



Matthew Higgs

ARTIST AND CURATOR MATTHEW HIGGS IS THE DIRECTOR OF WHITE COLUMNS, NEW YORK. HE RECENTLY CURATED THE EXHIBITIONS "WORDS FAIL ME" FOR THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, DETROIT, AND "EXHIBITIONISM" FOR THE CCS BARD HESSEL MUSEUM AT BARD COLLEGE, ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK.

1 Robert Rauschenberg, "Cardboards and Related Pieces" (Menil Collection, Houston) This wasn't just one of the best shows I saw this year—it was one of the best shows I have ever seen. Exquisitely installed in the Menil Collection's understated spaces, Rauschenberg's reconfigured cartons were produced mostly in 1971 (the related "Venetians" and "Early Egyptians" series, also represented here, followed between 1972 and 1974). These deceptively "minor," rarely seen works offered further evidence, if any was required, of Rauschenberg's maverick imagination. Think of a point somewhere between the abrasive dynamics of Kurt Schwitters and the attitude of Cady Noland and you start to get close to these works' alchemical magic.

2 Judy Linn (Feature Inc., New York) Seemingly artless, and free of cynicism or irony, Linn's profoundly observed images continue to resonate days, weeks, months, even years after one's first viewing. In her fifth solo outing at Feature Inc., she showed a perfectly choreographed, perfectly pitched group of modestly scaled prints, including images of a tea towel, of the back of a woman's head, and of a cow and its reflection, and two separate pictures of knees. The everyday has never looked so ordinary or so strange.

3 Frank Sidebottom (Chelsea Space, London) Under the direction of Donald Smith, Chelsea Space has evolved into a truly unique concern, presenting shows that focus on, say, Samuel Beckett's approach to rehearsing or on Jeremy Glogan's unheralded late-1990s South London gallery The Top Room. But Smith's curatorial *pièce de résistance* was this recent overview of the world of Frank Sidebottom, papier-

mâché-headed alter ego of artist and musician Chris Sievey. So complex is Sidebottom's *modus operandi*—he is a television entertainer, cartoon character, stand-up comedian, cult hero, and more besides—that I will not attempt to explicate it but will simply say that the exhibition, which combined props, films, animations, and drawings, revealed in Sidebottom's absurdist sensibility and that Beckett surely would have approved.

4 "WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution" (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles) LA MoCA's ongoing commitment to large-scale, research-driven historical surveys (e.g., "Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949–1979" [1998] or "A Minimal Future? Art as Object 1958–1968" [2004]) continues to put most other contemporary art institutions to shame. Connie Butler's broad and revealing exploration of feminist art activity was yet another exemplar of what any serious museum should be doing, to wit: dedicating curatorial, logistical, and financial resources to projects that aren't guaranteed to draw huge audiences or create headlines, but that expand our knowledge of art and of its pivotal role in shaping and animating our culture.

5 "How We Are: Photographing Britain" (Tate Britain, London) Arranged chronologically in six sections, this recklessly ambitious show explored photography's relationship with "Britain," "the British," and "British-ness" from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Featuring work by professional, amateur, vernacular, and art photographers, it was coherently argued and beautifully installed—until, that is, the final section,

a mishmash of often-derivative contemporary work that felt like a poorly conceived afterthought. But even this letdown of an ending couldn't quite undermine an otherwise exemplary and occasionally exhilarating project.

6 Shannon Ebner, "The Sun & the Sign" (Wallspace, New York) Ebner uses photography—to my mind, in a wholly original manner—as a kind of quasi-sculptural form. Her second solo show at Wallspace attested to her continuing interest in language's fragile status but found her moving away from her earlier engagement with landscape into more claustrophobic territory. The works on view invoked the physical entropy and bleak psychology of artists like Gordon Matta-Clark or Bruce Nauman while remaining defiantly their own.

7 The NY Art Book Fair (New York) In a city where seeking out art-related publications is becoming an increasingly frustrating task, this annual event, organized by the committed bibliophiles at Printed Matter, provides a unique platform where publishers, distributors, dealers, and consumers can connect in an atmosphere that's part trade show, part bustling bazaar, and part fan convention. Though only in its second year, it already feels like an institution.

8 Marcel Broodthaers—Films (Anthology Film Archives, New York) This rare screening of Broodthaers's films, the first New York showing for many in more than a decade, was jointly organized by White Columns and Michael Werner Gallery on the occasion of the restaging of the artist's classic 1975 installation *Décor* at Werner's Seventy-seventh Street space. (Full

disclosure: I'm currently the director of White Columns, but any occasion to see Broodthaers's films is to be celebrated.) Cryptic, elliptical, aesthetically and intellectually promiscuous, Broodthaers's films are often also flat-out hilarious, and are essential viewing for anyone interested in the possibilities and potentiality of art.

9 Fischli & Weiss, "Flowers & Questions: A Retrospective" (Tate Modern, London), "Equilibres" (Matthew Marks Gallery, New York), and "Books, Editions and the Like" (Swiss Institute, New York) A year should never go by without an opportunity to see work by Peter Fischli and David Weiss. And this was a vintage year, as I managed to catch not only their exuberant and idea-packed retrospective at Tate Modern, but also Matthew Marks's concise survey of the miraculous "Equilibres," a series of photographs of precarious sculptural tableaux, and the Swiss Institute's informal, process-oriented display of the duo's innovative approach to publications and printed ephemera. So apparently casual is Fischli & Weiss's brilliance that it makes me, as an occasional artist, green with envy.

10 Padraig Timoney (Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York) Surprisingly, this was the Irish artist's first solo show in the United States. For more than fifteen years, Timoney has taken a highly idiosyncratic and mercurial approach to art. Encompassing just about every conceivable medium, but rooted in an expansive notion of painting, his practice shares something with the calculated meanderings of Sigmar Polke. But no single comparison can begin to articulate the elusive essence of Timoney's genuinely puzzling and complex art. □

1. Robert Rauschenberg, *80ft. (Cardboard)*, 1971, cardboard, 51 1/4 x 82 1/2 x 6 3/4". © Robert Rauschenberg/Licensed by VAGA, New York. 2. Judy Linn, *Untitled*, 1999, color photograph, 18 1/2 x 13 1/4". 3. Frank Sidebottom, *Chelsea Space Is Acel*, 2007, mixed media. Installation view, Chelsea Space, London. Photo: Shoko Maeda. 4. Judy Chicago, *Rejection Fantasy Drawing #4 (Rejection Fantasy)*, 1974, colored pencil and graphite on paper, 40 x 30". From "Rejection Quintet," 1974. © Judy Chicago/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. 5. John Thomas, *Two Women in Welsh National Costume Drinking Tea*, 1875, black-and-white photograph. © 2007 National Gallery of Wales. 6. Shannon Ebner, *The Crooked Sign*, 2006, black-and-white photograph, 64 1/2 x 47 1/2". 7. The NY Art Book Fair, New York, 2007. Photo: Leah Moskowitz. 8. Marcel Broodthaers, *La Bataille de Waterloo (The Battle of Waterloo)*, 1975, strip from a color film in 35 mm, 10 minutes. © Estate of Marcel Broodthaers/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SABAM, Brussels. 9. Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *The Roped Mountaineers from Equilibres*, 1984, black-and-white photograph, 15 1/2 x 12". 10. Padraig Timoney, *Hidrangea*, 2007, rabbit-skin glue and pigment on canvas, 51 1/2 x 59".



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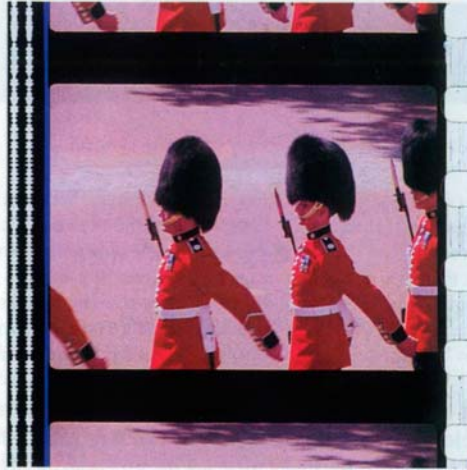
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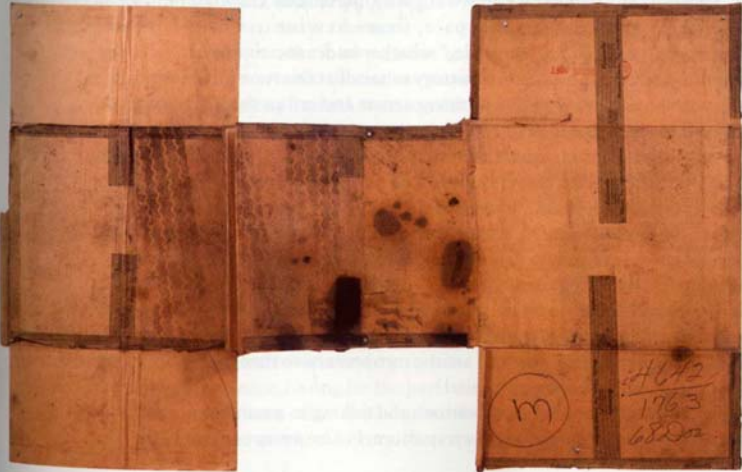
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