



Cadences

ICON AND ABSTRACTION IN CONTEXT

February 16 through April 7, 1991

Organized by Gary Sangster, Curator
The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York

TERRY ADKINS

Born 1953 in Washington, D.C.
Lives and works in New York.

Terry Adkins is an artist and jazz musician whose art involves an ecology of materials. Adkins "recycles" objects from everyday life, altering them to create a dynamic equilibrium of carefully balanced asymmetrical parts. His works draw meaning from their physical qualities, as well as their visible traces of history. *Parker Gray*, for example, appears to be a large J-shape, carefully balanced at an angle on the floor. Markings on the wood, however, reveal that it is a window-frame removed from its original context, modified slightly and turned upside down. Adkins' work has been compared with the energy and spirit of African art,¹ although it also lies within the continuity of work by Western artists such as Constantin Brancusi.

Adkins believes we must recover from living in a world obsessed with the gigantic and the spectacular. His works question the materialism of Western society by transforming matter into meaning.



Terry Adkins, *Parker Gray*, 1990. Wood and tempera, 133 x 95 x 7 1/2". Courtesy of Ledisflam Gallery, New York

The sensory and materialist premises of Western philosophy and science have had a major influence on the state of prevailing conditions. We live in a world wherein quantity overwhelms quality; where information is more important than knowledge; where image veils the lack of substance; where the millionaire is the hero of modern life; where the monetary value of art increases by the degree to which it is absorbed by the gigantic. We must begin to seek alternatives to these deviations. We must recover from them.

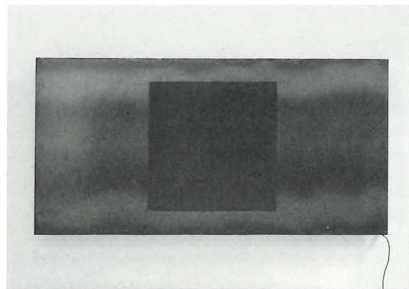
Terry Adkins

1. Lowery Sims, "On Notions of the Decade, African-Americans and the Artworld," *Next Generation: Southern Black Aesthetic* exhibition catalogue (Winston-Salem, NC: Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, 1990) p. 10.

BP

The members of BP were born in 1962.
The group lives and works in Nice, France.

BP is a collaborative group whose materials and methods come exclusively from the world of automobiles, petroleum, machinery, and oil. Adopting their name from the multinational oil company British Petroleum (B.P.), BP's work suggests artmaking as both a form of participation in and a critique of commerce and industry. *Untitled* is an "oil" painting which displays a thin film of used motor oil within a large iron frame. After slowly flowing down, the oil is pumped back up and recirculated. The work is a metaphor for the systems which govern the circulation of commodities and, more importantly, the circulation of meanings.



BP, *Untitled*, 1990. Sheet iron, motor oil, and electrical pump, 58 1/2 x 117 x 7". Courtesy of Galerie Jade, Colmar, France

We share our culture with millions of other people, that is the world culture of an industrialized and mediatized, occidental world. We use language restricted on purpose to a range of simple shapes that are inherited from the modern [art] "tradition." The materials we use come exclusively from the automobile and oil industry. They have a visual power of their own and they entice the viewer to experience the work directly. Still, their origin implies a virtual picture of the everyday world and the presence of concepts of movement and communication—concepts which we circulate within the universe of contemporary art in search of its boundaries.

BP

DANA DUFF

Born 1955 in Minnesota.
Lives and works in New York.

Dana Duff's work suggests the invisible forces that structure and affect cultural and natural forms. Duff selects her materials, in part, for their social and historical resonances, although these resonances may lie just beneath our conscious awareness. *New Currency*, for instance, is made of salt and steel and may remind us that salt was the first form of standardized currency. *Salt/Comb* suggests salt's crystalline structure, as well as the hexagonal shape of honeycomb. Her forms draw on both the organic logic of nature and classical systems of proportion.



Dana Duff, *Salt/Comb*, 1987. Salt, copper, and wood, 32 1/2 x 32 1/2 x 3". Collection of Saul and Ellyn Dennison, Bernardsville, New Jersey

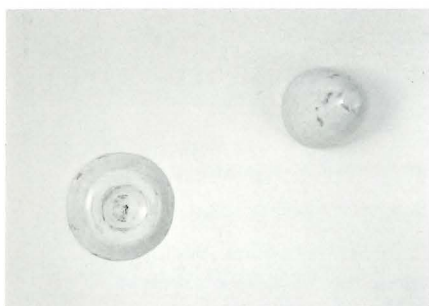
I speculate that there may be a body memory which is attracted or repulsed by certain substances, forms, images—literally a "taste" which is physically integrated in our blood, cell, and molecule—beyond what is learned. How do I respond to salt? To a golden proportioned rectangle? To a "right" form? Why?

Dana Duff

MARIA ELENA GONZALEZ

Born 1957 in Havana, Cuba.
Lives and works in New York.

Maria Elena Gonzalez's work exists in a metaphorical space that is neither wholly familiar nor wholly unfamiliar. Her work triggers multiple associations by drawing on viewers' stored perceptions of the world. *Nursing Missile* suggests the form of an egg or breast, as well as a bomb, bullet, or airplane nose, simultaneously evoking fertility, creativity, threat, and attack. Together, *Nursing Missile* and *Bowl* imply sexual union and the physical complementarity of machine parts. Gonzalez's mode of installation activates the wall and surrounding space, and, by extension, implicates the viewer in a direct physical encounter.



Maria Elena Gonzalez, left: *Bowl*, 1990, 14 3/4 diameter x 2".
right: *Nursing Missile*, 1990, 11 3/4 diameter x 11 1/2". Plywood,
wood putty, and lacquer. Courtesy of the artist

The sort of education I received and my personal interest in Western art makes my work predominantly informed by the modern and Western traditions. However, it is also influenced by my personal background, which is fertile with Cuban and Catholic traditions.

Given that materials already have a set of information and/or history built in, how I shape them, how I use their colors and textures, and how they convey ideas through their inner power determine the success of the work.

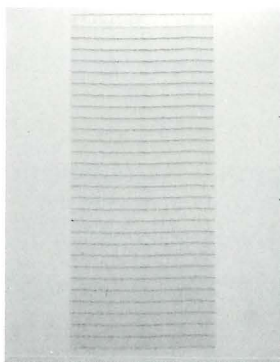
Triggering intellectual inquiry always adds a dimension to the art experience, but this may vary from viewer to viewer. I feel my work pierces to the level prior to the thought-forming stages, thus experiencing it comes about before understanding or comprehension.

Maria Elena Gonzalez

CLAUDIA MATZKO

Born 1956 in Providence, Rhode Island.
Lives and works in New York.

Claudia Matzko is concerned with the relationship between individuality and collectivity, spirituality and concreteness, historical trace and material presence. Matzko's work deals in part with the dilemma of women's absence from the space of written history. *Untitled*, her current installation, is made of over 150,000 tiny rectangular glass slide covers and dressmaking pins. While its grid pattern suggests an aesthetic space removed from the "real" world, its transparency and reflective quality enable it to incorporate any environment in which it is installed. Its materials refer to both research science and women's domestic labor. The visual effect is one of unfixed reflection where forms exist in an ongoing process of becoming visible and dissolving into invisibility.



Claudia Matzko, *Untitled*, 1990. Glass tubes and fishing line,
103 x 44 x 1/2". Courtesy of Wolff Gallery, New York

The process of making the work is repetitive, not unlike factory work or chanting, and much of the works can be assembled by anyone. I am interested in relative size—cells that grow and end life, or how one reconciles the enormous capacity for individual feeling and the minute amount of space we occupy as bodies in our world.

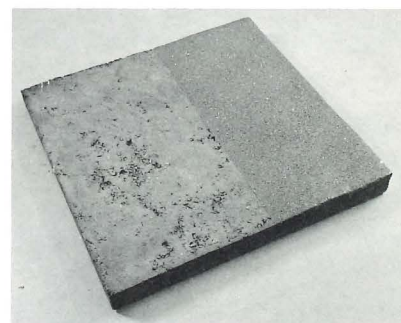
The idea of a physical and mental void—a space of emptiness and utter and complete silence—has become central to my work. It is a land outside of grammar, to be feared and respected but not touched or filled. My guess is that it is a feminine space, although I do not know. It has to do with accepting that what cannot be known or theorized may be more valuable than what we do know, and so a space is found for silence.

Claudia Matzko

CURTIS MITCHELL

Born 1953 in Bayshore, New York.
Lives and works in New York.

Curtis Mitchell's works are calculated fabrications of the arbitrary. *Untitled (Foil)*, an unrolled length of aluminum foil, transforms a small, efficiently packaged household item into a large-scale floor piece reminiscent of body and landscape art of the 1970s. Ironically, *Untitled (Foil)* relies on the inherent properties of an ordinary household item to create an elegant and striking work of art. *Untitled (Subway Stripe)* looks like an actual fragment of subway platform but is really a facsimile. Artificially soiled to give the appearance of authenticity, its relationship to history is as contrived as a pair of pre-washed jeans. Mitchell's works wryly comment on the relationship between artifice and authenticity.



Curtis Mitchell, *Untitled (Subway Stripe)*, 1990. Dirt, cement, and subway stripe, 3 x 34 x 34". Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

My materials and procedures are empirically determined. Abstraction without superfluous artifice. Beauty is irrelevant.
Curtis Mitchell

TOMOHARU MURAKAMI

Born 1938 in Tokyo.

Lives and works in Tokyo.

For Tomoharu Murakami, painting is a ritual whose process is associated with prayer and meditation. For Murakami, the act of painting is more important than the finished product. When successful, the artist feels that it enables him to transcend his individuality to connect with a universal spirit.

In *The Stations of the Cross*, a series of 14 prints, Murakami uses the story of Christ's Passion as a means of exploring contemporary experience. According to the artist, our contemporary incapacity for suffering—through avoidance or repression—and our concomitant obsession with pain and violence represent two sides of the same coin, an inability to confront and accept the passion of our existence. *The Stations of the Cross* represent an immersion in suffering and the hope of redemption.



Tomoharu Murakami, "Fourteenth Station," *The Stations of the Cross*, 1989. Print from two stones, edition 1/8, 25 1/2 x 19". Courtesy of James Corcoran Gallery, Santa Monica
Photo: Shigeru Yokota Gallery, Tokyo

My work is produced from the tradition of the East. However, artwork is the result of a long process which requires a purification of one's innermost voice. If the work could reach absolute universality, there would be no border between the East and the West. It is not important to comprehend my work, rather it is more important to appreciate it through your inner being.

Tomoharu Murakami

CHARLES RAY

Born 1953 in Chicago.

Lives and works in Los Angeles.

Charles Ray began his career as a performance and body artist in the 1970s. His early installations often included his own body as a sculptural element. The works were theatrical and created an atmosphere of anticipation which implicated the viewer in a visceral, empathetic relationship. Many of Ray's works explore the relationship between the body and technology. When asked to do an artist's project in the *Cadences* exhibition catalogue, Ray chose to create 5,000 original handmade drawings, rather than have a work reproduced mechanically. Other works investigate the nature of illusion, a traditional concern of Western art which Ray updates through the use of technical apparatus and abstract vocabularies. *Spinning Spot* consists of a 20" disk spinning at 3,500 rotations per minute. The disk spins so fast that its movement is invisible to the human eye.

The works included in *Cadences* are from a series of boxes, each composed of a different substance—steel, printer's ink, and aluminum. None appear exactly as they are. $32 \times 33 \times 35 = 34 \times 33 \times 35$ looks like a cube, but is actually a rectangle recessed into the floor. *Ink Box* appears solid, but is really filled with fluid. These works continue Ray's interest in engaging, provoking, and teasing a response out of his audience.



Charles Ray, *Ink Box*, 1986. Steel, 200 gallons of newspaper ink, 36 x 36 x 36". Courtesy of Burnett Miller Gallery, Los Angeles

[With the Ink Box] it's not about boxing anxiety, it's about creating anxiety. If you spill ink all over the floor, there's no anxiety there. You've got a mess. But if you have a potential for a mess, you have anxiety. Anxiety only exists when there's potential for disruption, right?

Charles Ray

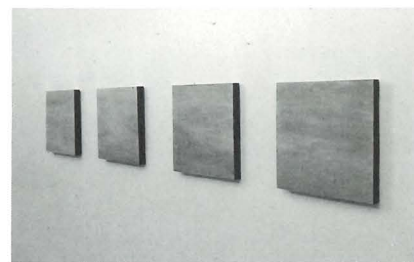
From Lucinda Barnes, *Charles Ray* exhibition catalogue (Newport Beach, CA: Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1990) p. 18.

EVA SCHLEGEL

Born 1960 in Hall, Tirol, Austria.

Lives and works in Vienna.

Eva Schlegel's floor pieces, made of thick layers of graphite, resemble lead or other heavy metals, substances whose weightiness is accentuated by the suggestion of gravity pulling them to the ground. Schlegel's wall pieces, made of oil paint and lacquer, are suggestive of various natural substances—water, landscape, sky—without referring to any one specifically. Schlegel is interested in placing viewers' perceptions into flux, cultivating confusion and creating an infinite space into which we can project our own desires.



Eva Schlegel, *Untitled*, 1990 (detail). Oil on plaster, 6 pieces 19 1/2 x 19 1/2" each. Courtesy Shoshana Wayne Gallery, Santa Monica and Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna

My work is mainly a preoccupation with space in both theoretical and physical terms (e.g. architectural spaces, cosmic dynamic space conceived in mathematical equations, undefined depth space, space of conception, imaginary space, etc.)

The shiny surface of my work is attractive and seductive and "reflects" the consumer's instinct.
Eva Schlegel

Cadences ICON AND ABSTRACTION IN CONTEXT

Cadences: Icon and Abstraction in Context

explores the nature of cultural meaning embedded in abstract forms. The exhibition presents a range of work by artists from diverse communities to examine links between art and social experience. It demonstrates that although works of abstract art may share certain visual similarities, the content of abstract art is not universal, but culturally specific and developed from particular contexts and frames of reference.

The artists in *Cadences* draw on diverse artistic strategies and systems of belief. Some suggest meanings that lie just below conscious awareness, while others engage with critical theory or make direct political commentary. Some heighten our awareness of our own bodies or explore the possibility of sense memory, whereas others view artmaking as a form of meditation or spiritual practice.

As an investigation of contemporary art *Cadences* considers not only the meanings of specific works, but the role of abstraction in a media-saturated, information-dominated society. In contrast to the illustrative and frequently authoritative forms of representation favored by the media (and by artists who critique the media) *Cadences* explores forms of knowledge and communication that sometimes elude analytical understanding. Access to these forms of knowledge may come through bodily sensation or the experience of space, rather than through pictures or words. *Cadences* explores the possibility of an area in contemporary life outside the incessant flow of media information.

Cadences suggests that perhaps our ways of knowing the world—like our histories, practices, rituals, and beliefs—are far more diverse than we are usually led to believe, that perhaps we are connected to the world and to each other by powerful experiences that defy verbal or pictorial description. This viewpoint does not resist the claim that meaning relies on a play of signs, rather it encourages an expanded notion of what constitutes a sign in diverse and mutable contexts.

ALSO ON VIEW February 16 through April 7, 1991

LOVE FOR SALE...FREE CONDOMS INSIDE

Gran Fury with PONY

Gran Fury is a collaborative artists group that creates public projects which seek to both inform a broad audience and provoke direct action to end the AIDS crisis. In their commitment to addressing the diverse communities of people whose lives are affected by AIDS, Gran Fury has begun working with other groups for the first time. For this project, they are collaborating with PONY (Prostitutes of New York) to address the misconceptions surrounding AIDS and prostitution.

Gran Fury's window installation has been funded by the William Olander Memorial Fund, with the continuing support of the Jerome Foundation, The Greenwall Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

AND 22 MILLION VERY TIRED AND VERY ANGRY PEOPLE

An Installation by Carrie Mae Weems

Carrie Mae Weems' installation combines photographs and text to confront and expose embedded stereotypes concerning Afro-American culture.

And 22 Million Very Tired and Very Angry People has been funded in part by the Jerome Foundation, The Greenwall Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

LATE 20th CENTURY STILL LIFES

Paintings by Manuel Pardo

Manuel Pardo's extraordinary series of generic still-life paintings, intended as commemorative objects, also examine the nature of painting in postmodern society in new and provocative ways.

Late 20th Century Still Lifes has been funded in part by the Jerome Foundation, The Greenwall Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

For more information on artists in the exhibitions, please consult the Museum's Soho Center Library.

Funding for *Cadences: Icon and Abstraction in Context* has been provided by the New York State Council on the Arts and the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

Cover image: Claudia Matzko. Detail, maquette for *Untitled* installation, mixed media, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1991. Photo: John Berens.

Photo credits: photographs of works have been provided by the owners or galleries cited, except for Maria Elena Gonzalez, *Bowl* and *Nursing Missile*: photo by Fred Scruton.

PANEL DISCUSSION

**ABSTRACTION AND
MEANING : HISTORICAL
REFLECTIONS AND
CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS**

Sunday, March 10, 2:00 p.m.
at Uris Center Auditorium,
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
(Fifth Avenue at 82 Street)
Free with museum admission
No reservations necessary

The New Museum joins The Metropolitan Museum of Art to present this panel discussion in conjunction with both *Cadences: Icon and Abstraction in Context* and *Kazimir Malevich, 1878-1935*, on view at the Metropolitan.

Panelists:

Terry Adkins, artist

Dana Duff, artist

Eleanor Heartney, art critic

Gary Sangster, Curator, The New Museum

Moderator: Lowery Sims, Associate
Curator of Twentieth Century Art at
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The New Museum
OF CONTEMPORARY ART

583 Broadway New York, NY 10012
(212) 219-1222