

A Strategy Hinted At: New Conceptual Art

In the main gallery this fall, Artists Space presents "A Strategy Hinted At," an eight-person exhibition of new Conceptual art featuring photography, installation, video and yoga classes. Artists in the exhibition include: Steven Carter, Brigitte Engler, Aki Fujiyoshi, Neil Goldberg, Benita-Immanuel Grosser, Orit Raff, Mike Sale, and Michael Zahn.

In the past few years, many young artists have established themselves as renegade Conceptual artists, producing bodies of work in which conventional logic is set aside for correspondences of a different sort. Their art is unpredictable as to medium, with any one body of work possibly including artworks made of found objects, fabricated things, photographs or commercial graphics. Similarly, much of the work appears ambivalent as to intent. Is it epistemological, philosophical or merely quirky? The touch is light; a strategy may be hinted at, but faintly.

New York artist **Steven Carter's** *Tile Series* dissolves the rigorous modernist grid mysteriously into nothingness: a shadow on the wall. Thin taut wires suspended from floor to ceiling and wall to wall form delicate armatures from which are suspended tiny ceramic squares, marking each intersection of vertical and horizontal. But these couplings hover and disappear into the foreground, leaving only the shadow each construction casts on the wall behind it. Carter, with subtle wit and delicacy, circles painting from a somewhat ironic distance, substituting questions of surface and support with investigations of depth and volume.

French artist **Brigitte Engler** started making needlepoint artworks after reading a book by John Lurçat, titled *La Tapisserie Française*, in which he advised artists who want to do a tapestry to start with needlepoint. One could find out what is special about tapestry art, he wrote, by thinking in terms of needlepoint: flat, juxtaposed colors, as opposed to the nuances of, say, brushstrokes.

In each of her jazzy, abstract needlepoints, a wood grain pattern made up of black and one other color wool thread shifts the eye back and forth to hallucinatory effect. Engler utilizes the tenets of pure transcendent abstraction in a playful, distinctly postmodern way, bringing symbolic and allegorical reference back to abstract form.

Performance is at the heart of New York artist **Aki Fujiyoshi's** work. Like performance and video artists since the '70s--Joan Jonas, Laurie Anderson and Chris Burden, among others--Fujiyoshi freely blends elements of drawing, sculpture, music video, and installation in her video artworks. Her on-going series, *Self-Portrait as Still Life* (videos in which she watches a video of herself creating a still-life from objects she uses every day), and her public access cable TV show, nON Television, have provided her with a structure for her loose-limbed *tableaux vivants*, and demonstrate a cunning awareness of formal issues that gave rise to the re-introduction of the self into art.

New York video and installation artist **Neil Goldberg** lets meaning and art emerge between words and sentences, objects and the environment. *Fax Project*, presented here, is an installation that consists of over 100 one-page letters recording his dreams, which he then faxes to Fortune 500 companies. A chance relationship is created between dream content and corporate recipient: an angry dream about an old boyfriend goes to Quaker Oats, one about his mother is sent to General Motors. Process-oriented, ritualistic and repetitive, Goldberg's work is formed by the context for which it was created; the artworks displayed are simply vehicles through which he produces meaning.

The Berlin-based duo that calls themselves **Benita-Immanuel Grosser** combine exercise with theory in their debut as yoga instructors at Artists Space this fall. The beginner and intermediate classes, titled (*Participating, at the same time*) are based on the method of Swami Vishnu-Devananda, and will take place in the gallery as part of the exhibition. Grosser has custom-made a yoga mat to conform to the shape art objects in the exhibition and to the gallery's columns. With this on-going participation/performance, Grosser challenges the dominant presence of the exhibition space by shifting the question of identity from artist to the space and situation in which he or she exhibits.

The photographs by **Orit Raff**, a twenty-six-year-old Israeli-born artist, consist of amusing references to the done-to-death subject of the body--specifically the female body-as spectacle. Raff's touch is appealingly light; she has a wonderful way with scale, and combines a sense of almost off-hand observation with wit and freshness. In one photo a bared arm resting on a piece of grid paper has a neat row of teeth marks impressed in the smooth skin; in a self-portrait, the artist stands in profile, dressed in a sexy, see-through chemise, with a bruise on her neck. The sexual, not to say erotic, overtones are obvious. But encoded in all her work is a larger, conceptual framework, a self-conscious attitude toward her materials and photographic conventions that layers sincerity with insincerity.

British artist **Mike Sale** proposes to throw a reinforced brick through an enormous plate glass window at the Neue National Galerie in Berlin as a tribute to its architect, Mies van der Rohe. Van der Rohe, whose last (unrealized) building was to be one which used brick as its main structural supports, surely would have approved. Exhibited at Artists Space is the brick, and Sale's diagrams mapping its trajectory.

New York artist **Michael Zahn** is a man of his time--that is, a postmodernist time that is arguably fractured into several simultaneous dimensions. The so-called "desktop document" exhibited here, titled *Zero, Ten (0, 1, 0...)* creates a maddeningly elusive subject at the intersection of a web of interdisciplinary violations, constructed from the nodes of drawing, painting, sculpture and architecture. Zahn's project includes writing, photos, notes, drawings, plans, models and other material related to the work's actual construction.

--Anastasia Aukeman, Curator