

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Yablonsky, Linda. "Postcards from the edges." *Art Review*. September 2003, pp. 29-30



Postcards from the edges

Could the recent outbreak of internationalism in New York have been a reaction to national politics?

Perhaps it was just coincidence. While the US government works to close the country's borders to foreign terrorists, New York galleries joined the Whitney Museum of American Art in welcoming the work of artists who neither live nor work in America. Of course, foreign-born artists are always having shows here and frequently stay on as residents, but summer brought an especially high concentration of new faces from far-flung places.

At the Whitney, the art in "The American Effect: Global Perspectives on the United States, 1990-2003" was supposed to be good for us. Yet it was difficult to imagine how anyone living in the city that bore the brunt of the 2001 terrorist attacks - a city that is home to hundreds of immigrant cultures - could still be wondering how other nations perceive us.

"It's packing them in," the museum's publicist, Stephen Soba, observes. "Should be required viewing of all people in power," one visitor wrote. "I don't have enough elephant dung to show my appreciation," remarked another.

What most surprised the homies was not the gorilla-size mud people by Ousmane Sow or Bodys Isek Kingelez's futuristic Baghdad-on-Hudson. It was curator Lawrence Rinder's discovery of more than ▶

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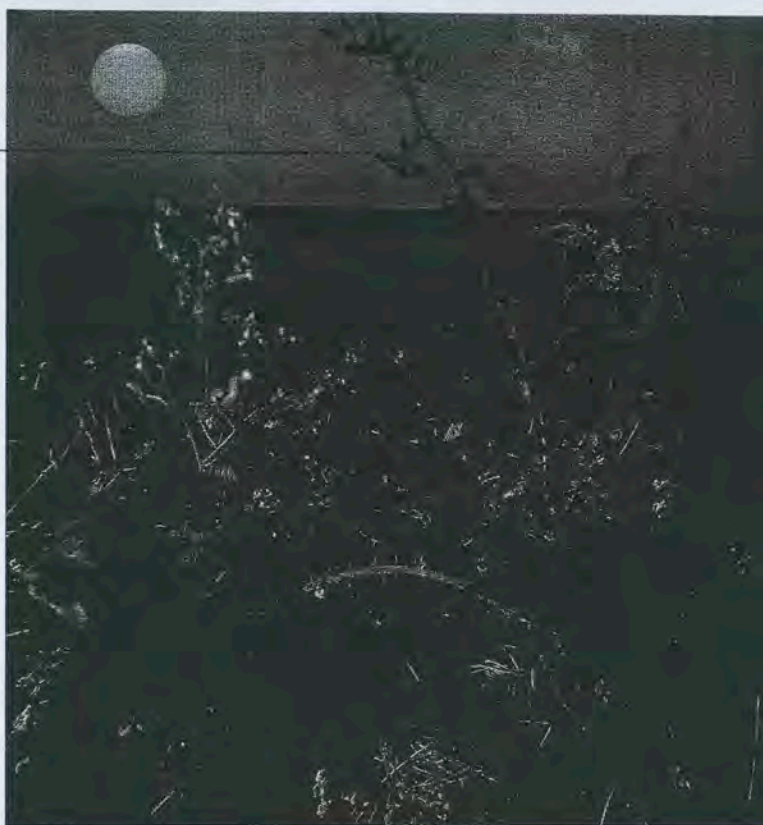
◀ 40 artists who had yet to register on anyone else's radar. "The art was already out there," Rinder said of his travels before September 11. Maria Marshall certainly was. The Bombay-born Brit had a video at the Whitney but she showed a better one at Team Gallery's summer group show, "Throw Back", where her class-conscious *Staying Alive* substituted an eight-year-old's birthday party for a scene in *Saturday Night Fever*. Damien Hirst was out there too, stealing the group show at Gagosian with *Armageddon* (2002), a large canvas densely matted with dead house-flies – horrible and brilliant.

But let others desperately seek weapons of mass destruction. At Barbara Gladstone, the mysterious Jean-Luc Mylayne invited would-be twitchers to his August exhibition of stealthy new bird photographs. The French photographer works so slowly that his appearance in any gallery anywhere is rare enough on its own. Mylayne has produced only 150 photos in 35 years. Each photograph takes him six to eight months. The nomadic artist waits that long while birds alighting in whatever location he is camping get to know him. Then he moves in for the close-up.

Some birds directly confront the camera. Some camouflage themselves in grass or trees. Some preen. And Mylayne has to get them right the first time he shoots. His work is not edited; each C-print is unique. Special lenses provide single frames with multiple perspectives. And each image captures a living calm so fragile that the slightest sound can startle. Mylayne does not generally resort to darkroom tricks. As the gallery's Maxime Falkenstein puts it, "His pictures are just what the natural world looks like to the naked eye. Artists love him." Collectors too: prices run to \$35,000. (A little bird said so.)

Only slightly more down to earth, the New Museum of Contemporary Art introduced the multimedia sculpture of José Antonio Hernández-Diez. He is something of a Venezuelan Gordon Matta-Clark, as concerned with social and economic realities as with concrete form. Works included a clothesline with decomposing, pork-fried skateboards. Welcome to New York, José!

Another South American took over Deitch Projects, as Eli Sudbrack's Assume Vivid Astro Focus [see Reviews, p101] became Brazil's answer to Andy Warhol's "Exploding Plastic Inevitable". But the summer's kinkiest gallery show was "The Milking Stool", Klemens



Gasser & Tanja Grunert's import from the University of Art and Design in Lausanne. Unlike the three-legged American kind, Swiss milking stools are peg-legged strap-ons and the artists' improved versions did not shy away from suggesting saddles, glory holes, dildos and breasts. No conceptualists here! They created actual objects from found form, function to follow, or swallow.

Ambivalence returned in "Torn Between Two Lovers", a group show exploring the fusion of photography and painting that sculptor Katharina Fritsch curated for, or rather sent to, Matthew Marks. (As she noted in a call from Düsseldorf, she hadn't visited New York in three years.) Her selections included painted photographs, photographs about paint and paintings from photographs. The curatorial theme grew from experiments of artists in Fritsch's hometown – Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, Andreas Gursky, Thomas Ruff and herself. That lot.

Except what got everyone's attention were the profoundly shocking Laserchromes by collaborating artists new to New York, Hans Brandli and Pia Fries. Their pictures involved brightly lit close-ups of squid squirming through putrid pink and green paint against Plexiglas.

"It's all playing with what's real or not," Fritsch said, hitting on what may be the Zeitgeist of the moment, as artists increasingly close the gap between art, popular culture and advertising, fiction and non-fiction.

So what we see now may be more than what we get, but Americans tend to be myopic. In his perceptive catalogue, the Whitney's Rinder noted that only 14 per cent of Americans hold passports. The *New York Times* reported that American readers, who have never shown great interest in even the giants of literature from abroad, will be buying fewer than ever books in translation because publishers are no longer printing them. Still, why worry? We have plenty of art.

Linda Yablonsky

"The American Effect: Global Perspectives on the United States, 1990-2003", to 12 Oct, Whitney Museum of American Art, NY 10021 (+1 212 327 2801, www.whitney.org); José Antonio Hernández-Diez, to 21 Sept, New Museum of Contemporary Art, NY 10012 (+1 212 219 1222, www.newmuseum.org)

Preceding page: Marlo Poras, *Mai's America*, 2002, video production still, at the Whitney. **Above:** Jean-Luc Mylayne, *No SIP July August 1982, 1982*, C-print, 123 x 123cm