

Art in America

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Venice Biennale
Balthus
Interview with David Salle
John McLaughlin
Sculpture Projects in Munster



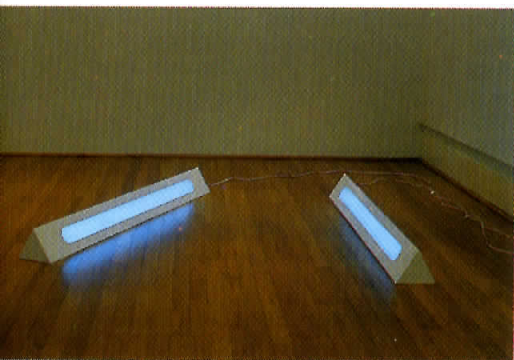
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LOS ANGELES

Terri Friedman at Special K

With splashy extravagance, Terri Friedman's latest fountains and tubing sculptures continue her raucous exploration of the properties of liquids. Gleefully biological, these sculptures are human surrogates—complex systems that celebrate the idea of circulation as a life-giving, exuberant force. *Noise*, a knot of IV tubing through which clear water and metallic glitter circulate, is like a caffeinated brain in action. *Growing up in Public* is an 11-foot-high pair of leglike plastic sheets in which orange-colored water courses through tubes in a zigzag pattern. Looking like orange-flavored freezer ices encased in clear plastic, the gawky "legs" lead down to plastic bags in the shape of shoes. Thanks to these cartoon feet, the piece seems ready to walk off into an animated film.



Robert Montgomery: *don't let me fuck up will you 'cos when I need a friend it's still you*, 1996, mixed mediums; at Inman.

Friedman imbues her works with decorative, liquid life. She filled an upstairs gallery with various-sized clear sheets of mylar, vinyl and acetate; smears of colored acrylic paint suggest legs, flowers and ears. Percolating nearby is the outrageous *Grandma is Pregnant*. A small plastic sphere covered in a baby-blue knit cap crowns a larger clear Plexiglas sphere; the latter contains a small pump that regularly spurts yellow water on the side of the bubble. Pointed towards the viewer, this burgeoning life force seems to insist on making its unlikely presence known.

Friedman's show-stopper is her largest fountain to date,

Phew, a 10-foot-tall armature which circulates dark lime-colored water into a huge aluminum bowl. The armature, covered in baby-blue fleece, holds a drooping plastic bag into which the green liquid is slowly pumped. For about two minutes, the water slowly fills the bag; then it is released into the bowl by a timed sphincter. The resultant splash is both startling and cathartic, comically inverting one's expectations about the continual flow of fountains. Friedman transforms our sanitary fetish for flushing into a stimulating public decoration with a rejuvenating life of its own. Without restraint or hesitation, her fountains and wall works offer upbeat purgation, comically celebrating organic life in a way that seems completely original.

—Michael Duncan

Nobuyoshi Araki at Blum & Poe

For viewers who think of Nobuyoshi Araki as the Japanese Helmut Newton, a photographer of soft-core geisha bondage tableaux and the Tokyo after-hours scene, this exhibition came as a small surprise. Seventeen black-and-white photographs from the 1991 series "From Close Range," shown for the first time in America, presented Araki as a practitioner of symbolist still life. Taken on or from the balcony of the artist's Tokyo apartment, the photographs were conceived in response to the death of Araki's wife and sometime collaborator, Yoko.

Elegiac motifs predominated. Wilted flowers, weathered surfaces, the desiccated corpses of garden lizards—although heavily styled by the artist's self-consciously decadent sensibility, these pictorial elements all refer to traditional memento mori. While we recognize them as clichés, they continue to exert the emotional force we feel when confronted with the irrevocable.

Araki uses compositional devices to heighten this poignancy. By focusing on objects divided in half (an array of freshly cut apples laid out on a rusting table top is especially haunting) or on objects observed in pairs but framed so as to emphasize their separate identities, he

invests his subjects with a loose-fit anthropomorphism. The contrasting but complementary shapes of an anthurium and a bird of paradise—flowers of decidedly bisexual appearance—thus serve the same semantic purpose as do a couple of shoes, worn and mismatched, in another image. By its somewhat arch reference to van Gogh's famous painting of a pair of boots, the latter picture also hints at a degree of irony; after all, Araki is an artist who carefully navigates the vernacular while avoiding kitsch.

Still, there is bathos in such self-regard, no matter how closely calibrated, and it was exacerbated here by the way these unframed, medium-sized photographs (ca. 41 by 25 inches) were installed—pinned by their curling edges to the wall in a straight line around the gallery. Such studied informality was jarringly at odds with the ostensible subject matter of these photos. Nor are the prints themselves especially good, so that the viewer is denied the esthetic pleasures customarily offered by "pure" photography of this meditative sort.

As it happens, the photographs in this show were originally reproduced—at higher print quality and with many others from the same series—in book form, a much better format for work so dependent on the viewer's emotional receptiveness. Unfortunately, the exhibition seemed arbitrarily chosen, and the sparse installation gave no hint that Araki is celebrated in Japan and Europe partly for the prodigious volume of work he shows, often in rather ad hoc situations. This puzzling show offered a new and not very interesting look at a photographer who, to judge from his reputation abroad, is capable of better.

—Virginia Rutledge

Rico Lebrun at Koplin

Rico Lebrun (1900-1964) was the best-known Los Angeles artist of the 1950s, acclaimed for his somber, expressionistic paintings and drawings on such angst-ridden themes as the Crucifixion, Dante's *Inferno* and the Holocaust. This exhibition of works from that decade presented a more playful and sardonic side of the artist. Lebrun's virtuosic draftsmanship freed him to experiment with a wide range of art-historical subject matter, as demonstrated by these varia-



Terri Friedman: *Phew*, 1997, mixed mediums, bowl, 6 feet in diameter; at Special K.

tions on famous works of Goya, Grünewald and Velázquez.

One series of drawings was inspired by a 14th-century Pisan fresco, *The Triumph of Death*, attributed to the Italian artist Francesco Traini. Traini's bucolic hillside tableau depicts a group of noblemen and women on horseback—traditionally described as characters from the *Decameron*—who have just stumbled across the decaying corpses of a trio of plague victims. Lebrun presents various "action shots" from this scene. In a close-up of two of the horses screeching to a halt, he captures the wild curiosity evoked by this

Nobuyoshi Araki: *Untitled (From Close Range)*, 1991, photograph, 41 1/2 by 25 1/2 inches; at Blum & Poe.

