

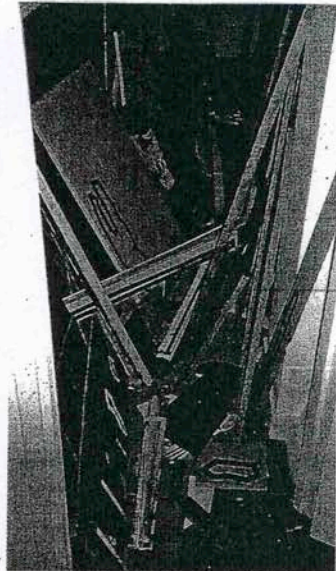
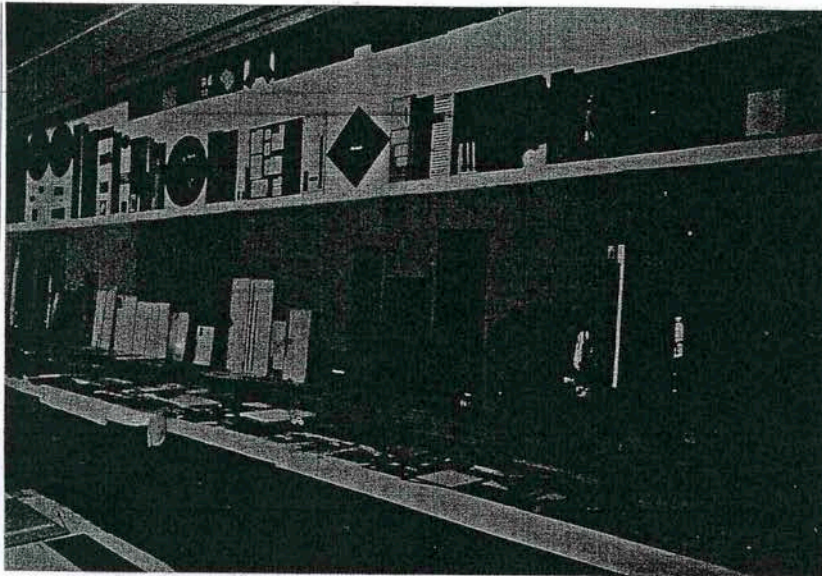
GLADSTONE GALLERY

Hanru, Hou, "Thomas Hirschhorn", Flash Art, Jan/Feb. 1997

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THOMAS HIRSCHHORN



Left: *Invitations* (installation view), 1994. Right: *Rencontres dans un couloir 1*, 1993.

SWITZERLAND IS PROBABLY the country which best maintains true harmony between its everyday reality and the tourist clichés: elegant beauty, order, tranquillity, cleanness... These are all part of the perceived Swiss culture. It would seem difficult to be an artist, in a more or less avantgarde sense, there. However, having decided to be an artist, then you may "automatically" go to the extreme, become radical, radically against "things," order especially, with a good sense of humor.

This is why Thomas Hirschhorn decided to be an artist, a true pioneer who takes great pleasure in provocation, and even attack. He also took a conscious or unconscious decision to "emigrate" to Paris: A metropolis associated with comfort, elegance, poetry, rational order, and poverty, "ugliness," brutality and the sense that he tends to "identify" with a dynamic, multi-cultural and exciting Paris, and detest another, universally beloved, bourgeois and conservative Paris.

Rejecting the kind of "French" or "Parisian" art which attempts to maintain a

kind of "chic" and sophisticated appeal, be it "neo-conceptual" or "neo-painterly," Hirschhorn takes to the streets in the poorest and racially/culturally-mixed *quartiers* to pick up his materials: old, dirty cardboard, abandoned wrapping paper, kitsch cloth and wooden panels... He gives these *déchets* or "scraps" new life by making them into so-called "fifty/fifty" collages (systematically occupying 50% of the surface of any object with found images or drawing). He then constructs installations and video works with these pieces: an enormous, disordered, and irritating universe. Surprising images that he collects from old magazines and wrapping paper and exposes in his works always make the public uncomfortable and sometimes even scandalized: they are exactly what a conservative public want to ignore because they are overtly political and "anti-aesthetic."

However, such political messages are never transmitted in reductionistic, easy-to-identify forms. Instead, they are embodied in extremely various, vital performances with objects and the body that always actively in-

volve the artist and the audience. The performances, rather than the subject matters, are veritable political struggles, as the artist states, "I want to struggle for equality and justice, the human equality by making my artistic work politically, by posing the questions politically, instead of posing political questions; this is a political work with meaning." As a natural result, Hirschhorn often brings his work to display in unconventional venues like cafés, streets, and private flats. His art therefore goes beyond the "high" Parisian and international art world and intrudes into the "low" reality itself.

Hou Hanru

Hou Hanru considers that in today's French and European art world, Thomas Hirschhorn is a unique figure who tries to bring art into an enlarged field of confrontation with reality. He began his career as a socio-political activist in visual creation, he develops his work in the art world without losing his energy and engagement. Rather, he is constantly challenging, with a great sense of humor, the boundaries of the art world and art in general.