

AND 22 MILLION VERY TIRED AND VERY ANGRY PEOPLE

CARRIE MAE WEEMS
WorkSpace

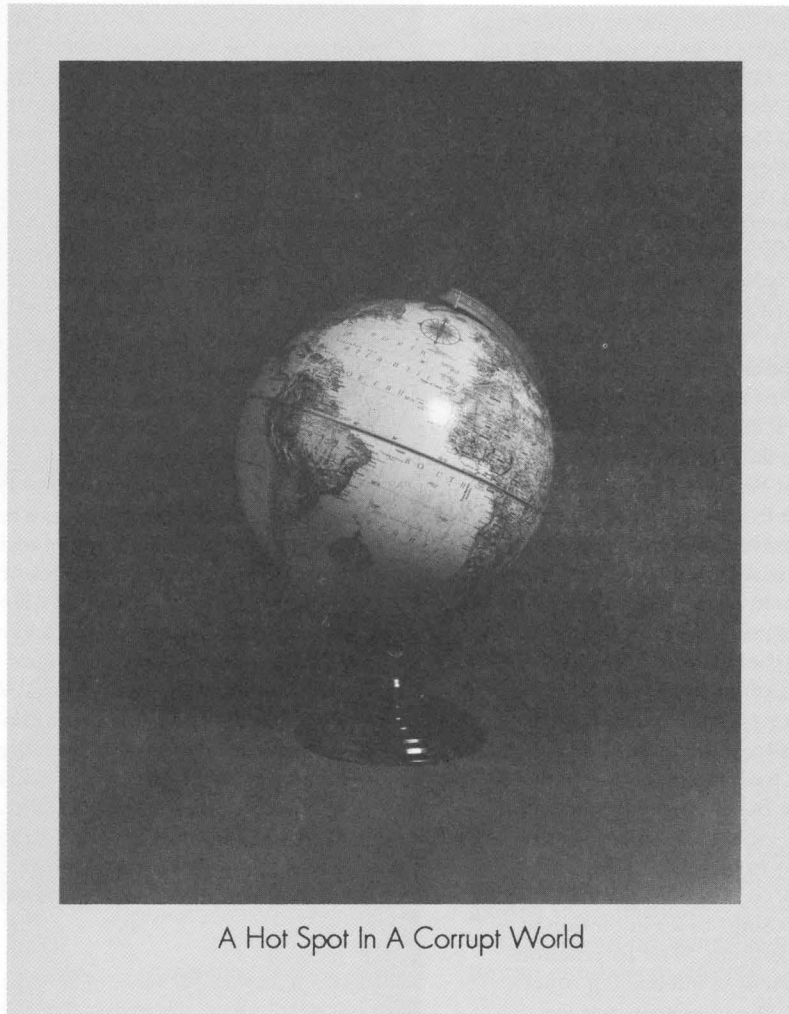
February 16 - April 7, 1991

The New Museum of
Contemporary Art, New York

Carrie Mae Weems' installation *And 22 Million Very Tired and Very Angry People* sets up a visual and textual polyphony in the space of the ten-by-twelve foot gallery, a fugue of dissident positions directed against oppression. Where Weems' earlier work has dealt specifically with complexities of African-American experience and culture, this new work situates itself in a shared ground of suffering that cuts across racial boundaries:

suffering associated with class. By way of evocative, iconic images appearing in a series of photographs, and contending voices materialized as text on banners that, suspended from the ceiling, reach toward the floor, the installation addresses itself to the question of collective action.

Fifteen framed large format Polaroid photographs circle the space. Weems' first works in color, each presents an object rich in associative references, isolated against and yet emerging from a monochromatic ground. The restricted color range of the photographs is dominated by sepia, the warm brown color of their common ground, and helps to open the historical scope and register of the installation. At the same time, it suggests the skin color litany that forms the textual component of a suite of portraits of young African-Americans in Weems' book *THEN WHAT? Photographs and Folklore*: "DEEP BLACK, ASHY BLACK, PALE BLACK, JET BLACK, PITCH BLACK, DEAD BLACK,



A Hot Spot In A Corrupt World

Carrie Mae Weems, "A Hot Spot In A Corrupt World" from *And 22 Million Very Tired and Very Angry People*, 1991, Polaroid print with text on matting. Courtesy of P.P.O.W.

BLUE BLACK, PURPLE BLACK, CHOCOLATE-BROWN, COFFEE, SEALSKIN-BROWN, DEEP BROWN, HONEY BROWN, RED BROWN, DEEP YELLA BROWN, CHOCOLATE, HIGH-BROWN, LOW-BROWN, VELVET BROWN, BRONZE, GINGERBREAD, LIGHT BROWN, TAN, OLIVE, COPPER, PINK, BANANA, CREAM, ORANGE, HIGH YALLA, LEMON. OH, AND YEAH CARAMEL."

I say now, if the white folk
fight for thyself, and the
Black folk fight for thyself,
we gonna crumble apart...
There's whites that suffer,
there's Indian people that
suffer, there's Mexican
American people that suffer,
there's Chinese people that
suffer, and I'm perfectly willing
to make this country
what it have to be.
We gonna have to fight
these battles together.
Fannie Lou Hamer

Every individual is not only the
synthesis of contemporary
relationships, [s/]he is also a
summary of the entire past.
It may be objected that what
each individual can change is
very little. This is true up to a
point. But since each person
can join others who want the
same changes [s/]he can
multiply [her/]himself an
imposing number of times.
If the change desired is
"rational," historically possible,
then even a very radical
change can be achieved, one
that did not seem possible
at first sight.
Antonio Gramsci

Across each photographic image, a short text appears, a "caption" that plays with the device of captioning to add depth as well as the texture of diversity, both tonal and referential, to the range of associations. An old manual typewriter, with blank paper rolled in and ready, is somewhat anachronistically labelled "An Informational System," and points to Weems' own methodology here— from a limited set of symbols, an array of meanings waits to be generated. It also indicates ideas of hand-made revolution, of the efficacy of individual actions within a monolithic system, and of the possibility of individual actions linking up with others in a larger struggle, that are the installation's main themes. "By Any Means Necessary," deadpan in its irony and yet dead serious, offers an ordinary rolling pin to suggest that even tools of subjugation can become instruments of resistance, dependant only on mobilizing the user's initiative and powers of creative reinterpretation.

Taken together, the "captioned" photographs establish an atmosphere of volatile stillness, complicated by Weems' characteristic wit and the sense of an historical "moment" that sweeps forward from the nineteenth century. "A Hot Day" shows an old-fashioned rotary fan, evincing conditions when the common folk might grow restless and the ruling class a bit uneasy, conditions that recall, among others, the antebellum south, the Detroit and Watts riots of the 1960s, and summer in the inner city today. "A Hot Spot In A Corrupt World" presents just that: a globe on which the reflected source light is gathered in a single point that obliterates a portion of the image — a hot spot in technical photographic terms — situated on the western coast of north Africa. While the musket held by the black man in the cropped image "An Armed Man," together with his attire, suggest the period of the Civil War, the image of "A Veiled Woman," her sheer black veil held aloft to shield her face, conjures up the memory of the Algerian War against French colonial occupation, and the explosive, influential film about that war, *The Battle of Algiers*. All the tools necessary to revolutionary action are laid out: "A Little Black Magic," a small and talismanic piece of African statuary, joins with "Some Theory," an unidentified book standing ready to be read; "A Hammer" and "A Sickle" meet up with "A Bell To Ring" — specifically, a small liberty bell — and "A Song To Sing" to set in motion at once the strains of the Communist anthem, "The Internationale," and Pete Seeger's '50s-era anthem of left-leaning American idealism, "If I Had a Hammer." The liberatory impulse behind the two superpowers is thus summoned up, and reverberates in tune with a world order recently and rapidly unraveling. "A Precise Moment In Time," showing a simple alarm clock, stretches taut the sense of struggle slowly gathering momentum.

Down the center of the gallery, white silk-like banners lead in an opening, alternating file toward the back wall, where "AND 22 MILLION VERY TIRED AND VERY ANGRY PEOPLE" — picking up where the Seeger song leaves off— is written out in

relief. Each banner bears a silk-screened text, whose sources range from Malcolm X, Rosa Luxemburg, and Antonio Gramsci, to Fannie Lou Hamer, Angela Davis, and Ntozake Shange. Each addresses, from a specific position shaped by historical circumstance, the question of effecting change at once within and against those circumstances. Luisah Teish offers instructions for a hex: "Theory is important, it assists in grounding one's philosophical principles. But in the face of the enemy one needs to shore up one's courage. Follow these procedures. . . ." While embracing the role of theory in formulating and, to an extent, fomenting action against oppression, Weems' installation places theory on a par with other forms of nourishment, other tools, from "A Dagger" to "A Cool Drink of Water," the latter of which might describe the formal elegance which balances the work's hot content. At one level, lettered across the free-floating banners that brush the viewer's body as he or she traverses the space, the texts form a landscape of language and thought through which diverse images appear. Extending into a larger discussion the exchange between folkloric narratives and photographic images of Weems' previous work, this installation more specifically spatializes and spells out ideas inherent in her *American Icon* series, which deal with the ideology embedded in ordinary domestic objects.

With this, images of the present are also engaged, carried as inevitable if invisible baggage into the gallery by each viewer. At this writing, it is images of war as a relentless mini-series, shot on exotic location, a spectacle of technological prowess that gives the lie to Western discourses of development, diplomacy, and progress. *And 22 Million Very Tired and Very Angry People* returns the space of consideration and historical depth to the exigencies of the present, space and depth banished by purveyors of our daily information. Weems' emphasis in this work on the insidious alliance of class loyalty with racial bias puts a finger on the pulse of the current conflict: despite familiar invocations of our national interest in the war in the Persian Gulf, it would seem that securing cross-national class relations has taken precedence over all domestic considerations, just at the point that growing communities of color have begun to affirm their share in the population of the U.S.

Laura Trippi, *Curator*

CARRIE MAE WEEMS was born in Portland, Oregon, in 1953. She has recently had one-person shows at P.P.O.W. in New York, CEPA Gallery in Buffalo, and the ICA in Boston. Her book *THEN WHAT? Photographs and Folklore* was published by CEPA in 1990. She lives in Northampton, Massachusetts, and teaches at Hampshire College.

LOVE FOR SALE . . . FREE CONDOMS INSIDE

GRAN FURY with **PONY**
Broadway Window Installation

February 16 - April 7, 1991

The New Museum
of Contemporary Art,
New York



In 1987, the late William Olander, then curator at The New Museum, invited ACT UP, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, to create an installation in the Museum's Broadway Window. The result was *Let the Record Show...*, a work which employed forms ranging from an electronic display board to photo blow-ups and mock tombstones to chronicle the rise of the AIDS crisis and reveal its political dimensions—that is, its basis as a crisis within the repressive, and aggressively homophobic, rhetoric of the conservative right, and the financial and legislative resources that this rhetoric commands.

Another outcome was the formation of the AIDS activist art collective Gran Fury from the members of ACT UP who conceived and produced the installation. An arts group whose target audience lies largely outside the artworld, Gran Fury has gone on to produce a series of public art projects that call attention to the ways in which public policy and public opinion concerning AIDS are shaped by exclusionist values. "KISSING DOESN'T KILL," reads one of Gran Fury's more celebrated poster projects, "GREED AND INDIFFERENCE DO." Deeply seated myths and fears about the cultural other often play on myths and fears about sexuality itself; in the ideology surrounding AIDS, such a collusion has abetted in the spread of the epidemic, allowed to run relatively unchecked not only through the gay male community, but also, increasingly, through disenfranchised African-American and Hispanic populations, apparently considered expendable.

As the demographic face of AIDS has changed, Gran Fury's billboard, bus and subway poster, and, most recently, bus shelter projects have correspondingly broadened their focus. They have achieved a high degree of public visibility, provoking controversy, and even censure. Unapologetically, Gran Fury's interest is in using art and artworld funding to accomplish patently political ends: the group's avowed aim is specifically to provoke direct action to end the AIDS crisis. At the same time, somewhat paradoxically, the group has gained the admiration of the artworld, garnering serious critical reception as well as invitations to participate in prestigious exhibitions. In fact, Gran Fury's work is extended by

I'm a Safe Sex Pro

*Do not ask me to have sex without a condom.
Condoms can stop diseases like AIDS,
syphilis and herpes.*

I use condoms without exceptions.

*If I did not, I would not be safe. And neither
would you. For more information about safer
sex call PONY at (212) 713-5678.*

a post-project afterglow of media attention. Regardless of its mandate, or rather because of it, the group is not content to employ standard aesthetic forms toward pronouncing a tidy political agenda, nor simply to appropriate media techniques and motifs, reinvesting conventional patterns with convention-questioning content. Instead, Gran Fury appropriates, and orchestrates, artworld and media together, in all their aspects, as highly sophisticated systems for disseminating values and information. Because the idea of AIDS is embedded in a network of beliefs whose implications are at once profoundly personal and extremely far-reaching, the work of Gran Fury addresses issues whose reverberations go beyond an accomplished media critique (though it is that), and beyond sound-bite sloganeering (though it is that as well). It touches and taps regions of covert awareness where repression itself resides, from the repressed of sexual and racial taboo to the swallowed anguish of irretrievable loss. Between the introversion of mourning and the collective action that is militancy,¹ Gran Fury fashions works that form a path — savvy, agile, and incendiary — giving voice to fear and grief, translating private trauma to the theatre of speech, and with each new project reaffirming the assertion that SILENCE = DEATH.

For the current installation in the Broadway Window, Gran Fury has collaborated with PONY (Prostitutes of New York), a sex-workers' advocacy organization committed to the decriminalization of prostitution, to address a twin set of concerns: on the one hand, the mythology that underlies and structures the stigma attached to sex-workers in general and prostitution in particular, and, on the other, misconceptions surrounding prostitution and AIDS.

During the past ten years, the AIDS crisis as managed by the media and public policy has contributed to the reinvigoration of a quasi-Protestant ethic, and to the institution of what could be called a new hygienic movement (sex, cigarettes, and alcohol are out, health food and exercise are in). Powered, too, by the imperatives of professionalization, and the expansion of the "workday" and the "workplace" into *anytime*, *anyplace* thanks to computerization, this hygienist work ethic depends on the denial of pleasure — pleasures of the flesh, specifically, since pleasures of the marketplace, and also of the mechanized "workout," are necessary to its operation. The aging of the baby boom generation has lent its anxieties to fuel these developments, and also has resulted in a widespread, sometimes frantic, often nostalgic, reinvention of the idea of the American Family. (As if the

Americans love and hate sex. Sex sells products, fuels popular novels and Hollywood's star system. And yet, when this commodification becomes literal, when sexual pleasure is bought and sold, Americans are terrified. Sex professionals bear the burden of this fear. Prostitutes have historically been publicly villified, leaving them vulnerable to attack, abuse, and harassment from all sides. Yet they never seem to run out of clients. The criminalization of prostitution denies them safe working conditions, and targets them for abuse and violence by johns, cops, and criminals. The public's fear and contempt for prostitutes deprives them of social status and undermines their self-respect. Sex-workers are held in such low esteem that, even though they come from all walks of life — men and women, straight, gay and bisexual — few identify their work openly. Sex-workers facilitate an exploration of sexuality which has tremendous cultural influence, and yet has been given no public recognition; in fact, it has been rigorously denied, hidden, and heinously misrepresented.

The media obscures the true identity of sex-workers. It is estimated that there are approximately 1 million prostitutes in the United States; as many as 10 to 15% of all women have worked "the life" at some time. We never see or hear about the prostitute who pays taxes, has a family, and raises children. The AIDS crisis has intensified America's desire to locate its fear of prostitutes in a "quasi-scientific" medical phenomenon — sex-workers become not just carriers of disease, but agents of death. The media continually reinforces this perception, seeking out "Typhoid Marys" rather than discussing the ways in which we are all affected and must share responsibility for preventing further HIV transmission. Numerous studies (most recently, the National Research Council, 1990) have demonstrated that sex-workers do not represent a major vector of infection. Sex professionals are more aware of transmission risks than their clients. In fact their sex-work depends on the practice of safer sex. They are in far greater danger of infection than their customers, who will often offer to pay more if a prostitute doesn't use a condom. If prostitutes

WITH PONY

were transmitting HIV, there would be many more white heterosexual males diagnosed with AIDS than is reflected in current statistics. Since 1981, the percentage of men who contracted AIDS through engaging in heterosexual sex has remained constant at 2%, while the percentage for women is 28%.

Think how much pleasure, comfort, and joy sex-workers have given. They are massage therapists helping people learn about their bodies while relieving stress. Perhaps they are responsible for preventing millions of cases of hypertension at the very least. Imagine how insane New York City might be without their services. They help the business community—the beauty industry, restaurants, cab companies, health clubs, doctors, supermarkets, and beeper companies among others. Their business is pleasure; their pleasure means business. America's sex phobia leaves its citizens with few opportunities to learn about pleasure. Prostitutes can provide a positive environment in which people can explore their sexuality. Clients can learn about sexually transmitted disease from prostitutes and about how to keep themselves and their sexual partners healthy. The intimate space prostitutes create leads people to reveal their personal problems. Many prostitutes provide counselling, healing both psychic and sexual imbalance.

Perhaps most importantly, prostitutes provide the first introduction for many to the necessity and pleasures of safer sex. If they were honestly recognised as an integral part of America's sexual culture, they would be considered the vanguard of responsible sexual practice. The National Institutes of Health should consider hiring these sex professionals to develop programs about AIDS education and safer sex practice. Safer sexual practice is more than simply about reducing the risks of transmission; prostitutes have pioneered the ways in which safe sex can be erotic. The health and safety of everyone depends on this continued exploration of how to reinvent sexuality in the age of AIDS.

Gran Fury with PONY (Prostitutes of New York)

dysfunction of the nuclear family unit were not everywhere evident, the recent PBS rebroadcast of its 1971 landmark of cinema verité, *An American Family*, offered a reminder.) Against the chaste and proper pleasure of the family, the shadow world of prostitution is defined. And vice versa.

The two terms require one another. The catch and linchpin of this dichotomy, however, is feminine sexuality, always already a threat and aberration within a patriarchal exchange economy. Are all wives sex-workers, are all women whores? From hysteria to anorexia, women have historically symptomitized sexual desires deemed too dangerous, even to the point of life threatening, to articulate otherwise (silence = death). Kept under cover of criminalization, prostitution — which of course includes both male and female sex-workers, and an array of sexual proclivities — occupies an ambivalent position within the social structure. An industry shaped to service masculine desire and to maintain the status quo of our sexual economy, the field of prostitution at the same time seems to harbor the specter of feminine sexuality unleashed, and independent. Gran Fury's collaboration with PONY confronts this contradiction, whose status as unspeakable helps to uphold a larger system of coercion and repression. The risks of such an enterprise, at precisely this moment in time, are not negligible, nor are the issues or emotions raised by the topic easy or resolved. But the risks of ignorance are hand in glove with the real risks and stakes of the AIDS epidemic. As Gran Fury has elsewhere asserted, "THE AIDS CRISIS ISN'T OVER FOR ANYONE UNTIL ITS OVER FOR EVERYONE." Stepping, by way of its collaboration with PONY, beyond the purview of an AIDS activist agenda initially oriented primarily against homophobia in all its guises, Gran Fury in this installation isn't simply offering answers. The group is asking itself and its public, literally the person on the street, questions that go to the core of our identity as players in a game that may well be monopoly, but whose rules only gain in authority and force the more that we ignore the contradictions and discrepancies to which the game gives rise.

Laura Trippi, *Curator*

1. See Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy," *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, eds. Russell Ferguson, et al. (NY: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990) pp. 233-245.

GRAN FURY is a collective of AIDS activists dedicated to creating public art and provoking direct action to end the crisis. PONY (Prostitutes of New York and friends) is a formal organization of sex-workers' rights advocates dedicated to the decriminalization and deregulation of prostitution. They can be reached c/o PONY, 25 West 45th St., Suite 1401, New York, NY 10036, (212) 713-5678.

LATE 20th CENTURY STILL LIVES

MANUEL PARDO
New Work Gallery

February 16 - April 7, 1991

The New Museum
of Contemporary Art,
New York

Manuel Pardo's nine generic, nearly identical still-life paintings each consist of a schematized pink and green vase containing three roses with menacing thorns. Each painting has a different background color—acid yellow, lime green, hot pink, neon orange, electric blue, as well as indescribable shades of lavender, turquoise, purple, and red. The nine images, identically hand-painted, are heavily outlined in black, and a simple black line is used to differentiate foreground from background. Each is enclosed in a very heavy, angled black frame.

These paintings, alone or in a group, provoke odd responses, from an experienced critic's puzzled, "What in the world is this supposed to be?" to a decorator's observation that he couldn't hang a painting like that in anyone's living room because nothing else could possibly share the same space with it.

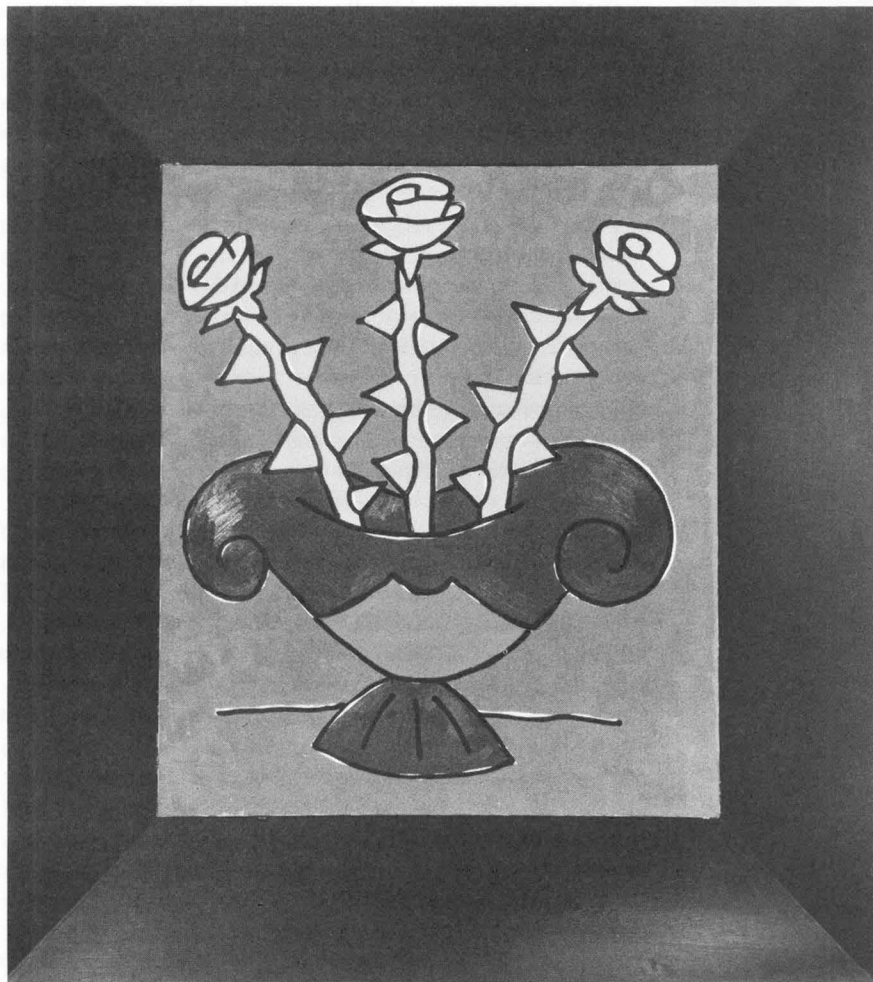
Certainly, they are unconventional on any number of levels. They don't look quite like anything seen within the familiar gallery/museum/art school/studio contexts. They are in part reminiscent of commercial greeting cards, cartoons, kids' advertising, and late sixties (Pucci-type) fabric design, but this Pop sensibility is improbably combined with stylistic hints of such early modernist giants as Picasso and Matisse. Lurking uncomfortably on the periphery are also shades of Leonid Carzou and Bernard Buffet, but the result doesn't have the self-conscious campiness that usually comes when "high" art is turned into kitsch.

I suppose what's so shocking about these paintings, both initially and even over time, is that they're unequivocally synthetic. There's no illusion in them at all. They simply don't refer to visual experiences outside the act and process of making art, even if the "art" in question is the kind we see everyday—advertising, calendars, posters, greeting cards, toys, paint-by-number sets—that isn't necessarily called by that name.

The enormous, thick black handcrafted frames which seem as important, if not more so, than the images themselves, are not only confrontational, they are visual barriers that force you to focus on the painting as a painting. Like religious icons, their visual strength and singularity creates a direct,

one-to-one relationship between the viewer and the work, a relationship in which the painting takes over and subsumes the viewer. These pieces are literal objects that could almost be described as sculptures. They are, says Pardo, oversized in the way that everything in contemporary life in America is oversized, so as to bring the work into a close relationship with society.

Emigrating from Cuba at the age of 10, Pardo eventually graduated from The School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. On the one hand, he



Manuel Pardo,
Late 20th Century Still Life,
1990/91, oil, canvas, and wood.
Courtesy of the artist.

benefitted enormously from contact with such experienced older artists as Jennifer Bartlett and Richard Artschwager; on the other, as a young artist exploring issues of “appropriation” in unconventional ways,¹ he met enormous resistance from many sources. This resistance ultimately reinforced his sense of distance from the mainstream art community, but also confirmed his commitment to particular issues and stylistic anomalies with which he was already deeply engaged.

Paramount for him, even at that time, was an obsession with early modernism’s belief in itself and in the fundamental value of painting; however, Pardo has consciously avoided the consistent stylistic evolution which is characteristic of modernism. The range of work in his studio indicates his phenomenal ability to paint just about anything, in any way. (For instance, a series of portraits of transvestites from the mid-1980s is executed in an eloquent, fluid 19th-century realistic mode. A subsequent series, based on Goya’s *Majas*, employs a more “modern” or abstract style.)

Despite Pardo’s outsider status—Cuban, gay, and outspokenly antiauthoritarian—his work is nonetheless engaged with certain very central and current issues in art criticism today. These revolve around “the death of painting,” the contested premise that painting is no longer a valid form of artmaking in today’s society. Once painting lost its authority as a means of representing “reality” (the camera having replaced painting in this dubious role), its validity came to be questioned, despite the fact that in the Western world its practitioners still for the most part adhere to this 19th-century realist narrative model.

The dilemma is that artists, no longer able to sustain an uncritical belief in painting’s viability as a visual language, find that the only alternative to using outmoded pictorial strategies inappropriate to a media-drenched contemporary world is to give oneself over to cynicism and irony, using appropriation rather than futilely attempting to be “original.”

Strategies for painting, or for the “end” of painting, thus include the elimination of all images or figure-ground relationships; borrowing from existing (largely media) representations and recontextualizing them; making neo-expressionist canvases by means of radical, non-art gestures (Andy Warhol’s urine paintings are one example); or appropriating images and/or styles from other eras and cultures (Gerhard Richter’s “abstract expressionist” canvases or the nostalgic images of McDermott and McGough are cases in point).

Critic and painter Thomas Lawson frames the predicament as “a message from all sides [that] there is no point in continuing to make art since it can only exist insulated from the real world or as an irresponsible bauble.”² He sees hope, however, in the work of a number of artists “that can be classified as painting... but that must be seen as something other: a desperate gesture, an uneasy attempt to address the many contradictions of current art production by focusing on the heart of the prob-

lem—that continuing debate between the ‘moderns’ and the ‘postmoderns’ that is so often couched in terms of the life and death of painting.”³

Pardo’s work, while clearly addressing this issue, is concerned with its viability in a larger social sphere; thus the “desperation” and “uneasiness” Lawson senses is absent from his work, replaced by a complex and open-ended humor, and a reservoir of faith in the paintings’ power to be emotionally and intellectually affective. For many artists and critics alike, some aspects of modernism continue to have validity, particularly its adversarial nature and its belief in its own enterprise; Pardo himself takes enormous pleasure in the act of painting, and finds continued enjoyment in looking at the works of the early modernists. At the same time, he grew up reading political theory; the ideas of Karl Marx were to post-Batista school kids what the Dick and Jane readers were to American children in the 1940s. Pardo’s early education therefore predisposed him to a highly critical and analytic view of early modernism, even as, in America, he was nurtured and educated by its products. This ambivalence informs and animates the *Late 20th Century Still Life* project.

Ultimately, larger social issues in the work are reinforced by strategic ones, but take precedence over them in the immediate experience of looking. Just as questions about the viability of painting reflect a crisis in belief that accompanies a challenge to the modernist paradigm, so too is another crisis of belief addressed by Pardo through the act of memorializing friends—and strangers—who have died of AIDS. For him, the vases are both a celebration and an act of mourning, at once specific and general, a testimony to the value of human life in all its manifestations. But this reading isn’t immediately apparent, since the still life has been the generic subject matter of the easel painter for centuries, and Pardo’s commemorations aren’t literal.

Perhaps the reason these generic still-life paintings evoke such a variety of strong responses is that, on a number of levels, they raise challenging questions of belief: is it possible to make a painting today that is more than an esthetic strategy? Is there a way to make a work that is at once morally and esthetically engaged? Can a work of art, in any way, make a real difference in the world?

Marcia Tucker, *Director*

1. An early painting installation, done as a thesis project in 1976, presaged the present work in surprising ways. Pardo “lifted” colors from the Impressionist galleries at The Metropolitan Museum of Art to use as background wall colors on which a fragmented nude, each part framed in a heavy black rectangle, was deployed.

2. Thomas Lawson, “Last Exit: Painting,” *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1984) p. 154.

3. Lawson, p. 164.

IN MEMORIAM : ON MANUEL PARDO'S LATE 20th CENTURY STILL LIFES

Like General Idea's 1988 AIDS graphic, Manuel Pardo's most recent still lifes represent the reinterpretation of a time-honored cultural icon. Both are visual representations of a phenomenon which has violently altered the way in which the "other" is viewed in Western culture. And like the General Idea graphic, Pardo's icons, with their appropriation of Pop color patterns and cartoon-like simplification, are meant to draw the viewer in and shock at the same time.

Eros and Thanatos, Beauty and the Beast, have become united in one image. Magnificent long-stemmed roses in full bloom arranged in exquisitely fashioned vases reveal themselves as memorials to the victims of AIDS, the Black Plague of the late twentieth century. A dark romanticism reigns within these images, metaphors for a precarious existence. Seductive roses rest innocently atop monstrous stalks with dagger-like thorns which, in a bizarre way, recall the sharp nipples of the artist's earlier character portraits of transvestites (1984-87). And like his series of black widow Majas (Spanish for "belle" or "flashy dame") from 1987, the enchanting innocence of these still lifes masks their deadly intentions. In a similar way, the urns from which the roses project are no ordinary vases, but rather funerary urns like those used to store the ashes of our departed.

For Pardo, the image of the still life represents death, or more specifically the anguishing process of a slow, painful death. *Nature morte*, the French expression for still life, acknowledges this relationship. Not only are the images "dead" in that they are frozen in time, locked within the oil and canvas which gave birth to them, but the very concept of floral arrangements implies death inherently. Cut down in their prime, the roses are placed in water to endure a long, merciless death. In their suffering, the flowers glow with radiance and beauty. Like the Phoenix, who burns itself to ashes on an altar fire, from which a new, young Phoenix arises in glory, their death symbolizes a process of spiritual transformation, a rite of passage.

The early Christians adopted the Greco-Roman image of the Phoenix as a symbol of Christ's resurrection and represented it in funerary sculpture. During the Middle Ages, it came to be associated with the crucifixion and represented the personification of chastity, a symbol of pure love which stands in opposition to lust, the gravest of the Deadly Sins. In allegorical still life, the Phoenix can often be seen as a decorative element on the vase containing the abundance of blooming flowers. Throughout its entire history, still life has been laden with hidden allegorical meaning. It is commonly seen as a *vanitas* theme, a visual depiction of the inevitability of death and, by extension, of the Christian passion and resurrection. Similarly, the image of the red rose symbolizes martyrdom. During the Renaissance, the rose was likened to Venus because of its beauty and fragrance, while the pricking of its thorns were compared to the wounds of love. The still life is thus a simul-

taneous image of physical suffering and mystical celebration.

It is from this duality of purpose that Pardo's still lifes were born. As memorials to the victims of AIDS, they represent both a sorrowful mourning of the dead and a joyous celebration of life. Like all memorials, they have been created not for the departed but for the living. By preserving the memory of the victims in our consciousness, these memorials help to keep them alive. For it is only with the loss of memory that someone or something truly dies. The Czech writer Milan Kundera equates memory with the preservation of life: "Forgetting... is the great private problem of man; death as a loss of self. But what of this self? It is the sum of everything we remember. Thus, what terrifies us about death is not the loss of future but the loss of past. Forgetting is a form of death ever present within life."¹

A second function of the memorial is that of warning. This function is most apparent in the form of war memorials. Maya Lin's Washington, D.C. Vietnam War Memorial is as much an admonition of war as it is a place of mourning and remembrance. As Susan Sontag has noted, "disease is regularly described as invading the society, and efforts to reduce mortality from a given disease are called a fight, a struggle, a war."² And thus, the victims of AIDS can be seen as the victims of gruesome international war. Like the war memorial, Pardo's still lifes are also a deadly serious warning. Safe sex is our only alternative, our only defense in the battle against AIDS. But even more importantly, Pardo warns us against the human tendency to judge its victims, to equate them with the evil which has assaulted them.

Gerard A. Goodrow

1. Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1981) pp. 234-235.
2. Susan Sontag, *AIDS and its Metaphors* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989) p.10.

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MANUEL PARDO was born in Cuba in 1952. Now living in New York, his work has been shown in the U.S. and Europe.

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