

berlin art diary

by Walter Robinson

The 1998 **Berlin Art Forum** -- Europe's biggest art fair devoted to contemporary art, now in its third year -- is well underway. Is anyone doing any business?

Legend has it that back at the 1989 Chicago art fair, when he was working for London dealer **Anthony d'Offay, Glenn McMillan** sold \$20 million worth of art (McMillan now has his own gallery in New York, **CRG**).

"He was turnin' and burnin'," said one young dealer here, quoting a line from the ultimate '80s money flick, *Wall Street*.

So, the question is, are there any millions at the Berlin Art Forum? Berlin has lots of good things -- but collectors?

"No reason to get nervous," said **Sebastian Deisen of Voges & Deisen**, Frankfurt. "The weekend will bring the business. People are coming from all over Europe." His booth is filled with framed color photographs in various sizes by **Martin Liebscher**. They're all called *Unidentified Flying Objects*, 1998, and show a strange, dark spacecraft menacing terrestrial cities and landscapes.

Close inspection reveals that the UFOs are fabricated from several plastic disposable cameras, disassembled, glued together and painted black. They hang into the picture field on a string. The photos are bargain-priced at DM 150 to DM 750 (a mark is about two-thirds of a dollar) and several have sold already -- perhaps to **E.T.**?

A bit higher up on the price scale, Berlin dealer **Mehdi Chouakri** has sold one of Swiss artist **John Armleder's** large Plexiglas sculptures for DM 25,000. Made of a single sheet of transparent, orange-tinted plastic that the artist has folded and bent slightly with the heat from a tool like a hair-dryer, the piece is a witty, simple, Pop reflection on formalist sculpture. The line formed by the edge of the plastic sheet glows incandescently orange.

"It's between painting and sculpture, yet it's totally transparent and you can see everything through it," said Chouakri, "and John likes that!" Armleder himself is not in Berlin -- he's in São Paulo, where he is Switzerland's rep to the concurrent **São Paulo Bienal**.

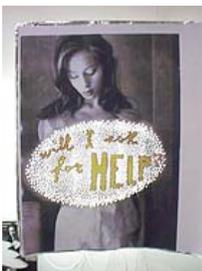
One of the newer galleries at the fair is **Asprey Jacques** from London (Jacques, by the way, is pronounced "Jakes"). **Charles Asprey** and **Alison Jacques**, the two principals, opened their gallery two months ago. They've filled their booth with sculpture and photographs by the British artist **Jane Simpson**, whose refrigerated chest of drawers -- a Regency-style table, painted white with bloody red-paint fingerprints and its top covered with a film of icy frost -- is



Martin Liebscher
Unidentified Flying Objects
1998
at Voges + Deisen



Jane Simpson
When Two or More Are Gathered
1998
at Asprey Jacques



Daniele Buetti
Will I Ask for Help?
1998
at ars Futura



Mary Carlson



Dandelion
1998
at Bill Maynes



Nadin Ospina
Paseante
1997
at Monique Knowlton



David Salle
Tightrope Walker
1998
at Lehman Maupin



Peter Hopkins
Capital Project
1997
at Galerie Sfeir-Semler



Clay Ketter
Oh Atlanta
1997
at Galleri Andreas
Brandstrom

included in the "**Sensation**" exhibition of the **Saatchi Collection** of young British artists, which has just opened here at the **Hamburger Bahnhof**.

Of Simpson's works on view at the fair are brightly colored latex casts of household objects -- a basin, an ice cream scoop, a cheese cutter. Her signature piece here is *When Two or More Are Gathered* (1998), a large group of multi-colored small pitchers jammed together on top of a plinth. It's £2,800, in an edition of two. There has been some interest....

At **ars Futura**, founded by **Nicola von Senger** in Zurich in 1992, is a group of works by **Daniele Buetti**, a 42-year-old Swiss artist who has showed at Ace in L.A. and at the **Gramercy Art Fair** in New York. The artist has taken images of "beautiful aliens" -- fashion models and movie stars -- punctured them with pinholes, then inscribed them with thoughtful questions of everyday life. "Does feeling that life is too short increase the intensity and passion of it in a desirable way?" The smaller collages on paper start at DM 1,000. One of his larger constructions, back-lit by fluorescent bulbs, sold at the fair for DM 6,500.

The New York dealer **Bill Maynes** brought works by four artists to the fair -- **Andrea Belag**, **Mary Carlson**, **David Ivie** and **Jim Torok**. Everyone was charmed by Carlson's *Dandelion* (1998), a canvas and wire model of the infamous weed that Maynes installed right at floor level. It was priced at DM 1,000 -- and you can't have it because it sold.

At **Monique Knowlton Gallery's** booth, several works by **Wade Hofer**, **Kahn & Selesnick** and **Peter Dreher** have sold, according to **Kimberley Marrero**. "It's been great so far," she said. What caught my eye was a 70-inch-tall inflatable statue of a robot with lights inside. It's called *Paseante* (1997), and is the work of Colombian artist **Nadin Ospina**. It's priced at DM 8,500.

Marrero said that Ospina is fascinated with the correspondence between the ancient and the pop, and has been known to dig up pre-Columbian figurines and rework them into the likeness of Disney characters. His work is currently included in a show in New York, "Mickey: An American Icon," at the **Alternative Museum**, and he will have a show at Knowlton later this season.

Over at **Lehman Maupin** is a large, fresh new painting by **David Salle** -- a triptych that seems to be done in his "classic" style, simple and ... odd. Called *Tightrope Walker* (1998), it measures 72 x 144 in. and is priced at \$145,000. On view as well are three, 18 square-in. studies for new paintings by **Ross Bleckner**, who will unveil the final product at Lehman Maupin in New York on Nov. 7, 1998. Bleckner is using an airgun to blow the paint out into small cell-like modules, for an effect that is part microscopic life, part computer imagery. And quite beautiful. The studies are priced at \$12,000.

It seems foolish to travel to Berlin to concentrate on New York galleries, so I headed over to **Galerie Sfeir-Semler** of Hamburg. To my surprise I spotted an energetic splatter painting on an optical plastic ground by **Peter Hopkins**, an old friend who now lives in New Jersey and has had two shows at the gallery. The painting is called *Capital Project* (1997), and costs \$10,000, "plus tax if it stays in Germany!" said **André Sfeir-Semler**.

The work of still another American is on view at **Galleri Andreas Brändström** of Stockholm. The artist is **Clay**



Andreas Brandstrom

Ketter, a 37-year-old former New Yorker who married a Swedish wife and now lives on a farm outside Malmo. Ketter's work, paintings and constructions that take the esthetics of the construction trade to the Neo-Plasticist limit, is much in demand these days. A few examples were included in **Sonnabend's** summer show, and the gallery will probably give him a solo show after it opens in new quarters in Chelsea.

In the meantime, Brändström said a Seattle collector had bought *Oh Atlanta* (1997), a large wall construction complete with a variety of shelving, for \$30,000. Paintings cost a bit less (\$22,000) and small, subtly colored drawings start at \$1,500. Ketter is obviously quite skilled at the building trades, which he learned in New York, then polished-up while working as chief technician for the **Rooseum** in Malmo.



Neo Rauch
Vorrat
1998
at Eigen + Art

At **Eigen & Art**, which has galleries in Berlin and Leipzig, gallery founder **Gerd Harry Lybke** told me that he was selling small paintings by both **Stephan Jung**, a 31-year-old Berlin abstractionist, and **Neo Rauch**, an (unusually named) East German artist whose pictures use flat commercial figuration and off-key industrial colors -- and a strange, possessed expressiveness. The large painting pictured here, *Vorrat* (1998), is about "men's problems," Lybke told me.

Over at Santa Monica dealer **Richard Heller's** booth, **Marcel Dzama** was drawing up a storm. Heller's walls are covered with the amusing, narrative drawings by the young artist from Winnipeg. At the bargain-price of DM 400 each, they're moving quite well.



Marcel Dzama

In the darkened booth of **Bloom Gallery**, Amsterdam are four large photos of an abject model and a grainy super-8 film loop of a tree-lined lane in Amsterdam. The installation is by **Arno Nollen**, who titles his photographs *Bright, Shiny and A Bit Dull* (1998). They sell for between DM 5,500 and DM 7,500. The sexy model in the photos is wearing clunky high heels and a negligee. Dealer **Annet Gelink** pointed out that the girl in the photo also has rather clear impressions in the skin of her wrists. "He tied her up," she said.

With this, I went to the closing ceremony, where one of the fair's participants is to be given the award for the best display -- a refund of the cost of their booth. More on this later.



Marcel Dzama
untitled
1998
at Richard Heller

WALTER ROBINSON is Editor of ArtNet Magazine.



Arno Nollen
Bright, Shiny and a Bit Dull
1998
at Bloom Gallery



John Armleder
untitled
1998
at Mehdi Chouakri

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