went wryly against the grain of the conventional institutional survey. Familiar works were included, but virtually all in the form of new versions—or, to borrow Sturtevant's preferred term, "repetitions." For instance, some viewers might have felt *déjà vu* contemplating the pointillist landscapes that show Herzog & de Meuron's New York condo tower 56 Leonard, which closely echo Reena's 2008 paintings of the very similar-looking New Museum. The repetitions afforded visitors the chance to see key examples of the artist's work while simultaneously providing Reena's dealers with new inventory. Reena always assumes a savvy audience, and it's safe to surmise that viewers were expected to perceive the latter benefit—an acknowledgment of market realities similar in spirit to Louise Lawler's ingenious disclosure-as-object label in her recent MOMA retrospective.

And yet, a bit perversely, the repetitions that collectors would presumably have found most enticing were not included. With its tightly edited selection of works, "Her and No" brought discipline to the artist's roving output, which seemed deceptively sober here. Aside from the recent eye-catching abstractions painted by Roombas, many of Reena's best-known works—for instance, the canvases fashioned from the sullied tablecloths of art-world dinners—were absent.

From the beginning, Reena's multifaceted identity has afforded Kelsey and Sundblad the opportunity to mine the various roles each plays within the art world (which, in Kelsey's case, includes the role of contributing editor of *Artforum*), and the degree to which any given subject is granted agency. The relationship between artist and collector was lightly mused on in *Bonjour! 1-3*, 2017, large-scale slapdash paintings that enmesh imagery loosely based on Courbet's *The Meeting* (1854) with the addition of more current signifiers like fidget spinners and a *Texte zur Kunst* journal tote bag. *Advisors*, 2016, an updated version of Reena's mid-2000s portraits of art dealers, attests to the consigliere-like status of art advisers to the museum patron, the most valued position today. Within weeks of the show's opening, one of the advisers depicted had placed "Advisors" in a notable private collection.

Ultimately, "Her and No" offered a tidy account of Reena Spaulings the artist, though it might have been a little too taciturn about the theoretical, economic, and

**Every aspect of Reena Spaulings calls into question whether her iterations of things we know—an art gallery, an art career—should be considered authentic.**

social apparatuses that Kelsey and Sundblad have thoroughly limned over the years. These complicated and messy concerns, so critical to the project that is Reena Spaulings, seem to have been reserved for discussion in the exhibition's catalogue, to be published next year—a deferred continuation of the show's dialectical maneuvers. If the exhibition's reticence was mildly frustrating to fans, it was also perfectly in keeping with the refusals and problematizations that have kept Reena's work vital and interesting all along. □

BEAU RUTLAND IS A CURATOR AND WRITER LIVING IN NEW YORK.

Visit our archive at [artforum.com/inprint](http://artforum.com/inprint) to read Bennett Simpson on Bernadette Corporation and Reena Spaulings (September 2004).

Mousse Magazine

REVIEWS

# Reena Spaulings "HER and NO" at Museum Ludwig, Cologne

Share

by Nicholas Hatfull

The name "Reena Spaulings" feels husky, with a hint of a dire edge. Notably, perfectly generic in a world of improbably literary-sounding characters, it likely lodged in readers' consciousness on first exposure, like ambient and spiky plane-tree pollen in one's throat. The name somehow conveys plausibility and a tell, even before one is versed in the nexus of influence and implication it spins. Established in 2004, the identity trifurcates: a novel by Bernadette Corporation, a Lower East Side and Los Angeles gallery with an enviable roster of associates, and a smartly represented artist (which is actually a collective). The book, spurred in part by John Kelsey's translation of Michèle Bernstein's roman à clef, *All the King's Horses*, drew on a Hollywood-size pool of writers to evoke a city one can't see, an "everyday group hallucination" where "double phoney has a greater reality than stones, rivers." The artist Reena Spaulings is, like the gallery, preeminently associated with Emily Sundblad and Kelsey, but personnel clues don't preclude the "distancing effects" and "possibilities of dis-identification that flourish as soon as we begin to operate under the sign of fiction." Such effects and possibilities were not far on the occasion of Reena Spaulings's first institutional collaboration with a museum. Curated by Anna Czerlitzki at the Museum Ludwig, it seems to be a painting retrospective, toggling through idioms of hazy pointillism, hegemonic portraiture, and late-epic bluster.



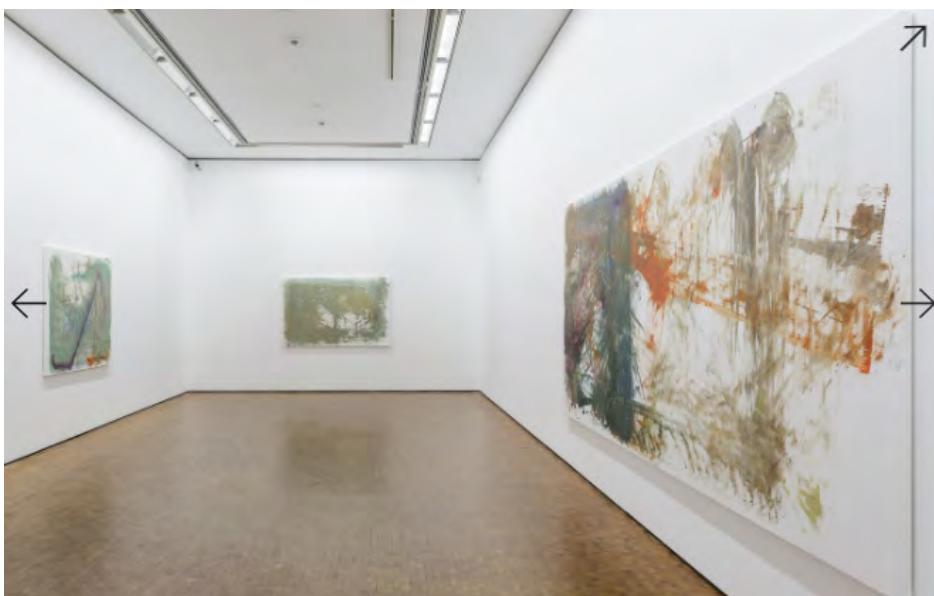
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Reena Spaulings "HER and NO" at Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 2017  
Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Britta Schlier

Hatfull, Nicolas. « Reena Spaulings "HER and NO" at Museum Ludwig, Cologne », *Mousse Magazine*, August 2017.  
<http://moussemagazine.it/reena-spaulings-no-museum-ludwig-cologne-2017/>

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## Mousse Magazine

Discrete series, perhaps the stickiest, will be revisited and appended with further, bespoke examples. *Post Card (Köln am Rhein)* is a series of speckled, touristic views of the Dom cathedral, prompted by a card sent from Cologne by Michael Krebber. Pointillism, through no fault of its own, is a museum crowd-pleaser (as anyone who's ever tried to look at the works of Georges Seurat during a half-term school break will confirm). These works may have as much to do with enchroma tests and the narcotic reverie evoked in Paul Thek's cityscapes, with something of their hovering pretty/bleak tone. But Reena Spaulings's amiable riffing on place and palatability is a gift for tour guides. As part of an incomplete trading-card set of classic modes, this suggests a hankering to see how these works fare with such a degree of embedding. It remains to be seen, as of the time of this writing, whether or not Reena Spaulings will deploy the barks of Rex Plus motion-detector alarms that accompanied the pictures' outing at Galerie Buchholz in 2010.



"Am I cleaning a large room or a small room?" asks the iRobot Scooba 450 in the text that originally heralded the *Later Seascapes*. It turns out it's as apt a scumbler as a scrubber, when put in the ring with emulsions of simpering taste (the group's satirist nostrils were alert to the whiff of sad poetry to be snuck from mildly unexpected names in Farrow and Ball's "Estate Emulsions" range: Smoked Trout, Mouse's Back, Blazer, Eating Room Red). But not only was it able to knock out "two Schnabel-sized areas on a single battery charge," it also completed the canvas as an interior-finish-soused Ouija board, summoning the flares of J.M.W. Turner's dimming sight, as the text claims. Beyond the digital steering and rounded right-angle buffing, viewers' eyebrows will raise when it dawns that, with a pinch of good nature, these do have flashes of Turner. Butt has proven able to cash check mouth wrote, so to speak, noticeably in passages that could be magnified samples of Turner's distinctive flecks of black and white. If there is a tang of snark in the mockery of both the revered obfuscations of "late style" and the soft belly of over-formulated "zombie abstraction," that tang is leavened by diverting gestures (whose charge registered in notices of their exhibitions at Galerie Neu and Campoli Presti). Whether these are any more or less laced with meaning than the used tablecloths from the gallery dinner, stretched up as "enigmas" on other occasions, is probably up to the viewer. But if one is game, Scooba spirit-wrote a sea monster. These works may be crossover hits. In 1997, CEO "D'Antek" (Walczak?) wrote on behalf of Bernadette Corporation: "As a successful corporation, you will be a cyborg, and you will need to justify yourself with warmth."



Hatfull, Nicolas. « Reena Spaulings "HER and NO" at Museum Ludwig, Cologne », *Mousse Magazine*, August 2017.  
<http://moussemagazine.it/reena-spaulings-no-museum-ludwig-cologne-2017/>

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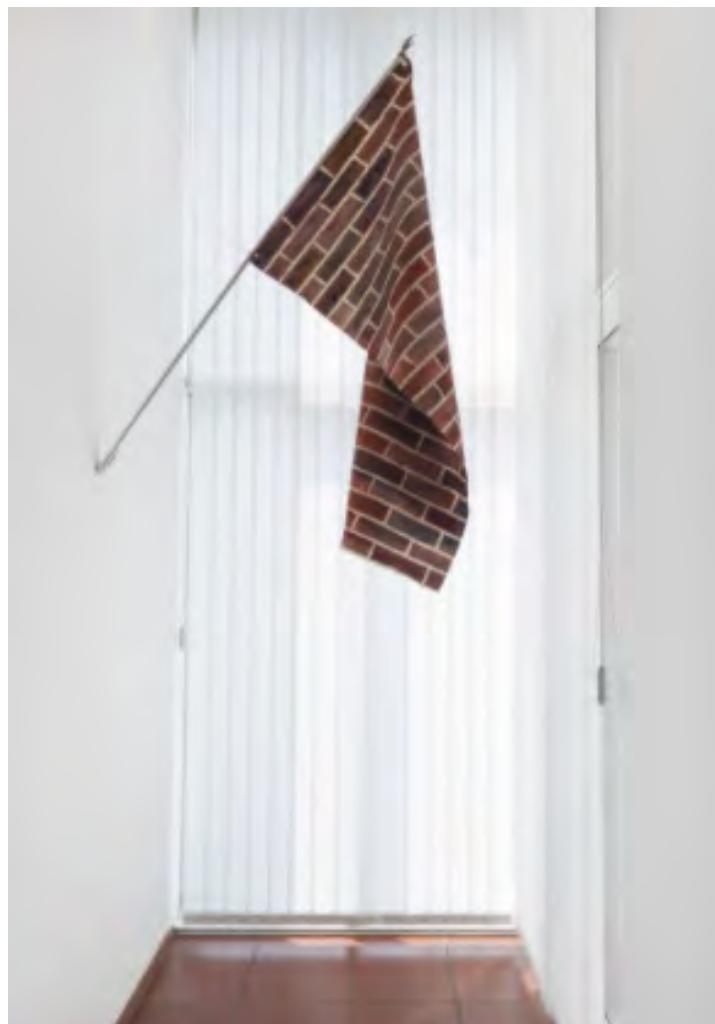
## Mousse Magazine

It's not unusual for Reena Spaulings to execute a series the week prior to the vernissage, and at the Ludwig, the masterpiece best known as *Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet* will be made fresh on three large freestanding aluminum panels. Heroicizing the body language between the bohemian plein-air painter and his collector, the industrialist Alfred Bruyas, during an encounter on the outskirts of Montpellier, the original work was seen as deviant in its subject. Rendering Courbet's professional itinerary in grand style was found insufficiently demure.

That artist, though far from deferential in his jaunty pose, was disclosing his position in a reticulated system, telling it like it was. Transposing the meeting to our own time sits compatibly with another featured series, the fourteen-piece *Advisors*. Dashed off in pitch-perfect nonchalance, these works are especially ticklish in their proposition of collective painting. Knowing that one or all of Jutta Koether, Emily Sundblad, and John Kelsey may have been involved, it's hard to silence one's twitching yen to discern authorship; the show's title, abrading the project series' tag, is *HER and NO*, steadfast in its refusal of such trivia. Ostensibly a contemporary splinter genre of the patron's commissioned portrait, these works could have appeared in *The Galleries*, Kelsey's text of lucid-dreamt premises strewn with art that resembles evaporating versions of other art. They are a little Merlin, a little Emily, a little Krebber, a little German-speaking female gallerist, a little Kelsey.

At the Ludwig, home to a motherlode of pops at the canon (now well-beloved fridge magnets), this survey makes an absorbing impression. It looks like Reena Spaulings is thwarting expectations and crowbarring room to shimmy by, to diligently fulfill retrospective norms. It's a new tangle in a ludic thicket of rarefaction.

at Museum Ludwig, Cologne  
until 27 August 2017





**Reena Spaulings – Pont du Carrousel**



*Reena Spaulings, Pont du Carrousel, Exhibition view, Photo credits: Florian Kleinefenn Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris*

Galerie  
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Reena Spaulings est née en 2004 avec une identité multiple, à la fois institution – pour mémoire, Reena Spaulings avait ouvert sa galerie éponyme à New York – et artiste fictive à la tête du collectif Bernadette Production. Représentée par la galerie Chantal Crousel, elle vient d'y réaliser *in situ* (information clé) des peintures sur Dibond.

L'exposition ressemble à un bilan géolocalisé. Au plafond de la pièce centrale, une carte du ciel correspond à l'alignement des étoiles vues de Paris le soir du vernissage, samedi 3 septembre dernier. Accédant aux autres salles, on sourit devant le portrait de Michel Houellebecq qui côtoie les créatures du jeu en réalité augmentée Pokemon Go (choisies pour avoir été aperçue dans le quartier).

Houellebecq et Grodoudou, les stars culturelles de l'été, illustreraient le “clinquant” et “l’égarement” décrit par Rilke dans *Pont du Carrousel* – titre de l'exposition. À moins que l'écrivain français soit l'aveugle du poème, “le juste inébranlable” ? On sourit alors davantage.

L'invasion des Pokemons remplace ainsi celle des punaises de lits de l'été 2010 à New York (les cinémas fermaient les uns après les autres) convoquée dans une exposition précédente de Spaulings, *Occupy Wall Street*. “*Pont du Carrousel* est une exposition qui se localise, et nous localise”, lit-on dans le communiqué. Reena Spaulings serait-elle la peintre absolue de la vie moderne ?

Jusqu'au 8 octobre Galerie Chantal Crousel à Paris

Wychowanok, Thibaut. «Les Pokémons envahissent la Galerie Chantal Crousel»,

*Numéro*, September 27, 2016.

<http://www.numero.com/fr/art/pokemon-reena-spaulings-galerie-chantal-crousel-michel-houellebecq>

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

## Numéro

# Les Pokémons envahissent la Galerie Chantal Crousel

**ART** L'artiste Reena Spaulings propose à la Galerie Chantal Crousel des peintures de Pokémons... et de Michel Houellebecq. Brillant !



Reena Spaulings, *Gloom* (2016). Peinture à l'huile sur Dibond. 100 x 130 cm.

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

Photo: Florian Kleinefenn

# Numéro

À la galerie **Chantal Crousel**, pas besoin d'iPhone ni de réalité augmentée pour partir à la chasse aux Pokémon : les créatures de Nintendo sont en peinture sur les murs. Ces huiles sur Dibond (aluminium et polyéthylène) sont de **Reena**

**Spaulings.** Personnage fictif imaginé par le collectif d'artistes Bernadette Corporation, Reena Spaulings signe pourtant des œuvres bien tangibles. Elle a même donné son nom à une galerie new-yorkaise en 2004 (Reena Spaulings Fine Arts). Elle incarne surtout une époque où le virtuel et la fiction (et ses personnages) comptent parfois plus que la réalité. Pas étonnant que l'artiste s'intéresse à ses confrères imaginaires Pokémon, créatures qui surgissent dans les rues et produisent leurs effets partout sur la Terre (qui n'a jamais assisté à un attroupement de joueurs dans les lieux où les Pokémon rares se cachent ?).

**Et si les artistes choisissaient leur sujet en fonction des “trend topics” de Twitter ?**



Reena Spaulings, *Wigglystuff* (2016). Peinture à l'huile sur Dibond. 100 x 130 cm.

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

Photo: Florian Kleinfenn

Wychowanok, Thibaut. «Les Pokémon envahissent la Galerie Chantal Crousel»,

*Numéro*, September 27, 2016.

<http://www.numero.com/fr/art/pokemon-reena-spaulings-galerie-chantal-crousel-michel-houellebecq>

# Numéro



Reena Spaulings, *Houellebecq #5* (2016). Peinture à l'huile sur Dibond. 100 x 81 cm.

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris  
Photo: Florian Kleinfenn



Reena Spaulings, *Doduo* (2016). Peinture à l'huile sur Dibond. 100 x 81 cm.

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris  
Photo: Florian Kleinfenn

**L'exposition de Reena Spaulings pourrait n'être qu'une proposition cynique**, surfant sur les buzz estivaux : Pokémon Go, mais aussi Michel Houellebecq, dont elle a réalisé quelques portraits (l'écrivain avait droit aux honneurs du Palais de Tokyo cet été). Mais l'artiste est loin d'en rester à la seule reproduction visuelle des hits de l'été, même si ses tableaux aux ratures et traits enfantins – proches de certains Cy Twombly – sont formellement très réussis. Elle soulève par exemple une question passionnante sur le futur de la pratique artistique : et si les artistes choisissaient leur sujet en fonction des "trend topics" de Twitter ?

**Weedle, Grodoudou, Gloom et Michel Houellebecq sont nos Persée et Hercule modernes, nos figures mythiques contemporaines.**

Wychowanok, Thibaut. «Les Pokémons envahissent la Galerie Chantal Crousel»,

*Numéro*, September 27, 2016.

<http://www.numero.com/fr/art/pokemon-reena-spaulings-galerie-chantal-crousel-michel-houellebecq>

# Numéro

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Vue de l'exposition, *Reena Spaulings, Pont du Carrousel*

Photo : Florian Kleinfenn. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

## **Reena Spaulings réussit surtout à sublimer les mignonnes**

**créatures** de Nintendo et la nonchalance célébrée Michel Houellebecq en monstres de cauchemar d'enfant. Mieux encore : elle les dépeint en personnages d'un bestiaire mythique contemporain. Weedle, Grodoudou, Gloom et Michel Houellebecq sont nos Persée et Hercule modernes. Justement, il est question de figures antiques au travers des constellations qu'a également reproduites Reena Spaulings. L'artiste a accroché au plafond de la galerie trois tableaux sur Dibond noir représentant la carte du ciel le soir du vernissage de l'exposition, le 3 septembre à Paris. Constellations mythiques d'hier (Aigle, Grande Ourse, Dragon) voisinent avec les nouvelles étoiles de notre époque...

**Toute l'exposition, en réalité, est conçue autour de l'idée très contemporaine de géolocalisation**, en l'occurrence celle de la Galerie Chantal Crousel. Les Pokémons peints sont ceux que l'on peut géolocaliser à proximité de l'espace. Et Michel Houellebecq aurait été choisi parce qu'il a été aperçu dans une rue avoisinante... tel un Pokémon rare en somme.

*Pont du Carrousel* de Reena Spaulings, jusqu'au 8 octobre à la Galerie Chantal Crousel, 10, rue Charlot, Paris IIIe, [www.crousel.com](http://www.crousel.com)

Par Thibaut Wychowanok

# LE COLLECTIF, ARTISTE CONTEMPORAIN

BÉATRICE GROSS

Le collectif d'artistes s'impose comme une figure spécifique du développement des pratiques collectives et collaboratives depuis les années 1960. Béatrice Gross avait abordé le sujet dans l'article « Brève histoire du collectif d'artiste(s) depuis 1967 », publié dans *les Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*. Ci-dessous, extraits choisis par l'auteure.

[...] Les expositions consacrées à la figure particulière de collaboration que constituent les collectifs d'artistes, ou à la collaboration artistique en général – collectifs compris –, n'ont cessé de se multiplier, [...] témoignant de la remarquable résurgence de ce phénomène lié historiquement aux néo-avant-gardes des années 1960 et 1970. [...] Mains ouvrages et articles (au sein d'un corpus critique, notons-le, étonnamment restreint compte tenu non seulement de la réémergence récente, mais aussi de la permanence, dans l'histoire de l'art contemporain, de ces pratiques collectives particulières) interprètent le phénomène du collectif d'artistes, faisant la part belle aux créations d'ordre relationnel et éthique. [...]



The Royal Art Lodge  
*Invariably One Thing Killed the Other*, série *Starting Over*  
2008  
Acrylique, papier et encre sur Isorel,  
5,08 x 5,08 cm  
Court. les artistes

Page de droite, de haut en bas:  
Bernadette Corporation  
*Reena Spaulings*  
2004  
Éditions Semiotext(e)

Les Ready-Made appartiennent à  
tout le monde®  
*Publicité, Publicité (histoire de  
l'art cherche personnages...)*  
1980  
Cibachrome, 154 x 119,5 cm  
Frac Poitou-Charentes  
© Succession Philippe Thomas

Cependant, encouragées par la multiplication de collectifs d'artistes peu enclins à l'activisme et la radicalité de certains de leurs prédécesseurs (ainsi l'approche ludique et informelle de Dearraindrop, hobbypopMUSEUM, Gelitin ou encore The Royal Art Lodge), d'autres voies interprétatives se dessinent, agitant une certaine *communauté* critique de débats houleux [...] L'investigation portant sur la nature et la signification du collectif contemporain tend alors à rejoindre celle relative au rapport des régimes politiques et esthétiques de l'art. [...]

Une esthétique de la collaboration saurait-elle donner lieu, à elle seule, à une création contemporaine légitime ? Autrement dit, la nature collective revendiquée d'une œuvre suffit-elle à en justifier l'existence ? Sur fond d'une réflexion plus large sur l'autonomie de l'œuvre d'art (en un sens toujours collective), cette interrogation amène à examiner, tour à tour, la question de la composition du collectif d'artiste(s) en lien avec la performativité de son identité de groupe, les origines historiques majeures du phénomène, puis, à travers une approche typologique, les domaines et structures de production adoptés, par analogie, par ce type particulier de communauté artistique intentionnelle.

#### REDÉFINITION DE LA NOTION D'AUTEUR

Il semble d'emblée que les enjeux fondamentaux du collectif d'artiste(s) ne résident pas tant dans la simple mise en commun pragmatique de ressources et de compétences, mais bien plutôt dans la nécessaire redéfinition de la notion d'auteur accompagnant cette collectivisation déclarée des moyens de production. Ainsi, la notion formelle de signature commune apparaît comme le critère déterminant dans la distinction entre le collectif d'artiste(s) et les autres formes de collaboration artistiques : groupes, mouvements, ou collaborations temporaires ne sauraient en effet constituer des collectifs à proprement parler ; les couples d'artistes (les Becher, les Poirier, Gilbert & George), les groupes informels (les futuristes, le Bauhaus, Fluxus) et les ateliers hypertrophiés (de Damien Hirst à Jeff Koons, en passant par Takashi Murakami) ne le sont pas non plus. Dès lors, on comprend que la construction délibérée d'une identité alternative – parce que collective et impersonnelle – revient à subvertir la figure traditionnelle de l'artiste et les institutions qui l'encadrent. [...]

Avant toute chose pourtant – avant toute idéologie ou mission particulières – le collectif d'artiste(s) forme une unité de travail spécifique, qui, contrairement à ce que son nom indique, ne nécessite en rien le regroupement de plusieurs individus (c'est-à-dire d'au moins trois) : être un collectif d'artistes, c'est d'abord et avant tout se déclarer tel. Paradoxalement, le critère de composition plurielle est ainsi non seulement insuffisant, mais pas non plus nécessaire. Deux personnes, voire une seule, suffisent pour se constituer en collectif, entité dont l'identité, comme toute autre, individuelle ou plurielle, est le fruit d'une construction. Ainsi, Bernadette Corporation est l'organe collectif de John Kelsey et Emily Sundblad, Assume Vivid Astro Focus celui du Brésilien Eli Sudbrack, The Atlas Group celui de Walid Raad, Les Readymades Appartiennent à Tout le Monde celui de Philippe Thomas.

Inversement, un collectif peut décider d'assumer une identité individuelle, forcément fictive. Ainsi, le collectif new-yorkais Reena



histoire de l'art  
cherche personnages...

The image shows the front cover of the book 'histoire de l'art cherche personnages...'. The title is at the top. Below it, there's a row of five vertical book spines, each with a different title: 'pop art', 'WARHOL', 'BEUYS zu Ehren', 'CUBISM', and 'DUCHAMP'. To the right of the spines, there's some smaller text. At the bottom right, it says 'les ready made appartiennent à tout le monde'. There's also some very small text at the very bottom of the page.

Apres un étreno à New York en décembre 1987, cette exposition mondiale fêtera sa première à Paris du 10 mai au 10 juillet. Pour l'occasion, nous vous proposons de venir à nos vernissages et apprécier à nous le monde.

À l'origine de l'art contemporain du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, l'art, collectivement nommé de nous intéresse particulièrement sur ce plan historique. Nous avons donc mis au point une exposition qui nous permettra de faire un voyage à travers l'art contemporain. Nous vous invitons à venir à nos vernissages et apprécier à nous le monde.

n'attendez pas demain pour entrer dans l'histoire.

les ready made appartiennent à tout le monde

Spaulings tire son nom de celui de l'héroïne du roman éponyme, conçu lui-même par un autre collectif, Bernadette Corporation : écrit à la manière des scripts de Hollywood, l'ouvrage est le fruit d'une chaîne de plus de 150 auteurs anonymes. Dans une variation à double-fond de la fiction auctoriale, The Bruce High Quality Foundation, fondation d'art fictive basée à New York, se présente comme « l'arbitre officiel du patrimoine de Bruce High Quality, se [consacrant] à la préservation de l'héritage du feu sculpteur social Bruce High Quality<sup>1</sup> », « art star », fictive elle aussi, du New Jersey. Ou encore, Otabenga Jones and Associates, collectif fondé en 2002 par Jamal Cyrus, Robert A. Pruitt et Otabenga Jones, artiste dont le nom dérive de celui du Pygmée Ota Benga, amené d'Afrique aux États-Unis en 1904 afin d'être exposé au zoo du Bronx.

La composition des collectifs d'artistes ne connaît donc aucune règle cardinale. Et si elle peut certes évoluer en fonction du mode de fonctionnement interne défini par chacun des collectifs – qu'il s'agisse d'organisations très ouvertes, tel Temporary Services, ou au contraire très fermées, telle The Royal Art Lodge (RAL), de laquelle, en principe, « personne n'entre, personne ne sort<sup>2</sup> » – elle se modifie avant tout au gré de contingences incontournables : désaccords ou essoufflement général, voire décès, comme ce fut le cas de deux des trois membres du collectif canadien General Idea (seul A.A. Bronson est en vie à ce jour). [...]

#### EFFONDREMENT DU MODERNISME

Il apparaît finalement que, s'il existe bien une notion commune à toutes ces cellules de collaboration, c'est ironiquement celle d'une conscience aigüe du risque permanent de leur dissolution. Ainsi Art & Language, collectif conceptuel fondé en 1967 à Coventry (Royaume-Uni) par Terry Atkinson et Michael Baldwin associés à David Bainbridge et Harold Hurrell, puis rejoints en 1969 par Ian Burn, Joseph Kosuth et Mel Ramsden, fut constamment animé de désaccords. Portant principalement sur les fondements mêmes de leur collaboration, ces nombreuses divergences, en l'absence d'un pôle de décision individuel régulateur et à cause de l'impératif d'unanimité de tous ses membres sous l'égide d'une signature collective, menèrent le collectif à une fragmentation du groupe et de sa branche new-yorkaise dès 1974. Comme l'expliquèrent une vingtaine d'années plus tard, en 1995, Baldwin et Ramsden (les deux membres restants du collectif, dépositaires exclusifs de ses activités, passées et présentes), ce qui constituait jusque lors « une confusion dialectiquement fructueuse devint un chaos d'individualités et de préoccupations en compétition<sup>3</sup> ». Or, ces perpétuelles dissensions se révélèrent aussi force motrice et créatrice du collectif : malgré les difficultés à analyser précisément le mode de fonctionnement de Art & Language, tant les témoignages de ses anciens membres divergent, son

Béatrice Gross est commissaire d'exposition et critique d'art indépendante. Elle prépare actuellement une exposition de la collection particulière de Sol LeWitt au Drawing Center (New York) en collaboration avec Claire Gilman, Senior Curator. Béatrice Gross est également la conseillère éditoriale et curatoriale de *Mémoire Universelle* (Bruxelles), un projet pluridisciplinaire d'encyclopédie thématique et subjective.



The Wooster Group  
The Wooster Group's Version of Tennessee Williams' *Vieux Carré*  
Ph. Paula Court  
© The Wooster Group

Page de droite, en bas :  
Internationale Situationniste  
Bande dessinée détournée parue dans *Internationale Situationniste*, n° 8, janvier 1963

# artpress 2

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



39

importance décisive dans l'émergence du collectif comme nouveau type de collaboration apparaît clairement en ce qu'il fut le premier à « [éprouver] nombre des défis et limites de cette forme [de collaboration]<sup>4</sup> ». Art & Language, formation fluide qui, au plus fort de son existence, au cours des années 1970, compta une cinquantaine d'affiliés, apparaît ainsi comme le premier collectif *stricto sensu* de l'histoire de l'art: pour la première fois semble-t-il une communauté d'artistes créa collectivement, sous une signature unique et impersonnelle, mettant tous ses membres, et leurs contributions, sur un pied d'égalité.

Il n'en demeure pas moins que le phénomène contemporain de collectivisme artistique doit beaucoup à des types anciens de collaboration au sens élargi du terme, au premier titre desquels ceux suscités par les mouvements dada et surréaliste. [...] Décisive fut également, dès 1957, l'influence de l'Internationale Situationniste (IS), dont le projet révolutionnaire et les pratiques tactico-ludiques se traduisirent par une production collective et (relativement) anonyme, malgré l'omniprésence de son porte-parole et fondateur Guy Debord. [...] Il fallut toutefois attendre « l'effondrement général de l'autorité des protocoles culturels individualistes que constitue le modernisme<sup>5</sup> », comme le déclara Charles Harrison, membre de Art & Language, pour voir naître la modification de conscience artistique nécessaire à l'émergence formelle du collectif d'artistes.

Ainsi, Art & Language rejeta non seulement l'identification de l'artiste à un génie individuel, mais aussi la primauté du champ visuel, et plus particulièrement du genre pictural, en faveur de positions auctoriales hybrides et de l'incorporation du texte dans le domaine artistique. [...] Cette conception radicale de l'art et de l'artiste emprunta alors une voie impersonnelle et bureaucratique, imitant à la perfection, jusqu'au fééтиisme peut-être, l'autorité des bureaucraties culturelles dominantes, stratégie qui lui vaudra la qualification – péjorative sous la plume de Benjamin H. D. Buchloh – d'« esthétique de l'administration<sup>6</sup> ». [...]

**Art & Language**  
Vue de l'exposition *Art & Language Uncompleted*,  
MACBA, Barcelone, 2014  
Ph. EOS-AF, Estudi Orpinell & Sánchez -  
Artesania Fotográfica



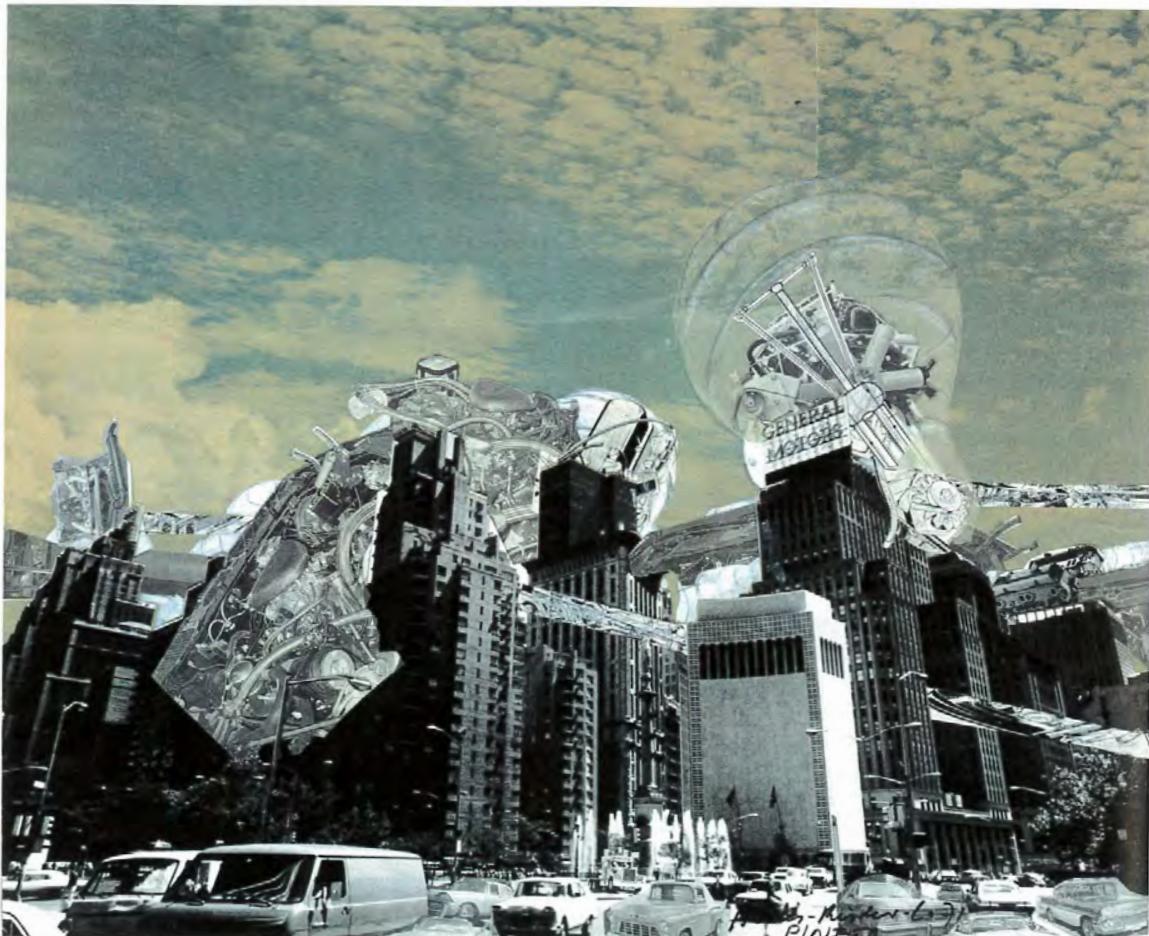
## RADICALISME SOCIAL ET POLITIQUE

Tout en rejetant la moindre notion de hiérarchisation interne, les collectifs d'artistes se soumettent, d'une manière ou d'une autre, à un certain degré d'institutionnalisation. Alors qu'une division concrète du travail peut s'opérer *de facto* entre les différents membres d'un collectif, l'identité générique du groupe comme cellule de production se rapporte souvent à des domaines ou modèles de production collective préexistants, exogènes au domaine des arts plastiques. [...]

Bien souvent néanmoins, des collectifs d'artiste(s) se réfèrent à des structures propres aux arts appliqués et aux arts vivants. À la croisée de l'art et de l'architecture, dans la mouvance des utopies psychédéliques des années 1960 et 1970, les Américains de Ant Farm, les Autrichiens de Coop-Himmelb(l)au et bien d'autres créèrent des types inédits d'espaces ouverts et flexibles, à l'instar de l'*Oasis no. 7* [...] de Haus-Rucker-Co ou le *Blow-out Village* d'Archigram Group [...]. Dans le genre proprement contemporain de la performance, l'héritage du groupe Fluxus est visible dans des collectifs dont la structure s'apparente alors à celle de compagnies de théâtre, tel le légendaire Wooster Group à Soho (New York), ou de formations musicales, tels Japanther à Brooklyn, Lucky Dragons à Los Angeles, ou Section Amour à Paris. [...]

Des collectifs tels 16 Beaver Group, Critical Art Ensemble ou The Center for Land Use Interpretation, empruntent la voie d'un radicalisme social et politique proche de l'activisme – activisme qui, selon certains (au premier rang desquels l'historien Gregory Sholette), serait au fondement de toute initiative collective véritable. En ce sens, le collectif de commissaires What, How and for Whom? (WHW) à l'origine de l'exposition *Collective Creativity: Common Ideas For Life and Politics* affirme sans dé-

Klaus Pinter (Haus-Rucker-Co)  
*Rooftop Oasis Structures*  
1971-73  
Dessin, encre sur impression offset et  
collage, 28,2 × 35 cm  
Ph. François Lauginie  
Frac Centre, Orléans



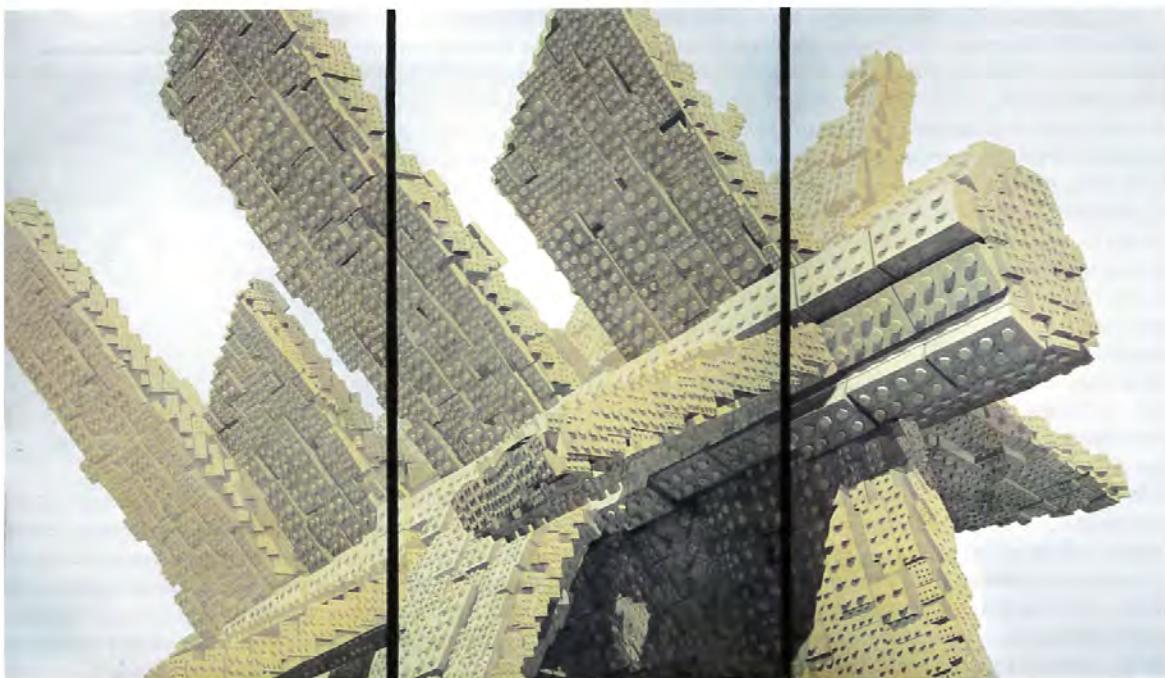
tour : « La créativité collective est non seulement une forme de résistance au système dominant de l'art et à l'appel capitaliste à la spécialisation, mais également une critique productive et performative des institutions sociales et de la politique<sup>7</sup>. » [...]

Au plus proche de ce qu'ils critiquent (à savoir le marché de l'art et ses acteurs), de nombreux collectifs se constituent en effet autour d'un programme de court-circuitage des agents traditionnels de leur promotion : galeries commerciales, fondations, musées... Ainsi, Reena Spaulings, artiste fictive à la tête du collectif du même nom, ouvert en 2004 sa propre galerie, Reena Spaulings Fine Art. Fondée et animée par les deux membres principaux de Bernadette Corporation, auxquels viennent s'adosser, en fonction des projets, divers collaborateurs réguliers, la galerie expose non seulement ses productions collectives, mais aussi les travaux individuels de certains de ses contributeurs. [...]

#### L'ŒUVRE PRODUIT SON AUTEUR

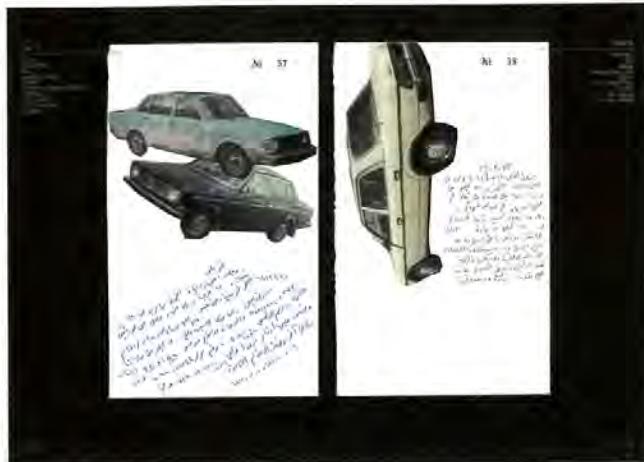
Les formes d'identification de certains collectifs d'artistes répondent parfois enfin tout simplement à des contraintes sociales et politiques extérieures, comme ce fut le cas de nombre de collectifs issus de l'ex-bloc communiste, tel le groupe cubain Los Carpinteros qui, afin de déjouer la censure, s'identifie au corps de métier artisanal des charpentiers. Dans un climat politique de surveillance et de répression généralisé, l'important pour Alexandre Arrechea, Marco Castillo Valdés et Dagoberto Rodríguez Sánchez était de se placer dans le contexte non des idées ou de l'art d'avant-garde, mais plutôt dans celui du travail manuel et des modes traditionnels de production. Depuis 1994, à l'abri de cette stratégie de camouflage, le groupe redéfinit à son tour la notion d'auteur, lui conférant une modestie

Los Carpinteros  
*Knin Lego*  
2012  
Court. Kunstmuseum, Thonon



étrangère à la figure héroïque du génie romantique et moderniste ou de l'« artiste-intellectuel » ou « artiste-manager » contemporain. Si la représentation de la structure de leur collaboration préoccupait Los Carpinteros à leurs débuts (comme l'attestent *Interior Habanero* ou *Habana Country Club*), qui, à la faveur d'une esthétique conservatrice rappelant le style colonial cubain, parvinrent à tromper la vigilance des autorités, ceux-ci décidèrent rapidement de renoncer à l'autoportrait et à la peinture, afin d'éviter deux écueils, celui d'une œuvre à portée strictement sociologique ou politique, mais également celui de la représentation problématique d'une instance auctoriale collective : « Les tableaux documentaient notre manière de travailler. Deux d'entre nous étaient toujours représentés dans l'œuvre, le troisième regardait, et peignait. Le fait que nous travaillions à trois, au sein d'un collectif, était

au commencement une déclaration d'ordre conceptuel. Ce discours était important pour nous à l'époque. Aujourd'hui, nous ne sommes plus qu'un auteur<sup>8</sup>. » Cette évolution auctoriale prit corps dans des changements concrets et formels : « Nous prîmes des décisions radicales, l'huile disparut complètement de nos installations. Nous continuâmes à peindre, mais seulement à l'aquarelle. Ces études devinrent progressivement plus importantes, elles devinrent notre moyen de communication et notre vivier d'idées<sup>9</sup>... et leur œuvres gagnèrent en subtilité. L'ensemble de ces dessins dits préparatoires, ou projectifs, en ce qu'ils peuvent donner naissance à de nouveaux objets ou environnements, constituent une riche correspondance visuelle devenue décisive dans la méthodologie du groupe, laquelle vaut finalement pour elle-même, comme processus constitutif, rétroactivement, de ses producteurs : l'œuvre produit son auteur. [...]



The Atlas Group (1989-2004)

Notebook Volume 38: Already

Been in a Lake of Fire \_ plate

57/58

1991

30 x 42 cm

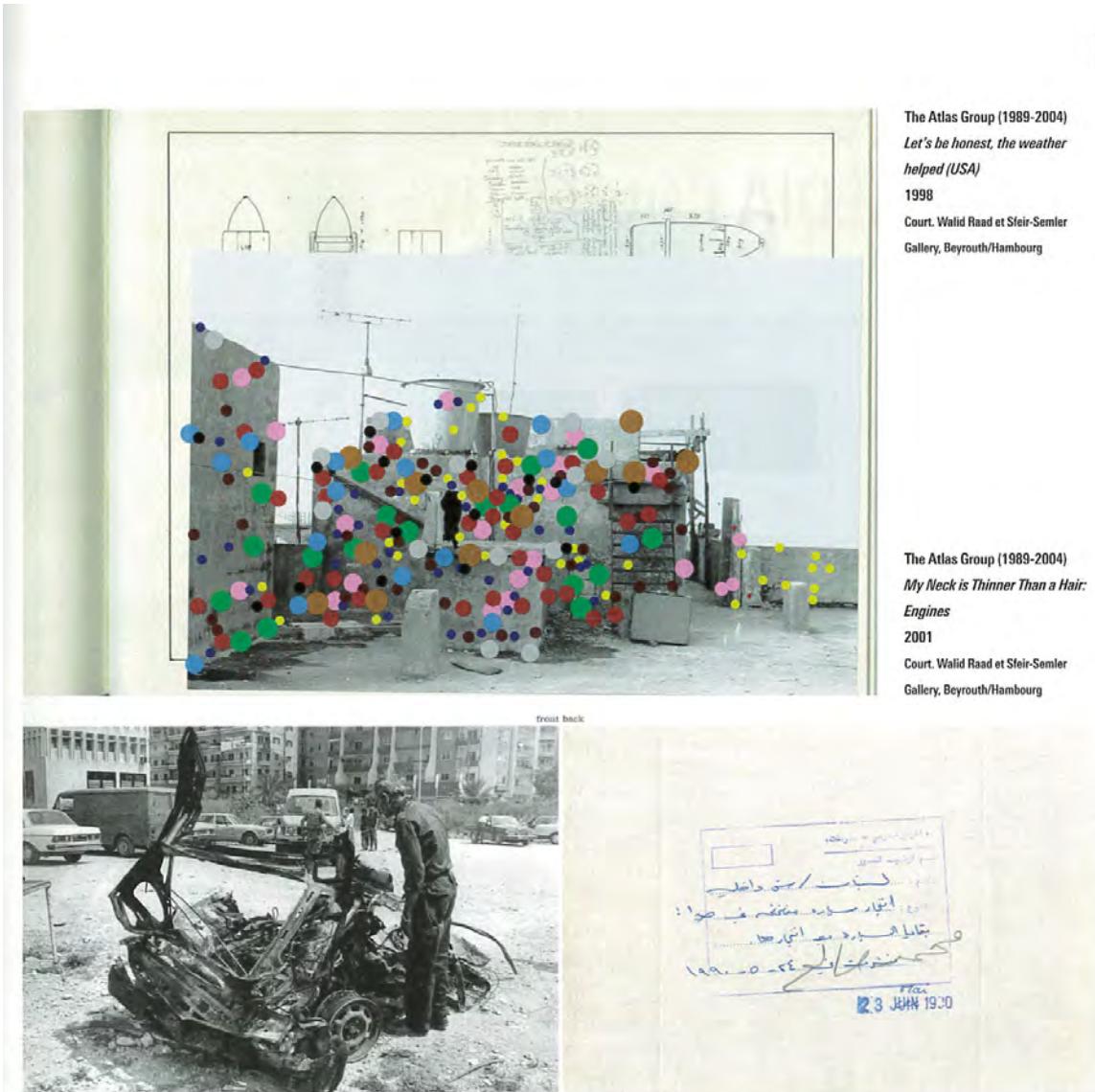
Court: Walid Raad et Steir-Semler

Gallery, Beyrouth/Hambourg

### CAS-LIMITE

Dans un urgent rappel à la nécessité de concevoir l'histoire comme une production collective, l'Atlas Group, fondé en 1999, constitua de vastes archives sur le thème de la guerre du Liban, qui sévit de 1975 à 1991. Soucieux d'informer et d'entretenir une mémoire collective trop souvent sujette à la manipulation d'intérêts particuliers, le groupe publia en ligne l'ensemble des documents produits entre 1989 et 2004. [...] Un corpus central toutefois constitue la base du projet : le « dossier Fakhouri », du nom du célèbre historien de la guerre civile, nous dit-on. Le groupe déroule en réalité un récit conceptuel énoncé par un seul individu, Walid Raad, abordant de manière radicale, à travers la fiction d'une collectivité, le problème de l'unité d'une population divisée et meurtrie. Mélant avec une ambiguïté déconcertante fait avéré et fiction, l'institutionnalisation imaginaire de sa démarche permet à l'artiste libano-américain de désamorcer, tout en se l'appropriant, l'autorité du discours officiel, comme en témoignent, non sans humour noir, ses conférences dérivées de *My Neck Is Thinner Than a Hair*, conférant une nature autant visuelle que performative à sa fiction archivale. La construction d'une telle identité collective traduit en dernière instance le caractère idéologique de tout corps d'archive, quelque impartial qu'il paraisse. Au fond, il ne s'agit pas pour l'artiste d'établir ici un bilan objectif de ces années sombres, mais bien plutôt de parvenir à ériger une instance impersonnelle porteuse de la multiplicité des voix constitutives du réel et de ses contingences. Ainsi, le collectif autodéclaré de Walid Raad réactive, avec d'autant plus de vivacité qu'il constitue un cas-limite, l'interrogation autour de la notion même d'auteur présente dans tout collectif d'artistes. Loin d'une inversion collectiviste ou sociologisante du mythe de l'individualité autonome, la collectivité fictive de l'Atlas Group renvoie en vérité à la collectivité réelle de l'œuvre contemporaine, de sa genèse à sa réception, dont l'auteur, individuel ou collectif, se révèle le producteur impersonnel et oblique.

Dans un contexte où une importance croissante est accordée au processus de production artistique au détriment de son produit, les rares investigations critiques autour du collectif d'artistes proprement dit ne manquent pas de mettre en scène de manière récurrente l'antagonisme des conceptions stratégiques (ou éthiques) et purement esthétiques ou formalistes de l'art. Toutes deux, néanmoins, semblent se rejoindre sur l'identification du collectif d'artistes en tant que structure d'avant-garde. Or, si le collectif d'artistes, suivant notre hypothèse, est bien issu de la désintégration des principes modernistes, comment saurait-il s'accorder de cette notion de structure d'avant-garde, motif moderniste par excellence ? Nous affirmons au contraire que la simple éthique qui impose le renoncement à une signature personnelle ne saurait désormais suffire à établir une quelconque légitimité artistique. La question du collectif nous conduit alors à réactiver celle de l'évaluation critique de l'œuvre dans son rapport au réel : au fond, ce n'est pas tant la question de la genèse auctoriale de l'œuvre, mais plutôt la dialectique de l'autonomie et de l'hétéronomie de l'art, et la capacité d'une certaine création contemporaine collective à la penser *in concreto*, qui resurgit à la faveur de l'analyse historique et critique du collectif d'artistes.



The Atlas Group (1989-2004)

*Let's be honest, the weather helped (USA)*

1998

Court. Walid Raad et Steir-Semler

Gallery, Beyrouth/Hambourg

The Atlas Group (1989-2004)

*My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair: Engines*

2001

Court. Walid Raad et Steir-Semler

Gallery, Beyrouth/Hambourg

<sup>1</sup> The Bruce High Quality Foundation, «The Bruce High Quality Foundation, the official arbiter of the estate of Bruce High Quality, is dedicated to the preservation of the legacy of the late social sculptor, Bruce High Quality», dans *The Bruce High Quality Foundation Foundation and Other Ideas*, BHQF Press, 2008, p. 55-56.

<sup>2</sup> «No one gets in, no one gets out», cité dans «An Interview with The RAL by Wayne Baerwaldt and Joseph R. Wolin», dans *The Royal Art Lodge: Ask the Dust – dictionary of received ideas*, Drawing Center / Power Plant, 2003, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Art & Language, «We aimed to be amateurs», co-écrit avec Charles Harrison, dans Alexander Alberro et Blake Stimson (éd.), *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, The MIT Press, 1999, p. 448.

<sup>4</sup> Chris Gilbert, «Art & Language and the Institutional Form», dans Blake Stimson et Gregory Sholette (éd.), *Collectivism After Modernism: the Art of Social Imagination since 1945*, University of Minnesota Press, 2007, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Harrison, «A Guide to the Exhibition», *Art & Language in Practice*, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1999, cité dans Brigit Eusterschule, *Kollectiv Kreativität / Collective Creativity*, Revolver / Archiv für Aktuelle Kunst, 2005, p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, «Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions», dans *October*, vol. 55, hiver 1990, p. 105-143, où le critique qualifie les activités de Art & Language de «quêtes autoritaires d'orthodoxie» (p. 107).

<sup>7</sup> WHW, «New Outlines of the Possible», Brigit Eusterschule, *Collective Creativity*, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Los Carpinteros, entretien avec Rosa Lowingern, *Sculpture Magazine*, décembre 1999, vol. 18, no 10.

<sup>9</sup> Los Carpinteros, entretien de juillet 2003 reproduit dans *Los Carpinteros*, Institute for Research in Art/Contemporary Art Museum (Tampa) / Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (La Havane), 2003, p. 124-125.

<sup>10</sup> «Brève histoire du collectif d'artiste(s) depuis 1967» a été publié dans les *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, n°111, printemps 2010. Nous remercions Jean-Pierre Criqui, rédacteur en chef des *Cahiers*, ainsi que les Éditions du Centre Pompidou d'avoir autorisé la publication de ces extraits. Le titre, le chapeau et les intitulés sont de la rédaction.

Claire Moulène. "Occupy New York. Une vision de Big Apple déclinée sur fond de trompe l'oeil et de cartons à pizza,"  
*Les Inrockuptibles* N° 840, January 4, 2012, p. 85.

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

**Occupy New York**

**Une vision de Big Apple déclinée sur fond de trompe-l'œil et de cartons à pizza.**

C'est une trilogie new-yorkaise qu'esquisse Reena Spaulings à la galerie Chantal Crousel. Véritable roman à elle seule, personnage de fiction inventé par le collectif Bernadette Corporation avant de se métamorphoser en galerie et de s'implanter dans le Lower East Side, Reena Spaulings incarne une nouvelle vision de l'artiste, néoconceptuelle et plurielle. Chez Chantal Crousel, histoire de brouiller encore les pistes, Reena Spaulings s'est associée à Catherine Feff, une artiste française pas vraiment identifiée dans le champ de l'art, mais vraie businesswoman, détentrice du record mondial du plus grand trompe-l'œil. Elle présente ici une vue panoramique et industrielle de New York qui sert de toile de fond, au propre comme au figuré, à toute l'exposition. Car le motif décliné par Reena Spaulings and Co est bien celui de New York. La ville d'avant le 11 Septembre, érectile et bleu limpide, mais aussi le New York de la prolifération maladive et sanguinaire (la microscopique punaise de lit chromée et "punaisée" au mur, qui rappelle l'invasion massive des fameux *bed bugs* de l'été 2010). Autre image d'Epinal convoquée : celle des indignés de Wall Street brandissant leurs slogans sur des cartons à pizza. Mais ici, pas de mots d'ordre. Disparus les "99%" et les mises en cause des "banksters", ne reste que le support, les fameux cartons à pizza transformés en monochromes, recouverts de peinture à l'huile bleu nuit ou d'une émulsion orangée signée Farrow and Ball, la très hype marque de peinture anglaise.

**Claire Moulène**

**Occupy Wall Street** de Reena Spaulings, jusqu'au 14 janvier à la galerie Chantal Crousel, 10, rue Charlot, Paris III<sup>e</sup>, [www.crousel.com](http://www.crousel.com)

Courtesy galerie Chantal Crousel, photo Florian Kleinefenn

**Enigma 4 de Reena Spaulings, 2011**

«2010. The Avatar as artistic strategy..», *Art since 1900*, 2010, pp.764-769.

## art since 1900

HAL  
FOSTER  
ROSALIND  
KRAUSS  
YVE-ALAIN  
BOIS  
BENJAMIN H. D.  
BUCHLOH

# ART SINCE 1900

MODERNISM  
ANTIMODERNISM  
POSTMODERNISM



# art since 1900

2010<sub>b</sub>

French artist Claire Fontaine, whose “operation” by two human assistants is itself an explicit division of labor, dramatizes the economies of art in a major retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami, Florida: the show marks the emergence of the avatar as a new form of artistic subjecthood.

Since Marcel Duchamp invented the first readymades in the teens of the twentieth century, using found and often mass-produced commodities in works of art has become as widespread as figure drawing once was for painters. There are two justifications most frequently given for presenting commodities in the place of art. First, based on often-quoted statements by Duchamp, it is said that the artist's choice of an object is what matters in making a thing into an art work—that, by definition, artists are authorized to legitimize virtually anything as art, ranging from a bicycle wheel to a snow shovel, to take two examples from Duchamp's oeuvre, merely by calling it so. A second justification supplements this first: commodities themselves carry powerful visual messages that may be manipulated—even “spoken”—as a ready-made symbolic language, as when Robert Rauschenberg or Andy Warhol appropriated the Coca-Cola logo as an American icon. Since the late seventies, when the question of gender's social codes began to emerge among artists such as Cindy Sherman or Barbara Kruger, a third understanding of the readymade emerged: stereotypes were identified and re-presented as expressions of what might be called the “human readymade.” Sherman, for instance, embodied stereotypes of feminine Hollywood protagonists or supporting actresses in her *Film Stills*, while Kruger appropriated such stereotypes by utilizing found photographs as the ground for trenchant graphic texts that operated as disarming “captions.” Both artists reframed the “human readymade” in order to challenge the presumption that femininity is constituted from a menu of biologically determined attributes.

In the United States, the struggles and controversies around identity politics that characterized a good deal of art during the late eighties and nineties, and which were greatly indebted to the strategies of impersonation and appropriation pioneered by artists such as Sherman and Kruger, ultimately resulted in an effort to possess and recode such stereotypes, or alternately to express the discomfort or rage at being misrepresented, or dispensed, by them. Hence the work of Adrian Piper or Lorna Simpson confronted viewers with their presumed stereotypical preconceptions about African-Americans in an effort to move beyond such ready-made characterizations. In other words, like Duchamp's so-called nominalism, where a commodity was con-

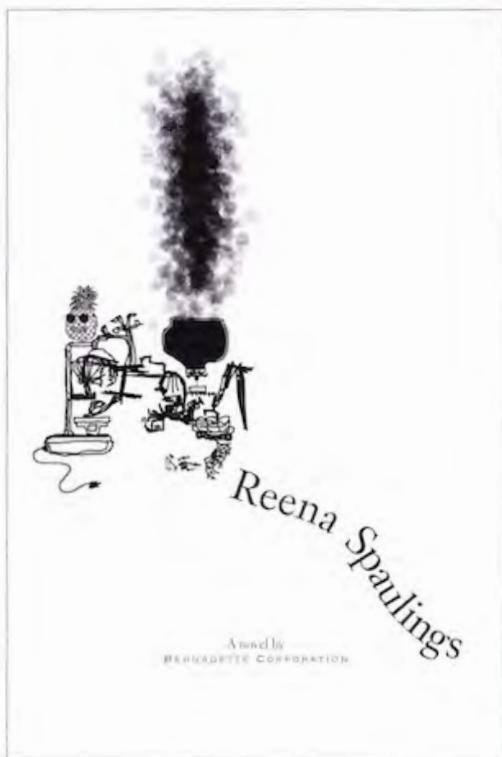
stituted as a work of art by being named such, much of the associated with identity politics pivoted on the authorization name—in this case, to name an identity, rather than a work of art. More recently, a distinctly different strategy pertaining to personhood has emerged among artists who introduce fictional characters as readymades—or *avatars*—into a variety of real and virtual environments. Like the surrogate actors in video games also known as avatars, these artist-built characters have no essential link to an existing person or identity per se. Instead, they are remote-controlled avatars who, like their virtual cousins in the game world, may travel to places or articulate meanings that would be inaccessible to any flesh-and-blood individual. In other words, avatars “free” artists from identity, allowing them to propose forms of selfhood, or subjectivity, that may be collective, imaginary, or utopian.

## Artist Inc.

The term *corporate* is typically associated with business enterprises, but it can signify any organized group endeavor. Under the conditions of contemporary media society, corporations of every type distinguish themselves aesthetically through the adoption of “visual identities” (that is, coordinated design campaigns encompassing logos, merchandising display, and advertising), and empathically through representation by a leader or public spokesperson. Artists who wish to de-emphasize their own individuality—and the powerful myth of artistic creativity that entails—have also formed corporate entities that function as a kind of anthropomorphic brand, or avatar. The Bernadette Corporation, for instance, is an artists' group founded in 1994 and known for its forays into fashion, art dealing, and activism, whose flexible model of the “holding company” allows it to shuttle between the art world and politics like other collectives established in the eighties, such as ACT-UP or the Guerrilla Girls. In 2004, the Bernadette Corporation published a novel titled *Reena Spaulings*, which serves as a kind of manifesto or a general theory of avatars [1]. In it, the fictional adventures of the title character, Reena Spaulings, indicate two forms of image power: first, the capacity of images to absorb human beings into pictures through *identification*, and

# art since 1900

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



1 • (above) Bernadette Corporation, cover of *Reena Spaulings*, 2004

2 • (right, top and bottom) Reena Spaulings, "The One and Only",  
Sutton Lane Gallery, London, 2005  
Installation view

second, the *projection* of powerful representations into real situations in order to manipulate events.

In the opening chapter of *Reena Spaulings*, Reena, working as a guard at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, falls into an extended meditation on Édouard Manet's famous painting *Woman with a Parrot* (1866) hanging in the gallery where she's on duty. Over and over again, the book narrates encounters between persons and pictures where the differences between them begin to blur: "She stood up a little straighter and fixed her eyes on a Manet on the opposite wall. The woman in the painting had Reena's blank pallor and below-the-radar presence. Reena could be a Manet, one of these thinking pictures you can't see through, no matter how long you stare at them." Reena becomes precisely such a "thinking picture" when Maris Parings, a flamboyant entrepreneur, recognizes her particular brand of bohemian chic and transforms her into an underwear model, giving her new social mobility as a celebrity (that is, a human picture or avatar) and allowing her to build new communities through a delirious sequence of live and mediated representations. If Reena meets and recognizes herself as a picture in her encounter with the Manet, and *becomes* a picture in her metamorphosis into fashion model, in the third paradigm



2000–2010



# art since 1900

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

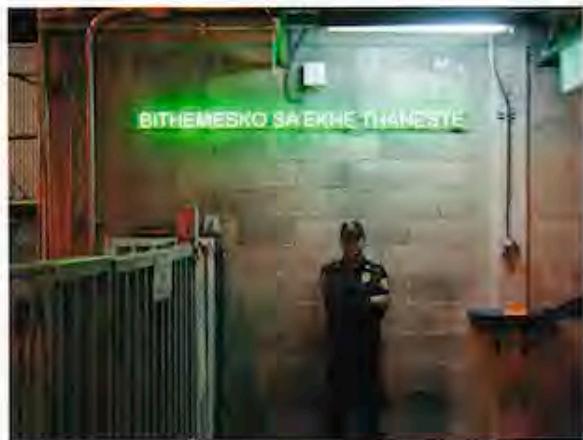
2000-2010

explored by *Reena Spaulings*, such personified pictures begin to operate as agents. This shift into image-agency—or the realm of the avatar—occurs most explicitly in a staged riot produced by Parings' company, *Vive la Corpse*, and titled *Cinema of the Damned* (or a Battle on Broadway), in which a performance starring Reena and a full cast of insurgents in the street shades into an actual riot. When images act, *Reena Spaulings* seems to assert, the fictional has real consequences as a kind of catalyst, and art attains the potential to function as politics—in other words, as an avatar.

Indeed, in 2004, the same year the novel was published, the fictional character *Reena Spaulings* began to operate as an avatar in the world—both as an art dealer, running *Reena Spaulings Gallery* in downtown New York (founded by the writer John Kelsey and the artist Emily Sundblad), and as an artist who has contributed works to group exhibitions, staged her own one-person shows, and even entered the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. *Spaulings'* art objects are sometimes produced in collaboration with gallery artists, and sometimes composed of materials drawn from the ordinary gallery "artifacts," such as guest books or tablecloths from opening dinners. In her first solo show, "The One and Only" in 2005, she introduced a powerfully iconic genre of objects: various types of flags mounted on ordinary household flagpoles [2]. The flag is of course a special kind of representation whose purpose is to assert sovereignty. By posing as a flag, the work of art reveals its unconscious imperialist drive: to claim space and demand recognition. This gesture is echoed by the flag's equally "imperializing" absorption of art's two classic media—painting as a colored surface, and sculpture as a three-dimensional object (these works even give a nod to time-based media, since the point of a flag is to move with changing currents of air). In short, *Reena Spaulings* began her public career as an artist by planting a flag: she would occupy space in the physical and informational circuits of the art world, and she would embrace as many media as possible in what Rosalind Krauss has called the "postmedium condition." A third impulse supplemented these first two: *Reena's* insistence on being *both* artist and art dealer. Instead of entering *into* an art world, one might say that *Reena Spaulings became* an art world.

## Breaking the division

Since the sixties a vast number of new galleries, art fairs, biennial exhibitions, and museums—often designed by celebrity architects—has emerged, causing the art world to grow so large and so spectacular that it functions as a branch of the entertainment and tourist industries. Such are the general conditions that Bernadette Corporation, as well as other avatars like the Paris-based Claire Fontaine (whose name is drawn from the well-known French notebook company Clairefontaine, and who is "operated" by her human assistants, Fulvia Carnevale and James Thornhill) responds to. It is no longer enough for an artist to make objects in a studio and wait passively for these works to enter the public sphere—rather, as *Reena Spaulings* implies, the entire system of



3 • Claire Fontaine, *Foreigners Everywhere* (Romania), 2010  
Emerald green argon glass, framework, electronic transformer and cables.  
10 x 238 x 5 (31/8 x 89 1/2 x 1 1/8)

production, distribution, sales, display, and critical reception that constitutes an art world must be, as economists put it, vertically integrated. Indeed, Claire Fontaine, whose work often echoes that of other artists—as when she makes flags recalling the work of *Reena Spaulings*—is profoundly concerned with questions of labor. As she states in a 2006 interview with John Kelsey, "The division of labor is the fundamental problematic of our work. Claire Fontaine grew out of the impossibility of accepting the division between intellectual and manual work; the art world is best adapted for fleeing this sort of hierarchy." Claire Fontaine understands herself as a ready-made artist, but more profoundly, she explores a division of labor that increasingly characterizes globalized economic systems: the separation between manual production, which may take place in locations and cultures very remote from the intellectual labor that commands it from metropolitan centers. Indeed, her projects often acknowledge the wider geopolitical conditions of global labor, which habitually crosses national borders through migration—legal and illegal—and corporate outsourcing. In *Foreigners Everywhere* [3], for example, which was exhibited in a window in East Jerusalem in 2008, such ethnic/national division is directly enunciated, as Claire Fontaine recounts in a 2008 interview: "The Hebrew and Arabic translation of St Paul's sentence 'Divide the division,' or 'Divide the divided,' flash on and off in the two languages alternatively, [on neon signs] one on top of the other.... Of course, the violence of the translation is the core of our gesture: in Arabic the sentence sounds more like 'Break the division.'"

Since artists are among those few persons left (corporate or otherwise) who habitually span manual and intellectual labor in a single individual, their "mode of production" may serve as a laboratory for questioning the division of labor that characterizes global economics more broadly. Indeed, as the philosopher Bruno Latour has argued, in a networked world, the local and the global

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are always directly connected, usually existing side-by-side (he gives train lines as an example of how even a remote station in the countryside is directly linked to a vast transportation infrastructure). Bernadette Corporation and Claire Fontaine resist displacing the mechanisms of globalization onto forces or conditions external to them: art does not reflect global division of labor, but rather the artist herself is formed by those divisions. It is therefore not surprising that Claire Fontaine's major 2010 retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami, Florida, was titled "Economies" and included work that explicitly mined the financial relationship between the artist and her gallery. Like many specialized markets based on highly customized products, such as fashion or graphic design, the art world's economy is largely based on trust (despite the open secret that artists are often exploited economically by their galleries and that collectors are frequently slow in paying for works of art). "Economies" included a series of framed blank checks—each titled "*Trust*" with the name of its signatory in parentheses—issued by several of Claire Fontaine's galleries from around the world. If a collector "breaks the glass" and fills in the check, s/he destroys Fontaine's work, while simultaneously profiting from it, and perhaps bankrupting the gallery in question. Of course there is a parallel dilemma for the art dealer who would have to decide whether or not to honor the check.

The success of an avatar lies in its capacity to operate within a particular world (it would, after all, be impossible to "see" the

global operations of a multinational corporation all at once, but it is easy to understand Claire Fontaine's allegory of *carte blanche*). Making a successful avatar thus entails inhabiting a particular world, by mastering and exhibiting its rules of behavior.

## Enter the picture

The Chinese artist Cao Fei (born 1978), for instance, has constructed a three-dimensional simulation of contemporary China—her RMB City—in Second Life, a "community" launched by the Linden Lab in 2003 that allows users (known as residents) to build and inhabit a wide range of invented environments. There is a great aesthetic difference between Bernadette Corporation and Claire Fontaine's Conceptual art-inspired techniques and the lush animations of Cao's elegiac videos set in Second Life, which recall Japanese *anime* and the worldwide culture of graphic literature and cartoons [4]. What most distinguishes Cao's art, however, is the viewer's immersion in her image of RMB City. The allure of Second Life, after all, is for participants to collectively enter into a picture: the game itself is a social experiment in how a group of "residents" drawn from all over the world may together inhabit the same virtual space. Although the prevailing atmosphere of Second Life is one of pleasurable escape—as though its residents are enjoying an island vacation—businesses, art events, and political actions have all taken root there, and a genuine economy is facilitated by the



4 • Cao Fei, *The Birth of RMB City*, 2009  
Second Life environment

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5 • The Atlas Group / Walid Raad, *Notebook Volume 38: Already Been in a Lake of Fire* [cat.A] \_Fakhouri\_Notebooks\_38\_055-071, 1999/2003  
Detail, from a set of nine plates; each 31.3 x 43.3 [12 1/2 x 17], edition of 7 + 1AP

game's currency, the Linden Dollar. Cao's RMB City includes several of the signature "icons" of China, ranging from a floating panda to a suspended model of Rem Koolhaas's design for the Beijing headquarters of CCTV. But here the ready-made stereotype, unlike those proffered by the artists of appropriation and identity politics, is literally inhabitable: one can navigate within it as *an environment* and Cao's avatar, China Tracy, does so, as if physically leading her viewers through an allegory of the recent history of China, whose physical face seems to change daily and whose citizens' identities are under massive reconstruction as well.

The videos that lead us through RMB City are very beautiful, and the avatars one sees along the way are exotic: sometimes humanoid, sometimes not, sometimes dancing alone in elegant spasms, sometimes conversing intently in intimate pairs. But perhaps the most significant aspect of Cao's RMB City project is how it represents two kinds of movement indigenous to virtual worlds: first, a smooth gliding locomotion and, second, jump cuts from one location to another. Each type of motion offers a distinct alternative for navigating within pictures—either total absorption corresponding to the fantasy of frictionless Internet surfing and

immersive gaming; or instantaneous mobility banishing gravity and space to allow for sudden movement from one unrelated site to another. In both cases, virtual space suggests a world of sovereign privilege that, in Cao's RMB City, seems intimately related to the conditions of manic real-estate development in contemporary urban China—a condition marked by the frequent presence of rotating signs proclaiming Second Life "land" for sale.

## The authority of visual information

As familiar as these two types of virtual locomotion are, it is important to explore and understand them, for as our everyday world begins to consist more and more of digital environments of various sorts, the question of how to *cohabit an image* becomes a pressing civic duty—thus giving new meaning to art history's traditional project of interpreting visual codes. Indeed, one of the most significant contemporary tasks in an era when photographs may be presented as evidence to justify the declaration of war (as Colin Powell did at the United Nations in 2002 in his capacity as the US secretary of state), and scientists make discoveries through simu-

▲ 2009c

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lated visual models, is to interpret the meaning and veracity of pictures—to develop what is called “visual literacy.” The art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty has used the term “parafiction” to describe various artistic projects that address this situation by playing with the often highly charged dividing line between fantasy and documentary. Among the best known of these are projects of the Lebanese artist Walid Raad (born 1967), operating under the guise of The Atlas Group, an entity invented by Raad devoted to documenting Lebanon’s recent history.

The Atlas Group has produced three types of documents, as catalogued in their online archive: “Type A—for files that contain documents that we produced and that we attribute to named imaginary individuals or organizations. Type FD—for files that contain documents that we produced and we attribute to anonymous individuals or organizations. Type AGP—for files that contain documents that we produced and that we attribute to The Atlas Group.” In other words, The Atlas Group produced an imaginary archive that pertains to real historical events. The Fakhouri File, for instance is a series of 226 notebooks and 2 films bequeathed to The Atlas Group in 1994 by Dr. Fadi Fakhouri, “the foremost historian of the Lebanese wars.” These documents give with one hand what they take away with the other, as in “Already Been in a Lake of Fire\_Notebook Volume 38,” which includes elegant collages including cut-outs of every model of car used as a car bomb between 1975 and 1991, as well as details of the explosion and its casualties [5]. These pieces are delirious and beautiful—the cars are arrayed at different angles in what seems like a vicious parody of their imminent explosion. But while the fact of car bombings is very real, this whimsical “document” is utterly imaginary—and thus proper authorization is *taken away*. History is shown as an aesthetic folly that leads viewers to examine—somewhat queasily—their assumptions about archival truth. And the fact that images must be authorized in order to claim truth-value is made abundantly clear.

The question of authorization is even more potently at play in the work of the Yes Men, a pair of artist-activists who have successfully posed as corporate spokesmen by creating websites that look official in order to attract actual invitations to speak at business conferences or as press representatives. Their most spectacular project to date was the announcement of “Jude Finisterra” (one of the Yes Men posing as a representative of the Dow Chemical Corporation) on BBC Television, that Dow would take responsibility for the devastating Union Carbide chemical spill in Bhopal, India, in 1984, for which the company had refused responsibility since buying Union Carbide in 2001 [6]. For a few hours, the world thought that a major corporation was to do the right thing: in Bhopal victims of the disaster rejoiced in (well-founded) disbelief, and in the West, Dow’s stock price plunged, the market instantly assuming the news to be accurate. In an integrated media circuit, where news reports are drawn from other news outlets and infinitely recirculated, even a few hours were enough for the story to circle the world—and of course when the deception emerged, the



6 • The Yes Men, *Dow Does the Right Thing*, 2004  
Performance

backlash was equally swift and decisive. As avatars, the Yes Men not only literally reshaped the speech of a corporate giant (if only for a brief moment in time), but they demonstrated the manic circulation and recirculation of information that characterizes contemporary media. Both operations pivoted on how surprisingly easy it was to *authorize* information.

The avatars under discussion here fall into three categories: the *corporate*, whose purpose is to explore how artists reorganize their labor as a “vertically integrated” art world in microcosm; the *fantastic*, in which virtual spaces offer mythic forms of freedom of movement and association; and the *interventionist*, where parafictional “counterfeits,” either archives or characters, impinge on actual events. In each case, the question of an artist’s given identity is set aside in order to imagine forms of agency that no single person, acting alone, could affect.

#### FURTHER READING

- The Atlas Group. *The Truth Will Be Known When We Last Witness to Death: Documents from the Fakhouri File in The Atlas Group Archive* (Cologne: Walther König, 2004).  
Bernadette Corporation. *Future Spoolings* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004).  
Eleanor Heartney. “Life Like,” *All in America*, vol. 96, no. 5, May 2008, pp. 164–81, p. 208.  
Ruba Katrib and Tom McDonough. *Claire Fontaine/Economics* (North Miami: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010).  
Carrie Lambert-Beatty, “Mike Silliman: Fictionality and Plausibility,” *October*, no. 129, Summer 2009, pp. 51–84.

BRUSSELS

## Reena Spaulings

SUTTON LANE

A visitor to “The Belgian Marbles,” the recent exhibition by the Reena Spaulings collective, would have noticed two things right away. First, thanks to a series of colorful lithographs of the shadows of palm trees called “A Place in the Sun (Shadows)” (all works 2009), marble surfboards (*Mollusk [Portoro]* and *Mollusk [Rosa Portogallo]*) installed on the balcony, and brightly colored yoga mats on the floor, the exhibition felt tropical—but for no apparent reason: This being Brussels, the effect was incongruous, or merely weird. Second, everything seemed completely offhand, as if the artists had nothing in particular to say and instead just monumentalized whatever was happening around them in the art world, whatever they and their friends might have been doing. The shadows of palm trees were photographed in the group’s free time at Art Basel Miami Beach, and had been layered with the scanned lists of names from a sign-in book from Reena Spaulings Fine Art in New York, so each piece was in every sense an index of the mechanics of the art world—but not in any systemic or illuminating way. The marble *Radiators 1–3* were motivated only by a desire to replace the original radiators, which had been cleared out because they were deemed too ugly. The connecting pipes and bits of unpainted wall were left intact to indicate the absence of these originals. Even the use of marble appears to have been spurred only by the convenience of a relationship, in this case with the collector Josef Dalle Nogare, who owns a marble quarry near Verona, Italy, and offered materials and production in exchange for artworks.

But while the overall effect may have been one of total nonchalance, this impression would not have been accurate, nor were the tropical colors and themes as arbitrary as they first seemed. A clue was given by the exhibition’s title, which puns on the Parthenon statuary hauled two centuries ago from Athens to London. The whole exhibition revolved around this axis, which for the sake of convenience can be generalized to that of South/North, or hot/cold: The surfboards, yoga mats, and palm trees all evoke the heat of the South, while Brussels is northern and cold, like London; Spaulings’s marbles had made a northward journey from Italy parallel to that of Elgin’s. Such geographic constructions are also historical, speaking to the domination of Northern European powers over those in the undeveloped south. The radiators were inscribed within the same system: Whereas the original radiators had been installed to give heat, their doubles offered only the coolness of marble. Hot/cold is also light/dark, and the lithographed palm-tree shadows make the allegorical binaries explicitly solar—a point emphasized by the series title “A Place in the Sun (Shadows).” Sun/shadow is also origin/repetition (the vanished radiators and surfboards versus the shadows and signatures), and, ultimately, truth/error—therefore the possibility of knowledge, and interpretation from beginning to end. “The Belgian Marbles” offers a most exacting allegory of tropes, which belies any first sense of blasé chic, and confirms that Reena Spaulings continues to operate at the highest level of theoretical and stylistic sophistication.

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View of “Reena Spaulings,” 2009.

—David Lewis

# néo-conceptuels : la redistribution des rôles

Michel Gauthier

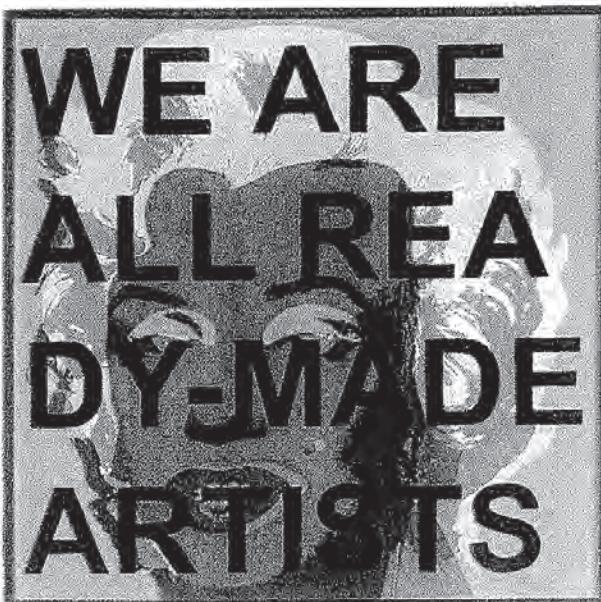
L'apparition, depuis quelques années, de certaines entités aux activités multiples, comme Reena Spaulings ou Continuous Project, donne un prolongement à la redistribution des rôles ouverte par l'art conceptuel historique, dont nombre d'artistes actuels ont choisi de rejouer ou d'examiner les propositions. Les néo-conceptuels sont souvent de nouveaux appropriationnistes.

On se souvient des trois propositions que Lawrence Weiner formula en 1969, occasionnant une rupture paradigmatique comme l'art n'en connaît pas si souvent : 1/ *L'œuvre peut être réalisée par l'artiste* – ce qui constitua, durant une longue période, le droit commun de la pratique artistique ; 2/ *Elle peut être réalisée par quelqu'un d'autre que l'artiste* – ce qui n'est pas loin de représenter, aujourd'hui, la situation la plus courante ; 3/ *Elle peut ne pas être réalisée* – avec laquelle s'ouvre l'âge conceptuel de l'art. Il semble que

certaines péripeties récentes conduisent à revoir la formulation de certaines de ces propositions historiques.

Ainsi la deuxième pourrait-elle s'accroître de la précision suivante : *L'œuvre peut être réalisée par quelqu'un d'autre que l'artiste, et notamment par le galeriste*. Dans une des scènes les plus fameuses du magnifique film de Jacques Demy, *les Demoiselles de Rochefort* (1967), on voyait un galeriste, plaisamment nommé Guillaume Lancien, faire éclater au pistolet des sachets de peinture au-dessus

d'une toile vierge. Le galeriste se faisait ainsi. C'est également ce qui s'est plus récemment produit avec Reena Spaulings. On connaît la galerie new-yorkaise Reena Spaulings Fine Arts, un marchand d'art comme un autre. Puis après apparut l'artiste Reena Spaulings, qui, milieu de la présente décennie, commença à exposer des œuvres – peintures, drapés, nappes de table et autres tourniquets de cart postales. Si l'art ne saurait plus être autre chose qu'une marchandise – rappelons-nous le texte du carton d'invitation de la premi



Claire Fontaine. « Untitled, (We are all, I & II) », 2006. Peinture, crayon, gouache, sérigraphie sur papier. 2 x (91 x 91 cm). (Collection privée, Court de l'artiste, T293, Naples galeries Art de Paris, Paris, et Chantal Crousel, Paris). Aerial painting, graphite and gouache, silkscreen on paper.

Conceptual artists are  
mystics rather than rationalists.  
They leap to conclusions  
that logic cannot reach.

exposition, en 1964, de Marcel Broodthaers : « Moi aussi, je me suis demandé si je ne pouvais pas vendre quelque chose et réussir dans la vie », il apparaît pleinement légitime que, finalement, ce soit le spécialiste de la marchandise, c'est-à-dire le marchand, qui endosse le rôle de l'artiste.

#### Le marchand en artiste

Sous cet angle, Reena Spaulings est une séquelle logique et réfléchie du warholisme : la récente série picturale des *Flowers* ne peut qu'évoquer celles que Warhol réalisa à partir de 1964 ; et les *Money Paintings*, toiles horizontales dont le rectangle, la composition et les couleurs évoquent les billets de banque, sont les intelligentes héritières des *Dollar Paintings* (les premières datent de 1962). Dans tous les sens de la formule, c'est une peinture de marchand à laquelle s'adonne Reena Spaulings. Avec *The Dealers* nous sont proposés des portraits à l'huile de personnalités du monde de l'art, obtenus à partir de photographies téléchargées depuis les pages *people* de sites comme celui de *Artforum*. Les *Enigmas* jouent la même partie, mais de façon encore plus critique. Cette fois, ce ne sont pas les visages des marchands et autres intermédiaires du marché de l'art qui sont figurés, mais les nappes tachées, sur lesquelles ceux-ci ont diné à l'issue de tel ou tel vernissage, que précise le cartel du tableau. Les à-côtés des à-côtés de l'art deviennent le centre du dispositif, les objets mêmes de l'exposition, en une impeccable caricature du processus de fabrisation en quoi consiste peut-être le marché de l'art et même tout marché. Le titre de ces œuvres, *Enigmas*, ne manque pas d'évoquer le « caractère énigmatique » de la marchandise dont parle Marx dans un célèbre passage du *Capital* (1). Cette énigme tient dans la faculté qu'ont les marchandises de prendre « l'aspect d'autres indépendants », de dissimuler les rapports sociaux qui les ont déterminées : la nappe souillée qui se transforme en une peinture abstraite, une marchandise faisant l'abstraction des relations de production qui l'ont vu naître – ici, l'offre par une galerie d'un dîner aux personnes qui, directement ou indirectement, vont permettre le commerce dudit produit – pour ne plus montrer que sa valeur. Si l'objet

## Around and Beyond Neo-Conceptualism

Over the past few years a number of multifarious endeavors such as Reena Spaulings and Continuous Project have taken the recasting of roles begun by historical Conceptualism to a new level. Many artists today are engaged in reappraising that current or producing new takes on it. The Neo-Conceptualists, it seems, are appropriating the appropriators.

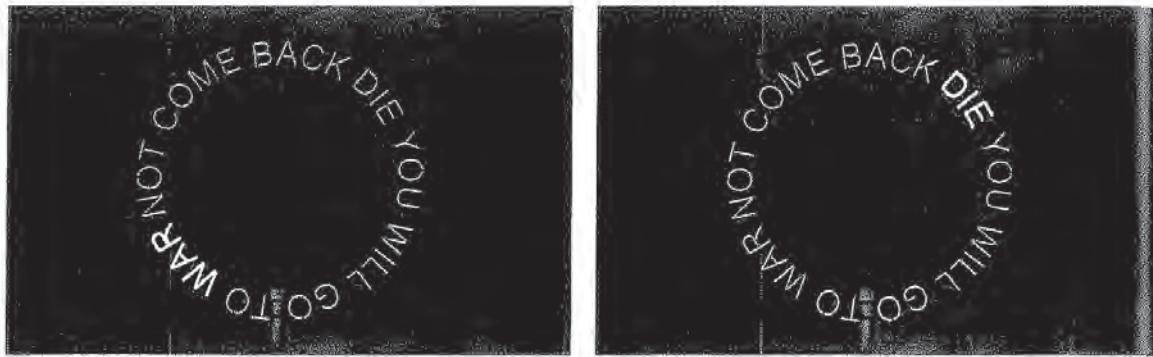
■ Lawrence Weiner's famous three statements formulated in 1968 marked a paradigm shift, the kind of rupture that does not occur very often in art: "1 The artist may construct the piece." This was the rule in the practice of art for a long time. "2 The piece may be fabricated" by someone other than an artist, which comes pretty close to describing the most common situation today. "3



Ci-dessus : Yann Sérandour, « Fantômes », 2008, impression numérique sur MDF, 11 éléments. Dimensions variables. (Coll. privée, Nantes, Court g8 agency, Paris). En haut à gauche, Mario García Torres, « Sing Like Baldessari », 2004. (Court Jan Mot, Bruxelles). « Ghosts. » Digital print on MDF. Dimensions variables.

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art conceptuel



Claire Fontaine. « Ibis redibis non moneris in bello ». 2006. Dimensions variables. Neons, lampes, programmeur électronique (Court, de l'artiste et galeries Air de Paris et Chantal Crousel, Paris). Ph. J. Hornbill. Neon, electronic programmer, cabling, framework, nine lamp fittings and lamps.

d'art est toujours la réification de l'acte qui l'a engendré, il devient dans le cas présent la réification du procès de sa marchandisation. Quand on sait qu'avant d'être une galerie, Reena Spaulings aura été l'héroïne d'un roman écrit par Bernadette Corporation (2), un collectif figurant parmi les artistes dont les œuvres sont vendues par Reena Spaulings Fine Art, on mesure dans quels lacs la figure de l'auteur et

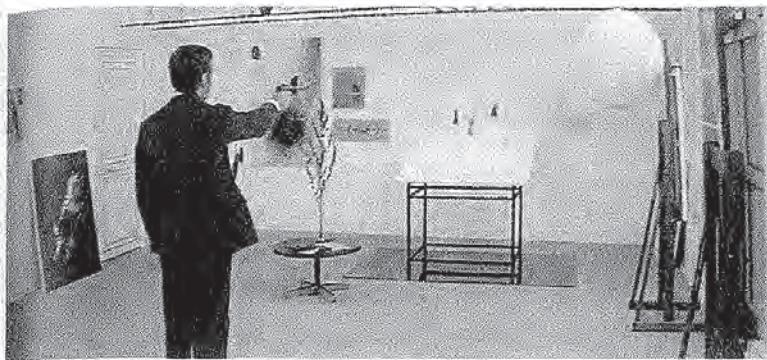
la distribution classique des rôles sur la scène de l'art peuvent alors se perdre. Et l'on songe bien sûr à l'une des œuvres les plus connues de l'agence Les ready made appartenant à tout le monde<sup>3</sup>, ouverte en 1988 par Philippe Thomas (3), qui, sous le slogan publicitaire « Histoire de l'art cherche personnages », appelait à « une totale révision du droit au registre des auteurs » (*La Pétition de principe*, 1988).

Toutefois, ce ne sont pas la dimension borgéenne ou les jeux pseudonymiques à la Pessoa qui retiennent l'attention dans les activités de Reena Spaulings, mais le mime par anticipation d'un modèle d'intégration verticale qui pourrait s'emparer du monde de l'art : une même structure assurant les fonctions respectives de l'artiste, du marchand, du critique, voire du personnage de fiction. Et si « Reena Spaulings » est l'invention qui permet à quelque chose comme une collectivisation du travail artistique, de mise à distance des subjectivités et expressions individuelles de se manifester, ce nom pourrait aussi être une marque : faudrait-il se réjouir de voir les collectionneurs acheter une peinture ou une sculpture de marque, comme on acquiert une automobile Honda, un téléviseur Philips, de l'eau de toilette Christian Dior ou un cahier Clairefontaine ? Il y a dans l'art de Reena Spaulings une distance, la possibilité d'une pluralité de lectures ainsi qu'une absence de didactisme que l'on ne retrouve pas dans les productions d'une autre « artiste collective » et readymade, dont il est pourtant organiquement proche et avec laquelle il partage un certain nombre de convictions politiques : Claire Fontaine (4).

En effet, trop souvent, les réalisations de Claire Fontaine semblent simplement incarner le parti d'une certaine bien-pensance, pratiquer un business des belles causes qui n'en a réalité d'autre efficace que de donner bonne conscience à ces acteurs du monde de l'art qui tachent les nappes lors des dîners de vernissage. Une phrase tirée de *Je hais les matins*, le livre de Jean-Marc Rouillan (5), ex-membre d'Action directe, ou les mots « Palestine occupée », écrits au moyen de milliers d'allumettes enflammées le jour du vernissage à la galerie Dvir (Tel-Aviv), à la fin de 2008 (6), viendront heureusement rassurer ces maladroits convives sur le sérieux de leurs occupations. Portraits warholiens de Mao et de Marilyn, ou néons de Nauman, Claire Fontaine arraîsse telles formes léguées par l'histoire pour les tester d'un propos qui les transformera en



Continuous Project #1, Maccarone Inc., New York, May 11, 2003  
(Court Continuous Project - Ph. W. Guyton)



« Les Demoiselles de Rochefort » de Jacques Demy. (© Cine-Tamaris - 1967). Jacques Demy's film "The Young Girls of Rochefort".

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The work need not be built."(1) With this latter statement, the conceptual period of art began. Perhaps some of these historic statements need to be reconsidered in light of recent events. The second, for instance, could be elaborated as follows: An artwork can be made by someone other than an artist, particularly an art dealer. In the famous scenes in Jacques Demy's magnificent film *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort* (1967), an amusingly-named gallery owner, Guillaume Lancien, is seen shooting at bags of paint hanging over a blank canvas. The gallerist becoming an artist. The same thing happened more recently with Reena Spaulings. Reena Spaulings Fine Art was known as an art gallery like any other. Then came Reena Spaulings the artist, who in the middle of the

current decade began to show her own work—paintings, flags, tablecloths and other such fare. If it is no longer possible for art to be anything but a commodity—remember what Marcel Broodthaers wrote for the invitations to his first show in 1964, "I, too, asked myself 'Why can't I sell something and become successful in life'"—it seems completely legitimate that a specialist in selling that commodity, or in other words, an art dealer, a merchant of art merchandise, should finally take on the role of artist.

#### The art dealer as artist

From that point of view, Reena Spaulings is a logical and self-conscious continuation of Andy Warhol. Her recent series of pictures called *Flowers* inevitably recalls Warhol's

similar sequence beginning in 1964. Her *Money Paintings*, horizontal canvases whose rectangle, composition and colors reference banknotes, are well thought-out heirs to the *Dollar Paintings* Warhol first made in 1962. Spaulings goes in for commodity painting figuratively and literally. *The Dealers* are oil portraits of merchants and other art world figures made from photos downloaded from the gossip columns of *Artforum* and similar Web sites. The *Enigmas* play the same game, but in an even more critical mode. This time what we see represented are not the faces of dealers and other art market middlemen but the dirty tablecloths left behind when they dined after one another opening as specified by the painting's plaque. The perks enjoyed by people who are essentially the kibitzers of the art scene become the center of interest, the very objects of the exhibition, in an impeccable caricature of the process of fetishization that is perhaps the essence of the art market and even any market. The title of these pieces, *Enigmas*, inevitably recalls the "enigmatic character" of commodities Marx wrote about in a famous passage in Capital.(2) This enigma is the ability possessed by commodities to appear autonomous, to hide the social relations that have determined them. For example, a soiled tablecloth transformed into an abstract painting, a commodity in which the relations of production that created it are present only in an abstract and therefore invisible form—in this case a dinner held by a gallerist for people who

Reena Spaulings, « Money Painting (50 Euro) », 2005. Technique mixte sur toile, 91 x 178 cm (Court, Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris). Mixed media on canvas.

outils de communication idéologique. Et le propos savoureusement ambigu et déflationniste de 1967, « *The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths* », devient, en 2004, un complaisant « *The true artist products the most prestigious commodity* ». La dévolution, ouverte par l'art conceptuel à d'autres que l'artiste, d'une partie des prérogatives qui lui appartenaient et le constat pop d'une réification marchande de l'œuvre d'art auront, dans leur articulation, conduit à l'introduction du collectionneur – avec Philippe Thomas –, puis du galeriste – avec Reena Spaulings – en artiste.

#### Logique de la reproduction

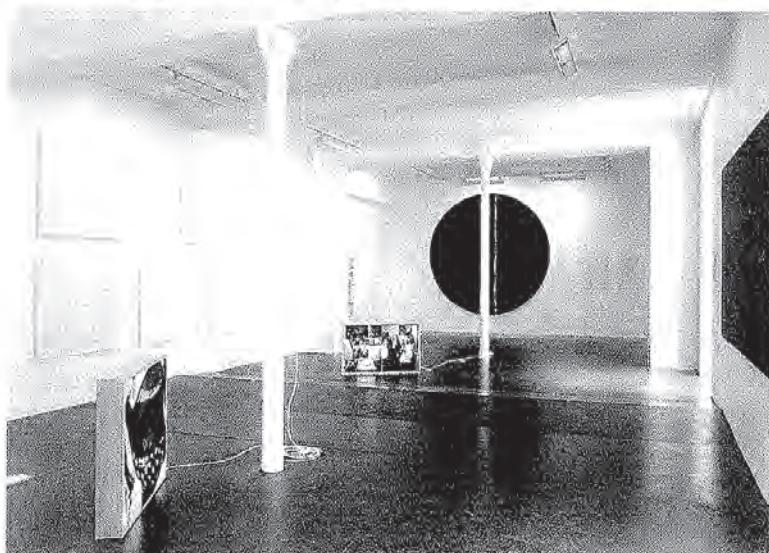
Dans les *Demoiselles de Rochefort*, le galeriste, plutôt qu'il les faisait, relâchait les œuvres. En effet, L'ancien reprend les séances de tir avec lesquelles Niki de Saint Phalle est entrée dans l'histoire de l'art (7). Autrement dit, le galeriste des *Demoiselles* est l'un des tout premiers appropriationnistes, Elaine Sturtevant ne l'ayant précédé que de peu – ses premières appropriations datant de 1964 (Johns, Stella, Warhol). Sachons voir dans cet épisode de comédie musicale l'esquisse d'un rapport entre la redistribution des rôles sur la scène de l'art et la substitution d'une logique de la reproduction à celle de la production, rapport que la situation présente consacre. Depuis quelques années, la plupart des artistes qualifiés de néo-conceptuels le sont au moins autant parce que leurs travaux remettent en jeu les travaux d'artistes conceptuels antérieurs que parce

**Kosuth** Joseph (Toledo, Ohio 1945) artiste américain. Il est un des artistes les plus didactiques du mouvement de l'art conceptuel. En 1963-64, il étudie la peinture à l'Institut d'art de Cleveland, puis suit les cours de l'Ecole des arts visuels de New York. Il crée et dirige ensuite le Normal Museum of Art. Dès 1967, avec Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner et Douglas Huebler, il fait partie du premier foyer conceptuel new-yorkais. En 1969, il est rédacteur de la revue *Art Language* et publie *Art after Philosophy*. De 1970 à 1972, il effectue des études d'anthropologie et de philosophie à la New School for Social Research à New York. Très tôt, K. abandonne la peinture. Dès 1965, il utilise le néon, *Three Colors*, et expose des objets

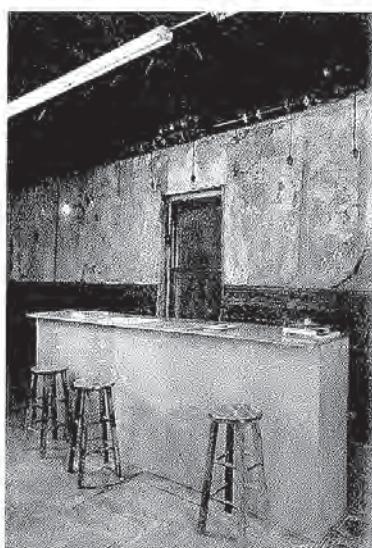
Yann Sérandour « Titled *I Art as Idea as Ideal* [Kosuth] » (détail) 2008. Tirage Lambda sur papier contrecollé sur aluminium 120 x 120 cm. (Coll. part.) France : Court, gb agency, Paris. Print on paper mounted on aluminum

qu'ils témoigneraient d'une confiance dans les grands idéaux de l'art conceptuel historique – primat du langage, lutte contre la réification objective. L'exemple le plus manifeste nous en est fourni par des œuvres de Mario García Torres telles que *What Happens in Halifax Stays in Halifax (In 36 Slides)* (2004-2006), une enquête sur une œuvre secrète de Robert Barry ou, plus encore, *Sing Like Baldessari* (2004), une version karaoké des *Sentences on Conceptual Art* (1969)

de Sol LeWitt, reprenant les ajouts et les répétitions pratiqués dans *Baldessari Sings LeWitt* (1972), une vidéo dans laquelle John Baldessari chante le célèbre texte de LeWitt. Mais puisqu'avec Reena Spaulings, Bernadette Corporation ou Claire Fontaine, il était question de groupes d'artistes, il convient ici d'évoquer Continuous Project, dont les activités illustrent, elles aussi, la double dialectique du brouillage des rôles, des statuts et de l'option reproductive. Continuous Project est un groupe



Ci-dessus Reena Spaulings. Vue de l'exposition « Courbet your enthusiasm ». Au mur, à gauche série « Enigma », 2008 dont « Enigma 14 ». Nappe provenant du dîner de vernissage de l'exposition « Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns? », organisée par Gavin Brown et Urs Fischer, à la galerie Tony Shafrazi, NY, 2008. (Court. de l'artiste et galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.) Ph. F. Klein (enm). Exhibition view "Courbet your enthusiasm." Tablecloth from the dinner after the opening of "Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns?", curated by Gavin Brown and Urs Fischer, Tony Shafrazi Gallery, NY. À droite : Claire Fontaine. « Ils redîss non morioris in bello » (détail). Installation à la galerie Reena Spaulings Fine Art, NY 2007. (Court. de l'artiste et Reena Spaulings Fine Art). Right Detail of installation at Galleria Reena Spaulings Fine Art, 2007.





While there, a class portrait that had been shot in 1969 was retaken. It was clear that some people were missing.

Mario García Torres. «What Happens in Halifax Stays in Halifax.» 2004-2006 (Court, galeries Jan Mot, Bruxelles, et Marian Goodman, Paris / New York)

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

directly or indirectly will make possible the product's circulation as a commodity—only its value remaining visible. If an art object is always a reification of the act that created it, in this case it becomes the reification of the process of its commodification. If we add that before becoming the name of a gallery, Reena Spaulings was the protagonist of a novel written by Bernadette Corporation,(3) a group of artists whose collective work was sold by Reena Spaulings Fine Art, we get an idea of how much the figure of the author and the classic casting of roles in the theater of art can disappear into its own twists and turns. Of course this brings to mind one of the best-known pieces by the agency known as Les ready made appartenant à tout le monde@ founded in 1988 by Philippe Thomas,(4) which, under the advertising slogan "Art history seeks characters" called for "a total revision of the laws concerning authorship" (*La petition de principe*, 1988). At any rate, what is most notable in Reena Spaulings' output is not its Borgesian dimension nor the Pessoa-like game of pseudonyms, but the forward-looking mimicking of a model of vertical integration that may take over the art world—a single organization assuming the respective functions of artist, dealer, critic and even fictional character. And if "Reena Spaulings" is an invention that makes possible something like a collectivization of the labor process of making art, a distancing of the individual subjectivities and expressions to be manifested, this name can also be a brand. Shouldn't we be happy to see collectors buy a brand-name painting or sculpture just like they would a Honda car, a Philips TV, Christian Dior eau de toilette or a Clairefontaine

notebook? Inherent in the art produced by Reena Spaulings is a distancing and the possibility of various readings, plus an absence of that didacticism found in the work of another collective readymade artist known as Claire Fontaine, with which Spaulings is organically linked and shares political convictions.(5) In fact, far too often Claire Fontaine's output seems to embody little more than fashionable political correctness, purveying a good cause in a way that in reality has no effect other than to offer a clean conscience to the art world bigwigs who stain tablecloths at opening dinners. For instance, a phrase borrowed from the book *Je hais les matins* by the ex-Action Directe member Jean-Marc Roullan,(6) or the words "occupied Palestine" written with thousands

of matches set alight on opening day at the Dvir gallery in Tel Aviv at the end of 2008,(7) only serve to reassure those clumsy dinner guests of the seriousness of their occupations. From Warholian portraits of Mao and Marilyn Monroe to Nauman neon lights, Claire Fontaine hijacks these forms inherited from art history and loads them with a content that transforms them into ideological marketing tools. And Nauman's nicely ambiguous and deflating 1967 statement, "The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths" becomes, in 2004, the complacent "The true artist produces the most prestigious commodity." When these two elements—Conceptual Art's delegation to others of some of the prerogatives once enjoyed solely by the artist, and Pop Art's report on the commodification and reification of the artwork—were articulated, the result was to place first the collector—Philippe Thomas—and then the gallerist—Reena Spaulings—on the artist's throne.

#### The logic of reproduction

The gallerist figure in *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort* didn't so much make art as give us remakes. Lancien revisited the firing range where Nikki de Saint Phalle shot her way into art history.(8) The gallerist in *Les Demoiselles*, in other words, was one of the earliest appropriators. In fact, Elaine Sturtevant did her first appropriations (of Johns, Stella and Warhol) only slightly before, in 1964. In this musical comedy episode we can see the first sketching out of a relationship between the recasting of roles in art on the one hand and the substitution of a logic of reproduction for one of production on the other, a relationship now firmly established. In recent years most of the artists considered Neo-Conceptualists

Yann Sérandour. «Le Plein.» 2008. Impression numérique sur papier. Dimensions variables.  
(Court, qb agency, Paris. Ph. R. Fanuel) "The Full" Digital print on paper. Dimensions variable



Les ready-made appartiennent à tout le monde. «Pétition de principe», 1988. (Coll. privée, Paris – Dépôt Collection musée d'art moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Musée Luxembourg © Ph. C. Moser) *Readymade belong to everybody*

comportant la critique d'art Bettina Funcke, le graphiste Joseph Logan et les artistes Wade Guyton et Seth Price (8). Son opus initial, *Project #1* (2003), a significativement consisté en la photocopie du premier numéro de *Avalanche* (1970-76), la mythique revue new-yorkaise de Liza Bear et Willoughby Sharp. À travers cette réédition, les artistes se font-ils critiques ou la critique et le graphiste artistes appropriationnistes ? Toujours est-il que le paratexte de l'œuvre d'art qu'est sa reproduction imprimée ne semble plus être le seul contrepoint du discours critique, mais également le fond sur lequel se détache l'action figurale contemporaine. Les remarquables *Printer Drawings* (à partir de 2005) de Guyton présentent des motifs, élaborés grâce à Photoshop, qui

viennent s'imprimer sur des pages de livres où figurent des images d'œuvres d'art (9). Notre époque donne ainsi à observer le singulier et mutuel recouvrement des logiques respectives de l'art conceptuel et de l'appropriationnisme. Ainsi *le Plein* (présenté à la galerie gb agency, Paris, à la fin de 2008), papier peint panoramique de Yann Sérandour, qui donne la liste de l'ensemble des objets rassemblés pour la reconstitution, à l'occasion de l'exposition *Hors Limites*, au Centre Pompidou, en 1994, de l'œuvre de même titre d'Arman. Le concept est ici celui d'une œuvre existante. La troisième proposition, de Weiner, comme la deuxième, doit donc être complétée : *L'œuvre peut ne pas être réalisée, parce qu'elle a déjà été réalisée.*



Renée Spaulding, «Flower 3», 2008. Huile et acrylique sur toile, 76 x 60 cm (Court, de l'artiste et Chantal Crousel, Paris. Ph. F. Kleinéferri). *Oil and acrylic on canvas*

(1) Karl Marx, *Le Capital. Critique de la marchandise et son secret*, trad. de Félibien, par J. Roy, Paris, Allo, 2003.

(2) Bernadette Corporation, *Renée Spaulding*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2005. Bernadette Corporation est un collectif à géométrie variable et pluridisciplinaire, fondé en 1994, dont John Kelsey (co-directeur, avec Emily Sundblad, de la galerie Renée Spaulding Fine Art), Antek Walczak et Bernadette van Huy constituent les pivots.

(3) L'année précédente, Philippe Thomas avait ouvert à New York la maison-mère, Readymades belong to everyone, de l'agence française.

(4) Claire Fontaine existe depuis 2004, à l'initiative de la philosophe Fulvia Carnavale et de l'artiste James Thornhill. Renée Spaulding Fine Art est sa galerie new-yorkaise.

(5) « J'ai désappris la nuit. Il ne fait jamais nuit dans vos prisons. Nous sommes toujours sous les projecteurs au halo orange, comme sur les autoroutes belges et les parkings de supermarché » (J.-M. Roullan, *Je hais les matins*, Denoël, 2001).

(6) Cf. *artpress* n°354, mars 2009 (ndlr).

(7) L'historien remarquera que la méthode du galeries est celle de l'artiste ne sont pas absolument identiques puisque cette dernière, en 1961, trait au moyen d'un carabine, non sur des sachets de peinture éclaboussant des toiles vierges, mais sur des assemblages d'objets et matériaux divers pris dans du plaisir, et dissimulant des sachets remplis de peinture qui, en éclatant sous l'impact des balles, projetaient des couleurs sur tout le relief. Aussi est-il permis de penser que Guillaume Léonard, non seulement ceux les fils de Niki de Saint Phalle, mais encore les amoureux (8) Josh Smith et Kelley Walker collaborent régulièrement avec le groupe.

(8) Sur Wade Guyton, voir l'article de Marjolaine Lévy, « Guyton/Epson Exceed Your Vision », 20/21, n°3, 2009.

Michel Gauthier vient de publier Gerwald Rockenschaub (Neuchâtel, *Idées et Calendrier*), une monographie consacrée à l'artiste autrichien, et un recueil de textes, *Les Promesses du zéro* (Essais sur Robert Smithson, Ed Ruscha, John Armleder, Carsten Höller, Martin Creed et Tim Siegert), Genève, Mamco/Dijon, *Les presses du réel*.



Wade Guyton, Untitled, 2008, 17, 5 x 12, 5 cm. (Court, de l'artiste). Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page

are so labeled at least as much because their work is a replay of their Conceptualist forbearers as because of their confidence in the great ideals of historic Conceptual Art—the primacy of language and the struggle against the reification of the art object. The most obvious example of this is provided by the work of Mario Garcia Torres, for example *What Happens in Halifax Stays in Halifax (In 36 Slides)* (2004-06), an enquiry into a secret piece by Robert Barry, and even more *Sing Like Baldessari* (2004), a karaoke version of LeWitt's 1968 *Sentences on Conceptual Art* with the additions and repetitions from *Baldessari Sings LeWitt* (1972), a video in which John Baldessari

sings LeWitt's famous text. But since with Reena Spaulings, Bernadette Corporation and Claire Fontaine the subject was artists' collectives, here we should mention Continuous Project, should also be mentioned, whose activities likewise illustrate the double dialectic of the blurring of roles and statuses and the choice of reproduction over production. Continuous Project is a group whose members include the art critic Bettina Funcke, the graphic artist Joseph Logan and the artists Wade Guyton and Seth Price.<sup>(9)</sup> Their original opus, *Project # 1* (2003), rather significantly consisted of a photocopy of the first issue of *Avalanche* (1970-76), the legendary New York magazine put out by

Liza Bear and Willoughby Sharp. Does this reprint turn the artists into critics or the critic and graphic artist into appropriationist artists? In any case, the paratext of an artwork, its printed reproduction, now seems to be not just the counterpoint of critical discourse, but also the background against which contemporary figural action stands out. The remarkable *Printer Drawings* Guyton initiated in 2005 present Photoshopped motifs printed on pages from books bearing illustrations of artworks.<sup>(10)</sup> Thus our time bears witness to the singular and mutual overlapping of the logics of conceptual and appropriationist art. Take, for example, *Le Plein* (shown at gb agency, Paris, in late 2008), a digital print on a wrap-around sheet of paper by Yann Sérandour listing all of the objects assembled for the reconstitution, on the occasion of the *Hors limites* show at the Pompidou Center in 1994, of an eponymous Arman piece. The concept here is that of the already-existing artwork. Weiner's third sentence, like the second, needs to be completed: the piece need not be built because it has been already.

Translation, L-S Torgoff

(1) Lawrence Weiner, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," Statements, Louis Kellner Foundation, 1988.

(2) Karl Marx, *Collected Works, Capital*, vol. 1, New York, International Publishers, 1996.

(3) Bernadette Corporation, *Reena Spaulings*. Boston, MIT Press, 2005. Bernadette Corporation is a multidisciplinary, variable-membership collective founded in 1994. Pivotal members include John Kelsey (co-director, with Emily Sundblad, of Reena Spaulings Fine Art gallery), Antek Walczak and Bernadette van Huy.

(4) The "French branch" of Readymades belong to everyone®, founded by Thomas in NYC the previous year.

(5) Philosopher Fulvio Carnevale and artist James Thornhill started Claire Fontaine in 2004. Reena Spaulings Fine Art is its New York gallery.

(6) Action Directe was a radical organization that carried out armed actions in the early 1980s. The citation comes from his description of life in prison: "I have forgotten what night is like. It's never dark in your prisons. We're always under orange-haloed spotlights, like the highways in Belgium and supermarket parking lots." (Jean-Marc Rouillan, *Je hais les matins*, Denoël, 2001)

(7) See *art press* 354, March 2009.

(8) Historians will note the difference of method: what Saint Phalle shot with a carbine in 1961 were not bags of paint that splattered all over blank canvases but assemblages of objects and materials stuck in plaster, with the paint-filled bags hidden behind them, so that the impact of the bullets made the liquid gush out over the whole three-dimensional pieces. One could consider that Guillaume Lanicet not only revisited her technique but improved upon it.

(9) Josh Smith and Kelley Walker regularly work with the group.

(10) For more on Guyton, see Marjolaine Lévy's article "Guyton/Epson: Exceed Your Vision," 20/27 no. 3, 2009.

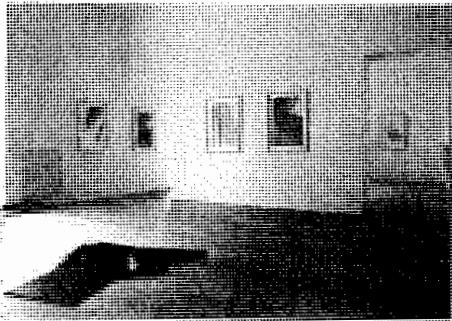
Kleinman, Rebacca. "Moving In", *Art Basel Miami Beach*, December 2009.

Art Basel Miami Beach

ART POSITIONS



Clockwise from above: Reena Spaulings, two installation views of *The Belgian Marbles*, 2009; Agathe Snow, *Jean Ann Kennedy Smith*, 2009; Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, *Salomania*, 2009.



## MOVING IN

Art Positions makes the leap to the Miami Beach Convention Center.

BY REBECCA KLEINMAN

**F**or the eighth edition of Art Basel Miami Beach, the Art Positions sector relocates from its outdoor, beachfront home to the heart of the main show inside the Miami Beach Convention Center. Solo and conceptual group shows are exhibited by 23 galleries from nine countries. Here we highlight five booths, including a newcomer from New York, an all-female group show and a clever take on collaboration by Gaylen Gerber.

### Ellen de Bruijne Projects

For the group show "My Rising Phoenix," the Amsterdam-based gallery presents an all-female lineup. Spanish artist Lara Almarchegui, whose mediums are photography, slideshow installation and printed books, explores themes of overlooked, often dilapidated architecture.

"Her work is about making us aware of the impact of nature, especially in dense areas like cities," says Ellen de Bruijne, an Art Positions regular.

There's also a concentration of video art. Netherlands native Falke Pisano looks to art itself and art history, as well as past abstract and constructivist images, to create new work. She's fond of layering pieces, too, according to de Bruijne, who cites a wall drawing layered with a video and another abstract drawing as an example.

Berlin-based Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz's collaborations concern gender issues. Among their videos for the show, *Salomania*, which documents the dance of the seven veils from the silent film *Salomé*, studies the character's image in film and modern dance.

### James Fuentes LLC

Artist Agathe Snow takes the solo show to an extreme again for the Downtown New York gallery. With an all-encompassing installation—right down to the booth's very tables and chairs from which dealer and collector broker sales—the total work of art is in the same vein as last year's weeklong dance marathon during the Whitney Biennial and 2007's postflood depiction of New York, complete with mock news coverage and beached whale.

"She makes multiple, crossover works in different mediums based on the same project, like a performance plus video plus sculptures," says James Fuentes. Her Art Basel Miami Beach installation and sculptures are a culmination of a long-term art series inspired by Leonardo da Vinci and Renaissance philosophy. (Earlier this year, the New Museum exhibited a related work, a Neoclassical pillar presenting 21st-century Renaissance theories.) "Her main influences are history and literature," adds Fuentes.

### Wallspace

New York-based Wallspace premiered at Art Positions in 2008. Co-director and co-owner Jane Hait says the move into the Convention Center gives her gallery a larger platform in terms of visibility. This year, Hait will be exhibiting Gaylen Gerber, Walead Beshty and Shannon Ebner, three artists who play off of one another for a quasi-collaboration that has as much to do with context as it does with each of their independent work.

"All their projects are distinct but overlapping," says Hait. "The concept also came about since one of the artists, Gaylen Gerber, is known to delve into how different artists interact, so he oversaw the overall booth."

Los Angeles-based artists Walead Beshty and Shannon Ebner are also exhibited. Ebner explores the interaction between the uses of language and the material concerns of photography, while Beshty's mediums are photography and sculpture. Gerber's salvaged souvenirs (from the work of artist Daniel Buren), presented in silver leaf, round out the gallery's offerings.

### Sutton Lane

Debuting at Art Basel in 2008, this London gallery returns with an exhibition of works by fictitious artist Reena Spaulings and the renowned Belgian artist and poet Marcel Broodthaers. In regards to the unique pairing—one contemporary and the other a late, great conceptual artist—Sutton Lane co-founders Gil Presti and Charles Riva point out a distinct connection between the two, citing that both were "born" artists in contrived ways: Broodthaers was a progenitor of the rigorous, witty practice of critiquing art institutions, whereas Spaulings evolved from the eponymous fine-art gallery in New York as a fictional "artist," who actually represents a collective of artists.

### i8 Gallery

Having shared a booth with two Scandinavian galleries in previous Art Basel Miami Beach installments, this Reykjavik-based gallery was ready to strike out on its own.

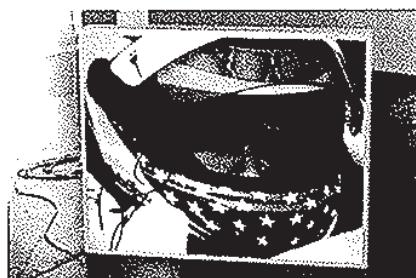
"We took a two-year hiatus to prepare for our re-entry with a strong, single project," says director Borkur Arnarson, who brings brand-new work by Berlin-based artist Egill Sæbjörnsson. "We're very excited about this work and happy to have it premiered here."

The solo show builds on Sæbjörnsson's recent video installation combining objects and projected video animations; everyday items take on an unexpectedly lifelike quality to encourage viewers to look at their surroundings with a fresh perspective. 

# Flash Art

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

## REENA SPAULINGS CHANTAL CROUSSEL - PARIS



REENA SPAULINGS. Danica, 2008. Light box and two duratrans. Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel. © Florian Kleinfeldt.

A photogenic display of canvases, light boxes (after Merlin Carpenter) reading "Die Collector Scum" and a ruined floor using the remainders of Wade Guyton's previous show at the gallery — the exhibition looks like an ironic summer group show. With a revolving stand of K8 Hardy's postcards or a set of master keys mimicking Claire Fontaine's work, the show presents Spaulings's identity as multiple and shared.

A series portraying the IndyCar racing star Danica Patrick (hardly

known in France) seems like a tongue-in-cheek comment on the fiction of Reena Spaulings and her enthusiastic reception in Paris.

Its title, "Curb Your Enthusiasm," mocks fascination for the avant-garde, recalls Larry David's TV show *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, which depicts the West Coast millionaire life of the former Seinfeld author.

Spaulings's show at London's Sutton Lane, "Bialystoker," also alluded to this type of comedy. As the main character of Mel Brooks's movie *The Producers*, Bialystock accidentally meets success with a musical he has designed to flop; Larry David's everyday life is an ordeal of embarrassing situations and mean humiliations where wealth and one-liners are of no help. Anti-heroes for whom money and fame aren't myth and excitement but misunderstanding and farce.

Benjamin Thorel

Gross, Béatrice. «Le retour de la mort de l'auteur.», *Double*, Spring-Summer 2009.

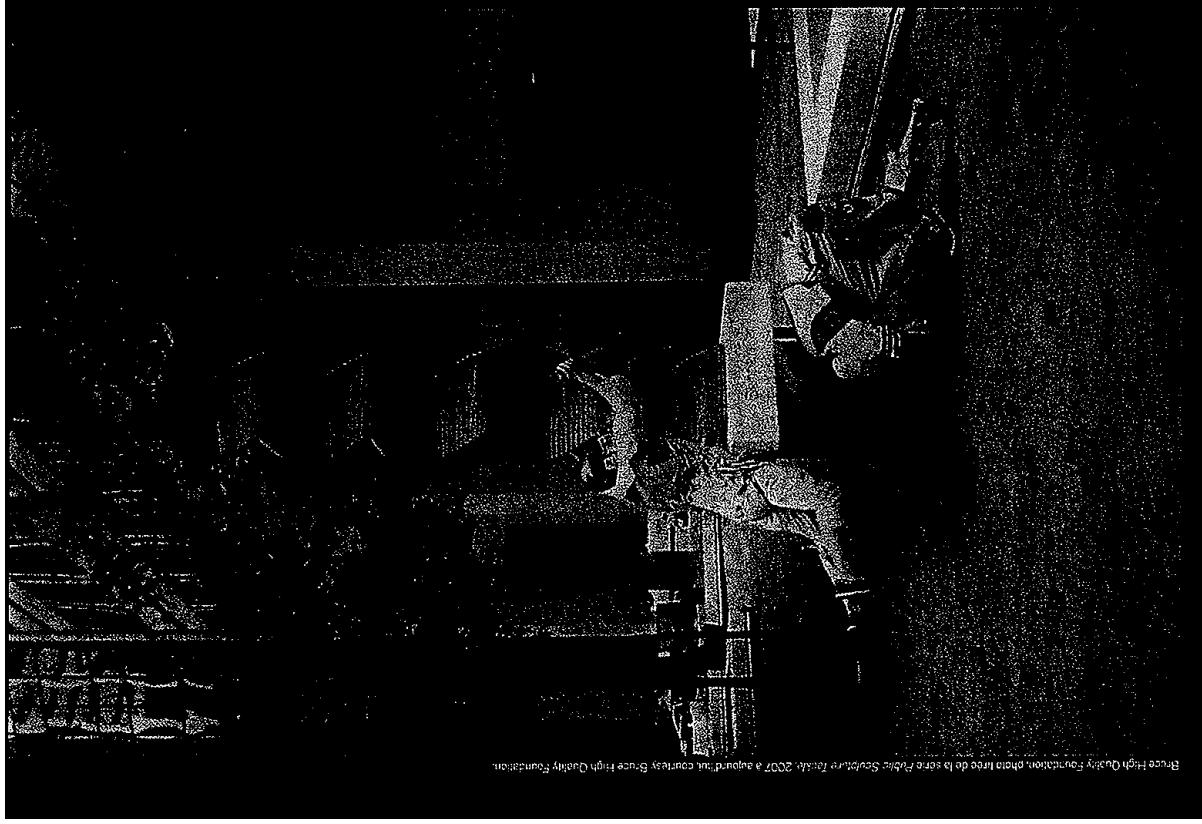


Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

# LE RETOUR DE LA MORT DE L'AUTEUR

JOYEUX BORDEL FERTILE OU ASCÈSE CRÉATIVE, LES COLLECTIFS D'ARTISTES INTERROGENT L'IDENTITÉ DE GROUPE. DE PARIS À NEW YORK, VIA BEYROUTH ET CUBA.

TEXT: BEATRICE GROSS



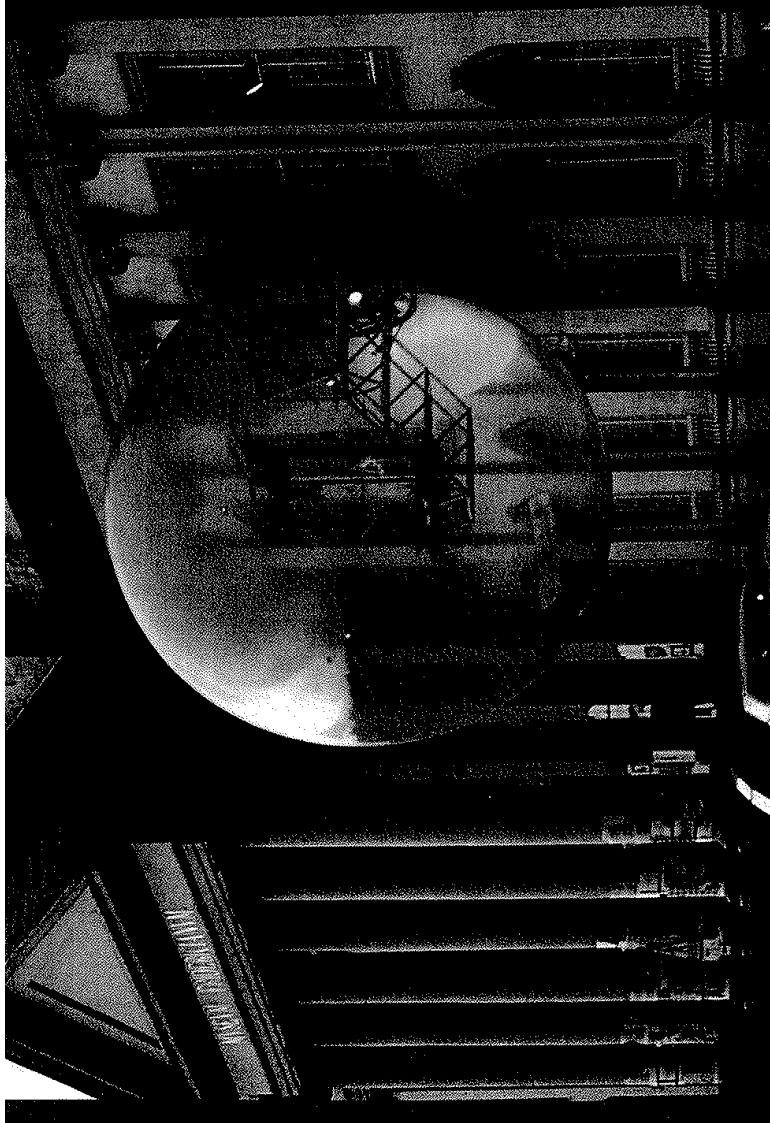
Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

Gross, Béatrice. «Le retour de la mort de l'auteur.», *Double, Spring-Summer 2009.*

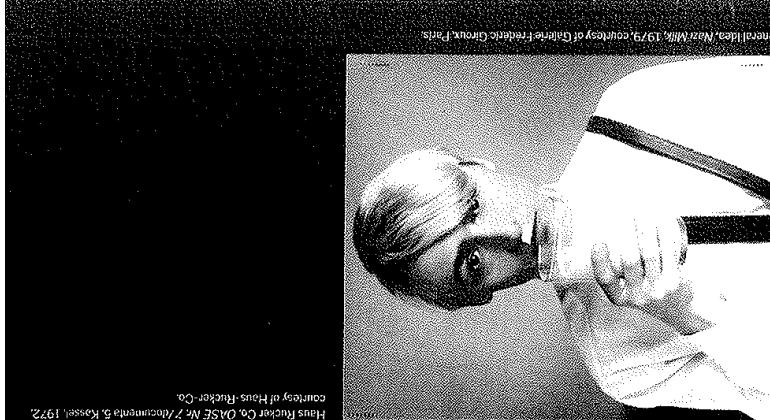




# Galerie Chantal Crousel



Hans Richter. Ode. DAISE N° 7. documenta 5, Kassel, 1972.



Hans Richter. Ode. DAISE N° 7. documenta 5, Kassel, 1972.

elle d'évoluer constamment, parfois en fonction de la nature de ses projets, mais surtout au gré de contingences irréductibles, désaccords, essoufflement général, voire disparition (AA Bronson est le seul survivant des trois membres de General Ideas, groupe canadien actif de 1967 à 1994). Si il existe une notion commune à toutes ces entités collaboratives, c'est ironiquement celle d'une conscience aiguë du risque permanent de leur dissolution. Au fond, les enjeux véritablement de signature collective ne résident pas tant dans la mise en commun pragmatique de ressources et compétences, mais bien plutôt dans le processus de redéfinition de la notion d'auteur: la construction de l'identité d'un collectif, réel ou fictif, revient en effet, *de facto* à renouer avec la fiction romantique de la figure de l'artiste solipsiste. C'est précisément autour de cette question fondamentale de l'identité de

l'artiste en tant qu'auteur que fut fondé, en 1968, le premier collectif stricto sensu, Art & Language, qui, au plus fort de son existence, au cours des années 1970, compta une vingtaine d'affiliés, et qui fit de sa structure plurielle l'incarnation de son rejet, non seulement de la primauté du genre pictural, mais aussi de l'identification de l'artiste à un génie individuel. La construction de l'identité collective d'AA&L, empruntant une voie impersonnelle et bureaucratique, se révéla alors coextensive de ses productions successives.

Sans s'identifier nécessairement à une cellule quasi administrative, les collectifs se doivent de adopter un certain degré d'institutionnalisation, se référant parfois à des modèles de collectivités extérieurs au domaine de l'art. Ainsi, dans la

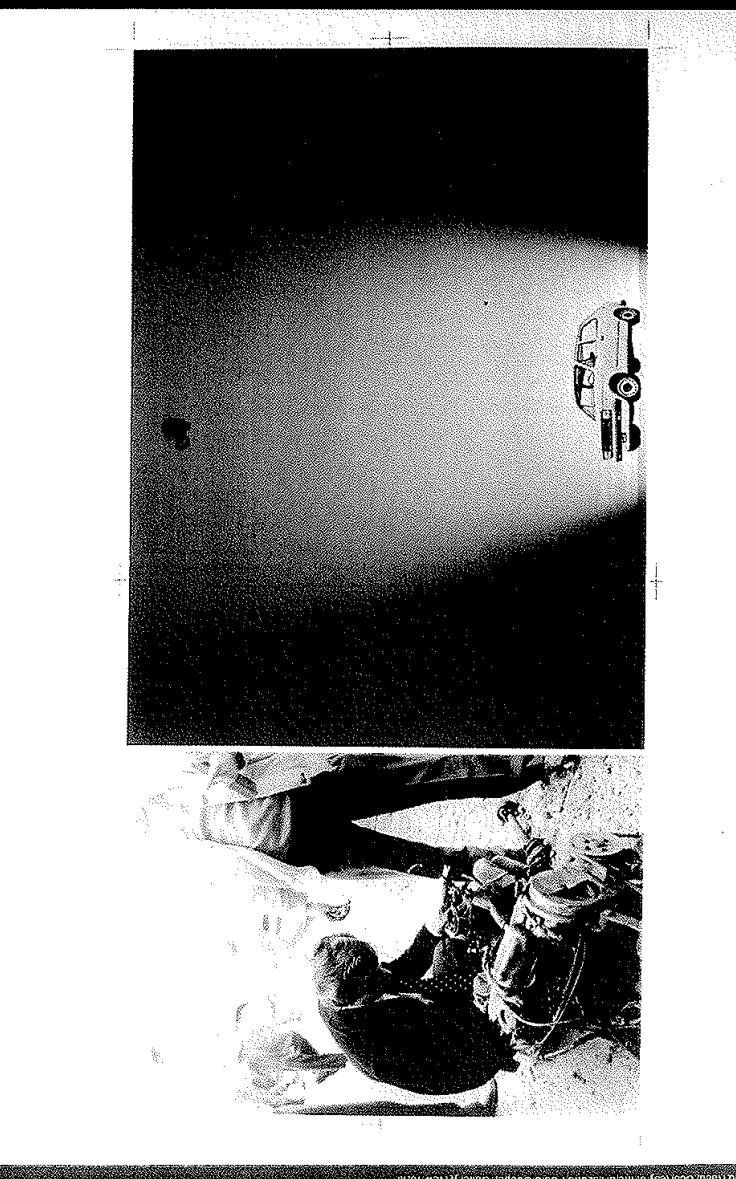
ligneée de groupes politiques à tendance activiste, certains s'apparentent à des organes d'information: les Français de Bureau d'Etudes organisent des tractages ciblés, tandis que les médiatiques Yes Men noyautent les outils de communication de multinationales controversées. D'autres, plus proches du domaine de l'édition, renouent avec une tradition initiée par le groupe Dada, l'internationale lettriste ou les situationnistes, en proposant des publications qui sont les témoins tangibles de productions collectives formelles: les féministes et zézerguer de LITTR. publient notamment une revue/livre d'artistes, chaque année depuis 2001; les New-Yorkais de Dexter Sinister (aussi éditeurs de la revue *Dot Dot Dot*, voir *Double* p.15) intègrent, dans une concentration horizontale originale, toutes les étapes de la réalisation d'un ouvrage, de sa conception sa distribution.

# Galerie Chantal Crousel

Plus souvent néanmoins, les collectifs d'artistes se réfèrent à des structures propres aux arts appliqués et aux arts vivants. A la croisée de l'art et de l'architecture, une constellation de collectifs (Ant Farm, Archigram, Coop-Himmelblau...) s'inscrit dans la mouvance d'euphories libertariennes des années 1960 en créant de nouveaux types d'espaces ouverts et flexibles comme la multitude de modules architecturaux ajustables qu'a imaginés Haus-Rucker-Co. Dans le genre contemporain de la performance, l'héritage du groupe Fluxus se donne à voir dans des collectifs proches de troupes de théâtre comme le légendaire Wooster Group de Soho, ou de formations musicales tels Gang Gang Dance à New York ou Luck Dragon à Los Angeles. A Paris, le collectif d'art sonore Labranisch rassemble le plasticien David Baula (voir page 30), le critique Olivier Lamm et l'ingénieur du son Stéphane Laporte, tous trois également musiciens. Expérimentateurs ludiques et conceptuels, ils composent performances et pièces enregistrées à partir d'une matière brute sonore extraite *in situ*. Depuis les années 1990 cependant, il apparaît que nombre de collectifs se structurent en fonction de l'institution dans laquelle ils s'inscrivent le plus naturellement : celle de l'art lui-même. Certains se constituent autour de lieux d'exposition alternatifs, le plus fameux exemple étant sans doute The Wrong Gallery, minuscule project room fondée à Chelsea (New York) en 2002, par Maurizio Catrelan, Massimiliano Gioni et Alí Subotnick. The Bruce High Quality Foundation quant à elle se présente comme la fondation officielle, détentrice

du patrimoine physique et spirituel, de feu Bruce High Quality, artiste fictif, sculpteur social et « art star » du New Jersey Oscillant entre reconstitution quasi archéologique et parodie déconstructrice de l'histoire de l'art, leur réinterprétation du *Radeau de la Méduse* (1819), *The Raft of the Medusa* (2002), offre une vision tragicomique d'une génération d'artistes qui ne semblent dévoiler leur survie qu'à leur union tactique.

Les formes d'identification choisies par certains collectifs d'artistes répondent enfin parfois simplement à des contraintes sociales ou politiques. Ainsi, Los Carpinteros (les charpentiers), en faisant mine de s'attacher à un corps de métier artisanal, déjoueront la censure du régime cubain des années 1990. Si la représentation de sa structure de collaboration préoccupe le collectif à ses débuts, ses membres décideront ensuite de renoncer à ce type d'autoréférentialité afin de parfaire l'unicité de leur signature collective. L'abandon de la peinture à l'huile, son remplacement par le dessin à l'encre, et le développement d'objets et environnements sculpuraux, se firont l'écho de cette évolution « autoritaire ». A la faveur d'un esprit de mystification similaire, l'Atlas Group de Walid Raad est un collectif fictif établi en 1990 et qui constitua un vaste corpus d'archives documentant la guerre du Liban de 1975 à 1990, mêlant, avec une ambiguïté désarçonnante, faits avérés et fiction. L'institutionnalisation de cette investigation, plus conceptuelle que proprement historique, permit à son initiateur de désamorcer, tout en se l'appropriant, l'autorité des discours officiels. En témoignage de manière exemplaire, les conférences dérivées de la série « My Neck Is Thinner Than A Hair: A History of Car Bombs in the Lebanese War » (2004).



Walid Raad. Courtesy of the artist and Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York

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Il s'agit finalement, avec la construction d'identités artistiques collectives, réelles ou fictives, de faire émerger la possibilité d'instances créatrices impersonnelles. Ainsi, la structure et l'identité des collectifs d'artistes contemporains renvoient, plus ou moins explicitement, souvent en abyme, à une autre collectivité, réelle et virtuelle à la fois, celle des collaborateurs indirects, artistes du passé, public, critiques etc. En dernière instance, l'auteur identifié d'une œuvre, individuelle ou collective, s'apparente finalement plutôt à son activateur qu'à son créateur au stricto. \_\_\_\_\_

Gross, Béatrice. «Le retour de la mort de l'auteur.», *Double, Spring-Summer 2009*.



# Art Review:

REVIEWS: REENA SPAULINGS

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

The popular US sitcom *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, in which *Seinfeld* creator/executive producer Larry David plays an exaggerated version of his bipolar self, is some kind of reference for the exhibition *Courbet Your Enthusiasm*, which stars a consortium of dealer(s) and artist(s) operating under the fictional guise of Reena Spaulings.

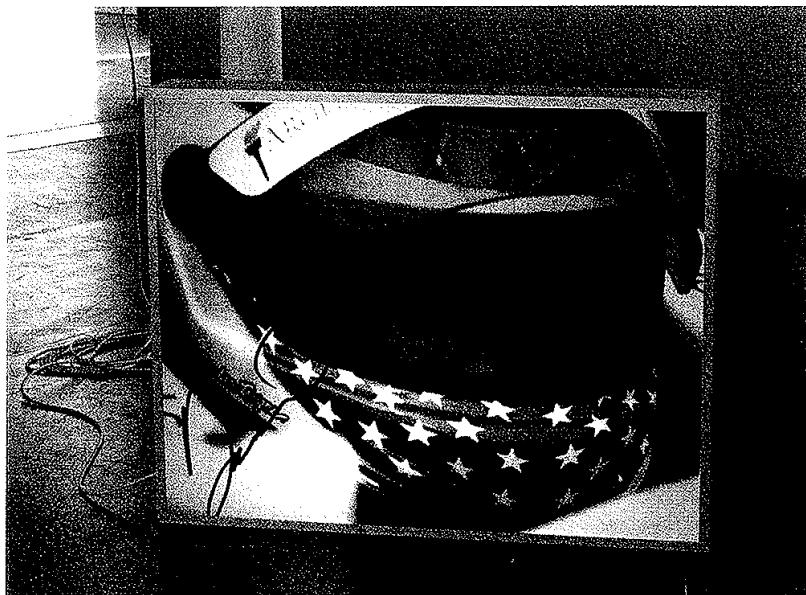
In fact, Reena Spaulings is the name of a gallery, Reena Spaulings Fine Art, opened in 2004 in New York by John Kelsey and Emily Sundblad. The gallery took its name from the main protagonist of an eponymous book coauthored by the members of the international collective Bernadette Corporation (which happens to be represented by the gallery). Kelsey and Sundblad are also the primary instigators of fictional artist Reena Spaulings. Reena Spaulings the gallery and Reena Spaulings the artist are interchangeable. Some artists that the gallery actually represents may take part now and then in giving Reena Spaulings (gallery and fictional artist) a body of work and an ironic spirit (rather than an actual definable style).

The ensemble of works exhibited at Chantal Crousel (all work 2008) includes a lot of trash (literally) and derision, and many (awful) paintings, celebrating Reena Spaulings's bipolar identity. The gallery's walls are dressed up with recent additions to *Enigmas*, an ongoing series, begun in 2005, that features stained tablecloths stretched on the walls like paintings – the dirty remains of past openings and dinners, whose hosts are named in the titles (*Artforum*, Brooklyn Museum, etc.). A few paintings cynically revisit genres – such as still life, in *Nature morte vivante*, depicting a dish of oysters (which are eaten alive, as we know) – or historical schools such as Pointillism, in the series *Dans la rue, New Museum* (featuring Pointillist representations of the New Museum in New York). Finally, two lightboxes have pride of place in the middle of the gallery floor. The first, *Courbet Your Enthusiasm* (AFA), illuminates a random photograph of an artistic gathering scanned from *Colin De Land: American Fine Arts*, a 2008 book about the dealer Colin De Land, who died in 2003 and was known for his ambivalence towards the art market. The second, *Danica*, illuminates the scan of an autographed photo of the American female racing-driver Danica Patrick; it is an image of pride and battle.

What, though, is Reena Spauling's battle? Is it a battle or rather a cynical experiment to exploit and celebrate the superficiality of a system that attaches more importance to a work's monetary value than to its actual worth? While mocking the dealer/artist relationship by unifying them completely, Reena Spaulings never attempts to redefine the market's rules. How far can the farce go? Violaine Boutet de Monvel

## REENA SPAULINGS: COURBET YOUR ENTHUSIASM

GALERIE CHANTAL CROUSEL, PARIS  
21 JUNE - 2 AUGUST



*Danica*, 2008, lightbox and two duratrans (scan of an autographed photo of the racecar driver Danica Patrick). Photo: © Florian Kleinefenn. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

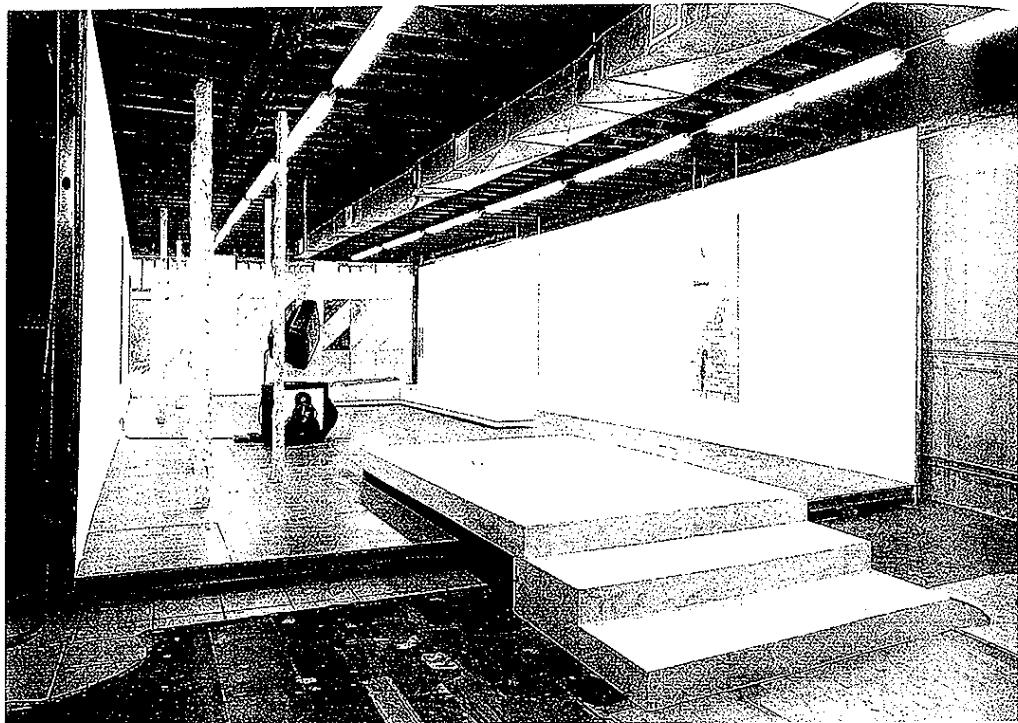
## TEXTE ZUR KUNST

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

### BESPRECHUNGEN

#### NEOLIBERAL GOTHIC

Über Stephan Dillermuth und Nils Norman bei Reena Spaulings, New York



Stephan Dillermuth, Nils Norman, „You have been misinformed“, Reena Spaulings, New York, Ausstellungsansicht

## TEXTE ZUR KUNST

Nach einigen kollaborativen Arbeiten, Aktionen und Projekten in den vergangenen Jahren haben sich die Künstler Stephan Dillemuth und Nils Norman diesmal zu einem gemeinsamen Auftritt in der New Yorker Galerie Reena Spaulings zusammengefunden, um die Wucherungen der kapitalistischen Krise in eine Installation zu übersetzen. In konspirativer Manier verfolgten sie mediale Spuren und andere Hinweise für die aktuellen gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen und Bedrohungen – und bezogen sich damit nicht zuletzt auf das Feld der Kunst selbst.

Neben abgetrennten Gliedmaßen wurde dabei auch die Frage in den Raum gestellt, welche Möglichkeiten, sich unter den gegebenen Umständen überhaupt noch zum Markt zu verhalten, vorhanden sind – und wohin ein strategisches Ja in führen könnte.

„Neoliberal Gothic“ – so könnte man am ehesten den vorherrschenden Stimmungswert von „You Have Been Misinformed“, der jüngsten Ausstellung von Stephan Dillemuth und Nils Norman bei Reena Spaulings, beschreiben. Diese Schau, ein wahres Kompendium ruinöser Räume, abgetrennter Gliedmaßen, schauriger nächtlicher Traumbilder und grotesker Ansichten vampirischer Raublust, apokalyptischen Irrsinns und ärmlicher Verkommenheit, setzte die volle Assoziationsmaschinerie in Gang, die sich mit „Gothic“ als einem historischen Genre verbindet. Doch erwies sich die von Dillemuth und Norman heraufbeschworene Düsternis als etwas vollkommen anderes als das „New Gothic“, das, mit Vertretern wie Damien Hirst, Aida Ruilova oder Banks Violette, einige europäische und amerikanische Kunstströmungen um das Jahr 2000 herum kennzeichnete. Diese Tendenz, die von Kritikern wie Jerry Saltz und Kurator/innen wie Shamin Momin als vage millenarisch-9/11-geprägter Zeitgeist verbucht wurde, dem es um eine Auseinandersetzung mit „dem Negativen, dem Melancholi-

lischen und dem Barbarischen“ gegangen sein soll, ließ sich am treffendsten mit dem erklären, was Benjamin Buchloh einst als „Chiffren der Regression“ diagnostiziert hatte. Unter diesem Begriff wurden künstlerische Flucht- oder Sublimierungsversuche angesichts krisenhafter sozialer Bedingungen symptomatisch, die mit Rückgriffen auf mythische, übernatürliche oder obskulantistische Themen einhergehen.<sup>1</sup> Dillemuth und Norman dagegen haben ihre Morbiditätsästhetik in Form einer kritischen, wenn auch letztlich zynischen Reaktion auf die gegenwärtige weltweite Finanzmarktkrise und deren bald zu erwartende Auswirkungen auf die ökonomischen und institutionellen Kreisläufe der Kunstwelt formuliert. In den Worten der Pressemitteilung zur Ausstellung: „This is a credit-crunch, pre-art-crunch extravaganza – don't miss it!“ („Das Spektakel pünktlich zur Kreditkrise und kurz vor der Kunstkrisis – auf keinen Fall verpassen!“)

Eine so klangvolle Ansage wurde dann durch die recht spärliche, wenn nicht gar ärmliche Ausstellungsinstallation Lügen gestraft. Im hinteren Teil der Galerie hing ein großer, horizontal angeordneter Keilrahmen von der Decke herab, auf dem eine verblasste, dem Anschein nach verwitterte Rasterstruktur zu sehen war, bei der jede Zelleinheit ein wechselndes Muster dreieckiger Füllformen aufwies, wodurch anscheinend eine Art minimalistische, zugleich aber auch dekorative Wandmalerei wie aus den 1970er Jahren angedeutet werden sollte. Entlang der sonstigen Galeriewände war eine Reihe vertrockneter, aus weißem Gips gefertigter Baumstümpfe sowie zwei kleinere, vertikal angeordnete Keilrahmen zu sehen, auf deren einer Seite sich schwach der Abdruck einer Ziegelmauer abzeichnete, während die andere Flecken unklarer Herkunft, Gips-

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kreide-Spritzer und urbane Überbleibsel aufwies, darunter eine zerknüllte, abstoßend wirkende Dollarnote. Die abgetrennte Hand einer Schau-fensterpuppe war so auf die Oberfläche der ersten Bildtafel montiert, dass sie sich à la Robert Gober auf scheinbar unpassend surrealistische Art und Weise in den Raum des Betrachters ausstreckte. Mitten in der Galerie stand ein bankartiges, rechtwinklig angeordnetes Objekt aus schlecht gestrichenem Sperrholz. Seitlich von dessen oberer rechter Kante befand sich ein in Auflösung begriffener, aus Gips gefertigter Negativabdruck vom Winkel des L-Balkens. Bei näherer Betrachtung wies dieser Eck-Abguss kaum sichtbare Abdruckspuren eines Körpers auf, erinnerte damit an die indexikalischen Verweisungsverfahren postminimalistischer Prozesskünstler/innen wie Bruce Nauman oder Ana Mendieta und warf nicht zuletzt die Frage auf, wer oder was an diesem unklaren Tatort seine Beweisspuren zurückgelassen hatte.

Und diese Frage, die die Betrachter als forensische Ermittler in einer Art abgehalftertem Gothic-Mystery ansprach, war im Verhältnis zu den zeitgenössischen Referenzen abzuwägen, die im zentralen Teil der Ausstellung in Szene gesetzt waren: drei aufeinander getürmte, große, überalterte Fernsehgeräte, auf denen ein Loop aus grotesken Porträts verschieden situierter Akteure aus Wirtschaft und Kunst zu sehen war, worüber wiederum ein Schriftband exotische Finanz-markttools wie „collateralized debt obligation“ und „credit default swap“ erläuterte. Bei einem der Porträts handelte es sich um angeeignetes Filmmaterial von einem pseudopopulistisch-apokalyptischen Live-Ausbruch des sich selbst zum „Einzelgänger“ stilisierenden CNBC-Finanz-experten Jim Cramer vom April 2007, mit dem

er auf die sich damals abzeichnende Krise des Hypothekenmarkts reagierte; ein anderes zeigte eine preisgünstig produzierte Parodie auf Victor Pinchuk, einen ukrainischen Oligarchen und „Mega-Sammler“ zeitgenössischer Künstler wie Damien Hirst oder Jeff Koons, der sich durch geschickte Ausnutzung des neoliberalen Privatisierungsprozesses im staatseigenen Eisen- und Stahlindustriesektor der ehemaligen Sowjetökonomie bereichert hat. Ein drittes Porträt galt Bill Ruprecht, dem Chef der Kunsthändelsabteilung bei Sotheby's. Im Video wird Ruprecht als eine Art makabre Paul-McCarthy-artige Figur mit schlecht angeklebter Pappnase und vom Kinn herabrieselndem Blutrinsal dargestellt, die von der Transzendenz des kulturellen und finanziellen Werts „herausragender Werke zeitgenössischer Kunst“ spricht, und dies anscheinend geradewegs von der Innenfenster von Reena Spaulings. Die vierte Figur im Videoloop, von demselben „Schauspieler“ verkörpert, ist wohl so etwas wie ein heruntergekommener Doppelgänger der Ruprecht-Figur. Der fügt der falschen Nase noch eine Pilotensonnenbrille, eine Truckermütze und einen speckigen dunklen Haarmop hinzu. Man sieht dieses zwiespältige Schauspiel, bei dem er wie unter Zwang vor dem rückwärtigen Fenster der Reena Spaulings Gallery auf und ab tigert und schließlich, anscheinend unter großen Schmerzen und an einen nicht näher beschreibbaren, in Luftpolsterfolie verpackten (Kunst-)Gegenstand gekrallt, durch die gesamte Galerie kriecht. In einer anderen Szene spricht er direkt in die Kamera, er gibt bauchredend ein Statement von Damien Hirst zum Besten, bei dem von dem „Konsortium“ die Rede ist, das der Künstler für den Ankauf von „For the Love of God“, seinem berüchtigten diamantbesetzten Schädel, gebildet

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hat, und dabei lässt er die zynische Bemerkung fallen, das sei „eine sehr demokratische Art des Kunstverkaufs“. Einsprengel zwischen diesen Momentaufnahmen sind Nahansichten einer dürfing verkleideten Zombie-Hand, die an einem Blackberry herumfummelt, eine Replik auf die abgetrennte Hand, die von der abgehängten Tafel herunterbaumelt, zugleich jämmerliche Materialisierung jener theologischen Figur der „Unsichtbaren Hand“, die den Fond für das Imaginäre des „Freien Marktes“ bildet. Schließlich sieht man noch, wie diese Figur mitten in der Nacht in unterschiedlichen Stadien physischen Verfalls zielloos durch Straßen, Treppenhäuser und über öffentliche Plätze des Finanzviertels von Manhattan taumelt; die Figur changiert zwischen den Gestalten eines Obdachlosen, eines niedergeschlagenen Manager-Vampirs, einer städtischen Big-Foot-Variante, eines ausgebrannten Bohemiens, der in einer grotesken *dérive* umher stolpert.<sup>2</sup> An einem bestimmten Punkt rollt sich diese Figur in der L-förmigen Nische einer minimalistisch anmutenden Sitzbank auf einem öden Firmenvorplatz zusammen, womit dann ein erzählungsreicher Tipp zur (Nicht-)Identität des entropischen Körperabdrucks geliefert wird, die im realen Galerieraum zu sehen ist.

Mit dieser Szene wird klar, dass Norman und Dillemuth einem so etwas wie die von Robert Smithson inspirierte Verschiebung dieses architektonischen Orts – 77 Water Street lautet die genaue Adresse – hin zum Nicht-Ort der Galerie vorgeführt haben, indem sie die Betrachter in eine Scheinruine eintreten lassen, die an die künstlich gealterten gotischen Architekturelemente in Sanderson Millers berühmtem Landschaftsgarten in Hagley Park aus der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts erinnert. Statt als Fragmente einer

fernen Zivilisationsepoke zu wirken, verweisen die von Norman und Dillemuth angedeuteten Ruinen allerdings weit eher auf die zuletzt ausgelaufene Ära der korporativ verfügten „Kunst im öffentlichen Raum“, die einem im Vergleich zu den obszönen, privat im Umfeld von Figuren wie Damien Hirst verfügten Massenspektakeln in ihrem verhältnismäßig aufrichtigen Streben nach einem moderaten, guten Geschmack und einer vermeintlich demokratischen Zugänglichkeit lächerlich naiv vorkommt.

Dillemuths und Normans Ehrgeiz lag darin, eine schlagende Formulierung für die zuvor erwähnten kunstgeschichtlichen Referenzen und zeitgenössischen politisch-ökonomischen Ereignisse vorzulegen, indem sie in Szene setzten, was Buchloh vielleicht als die „Embleme des melancholischen Infantilismus des Avantgardekünstlers, der seines historischen Scheiterns gewahr geworden ist“, bezeichnen würde. In Buchlohs Augen betraf das besagte „Scheitern“ das Verhältnis gewisser zwischen den Weltkriegen aktiver, (und in einem Analogieschluss auch) aus der Reagan-Ära stammender Künstler zu progressiven Formen gesellschaftspolitischer Veränderung. Doch für Dillemuth und Norman ist die von den Künstlern verfehlte historische Rolle weniger die von gesellschaftspolitischen Katalysatoren als vielmehr von zynischen Agenten des Marktes, die halsbrecherisch auf den Wellen kapitalistischer Ventures surfen und jenen das narzisstische Spiegelbild liefern, die auf die Rendite ihrer Arbeitskraft spekulieren – von Großsammern wie Pinchuk zu den Schmalspurkennern, die Monat um Monat neu die Karriere des jeweils gerade aufblitzenden akademischen Malereiestars boosten.

Obwohl sich nun Dillemuth und Norman eher diagnostisch denn symptomatisch auf solche

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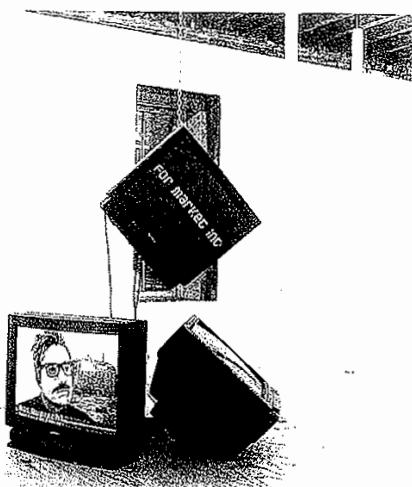
Erscheinungen beziehen, stellt sich doch die Frage, ob sie nicht ihrer eigenen Art des Zynismus auf den Leim gehen, die darin besteht, die verborgenen Verstrickungen dieser oder jener Institution zu enthüllen, sich selbst dabei aber auf eine moralisch höher stehende und letztlich machtlose Position der „Kritikalität“ zurückzuziehen. Auf diesen Punkt bezog sich zuletzt auch Jacques Rancière in einem Gespräch mit der Kritikerin Fulvia Carnevale und dem Reena-Spaulings-Mitbegründer John Kelsey, das in *Artforum* erschienen ist: „Die Kritik am Markt ist zur verkniffenen Werturteilsübung verkommen, die emanzipierte Einstellungen und Handlungsformen gar nicht erst aufkommen lässt.“<sup>3</sup> Klarerweise geht es Rancière nun nicht darum, den (Kunst-)Markt schlicht zu bejahren oder ihn als gegeben hinzunehmen, ihn interessiert vielmehr, die Vielfalt an Märkten, Institutionen und Feldern der Produktion und Distribution künstlerischer Arbeiten zu erkennen, die noch nicht zur Gänze durch jene Logiken der Spekulation, der Warenförmigkeit, des Spektakels determiniert sind, die in dem hoch exklusiven und leicht zu verurteilenden Bereich am Werke sind, der von Figuren wie Koons oder Hirst besetzt wird.<sup>4</sup> Hier könnte man an die ganze Welt der nicht profitorientierten, stipendienbasierten Institutionen denken, etwa an Art In General und Creative Time, universitätsnahe Programme wie das Vera List Center for Art and Politics an der New School, auf Zusammenarbeit beruhende Kunsträume wie 16 Beaver, ja sogar an einen tak-tisch doppelbödigen quasi-kommerziellen Raum wie Reena Spaulings selbst. Natürlich sind alle hier Genannten in unterschiedlichem Maße durch die jeweils aktuelle Lage des spekulativen Kunstmarkts beeinflusst. Doch erscheint wichtiger, dass sie durch die längersfristigen Investitionen und

Engagements staatlich-institutioneller und privatwirtschaftlicher Akteure aus einer liberalen Elite beeinflusst werden, die bei ihrem Umgang mit Kunst zwar nicht einfach am Profit interessiert sind, die dennoch aber selbst auf vielfältige Weise in große Kapitalvorkommen an globalen Märkten verstrickt und somit in hohem Maße Risiken ausgesetzt sind. Zwar wird sich also die derzeitige Krise der Finanzmärkte zweifellos schädigend auf zeitgenössische Künstler/innen auswirken, doch wird deren Reaktion in der Mehrzahl der Fälle wohl weniger in existziellem Leiden Baudelaire'schen Ausmaßes bestehen, das sie ob ihrer vermeintlich so promiskuen Beziehung zum kommerziellen Kunstmarkt beschleicht; vielmehr wird es für sie um die Frage gehen, wann und wo sie zu einer Zeit tiefer Budgeteinschnitte einen temporären Lehrjob, ein staatlich finanziertes Forschungsstipendium oder eine privat gesponserte Partnerschaft mit einer NGO oder einer Stiftung ergattern können. Anders ausgedrückt beziehen sich die meisten Künstler/innen auf den Kunstmarkt wie auf eine indirekte Instanz, die mit anderen zusammenhängt, als Teil ihrer banalen Arbeitswirklichkeit, in der es um die Nachhaltigkeit ihrer Berufsausübung geht, und nicht um die große Dialektik der Moderne, die in Form oder Gehalt ihrer Werke zu verhandeln wäre.<sup>5</sup>

T.J. Demos hat bereits festgestellt, dass Norman sich zwar sehr für mögliche Verstricktheiten zeitgenössischer Kunst mit den Machenschaften des so genannten „Spektakels“ interessiert, dass der Künstler jedoch seinem pessimistischen Standpunkt oft auch dadurch abgemildert hat, dass er unmögliche, „utopische“ Visionen zu alternativen sozio-ökologischen Veränderungen des kapitalistischen Städtebaus vorlegte, und diese formulieren gerade in ihrer mangelnden Verwirk-

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Stephan Dillerth, Nils Norman, „You Have Been Misinformed“,  
Reena Spaulings, New York, 2008, Ausstellungsaussicht



lichungsnähe substantielle politische Ansprüche an die Agenten neoliberaler Privatisierung, die auf eine „Rückforderung von Gemeingut“ zielen.<sup>6</sup> Was Demos als eine „ironische Verdopplung“ beschrieben hat, die einen Ausweg aus der anscheinenden Handlungsunfähigkeit vorangegangener künstlerischer Modelle einer negativen Kritikalität anstrebe, fehlt nun in „You Have Been Misinformed“ ganz und gar. Hier weichen etwaige utopische Energien gallebitterer Aggressivität gegen einen gleichgültigen Watschenmann wie Hirst.

Angesichts einer Krise, die in ihrem planetarischen Maßstab, in ihrer technischen Komplexität und ihrem katastrophischen Potenzial leicht die Grenze der Vorstellbarkeit überschreitet, erscheinen die temporären autonomen Zonen und urban-agrarischen Kommunen, die Norman in früheren Arbeiten, wie etwa dem gegen Gentrifizierung gerichteten Projektposter „Edible Forest

Garden Park and Monument to Civil Disobedience Adventure Playground“ (2001), polemisch herauftauchte, tatsächlich ganz unangemessen. Dagegen erscheint die in „You Have Been Misinformed“ vorgelegte Alternative gleichermaßen kurzsichtig wie melancholisch, wenn man sie etwa mit „Red Lines, Death Vows, Foreclosures, Risk Structures“, der letzten Ausstellung des Center for Urban Pedagogy im MIT Center for Advanced Visual Studies vergleicht.

Mit ihrer Bezugnahme auf Info-Ästhetiken nach dem Bauhaus und auf postmoderne, gegen die Ideologie der Ausstellung gerichtete Praktiken, erstellt die Ausstellung des CUP eine visuelle Genealogie des US-amerikanischen Nachkriegs-Hypothekenmarktes und zeichnet zugleich die Verstricktheit städtischer Erscheinungsformen der Ungleichheit nach „Rasse“ und Klasse mit der schrittweisen Deregulierung der globalen Finanzsysteme im Laufe der vergangenen zwanzig

## TEXTE ZUR KUNST

Jahre nach – ein Verhältnis, das sich exemplarisch an der Ausbreitung räuberischer, minderwertiger Hypothekenkreditpraktiken zeigt, deren Unkontrolliertheit und kurzfristige Profitorientiertheit die jüngste Welle von Bankenkonkursen in den Vereinigten Staaten ausgelöst hat. Während das im Ausstellungstitel „You Have Been Misinformed“ angerufene „Du“ im besserwisserischen und hämischen Hab-ich's-nicht-eh'-schon-immer-gesagt-Tonfall adressiert wird, hat das CUP seine Ausstellung im Center for Advanced Visual Studies als Plattform für eine weit reichende öffentliche Debatte eingesetzt, an der sich Urbanist/innen, Aktivist/innen, Historiker/innen und Finanz-expert/innen beteiligten und die sich mit den Ursachen der Hypothekenmarkt-Krise und deren Auswirkungen auf die gefährdetsten gesellschaftlichen Gruppierungen in den Vereinigten Staaten beschäftigten. Das CUP kann durchaus etwas mit den „gotischen“ Qualitäten der gegenwärtigen Krise anfangen, was schon bei einer Beschäftigung mit der Etymologie des Begriffs „mortgage“ beginnt – wörtlich übersetzt der „Todeschwur“. Doch durch sein ermittlerisches Forschen nach dem, was Marx die „vampirische“ Logik des Kapitalismus genannt hat, besteht das CUP darauf, dass wir bei den gespenstigen Landschaften der Anwohnerpfändung und der kommunalen Sparpolitik – und den Spuren unerträglichen Leidens darin – ansetzen. Und nicht bei der andauernden *danse macabre*, die Clement Greenberg zufolge die Avantgarde mit ihrer „goldenen Nabelschnur“ aufführt.

YATES MCKEE

(Übersetzung: Clemens Krümmel)

„Stephan Dillemuth and Nils Norman You Have Been Misinformed.“, Reena Spaulings Fine Arts, New York, 17 July bis 21 September 2008.

### Anmerkungen

- 1 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, „Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression“, in: *Art After Modernism. Rethinking Representation*, Brian Wallis (Hg.), New York 1984, S. 107. Eine Sammlung historischer Texte zum so genannten „New Gothic“-Phänomen in den Jahren seit 2000 bietet: Gilda Williams (Hg.), *The Gothic*, London 2007, S. 36–66. Praktischerweise verortet Williams diese Texte im Verhältnis zu klassischen literarischen und theoretischen Quellentexten von Horace Walpole über Sigmund Freud bis hin zu Mike Kelley, dehnt jedoch letzten Endes die Bedeutung des „Gothic“-Begriffs auf alles auch nur ansatzweise Gruselige, Versörrende, Abjekte oder Fremdartige aus – ein Risiko, das diesem bekanntmaßen schwer zu fassenden Begriff von sich aus schon zu eigen ist.
- 2 Standbilder der nächtlichen Streifzüge dieser Figur findet man in einer kleinen, fotokopierten und von Patterson Beckwith gestalteten Broschüre, die als ironisch-scheinbohemistischer, niederbudgetierter „Katalog“ zur Ausstellung „You Have Been Misinformed“ verteilt wurde. Ebenfalls darin enthalten waren die Zeitungsartikel, aus denen man sich für die Darstellungen von Pinchuk und Ruprecht bedient hatte, zudem noch ein Glossar, das die im Videoloop verwendeten Fachausdrücke der Finanzwelt erläuterte. Die Videopräts selbst kann man sich auf Dillemuths Website anschauen: [http://www.societyofcontrol.com/dillemuth/2008\\_spaulings/main.htm](http://www.societyofcontrol.com/dillemuth/2008_spaulings/main.htm).
- 3 Vgl. das Interview mit Jacques Rancière von Fulvia Carnavale und John Kelsey, „Art of the Possible“, in: *Artforum*, März 2007, S. 256–269.
- 4 Eine nuancierte und streitbare Auswahl von Analysen zum Thema „Kunst und Kunstmärkte“, bei der leider die Rolle von nicht profitorientierten Stiftungen und selbstorganisierten Künstler/innen-Räumen zu kurz kommt, findet sich in der Sonderausgabe von *Artforum* von April 2008 – mit Hirsts „For the Love of God“ auf dem Cover.
- 5 Vgl. hierzu den wichtigen Text von Gregory Sholette zu den Bedingungen gegenwärtigen künstlerischen Arbeitens, „State of the Union“, in: *Artforum*, April 2008, S. 181f., sowie seine verschiedenen theoretischen Fassungen zu künstlerischer „dunkler Materie“ unter [http://gregorysholette.com/writings/writing\\_index.html](http://gregorysholette.com/writings/writing_index.html).
- 6 T.J. Demos, „The Cruel Dialectic: On the Work of Nils Norman“, in: *Grey Room*, Nr. 12, Herbst 2003, S. 32–53.

# TOASTER'S CHOICE

A nouvelle vague of exhibition premises

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

Absurd as it may sound, a lot of curators think they're cowboys. Young mavericks eager to be the lone museum ranger burst onto the scene with dramatic salvos in hopes of becoming sudden superstars, and of eventually aging into leather-faced badasses.

More genuinely adventurous curators, on the other hand, are suspicious and critical of the cult of the individual. The growing role of collectives in contemporary art, along with the recent interest in fake or elusive identities, points to a time and place where anonymity trumps fame and where the cowboy mentality doesn't count for so much.

Like France.

Yes, France. The artworld considers France sleepy, provincial, crushed by the weight of its history. And such stereotypes do contain plenty of truth. The French are the champions of the "Non, c'est pas possible," and the word *bureaucracy* comes from the French for a reason: to get things done, the right stamps have to appear in the right spots on the right pieces of paper that have to be handed to the right person at the right moment.

But innovative curatorial approaches are far from being un-French. Setting aside a number of elder statesmen and women (Philippe Vergne, Christian Bernard, Catherine David), we find a great many younger curators eager to experiment. Generally the members of this demographic prefer independence, working without the institutional layers hovering above them. Freelance curators Vincent Pécoil, Natasa Petresin, and Florence Derieux have organized idiosyncratic

exhibitions in venues all over the country and in the rest of Europe. The Parisian curatorial duo Work Method has put forward unusual propositions, such as the photocopy-based show "Jiri Kovanda VS. restedu monde (l'tentatives de rapprochement)," mounted at GB Agency in 2006. The pair of Thomas Boutoux, a writer and editor, and Paris-based American artist Oscar Tuazon recently launched Castillo/Corrales, a tiny storefront space that hosts many of the most interesting and unexpected programs in town, and that obeys no rules but its own: it can shift identity from a gallery to an office, hotel, studio, or bookstore all in the span of a week.

If Castillo/Corrales moves explicitly toward collectivity, the group Toasting Agency provides an even clearer example of such an approach. Its founders, Alexis Vaillant and Eva Svennung, chose in 1999 to form not a gallery or an alternative space but rather an "agency" that works with art, artists, exhibitions, publications, and other collaborators sometimes far outside the artworld. The two took inspiration from the phenomenon of "toasting," which began in late-1960s Jamaica. Radio DJs would add their own vocals, or "toasts," to a song as they played it live on air. The DJs would thereby make use of existing music as a vehicle to contain—and distribute—their own personal chants, political tirades, or rhymed storytelling. The rest is history: dub, rap, hip-hop, and contemporary sample-based music.

To toast represents a particular strategy of survival in today's world

of big culture machines. In its original sense, as a covert tactic of (political) intervention within the fabric of public airwaves, to toast is to claim autonomy while inhabiting a system and delivering a message without needing to build the bulky machine that delivers it. As adapted by Svennung and Vaillant, toasting is a philosophy of retaining independence while gaining access to larger infrastructural "machinery." It offers a promising strategy for curating: stay free, use what's there, collaborate, melt into the background, and spend time with the art rather than on constructing its support system. To toast—if it is truly possible to do so—is to look beyond simplistic divisions between inside and outside, and to insist that, perhaps, the little people aren't against the Man but can ride on top of Him.

The Agency's first project took place in a driving school in the third arrondissement in Paris, where Svennung and Vaillant found all they needed for a slate of events they'd been wanting to put on: a room with rows of chairs, a projector, and a screen. When driving classes were not taking place, the room in the center of town sat empty. They brokered use of the space free of charge, and so began Toasting Agency's "Lectures, Talks, and Readings in a Driving School" (1999–2000), which claims a curiously varied group of participants: Jean Baudrillard, the actress Pascale Dauman, the tranny model-singer Amanda Lear, and others. (Emphasis on "claims." Precise records of the event are scant.) The absurd choice of a driving school as a site for cul-

tural production was clearly not a "critique" of, or alternative to, the art apparatus. It was more a declaration that context doesn't matter, as long as it can move art along.

Also in 1999–2000 was "Hair Styling—Cut of the Month," a yearlong exhibition at Coiffures Complices, a hair salon in the 14th arrondissement. Without an appointment, visitors could drop by for a haircut designed by a different artist each month: Jonathan Monk, Bless, Bernadette Corporation, Matthieu Laurette, Elena Montesinos, et al. In October 1999 Toasting Agency presented "From Camouflage to Free Style, 1," a group exhibition that took place inside David Shrigley's solo at Yvon Lambert. Interspersed throughout Shrigley's show were works by Olaf Breuning, Martin Kippenberger, Tobias Rehberger, John Tremblay, and Gerald Rockenschaub, among others. Far from being a hijack of someone else's show—à la Banksy, for example—"From Camouflage" was done in full cooperation with Shrigley and Yvon Lambert; it was an expression of community and of the potential for artworks to wander.

After 2000, Toasting Agency's focus shifted toward ToastinK Press, which published a variety of books and catalogues—including Bernadette Corporation's collective novel *Reena Spaulings*, with Semiotext(e)—as well as a free quarterly in French and English called *Pacemaker*, which featured "texts, conversations, essays, quotes, fictions, translations, stories, horoscopes, reports, love letters and prescriptions." The "jocularious" zine provided a wel-

MATTHIEU LAURETTE  
HAIR TATTOO (THE LABEL IS  
BACK, FASHION ALL TIME TOP 40  
SELECTED BY THE FACE), 2000  
EXHIBITION "HAIR STYLING—CUT OF  
THE MONTH," SALON COIFFURES  
COMPLICES, PARIS, 1999–2000  
COURTESY THE ARTIST, TOASTING AGENCY,  
PARIS, ALBRIGHT-KAHN, LONDON, AND  
DEWEAR ART GALLERY, OXFORD, ENGLAND

# Untitled 40

SPRING 2007

## Reena Spaulings

Sutton Lane, London, UK

14 October to 18 November 2006

Reviewed by Cameron Irving



Reena Spaulings, *Biafystoker*, Installation view, 2006. Courtesy Reena Spaulings and Sutton Lane.

As branding becomes more and more prevalent in late capitalist culture, who or what is behind a name becomes increasingly more difficult to locate. Franchises serendipitously merge with other franchises, whilst traditional positions of identity become shadowy. This dynamic has for some time been reflected in contemporary art production, and as a visitor to an exhibition containing works attributed to a certain 'Reena Spaulings', the parallels become acutely apparent.

Spaulings is the fictional offspring of the Bernadette Corporation - a collective that shuffles its internal anatomy to suite particular projects. One of these collaborative projects manifested as a multi-authored novel titled after the protagonist's name, simply 'Reena Spaulings'.

The character has subsequently been reinvented as a fictional artist, and also as a dealer based in New York. The gallery 'Reena Spaulings Fine Art' operates in Manhattan's Lower Eastside, and is founded by key member of Bernadette Corporation John Kelsey, with artist Emily Sundblad. Although Kelsey and Sundblad are primarily responsible for the Reena Spaulings phenomenon, an exhibition of her work can involve the participation of a loosely assembled body of collaborators, some of which exhibit at 'Reena Spaulings Fine Art' under their own names.

Spaulings' first exhibition in London comprised drawings and paintings that take for their subject matter the group's native city of New York and the art openings and performance

## Untitled 40

SPRING 2007

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

events that have happened under the roof of 'Reena Spaulings Fine Art'. Like a lot of exhibition titles, arbitrariness is often a determining factor, and the only relevance of the choice of 'Bialystoker' for this outing at Sutton Lane (apparently this is the name of a retirement home situated next to the gallery in New York.)

In the small confines of the London gallery, a forty by eight feet un-stretched canvas lay carelessly crumpled on the floor. Painted in amateurish acrylics, *The Bricks* (2006) is a double-sided emblematic pattern of municipal bricks and mortar that can - in theory at least - be worked on by any amount of contributors. Offering the viewer nothing but a blank façade, the wall-on-a-roll relegates an emblem of structural stability, reducing it to nothing more than a motif. It prompts obvious references to its collaborative origin, but with a slight sting in its tail. The self-consciously painted brickwork only achieves a bare semblance of recognition, as if to ape the aesthetics of a 'community project' and sneer at the orthodox political correctness of collaboration.

On the far wall, a work posing as an abstract painting turns out to be a tablecloth that has been swiped from an opening. Stretched taught over a frame *Enigma 2* (2005) is an example of a series of tablecloth works that display wine stains and cigarette ash that by default parody painterly abstract forms. This initially appears as a light-hearted exposé of debauchery that lurks behind a mask of sophistication, however the work avoids self-righteousness and instead makes each gallery punter an un-witting producer of their own 'Modern Art' as they booze and chat.

By comparison, other images of art scene stuff were hung in surprisingly smart frames.

Made from photographs taken at openings, small charcoal drawings attempt to document performance events and installation views, but the renditions are awkward and knowingly inaccurate. Cropped by black matte board that practically obscure each image, we get a glimpse of a gallery pulling the spotlights back on itself. The full extent of this self-referential narcissism is evident from the works of the same series that are simply drawings of existing Spaulings' works, such as fragments from *The Bricks* or a drawing entitled *The Enigma* (2006), which appears to be a mini black and white version of a tablecloth piece.

During my own visit, a gallery assistant kindly led me to another space that presented some sloppy pseudo-pointillist renditions of Manhattan luxury accommodation. Stacked on racks, I was encouraged to handle the paintings, and pull out each at will, disregarding (somewhat predictably) any sense of preciousness. This kind of reworking of deeply unfashionable art historical styles has its own history, and I find the aesthetic parallels to the work of BANK difficult to put out my mind.

The assistant also informed me they were 'bad' paintings, perhaps worried the irony might escape me. I found this irksome and started to wonder how much more 'flogging' of the proverbial 'dead horse' ironic painting will be forced to take. What concerns me even more is the ease at which work of questionable quality can slip through panoptic structures engineered by collaborative art groups. The flipside of 'freedom' granted by anonymity and fictional avatars, ultimately leads to an art for which responsibility is endlessly deferred, and in this case it facilitated the situation in a mostly predictable way.

Curatorial concepts can be Trojan horses for the creation of new artworks, new beginnings for old artworks, or future collaborations between artists.



come counterpoint to the usual tenor of discussion in Paris, a city where art discourse tends to be didactic. The most recent issue appeared in summer 2006, with contributors including Fia Backström, Larry Bell, Claire Fontaine, Adriana Lara, and Jan Verwoert.

That same year, Vaillant split off to pursue his own projects, but Svensnung continues under the Toasting Agency name. Most recently she helped produce the exhibition-cum-residency "Otra de vaqueros," in collaboration with the like-minded Mexico City curatorial group Perros Negros. (The show title translates to "Another Story About Cowboys," a Mexican saying that refers to a tall tale.) Rather than articulate a specific theme, Svensnung selected artists whom she felt had (or might have) certain affinities with each other and invited them to

live for a month in the heart of the Mexican capital: Karl Holmqvist, Allora and Calzadilla, Jay Chung and Q Takeki Maeda, Mario García-Torres, Minerva Cuevas, and others. Then, she let the artists do as they pleased, without prescription, and allowed whatever might happen to happen. According to several of the participants, the outcome was a highly productive period of intellectual exchange, friendship, and collective artmaking. The material results were on view at the Laboratorio Arte Alameda and other sites in Mexico City in spring 2007, then traveled to the Centre d'Édition Contemporaine in Geneva that summer.

One of Toasting Agency's still-unrealized projects is its most ambitious and represents the clearest example of its aims. Titled "Holiday for Plywood," this group exhibition

would take place inside a Hollywood movie. Working to gain entry to the set of a feature film already in production, Svensnung has invited artists to consider ways their works could be installed in the set, becoming part of the film's background. Although the initiative resembles Mel Chin's *In the Name of the Place* (1996), for which he and his collaborators inserted objects into episodes of the TV series *Melrose Place*, "Holiday for Plywood" would operate according to the logic of a group show unfolding across the time span of a movie, as if viewers were encountering them one next to the other in a real space. The exhibition would gradually reveal itself over 90 minutes. With any luck (and more funding), it will soon be on view in a theater near you.

In a recent e-mail, Svensnung said that Toasting "insists on the idea that

exhibitions are not the final destination of the artwork. It is where their 'second life' begins." In this view, curatorial concepts are Trojan horses for the creation of new artworks, new beginnings for old artworks, or future collaborations between artists. Curators don't "land" in a context and commandeer it with a long-winded monologue; rather, they "toast," entering contexts that don't belong to them—and which can be outside the artworld—to open a field of play for artworks. As curators, they recede. The ideal that Toasting Agency represents is to be less a cowboy than a good guest: it's not about riding hard and hoping for fame but instead about being an elegant, thoughtful, and charismatic raconteur whose stories spread like rumors as they are retold by others, fact mixing with fiction.



COSMOS ÉCOLE DE CONDUITE,  
SITE OF TOASTING AGENCY'S  
"LECTURES, TALKS, AND  
READINGS IN A DRIVING  
SCHOOL," PARIS, 1999-2000

REENA SPAULINGS  
MERCADO (NAME DIVIERTO NADA,  
PERO COMO GANO), 2007  
INSTALLATION VIEW, "OTRA DE  
VAQUEROS," CENTRE D'EDITION  
CONTEMPORAINE, GENEVA, 2007  
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND  
CENTRE D'EDITION CONTEMPORAINE, GENEVA

# The New York Times

## The Collective Conscious

By HOLLAND COTTER

Contemporary art is a multibillion-dollar global industry. But why does such a big deal look so small, so slight, with its bland paintings, self-regarding videos, artful tchotchkies and shoppable M.F.A. artists-to-watch? There has to be another way to go, an alternative to a used-up "alternative." By far the most interesting option so far, one that began to be news a few years ago and has increased its visibility since, is the work of miniature subcultures known as collectives. Basically, art collectives do away with the one-artist-one-object model. They come in various sizes and formats: couples, quartets, teams, tribes and amorphous cyberspace communities. Sometimes a group of artists assumes the identity of a single person; sometimes, a single artist assumes the identity of many. Membership may be official, or casual, or even accidental: friends brainstorming in an apartment or strangers collaborating on the Internet from continents away. And they may or may not refer to their activities as art. Research, archiving and creative hacking are just as likely to produce objects, experiences, information that is politically didactic or end-in-itself beautiful, or both. One way or another, joint production among parties of equal standing — we're not talking about master artist and studio assistants here — scrambles existing aesthetic formulas. It may undermine the cult of the artist as media star, dislodge the supremacy of the precious object and unsettle the economic structures that make the art world a mirror image of the inequities of American culture at large. In short, it confuses how we think about art and assign value to it. This can only be good.

Consider, for example, the work of a collective with the name 0100101110101101.ORG. It consists of two young Spanish artists, Eva and Franco Mattes, who call their art "media actionism." Last year, they produced an elaborate international promotional campaign (posters, magazine, trailer, etc.) for a Hollywood-style war film titled "United We Stand," starring Penélope Cruz and Ewan McGregor.

The images in the poster and trailer, with barely disguised but heroicized references to the current war in Iraq, can be taken as typical examples of Hollywood-style propaganda-as-history. But the layers of deception go deeper. The film itself, echoing President Bush's triumphal "Top Gun" turn, exists only as advertising. It is a fiction built on fantasy. But thanks to an extensive poster campaign, the nonexistent film may lodge in our consciousness all the same.

For an earlier project, the collective created a benign computer virus as a work of art and made it available on a computer disc. For another, it hacked the Nike Corporation's Web site, inserting an "official" announcement of Nike plazas to be built in cities all over the world. If art can be defined as the purposeful shaping of images to embody and expand ideas, this collective's activities easily qualify.

If you want to locate the discrete work of art, however, you have a problem. You can own a piece of the "United We Stand" project by buying (or stealing) a poster, and you might get the virus whether you want it or not. What's really on offer, though, is conceptual substance: ideas about surveillance, ownership and the pervasiveness of the cultural propaganda otherwise known as popular entertainment.

Other collectives, several of which are represented in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, which opened last week, stretch conventional definitions of art and artist even further, into the realm of activist politics, scientific experimentation and historical reclamation.

Critical Art Ensemble, now well known because of the 2004 investigation of one of its members, Steve Kurtz, on suspicion of bioterrorist activities, combines the first two elements. Well aware of 1960's communalism, and directly influenced by collectives from the AIDS movement — Act Up, Gran Fury, Group Material — Critical Art Ensemble operates as a combination of scientific investigative unit, anticapitalist guerrilla cell, public service agency and multimedia art studio. It has conducted research into government and corporate control of biotechnology and biogenetics, and then presented its findings in publications, exhibitions and public performances that sometimes

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evoked as semifictional collective memory.

**Surely the most complicated of all collectively conceived art personalities in circulation at present is the polymath entity named Reena Spaulings, who is an artist, an art dealer and a character in a novel. The gallery that carries her name on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, is by this point the best known and most conventional aspect of the Spaulings enterprise, though it didn't start out that way.**

**It was initially a storefront studio for the artist Emily Sundblad, who was in the United States from Sweden and was legally required to have a mailing address for residency. She and her partner, John Kelsey, used the space to create what amounted to an art project in the guise of a gallery, Reena Spaulings Fine Art, playing host to performances as well as exhibitions that lasted, in some cases, only a matter of hours.**

**Although artists have often become dealers, the Spaulings story flips the order around. It was only after the gallery became commercially viable that Spaulings had a solo show in a Chelsea gallery, a collective effort that incorporated elements from the Lower East Side space. At the same time, an autobiographical novel titled "Reena Spaulings" (Semiotexte, 2004) appeared.**

**To further confuse matters — and confusion of authorship, gender, media and other categorizing labels that the art market relies on to track product is the point of the Spaulings project — the book is the work of a second collective, Bernadette Corporation, with which Mr. Kelsey is affiliated. In the 1990's it created a fashion line and published a magazine (Made in U.S.A.); last year it established an underground film studio in Berlin. The novel itself was written by dozens of contributors, primarily via the Internet, and in the assembly-line mode once used by Hollywood film studios to produce scripts.**

**Indeed, like many collectives today, Bernadette Corporation exists largely in cyberspace, demonstrating that artists no longer require a place — a studio, a Chelsea — to make and show work, or a gallery system to promote it. In addition, just as collectivity de-emphasizes the singularity of the artist, digital media eliminate, or transform, the idea of the personal "touch" marketed as creative individuality. (The strenuous call for the revival of painting in the past few years might be seen as, in part, a reaction to the perceived encroachment of digital forms.)**

**Internet-savvy collectives like this one — and some collectives exist exclusively on the Web — take a holistic view of art as a long-term social process, rather than a short-term formal event. Just as important, they want to get their work out, free, to as wide an audience as possible, and the Internet lets them do so.**

**Unsurprisingly, both Bernadette Corporation and Reena Spaulings were created by artists well versed in anticapitalist and anticorporate politics. Nor is it surprising that the gallery itself, after its free-form early days, became a going commercial concern, in the process having its edge blunted through its capitulation to the system it supposedly bucked. The gallery, in fact, has recently received critical reprimands around matters of self-promotion. So where will its founders take their project now?**

Finally, it's important to acknowledge that making art collectively is by no means an automatic guarantee of radicalism, as the example of the much-touted Wrong Gallery proves.

A collaboration of three highly visible art world movers — Ali Subotnick, Massimiliano Gioni and the artist Maurizio Cattelan — it's a sort of free-floating curatorial project with no permanent address. For awhile it occupied a niche behind a locked glass door on a Chelsea street where it gave short-run shows to chic young artists. In conjunction with the biennial, it has organized a group show at the Whitney.

The Wrong Gallery's Whitney show is on a bad-boyish theme that Andy Warhol more or less finessed with his "Most Wanted Men" paintings 40 years ago. And this collective itself feels like tired old news. It's strictly an insider operation, limited to mildly tweaking the conventions and protocols of the art world while supporting business-as-usual. No wonder the industry thinks it's just the cleverest thing and gives it full approval. Like the art world in its present form, the Wrong Gallery is prominent and powerful, and trifling.

# The New York Times

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

take the form of laboratory demonstrations. For a German performance with the artist Beatriz da Costa, the collective tested food brought by visitors for genetically modified organisms, whose import European Union officials claimed had been banned.

A related performance about genetic engineering and organic food was scheduled for the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in the summer of 2004. But it was canceled after the police, answering a 911 call that Mr. Kurtz made from his home after his wife had a fatal heart attack, confiscated what they deemed were suspicious bacterial substances.

The substances were materials for one of the collective's art projects, which are always science projects. It would be easy to think that the government officials prosecuting Mr. Kurtz are simply too obtuse to see the "art" in Critical Art Ensemble's work. Yet it is just as likely that they see an art of potentially subversive information and don't like it.

Critical Art Ensemble is one of many art collectives operating on the principle that information is power and that it is most effectively made available through a combination of science and aesthetics. Another such group, the Center for Land Use Interpretation, combines history, environmental science and art to reveal the use, or misuse, of public land in the United States, with particular emphasis on what it sees as the excesses of the defense establishment.

The means that the collective uses are organizationally complex and specialized, beyond what any individual artist could manage. They include environmental research, book publication, exhibitions, an elaborate Web site and guided tours of military sites, chemical-weapon incinerators and abandoned shopping malls.

They are far less interested in producing art objects than in providing an experience of the world through a scientifically based aesthetic language of symmetries and disharmonies, tones and shades, concreteness and abstraction. Like the earth artist Robert Smithson, they locate the poetry of dissolution in geology. Unlike him, they don't physically shape the land itself, but shape the way you think about it. Through their art-as-science, or science-as-art, you make the environment, natural and constructed, your own without owning it.

If this collective model represents an alternative to the object-fixated market economy of art, other models are notable for turning conventional ideas of what an artist is inside out. For the singular artist-as-genius that is the foundation of the entire art industry, including sales exhibitions and criticism, they substitute multiplicity, anonymity, unpredictability.

Otabenga Jones & Associates, for example, is the identity assumed by four young African-American artists based in Houston (Dawolu Jabari Anderson, Jamal Cyrus, Kenya Evans and Robert A. Pruitt). Ota Benga was a real person, an African pygmy brought to the United States in 1904 and exhibited in a cage at the Bronx Zoo as a kind of living illustration for Darwin's "Origins of Species." Otabenga Jones is an invented character who is both a conceptual artist and a historian with an interest in critically reconstituting the connective tissue between African and African-American cultures.

In a recent solo show in Chelsea, his work revisited the Bronx in the 1970's and 80's, when hip-hop and graffiti, art forms with a communal base, were first becoming widely known. At DiverseWork in Houston in 2005 he and the four artists who sometimes use his name installed the equivalent of a sidewalk flea market selling bootleg DVD's and designer knockoffs.

The installation carries references to other artists: David Hammons, who once sold snowballs on the street in New York, and Georges Adeagbo from the Republic of Benin, who creates marketlike, altarlike outdoor installations. The piece also suggests that as commercial operations, there is no essential difference between the "art world" and the "real world," the gallery and the flea market, except for a protective divide. Outdoors, you could get arrested for selling bootleg goods; inside the art world's precincts, you're probably safe.

Otabenga Jones is four artists acting as one, with their four voices simultaneously blended and distinctive. The collective called the Atlas Group/Walid Raad, also devoted to recovering a social history, is one artist acting as many, specifically as the nonprofit research foundation called the Atlas Group. The subject in this case is the war-torn history of modern Lebanon, considered through installations of materials ranging from videotapes of prisoners being interrogated and tortured to photographic archives assembled by one Dr. Fakhouri.

But there is no Dr. Fakhouri. And although some of the Atlas Group material is based on real sources, much of it was produced by Mr. Raad, an artist based in Beirut and New York. Once you know what you're seeing, the work, usually presented in installation form, takes on an absurdist comic edge. At the same time it vividly evokes the almost preposterous horror of war itself, which Mr. Raad experiences both first hand and from a distance, and has

# les inRockuptibles

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

## Claire Fontaine Couvrir les feux

À la Zoo galerie, 49, chaussée de La Madeleine, Nantes. Jusqu'au 1<sup>er</sup> avril. Tél. 02.40.35.41.55.

## Reena Spaulings Beware of a Holy Whore

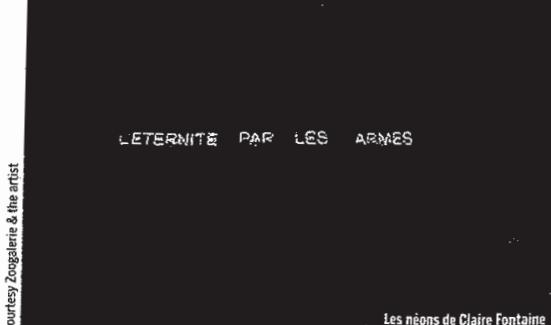
À la galerie Chantal Crousel, 10, rue Charlot, Paris III<sup>e</sup>. Jusqu'au 15 avril. [www.crousel.com](http://www.crousel.com)

**Deux groupuscules artistiques mettent en abyme l'art contemporain, ses poncifs et ses impasses. Sans renoncer à trouver une issue esthétique.** Mais qui es-tu donc Claire Fontaine ? La formule consacrée "vit et travaille à..." reste un peu lettre morte pour lever le masque de cette Claire Fontaine, qui est en fait un personnage fantôme, une fiction, et une véritable imposture. Signée James Thornhill, un artiste écossais, et sa complice, la Vénitienne Fulvia Carnevale, philosophe et fondatrice de la revue anarchiste *Tiggun*. Un duo très intello qui renoue avec une pratique politisée et clandestine de l'art. L'expo à Zoo Galerie

dégage ainsi des relents insurrectionnels avec une petite panoplie d'objets furtifs et dangereux : titrés d'un ambigu *In God They Trust*, maquant les échanges commerciaux et le terrorisme, de simples quartiers équipés d'un crochet dépliable comme les lames d'un couteau suisse sont censés rester indétectables au détecteur de métaux. Tout aussi incendiaire, la phrase "Je n'ai pas de mots pour vous dire comme je hais la police", extraite du *Made in USA* de Godard, tracée au plafond à la flamme d'un briquet, fait écho au face-à-face des jeunes insurgés avec les forces de l'ordre en novembre dernier. Ces émeutes sont d'ailleurs l'horizon violent

et crépusculaire de toute l'expo. A l'image de cette vidéo qui montre en boucle une photo de voiture en feu être, à son tour, détruite par le feu. Soit une parfaite mise en évidence par l'artiste de la manière dont tout mouvement révolutionnaire échappe à sa représentation. Quelque chose se perd entre l'action politique et sa documentation, et c'est cette limite-là que Claire Fontaine creusait déjà avec un néon dont l'allumage intermittent correspondait pile à son message : le mot "Strike" s'éteignait ainsi dès que l'on s'en approchait. Une manière de mettre l'œuvre en grève, de ne plus la consacrer comme un absolu au-dessus du réel. Or, un autre groupuscule artistique, très lié à Claire Fontaine, mène des coups d'éclat comparables. Les New-Yorkais Reena Spaulings, à la fois gaietistes et artistes, critiques d'art et éditeurs aux noms divers et variés, forment une fiction collective ou une constellation très floue, sans état civil bien réel. Ils exposent à la galerie Chantal Crousel des "peintures monétaires" qui floutent avec une patte abstraite le dessin des dollars américains. Ou comment représenter ce qu'est un tableau aux yeux du marché - juste de l'argent sur toile.

Judicaël Lavrador



Les néons de Claire Fontaine

Anthony Huberman. "Reena Spaulings : elle est douée mais ce n'est pas David Hammons,"  
02, (Paris) Spring 2006.

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

## 24. dossier

# Reena Spaulings : elle est douée, mais ce n'est pas David Hammons

par Anthony Huberman

Baudelaire fait fureur, ces temps-ci. Le goût du père de la critique moderne pour la décadence, la luxure et la décomposition parle à de nombreux jeunes artistes du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, ou, plutôt, à ceux qui fuient le XX<sup>e</sup>. « Le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent » – telle est la définition de la modernité que propose le poète français. Mais elle s'applique également à notre fascination contemporaine pour les identités fictives, insaisissables. Déguiser, masquer, détourner une identité équivaut à la rendre fugitive, en cavale, transitoire, temporaire, inconsistante.

La citation ci-dessus revient comme référence prédominante dans un texte du catalogue des commissaires de la Biennale 2006 du Whitney Museum – un texte issu de la plume d'un « troisième » et fictif commissaire du nom de Toni Burlap, inventé par les deux commissaires Philippe Vergne et Chrissie Illés. La Biennale a d'autres secrets mieux gardés : les corbeaux qui semblent se rassembler pour survoler le toit du Whitney (une œuvre de Jordan Wolfson), ou les rumeurs sur la nature et la provenance suspectes du tableau de Miles Davis (est-ce vraiment lui l'auteur?). Selon un autre énoncé de Baudelaire (repris par un tandem de jeunes commissaires en intitulé d'une autre exposition collective), « tout ce qui est beau et noble est le résultat de la raison et du calcul » – et beaucoup d'artistes fabriquent aujourd'hui des images séduisantes au moyen de trompeuses stratégies, d'identités cachées et d'intrigues secondaires introduites en fraude. En ces temps de guerre et de terrorisme international, on appelle ça des cellules dormantes. Fumée et miroirs.

L'histoire de l'art a sa part d'artistes fictifs, de R.Mutt et Rose Selavy (Marcel Duchamp) ou Charles Rosenthal Ilya Kabakov à de jeunes artistes comme Claire Fontaine (un duo italo-britannique), Norma Jean (un artiste italien), ou John Dogg (d'après la rumeur, il s'agirait du galeriste Colin de Landi). Les musiciens adoptent souvent plusieurs identités : Richard D. James semble en posséder des dizaines (la plus connue étant Aphex Twin). L'inéfondable romancier travesti JT LeRoy est devenu une figure culte de la littérature américaine, admiré par beaucoup mais vraiment connu de personne.

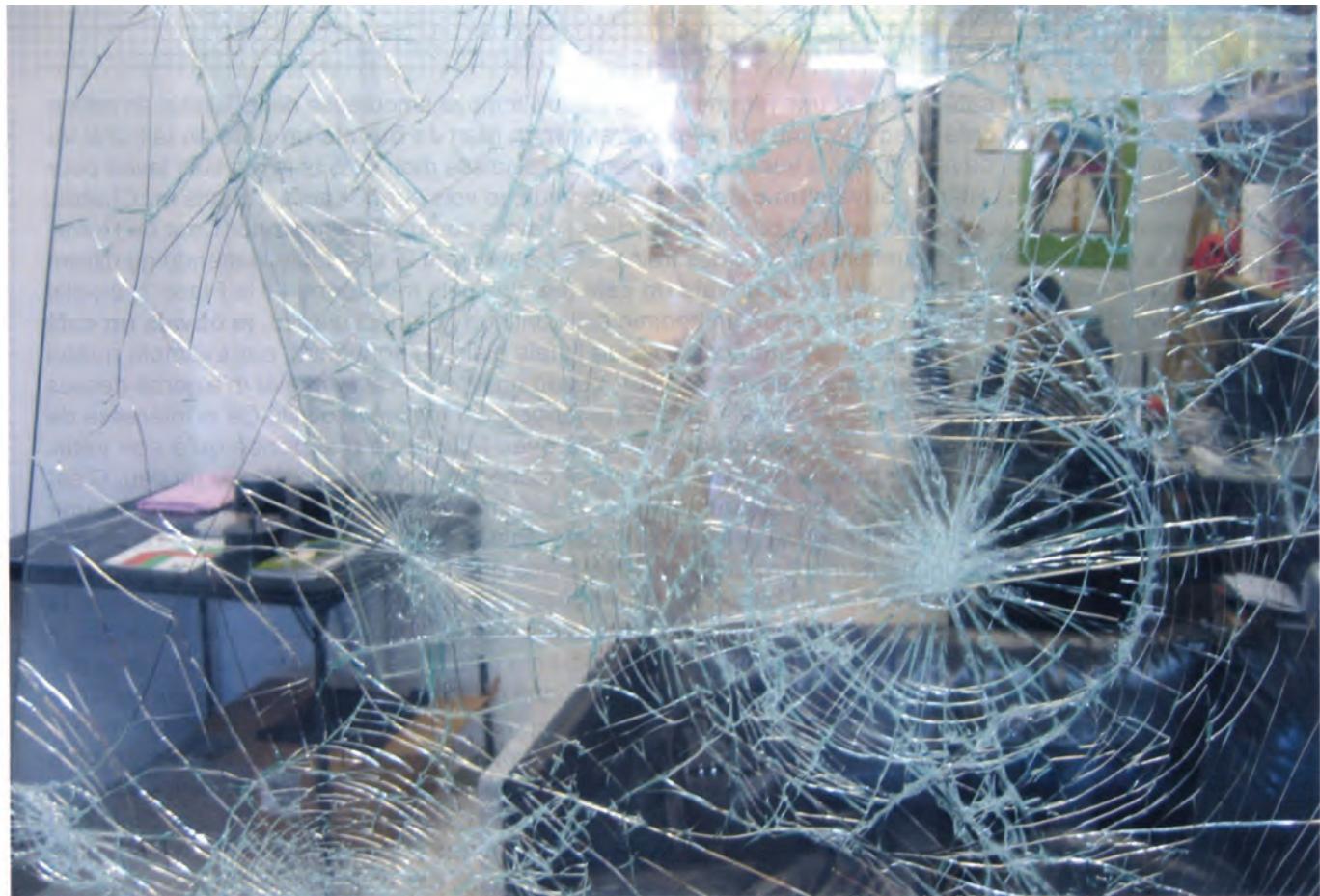
Il n'est pas bien difficile, tout compte fait, de se cacher derrière une fiction. Par contre, l'identité se complique lorsqu'il y en a tout simplement de trop. Tout enseignant en a fait l'expérience en voyant tous les enfants de la classe lever la main quand on leur demande qui a désobéi. Quand il y a trop de culpabilité, le processus d'identification du coupable ne fonctionne plus.

La notion même d'identité est plurielle : personne n'est qu'une seule chose mais peut être de sexe masculin, japonais, passionné de football et alcoolique. Mais l'identité est compromise lorsque ses composantes deviennent inconciliables, quand elles présentent trop de contradictions, quand elles sont trop incohérentes. L'identité peut être masquée, non par dissimulation, mais en accueillant à mains ouvertes la circulation de l'information, et en produisant une telle quantité, en fait, qu'on ne sait plus s'il faut se raccrocher à tel fragment plutôt qu'à tel autre, étant donné que le premier ne semble présenter aucun lien avec le suivant. Dans certains milieux, on appelle ça la schizophrénie.

Mais tout cela ne suffit toujours pas. Imaginez une chose qui serait composée non seulement d'innombrables morceaux contradictoires, mais où chacun des morceaux lui-même ne serait qu'un regard vide, un rien, un panneau « stop », un sans visage, un anonymat. Voilà qui pourrait faire un début de description de Reena Spaulings, « entité » de l'art contemporain new-yorkais qui est à la fois trop de choses et rien du tout. Reena Spaulings est née en 2004 sous la forme de l'héroïne d'un roman conçu par le collectif d'artistes Bernadette Corporation (non, ça n'est pas une vraie SARL). Les membres de BC avaient invité cent cinquante participants (vraiment ?) à écrire ensemble *Reena Spaulings*, l'histoire d'une jeune femme et de ses aventures dans les milieux new-yorkais de la mode, des superstars et de la désobéissance. Ce roman n'est que l'une des nombreuses formes adoptées par BC, dont des films, une collection de mode féminine, des albums et un magazine. En 2004 également, John Kelsey, l'un



Anthony Huberman. "Reena Spaulings : elle est douée mais ce n'est pas David Hammons,"  
02, (Paris) Spring 2006.



Seth Price first  
exposition monographique,  
Reena Spaulings Fine Art, 2004  
Vue de l'installation  
Courtesy RSFA, New York

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

des membres de BC, s'est associé à l'artiste Emily Sundblad, pour convertir une boutique de vêtements du Lower East Side de Manhattan en... quelque chose. Ils l'appelèrent d'abord « Sky High Art » (un jeu de mots avec les expressions anglaises « sky high » et « high art ») et l'inaugurèrent en collant aux murs des pages arrachées à un catalogue de l'artiste Michael Krebber. Pendant un temps, le local fut connu sous le nom « The Dress Shoppe » (La boutique de robes), parce que l'enseigne du locataire précédent était restée. Puis le choix sembla se fixer sur « 371 Grand », qui était tout simplement l'adresse du lieu. Finalement, ce fut « Reena Spaulings Fine Art », d'après le livre de la Bernadette Corporation de Kesley, indiquant clairement qu'il s'agissait bien d'une galerie d'art. Mais le flou perdure : les annonces par mail des expositions de la galerie proviennent toujours de l'expéditeur « 371 Grand ».

En tant que galerie, RSFA expose, représente et vend le travail d'artistes. S'ils ont un point commun, les artistes de Reena ont tendance à faire du *start-and-stop*, à trouver la liberté des fins de partie, à repérer l'énergie dans les interruptions. Ils font beaucoup de bruit en nous offrant beaucoup de rien. Ils nous mettent mal à l'aise (dans le bon sens du terme) parce qu'ils paraissent disfonctionnels ou mieux encore, *inopportuns (inconvénient)*, ce grand péché américain. RSFA n'est pas un lieu de l'économie fordienne, des efficaces chaînes de production, des raccourcis, mais un lieu où se développe une économie d'informations court-circuitées et de détours. Des dizaines de toiles de Merlin Carpenter empilées, chacune représentant une copie peinte à la main d'une critique de l'une des expos passées du RSFA; le sac à dos noir de Claire Fontaine (style « bagage abandonné ») dans un coin, plein à craquer de bonbons de Felix Gonzalez-Torres; des formes faites de plastique monochrome emballé sous vide, par Seth Price, tapissent des murs; d'innombrables tableaux et affiches, portant tous le nom « Josh Smith » griffonné en lettres immenses, par Josh Smith; de bonnes « mauvaises toiles » peintes en noir par Jutta Koether.

Et puis encore un détour. En janvier 2005, un an après être devenue une galerie – et un personnage de roman – Reena Spaulings fait l'objet d'une exposition individuelle chez Haswellediger & Co, une autre galerie commerciale, celle-ci à Chelsea. Elle expose (et vend) des drapeaux – ces éternels marqueurs identitaires – auxquels sont accrochées des moules (oui, Broodthaers est une âme

sœur), poupées ou fleurs de plastique. Un autre est peint d'un mur de brique, ou un est taché de vin rouge. Depuis, Reena expose ses *Money Paintings* représentant des billets de banque géants peints à l'huile ou à l'acrylique dans le style d'une aquarelle du dimanche. Dans le cadre de la Biennale du Whitney, cette année, elle expose deux stores de boutiques déglingués et recouverts de graffitis, commandés chez un fabricant de stores de Chinatown.

Là encore, il y a tout une lignée de commissaires ayant invité des lieux d'exposition à s'exposer eux-mêmes. Cette même Biennale d'ailleurs invitée la Wrong Gallery à proposer une exposition dans l'exposition. Mais habituellement, il s'agit alors de faire le portrait d'un lieu en tant que lieu, en tant que contenant pour autre chose. Reena Spaulings est un lieu d'exposition qui fait œuvre : c'est un contenant qui se ferme et qui exclut tout autre objet, un contenant qui ne révèle que son propre couvercle.

Certains d'entre nous sommes des œuvres d'art qui mutent en entités plus grandes, en plates-formes, en « lieux de rencontre ». Reena Spaulings fait le relationnel elle aussi : ça commence comme un espace d'exposition mais s'échappe, comme le fugitif de Baudelaire, pour se transformer en quelque chose de plus petit : un simple objet au milieu d'une exposition d'autres objets, un drapeau inanimé peint en sorte de ressembler à un mur de briques, attendant que vous vous heurtiez à lui sans pouvoir entrer. Mais en même temps c'est une galerie avec ses heures d'ouverture, du jeudi au dimanche, *open for business*.

P.S. : David Hammons n'en fait pas autant. Tout le monde sait qui il est. Il expose dans des galeries prestigieuses comme Ace et Zwirner, ou Salon 94. Il n'a pas de temps à perdre dans le Lower East Side, à faire de l'opposition, aux gags à la punk, ou à un art qui ressent le besoin de crier « Je suis conscient de moi-même !! ». Lui, il préfère éteindre les lumières de son atelier pour aller jeter un œil à la mauvaise toile de Miles Davis à la Biennale.

Traduction : Joëlle Marelli



Left: Reena Spaulings 2004 Book Right: Get Rid of Yourself 2002 Video still  
Courtesy The artist

## Bernadette Corporation

by Emily Pethick

Anarchy and fashion, identity, celebrity and a collaboratively written novel

Bernadette Corporation has been operating as a fictional corporation since 1994. Working from behind the blank facade of its logo, core members (John Kelsey, Antek Walczak and Bernadette van Huy) reorganize their internal structure on an *ad hoc* basis, frequently collaborating with others. They continually recast themselves in different guises, including a DIY underground *haute couture* label and the self-published magazine *Made in USA* (named after Jean-Luc Godard's 'worst film'), often working at the borders of art and fashion.

In 2001 Bernadette Corporation followed the anti-capitalist protest movement to Genoa for the demonstrations at the G8 summit. The resulting movie, *Get Rid of Yourself* (2002), centres on the accounts of the Black Bloc, a collection of activists and anarchist-affiliated groups that congregate at various events, often in order to disrupt mainstream demonstrations while preserving their anonymity with menacing black uniforms. Footage of violent clashes between armed police and activists is interspersed with glossy fashion images of 'radical noir', juxtaposing the bland passivity of high-capitalist fashion with a carnival of destruction and looting. A series of intercut vignettes feature Chloë Sevigny alone in an apartment, falteringly rehearsing statements made by the Black Bloc. Like Godard's strategy of casting of Jane Fonda in his 1973 film *Tout va bien* to popularize his post-1968 message of class struggle, Bernadette Corporation employ a well-known actor to disseminate their cause. At the same time Sevigny's slightly apathetic distance from the lines she reads serves as an acknowledgement of the limitations of an art project

that frames the radicality of others.

Recently the group have taken their foray into the realms of fiction in their collectively authored novel *Reena Spaulings* (2004), which involved the participation of over 150 anonymous writers and took three years to complete. Embracing the Hollywood studio screenwriting system, they invited a core group of writers including Jutta Koether and actor/poet Jim Fletcher to thrash out a storyline, farming out areas of the text and assigning different functions of the overall scheme. Seamlessly edited, the book is a summation of multiple experiences of, and perspectives on, its main subject, New York City, seen through the eyes of its central protagonist, Reena Spaulings – a 'material entity' dreamed out of the city, a place that is 'constantly exposed to the forces of communism'.

Reena is depicted as a continually morphing, interconnected, social, sexual being who moves through the city as it shapes her subjectivity; her body is an open, receptive, shared space, frequently coerced by others, 'a site for things to take place'. After starting out as a gallery attendant, in a series of obscure escapades she is headhunted as an underwear model, converses with Slavoj Žižek at an A-list cancer benefit Strokes concert, hobnobs with Karl Lagerfeld in ultra-hip night-club Waste, discovers an addiction to loss and becomes embroiled in anarchist actions, at which point she momentarily changes her name to Marks Engels.

The city also goes through a transformation. At one point it is devastated by a tornado that leaves behind it a trail of destruction, ripping through a gym of buff male models along the way. Spontaneous

gang violence sparks up around the city and a virtual war zone of civil unrest creeps in, a kind of hallucinatory uprising of collective unconscious desire. While Reena seems only too happy to detonate a bomb for one of her 'gang-guy' mates, one gets the feeling she is not wholly committed to the cause. With the help of her agent she eventually repackages her rebellion into the planning of a song-and-dance riot 'Battle on Broadway', proving capitalism's consistent ability to turn its own critique into fuel for its fire.

As with many of Hollywood's committee-authored leading characters, there is a lack of depth to Reena's persona. However, a literary masterpiece was never the ambition. Just as Godard sought with *Tout va bien* not only to make a political movie but also to make a movie in a political way, so this novel is more about the political connotations of the collective process of production than the final result. In the creation of a character whose 'thoughts and actions are not spanned by any author's mind' BC play a game that follows the same lines of their own quasi-corporate front and their profiling of the Black Bloc's refusal of political identity, subverting the capitalist fixation with 'individualism' and the art world's need for stardom – a literal 'getting rid of oneself'. At the same time, while BC's fictional 'incorporation' knowingly forms a sense of mystique around their activities, it also keeps their political position ambiguous. As Reena's agent Maris Parings says in the book: 'it was first of all a question of emptying out the space behind the company logo, which functions as a sort of mask or fog bank behind which anything at all, or nothing, could take place.'

Stillman Nick, "Reena Spaulings: an art brand", *Flash Art*, May 2006. pp.96-98.

# REENA SPAULINGS

AN ART BRAND

Nick Stillman

SECESSION

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



Stillman Nick, "Reena Spaulings: an art brand", *Flash Art*, May 2006. pp.96-98.

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

SINCE THE "FOUNDING" of Reena Spaulings sometime in 2004 a cloud of mystery has hung over the phenomenon. Who—or what—is Reena Spaulings? Painter of legal tender, rendered in the washy style of Michael Krebber? Sovereign nation/shadowy corporation? Fictional performer of are-you-a-genius-or-are-you-an-idiot dialectic of youth culture? A New York gallery? Yes... to all.

For the record: Reena Spaulings is a New York-based fictional artist whose primary catalysts are John Kelsey and Emily Sundblad, though a fluctuating cast of collaborators — Jutta Koether and Ei Arakawa are two of them — often participates in the collective's projects. Reena Spaulings Fine Art is a tiny, shoddy gallery in Manhattan's Chinatown that Sundblad and Kelsey opened in 2004, one of a small crop of galleries in the neighborhood that eschew codified presentational strategies of its Chelsea peers. With its perpetually drawn gate and sign saying nothing very legible, Reena Spaulings never really looks open. Finally, *Reena Spaulings* is the title and protagonist of a novel written by international collective Bernadette Corporation, a group of artists, writers, and filmmakers of which Kelsey is a member. In other words, Reena Spaulings is an art world brand.

Such manufactured mystery isn't uncommon in contemporary art; no less mainstream a publication than the *New York Times* recently profiled Reena Spaulings and other collectives participating in this year's Whitney Biennial, and the author, Holland Cotter, gently critiqued the Spaulings enterprise in relation to "matters of self-promotion." The allusion was likely to Spaulings' recent exhibition of a suite of Merlin Carpenter's paintings. The pieces, all on the ground and leaning in stacks against the wall, could be handled and leafed through by any visitor, like a casual flip through a magazine. The paintings were clumsily realistic depictions of actual pages from recent art publications (including *Flash Art*) with articles about Reena Spaulings Fine Art and its exhibitions. Self-referential, sure, but the gesture neatly inverted concrete art world relationships; critics whose opinions ostensibly determine an artist's reception found an uncomfortable spotlight on their own labor. And a second relationship was flipped: Reena Spaulings herself, Carpenter's dealer in this case, was instructed by the artist to paint washy backgrounds that would serve as a background for the articles Carpenter later painted. The dealer-as-pimp, taking a 50% share of the artist's labor for cutting a deal, was transformed by Carpenter into a laborer and a collaborator — forced to earn her 50% — restructuring the hierarchical dynamic that locates 'dealer' a rung above 'artist' on the art world food chain.

Spaulings works in the same ambiguously washy painting style for her series of "Money Paintings," sloppily painted banknotes, most of which are somehow defamed. *Money Painting (Purple Dollar)* looks like an unfinished American dollar. Conspicuous blank spaces pepper the abject note, as if the printer suddenly realized his shift was over and slipped into the



From top: SETH PRICE, first solo exhibition, 2004. Installation view; JOSH SMITH, Josh Smith Installation view. Opposite: EI ARAKAWA, Toward A Standard Risk Architecture, 2006. Performance documentation. All images: Courtesy Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York.

5 pm sunlight before finishing his work. *Money Painting (Dirty Euro)* is soiled with cigarette ashes. Defamation, in fact, pervades Spaulings' artistic oeuvre. In her 2005 show at Haswelldiger, Spaulings showed a legion of flags, as if proclaiming herself a sovereign queen with this regal showcase of what she dubbed in an enigmatic press release "hardcore art." Flags — normally symbols of allegiance and pride — became objects of abjection in Spaulings' hands. Many were caked in cruddy black paint, several were painted with a brick pattern, and one flowed into a basin, which included a photocopy from a porn magazine.

Spaulings' two pieces in this year's Whitney Biennial are both awnings manufactured by the Chinatown signage company Eastern Color Sign. *No.2*, a blank vinyl façade of a shit brown hue sliced in two, presides

dumbly in a corner like a discarded mist: a rough draft. When the curators conveye the awning would have to fit in a tight Spaulings requested that the staff "do they had to do to make it fit, for example a saw." *Emily Fisher Lan* is a white awning mounted above the Whitney's fourth-elevator entrance, partially obscured by mounted text that brands the museum's floor its Emily Fisher Landau Galler declaration of official sponsorship by the chairwoman of the museum's board. Spaulings' awning obediently replaces the shields, but also includes various unrepresentable nonsense-brands: images of crustaceans, a cell phone, a diamond, a watch — ready logos for Chinatown's many businesses of questionable legality, black holes of capitalism in New York's 10002 zip code.



Above: REENA SPAULINGS, Flag, 2004. Studio view. Below from left: MERLIN CARPENTER, Made in USA 2, 2005. Oil and acrylic on canvas; REENA SPAULINGS, Money Painting (Colonial Dollar), 2005. Mixed media on canvas, 91 x 198 cm. Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel. Photo: Florian Kleinfenn.

Each of these pieces take exalted objects/concepts — flags, museum patronage, money — and totally deflate them. Each exposes and implicitly attacks an example of capitalist structuring that, as Reena thinks to herself in *Reena Spaulings*, "...not only controls each situation but, even worse, also

tries to ensure that, most of the time, there is no situation." *Reena Spaulings* may be the best way to come to terms with the Reena Spaulings project as a machine of situation-creation. Written by a lengthy cast of Bernadette Corporation members and shifting exhilaratingly in narrative structure, the novel is a *Pierrot le Fou*-



like manifesto about ridding one's self bourgeois values and achieving mastery of one's thoughts, using Reena's twenty-year-old body and brain as its vehicle. Its denouement is hardcore art epitomized, a violent citywide spectacle of violence and anarchy, made possible by the ultimate hardcore art hurricane that devastates New York.

"Self-promotional" quibbles aside, the most valid criticism of Reena Spaulings might be that it's scenester stuff, that its fabricated downtown persona is a snobbish and escapist defection from the 'real world,' or at least the real art world. This is legitimate, but perhaps irrelevant to Reena Spaulings' concerns which seem to be to vacate a space (literally and figuratively) somewhere in the dizzying halls of 21st century capitalism that accommodates poetic dissent and willful defectors from real world and art world economic systems that blunt creativity (and criticism) by enveloping, branding and incorporating Bernadette Corporation began to blaze their path in the '90s and continues to today with its chameleon presence: as a fashion lab publishers of the confusing magazine *Mad in USA*, and filmmakers. Will Reena fall prey to vultures? Maybe. After all, she did become a thong model in *Reena Spaulings*. But then she strategically blew the cash on nothing much at all, forcing a total refashioning of herself and making creative complacency untenable. "Is there a dream of ongoing creativity directly connected to, inclusive of all of your activities?" Reena wistfully asks fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld in *Reena Spaulings*. The potential of this dream is the essence of Reena Spaulings.

*Nick Stillman is an artist, curator and writer. He is a curatorial advisor for P.S.1 Institute of Contemporary Art and lives in New York.*

*John Kelsey and Emily Sundblad are the directors of Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York. Reena Spaulings is a collective founded in 2004 in New York.*

*Selected solo show: 2005: "The One & Only Haswellediger & Co. Gallery, New York.*

*Selected group shows: 2006: "Make Your Own Life," IC Philadelphia; "Beware of a Holy Whore," Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum, New York. 2005: "Painters Without Paintings & Paintings Without Painters," Orchard Gallery, New York; The Baltic Triennial 2005, CAC, Vilnius.*



Kyle Bentley, « Reena Spaulings », *Artforum*, February, 2005.

**Reena Spaulings**

HASWELLEDIGER  
465 West 23rd Street  
January 22–March 19

Reena Spaulings is an art dealer (with an eponymous gallery on Grand Street), the title character of a Pynchonesque novel, and now an artist currently showing at the newish Haswellediger & Co. She is also, of course, a fictional persona dreamed up by the members of the collective Bernadette Corporation. The show provides an opportunity to investigate the various projects orbiting this elusive character. One can check out the hovel and a CD, titled *White Light/White Heat*, with tracks by the usual downtown suspects (Lizzi Bougatsos, Seth Price, Rita Ackermann, et al). But the main attraction is an assortment of flags, standing at attention or crossed like the crests of an oddly regal family of anarcho-bohemian LES scenesters. The flags—fabric remnants and tablecloths—are smeared with thick black paint or stained with (presumably cheap) red wine. They are adorned with plastic figures and utensils, fake flora, skull-and-bones appliqués, and various heavy metal detritus—"hardcore art" is, after all, what Reena claims to produce in the confessional letter that serves as the show's press release. Animated by the artist-marketers behind her, Reena is similar to Annlee, but, unlike Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno's mail-order manga character, Reena is never represented visually. She's "pre-aesthetic," absent and therefore ever-present—the hostess who left her party before it began. To quote our novelists: "How is she? Young and ugly and beautiful. All in one vehicle. A sponge, a vacuum."

—Kyle Bentley



"The One & Only," installation view.  
2005.

# The New York Times

## Art in Review; Reena Spaulings

By HOLLAND COTTER  
Published: February 4, 2005

Haswellediger & Co. Gallery  
465 West 23rd Street, Chelsea  
Through March 19

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Reena Spaulings is a fictional artist, performer and art dealer who is making a solo debut with this show, sort of. Behind the Spaulings name stands an international array of artists assembled for the exhibition by the collective known as the Bernadette Corporation. Formed in 1994, the collective has produced films, albums, magazines and books. One of its permanent members, John Kelsey, is co-director, with Emily Sundblad, of Reena Spaulings Fine Art on the Lower East Side.

The most visible component of the Chelsea installation is a suite of handmade flags, each the same size, each of different design, none exactly commanding a salute. One is painted with solid brick patterns, another is caked with tar, a third stained with red wine. Still others are festooned with mussel shells, plastic flowers, dolls and glass tubes.

The show also includes a collaborative novel titled "Reena Spaulings," compiled from passages written by numerous contributors. And in a few weeks a new CD will appear: a version of the Velvet Underground's classic "White Light/White Heat," recorded by artists recruited by Bernadette, among them Brian Degraw, Lizzi Bougatsos, Rita Ackermann, Jutta Koether, Seth Price, and Hanna Liden and Klara Liden. The latter two are sisters, and Klara Liden's recent solo show at Reena Spaulings Fine Art was one of the best of the season so far.

Reena Spauling's Chelsea debut is, by the way, Haswellediger & Co.'s third show since it opened last fall. Each has been strange and good, and unlike anything else in the vicinity. The gallery has, so far anyway, clearly been drawing on the kind of controlled anarchy associated with Colin de Land's American Fine Arts, recently closed on West 22nd Street. Maybe that spirit will continue to spread through Chelsea. And with any luck, there goes the neighborhood. HOLLAND COTTER

- Does Reena give interviews?
- Here we go...
- Can you tell us more about her stating: "The reason I opened Reena Spaulings Fine Art in the first place was because I thought the only sincere way to be an artist anymore was to be a dealer"
- This was a reference to the press release for Broodthaers' first gallery show, where he announced his career shift from poetry to visual art...  
The idea is that it doesn't matter what an artist makes so long as her work is circulated in a system over which she has no real control. On the one hand, becoming a dealer becoming an artist is about creating the conditions within which one's work can happen differently in a place like New York. In an intensely commercial context it is not enough to merely fabricate products. Reena Spaulings is a case of also fabricating the work's gallery and the dealer who represents it, even the other artists who conspire or compete with her, the working hours and the business climate they share, the press and the promotion, taking over all the aspects of one's exposure in the city as well as one's exposure to other dealers and other artists, etc. Reena prefers to displace herself between these two functions, artist and dealer, in order to exploit the fictional possibilities of both.

#### **What's fictional about those possibilities?**

- There is the flashy wheeler-dealer fiction, the New York woman fiction, the young genius fiction, the I am a machine fiction, the communist fiction, the booming market fiction, the suicidal fiction....
- A good friend, Claire Fontaine, has been working on an idea of the artist as ready-made, the idea that everybody who makes art is already somehow appropriating a prefabricated notion of authorship...but what happens when this notion is collectively taken up and shared between friends? To be an artist like Reena Spaulings or Claire Fontaine is to establish a figure and a function behind which a few people can find the freedom to work at a new distance from authorship, ownership, and signature style. The fiction allows a sort of detachment, a situation of desubjectivization, and thus another way of connecting ones production to that of others. And to fictionalize a dealer is to re-appropriate the business function, the power of representation and the production of value, and to occupy these things with other kinds of relations and behaviors. Fiction is maybe another way of saying the possibility of creating possibilities. And when the art world agrees to get sucked into your fiction it also agrees to give itself up to the possibility of being rewritten.

- Can you just tell us in a few words how you've been working, who you've been working with, and what type of events/shows have taken place in the gallery?
- The first show was an unauthorized Michael Krebber exhibition, with pages torn from the artist's catalogue and taped to the wall. This event was followed by a long backroom phase of almost total darkness and anonymity. The gallery changed its name to Sky High Art, and then changed it to something else again. There were week-long shows, one-hour shows, an anonymous group show under the title "Robert Smithson." Reena then started a country music band and the gallery was transformed into a sort of urban barn. Around this time, a Japanese performance artist named Ei Arakawa was hired to renovate the place using the latest digital gaming software. Then there was Stephan Dillemuth's midnight unveiling of his spaghetti sculpture in June. Throughout this first chaotic half of a year, the artists we show today began to appear, as if out of nowhere. These include Klara Liden, Josh Smith, Agathe Snow, Seth Price, Jutta Koether, K8 Hardy, Josephine Pryde, Claire Fontaine and many more.
- About Reena as a collective muse, artist and dealer combined - the dream profile... This particular frame, in parts structurally pulled out from a literary project (the eponymous Bernadette Corporation novel published this year) is an achievement in itself - in today's N.Y. particularly - a fluctuating space to work within and from. How does this space/frame inform the projects of the artists you invite?

"Reena Spaulings," the collectively-authored novel, is something else, a Bernadette Corporation project that happens to share the name Reena and some collaborators with the gallery. Reena Spaulings Fine Art and Reena Spaulings the artist, however, is not a Bernadette Corporation project.

Soon after Reena established herself as a NY gallerist, a monstrous painting-on-wheels by the artist Reena Spaulings appeared at PS1 Museum. This work was noticed by another gallery, Haswellediger & Co., which offered Reena her first solo show in Chelsea late last year. Then the book appeared and Reena-space was confused again. She became a gallery-artist-novel and New York has been following her radical displacements with curiosity and amazement ever since. The artists showing at Reena Spaulings instantly become conspirators and collaborators in this unpredictable process. They enter the backroom/brain/business on Grand St with a desire to become Reena-fied.

- The flags that the "überartist" made for the Haswellegiger Gallery were a brilliant response to the actual invitation to exhibit there. No single 'signature' but a multiplicity of them; flags but no flag-bearer (other than the name Reena Spaulings), no representations and not really consumable emblems of anything either, or? And then the V.U. White light/white heat covers.

The flags definitely filled that space in Chelsea. The record is actually three records: we remade WL/WH three times, song by song, with many different women singing under the name Reena.

- How the business going?
- Fine, we are doing our first art fair this summer.

**That's yet another type of exposure...**

**- And another way of keeping the fiction real.**

- Does Maris Parings and her likes show up at your openings?
- NYC is swarmed with this particular kind of power lady and they definitely show up. They have to. They are afraid of Reena. She is a shark and she is shaking things up in the business field. The other dealers watch her every move.

## NOTES ON MONEY (PAINTING)

by Reena Spaulings

I've made some money, I've made a few paintings, and I think I'm qualified to say something about it: they are both abstract. Like money, art takes on value, loses it again, circulates, is reproduced, is something we "make" (or fake), it comes between me and you, and it changes us. Lately I've been making *money paintings*. /

Marx said that money is a "real abstraction." Also, it has a "look" (not pretty or ugly, exactly), although it's not something you really look at. But how like a painting a 100 Euro note is, when I think of it. For example: Where does its value come from? Why does it move me so? Does it really exist? And did I really make it? Mostly, though, painting and money interest me for two reasons: each other.

They say that money makes money and we know that it also makes art - or at least has an influence on its making. The more money there is, the more art shows up (and the more it looks like art). My money paintings are not cash, they are sensations. They are expensive in every sense. I put everything into them. I really wasted myself. Now they are for the eyes, to be spent in a glance.

Sometimes I imagine something like an invisible, blacker than black market – something more like an anti-market. When the official market crashes you will finally be able to see these paintings as if for the first time. Only then will eyes open to receive uncountable sums just by looking or will they encounter total bankruptcy. For now, these are ambiguous and deviant notes, aesthetic cash, beautiful dollars. They are also counterfeits, forgeries, standing in for painting-painting. In this world, painting is work like any work. In the anonymous backroom, people are the money. They don't represent values, they literally embody and produce them. They move each other like money. In the backroom, images have no meaning other than themselves.

We found some very strange money that was used inside camps for displaced persons. A person displaced from Lithuania to Germany at the end of WWII had a special displaced money to spend – not Lithuanian or German but these temporary UNRRA notes that only had value on the inside (where nobody belonged). They were designed, made and spent inside the camp. Who knows what else was displaced as these notes circulated there? Did they buy socks or sex or potatoes? What were these things worth in a camp? What is the meaning of the short sentence that appears on the back of the five-unit note? All we know for sure is that this is ghost money and it's worthless now.