

■ The Pleasure of Aesthetic Life

The Showroom London October 23 to November 24

'The Pleasure of Aesthetic Life', curated by Amikam Toren, is a spare, well-considered show which, without any obvious unifying theme, manages to work as a whole expression of its title. The inclusiveness of his selection and the conceptual overlaps between the works not only speak of the contemplative aspect of art-making but also nibble away at the borders of art's defining features.

No Place Better Than This, 1995, by Anya Gallaccio, consists of a large square of plate glass supported by wooden trestles which is covered with candles in various stages of decomposition. Some of them are lit in a seemingly random pattern and their sporadic flames highlight the blackened wicks of the unlit candles. The surface of the glass is thick with peaks and troughs of melted beeswax which spills over onto the floor. Hollow forms drained of content and upright, curling shards erupt from what seems like a desolate landscape. The work traverses time and space as the past is always evident and the transmutation of material from solid to liquid to solid again speaks of a future always in process.

Gera Urkom's *Convolutions I*, 1996, is a work in two parts which explores the physiology of mark-making. A wall in the first gallery is covered with a wide, black, continuous brushstroke which curves and crowds across the surface like an intestine. In a video piece in the next room a similar brushstroke, computer generated, traces across the surface of a colour close-up of the brain. The unseen artist works from left to right following the contours and, when the surface has been fully covered, the mark begins to disintegrate, retreating back towards the left leaving a white trace in its wake. Then the trace itself dissolves and the process begins again.

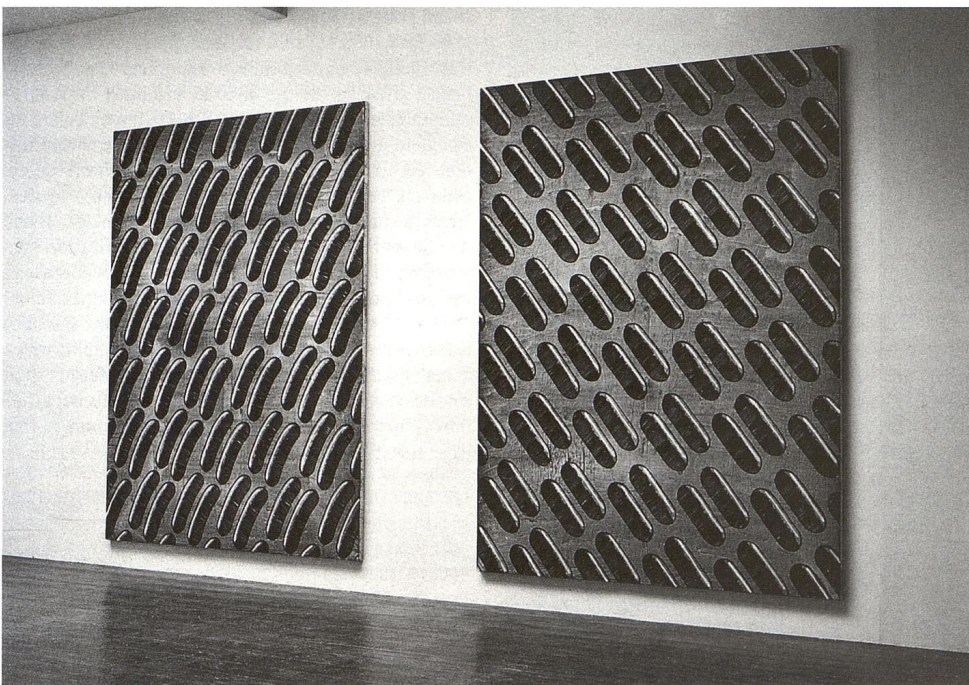
Two large rectangular canvases by John Wilkins, *Could Chew*, 1996, and *To Do*, 1996, strike the only heroic note in the show despite bearing a relation to Urkam's concern with mark-making and the graphic use

of black and white. Diagonal pairs of sausage shapes, similar, yet different on each canvas, float on a grey background. They are enlargements of something and their proximity to the brain video suggests the possibility of mutated cells. A conversation reveals that they are, in fact, enlarged representations of hatch marks, which leads to interesting associations about the nature of representation which are relevant to the exhibition as a whole. What is fascinating about Wilkins's painting is the contrast between the painstaking regularity of the marks themselves and their crude, cartoon-like content.

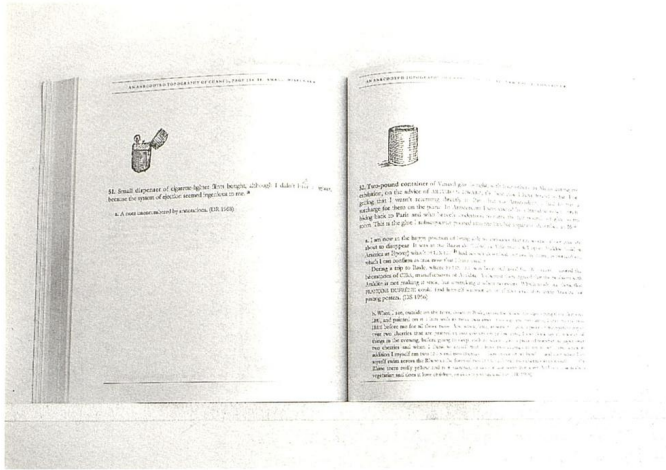
The showstopper, in my opinion, is a small, lyrical work by Douglas Gibb entitled *Monochrome*, 1996, which consists of a series of found black and white snapshots folded over to obscure their subjects and foreground the sky. Each photograph differs slightly in size, format and tone, but the white nullifying folds unify the work and serve to mediate the implied frustration of not knowing. Instead, we are offered the sky – that part of the image which no doubt went unnoticed in its original production and circulation. A flattened, monochrome Constable, with none of the bombast of Steiglitz's cloud formations, these skies are found objects which, through the obliteration of their subjects, seem able to carry transcendent meaning.

A bound book made up of acrylic sheets rests open on a perspex lectern. Made by the Canadian artist Denise Hawrysiw, this elegant work wittingly performs its title: *The Revelation*, 1988/1996. Turned individually, the pages are transparent – empty of signs or symbols; but resting en masse, they transform themselves into a liquid mirror. The silver reflective surface, undulating outward from the central spine, holds the image of the inquisitive reader who discovers herself as subject of the absent text.

Toren establishes a crucial new paradigm in the art and language discourse by including two commercially-produced paperback books which are displayed on plinths as discrete art objects. The first, which predates and embodies Fluxus, is by Daniel Spoerri, an artist closely associated with that movement, and is entitled *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*. Originally



John Wilkins
Could Chew 1996
To Do 1996



Daniel Spoerri
*An Anecdoted
Togography of
Chance* 1962

produced in 1962 in lieu of an exhibition catalogue, the book is a narrative mapping of an accumulation of objects taken from a table in Spoerri's Paris hotel room in 1961. A fold-out diagram with numbered outlines provides a key to the objects, each of which sets off the chain of associations which constitute the text. From filmic anecdote to pithy one-liners, the work consistently denies closure while meaning is always deferred. This is the fourth edition (Atlas Press, London, £13.99) and includes added comments by other artists associated with Fluxus such as Emmett Williams and Dieter Reach. Each edition is regarded as a further development of the last, thus the texts perform the endless possibilities of association.

The second paperback is by Georges Perec (1936-1982), a writer whose intense interest in the exercise of style led him to construct whole novels without using certain vowels. This book is called *Life A User's Manual*, (Collins Harvill, 1992) and it was first published in 1978. It comprises 99 brief chapters which tell the stories of 100 lives 'led in Paris and around the world'. Perec's chain of signification is based on the tenants of a particular Parisian block of flats and a number of chapters concerning 'Things found on the stairs' are threaded throughout the text in order to maintain the sense of a particular location.

Both these works defy linear narrative and can be opened and read in any place or direction. However, unless you have days to spend reading in the gallery, you'll want to buy them for yourself which means of course, that the show as process will continue – a fact which can be credited to Toren's curatorial skills. With extreme subtlety, each work negotiates the distance between subject and object by implicating the viewer's role in the production of meaning as a necessary part of the art-making process. ■

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■ Made New

City Racing London October 20 to November 17

English translations of Alfred Jarry's definitions of his philosophy of 'Pataphysics' are written in yellow high on the walls of the gallery's narrow hallways. According to Roger Shattuck, who is quoted in the press-release, Jarry's philosophy suggests that the 'virtual or imaginary nature of things, as glimpsed by the heightened vision of poetry or science or love can be seized and lived as real. This is the ultimate form of "authentic enactment"'. A strict analysis of the relation that these texts have to the rest of the exhibition, of which they are themselves a part, is probably not what the exhibition is attempting to induce; the texts rather give a bizarre sense of attempting to describe something which is only possible to make manifest through its very description.

This notion extends to the rest of the exhibition in the sense that some works, in order to be reconsidered, have to be remade. Nor is this merely a conceit for, in order to be seen at all, the works in this exhibition literally had to be 'made new'. Barry Flanagan's work, *ring n* from 1966 exists, when it is not installed, as a bag of builders' sand. In order to make the work manifest, the sand must be poured onto a particular spot on the floor and allowed to accrue and settle into its own more or less even conical pile. Then, some handfuls of sand must be taken from the top of the pile and allowed to drift down four sides of the cone to form what could be described as corners. *ring n* looks like a small volcano but this visual association is one which actually proves to be quite insignificant given the work's very declarative means of production. The work does not attempt to show what happens when a bag of sand is poured but to situate itself in equal relation to action and form so that both its potential and manifest presence might remain whether the work be constructed or not.

Tim Mapston's sculptures do not themselves require to be remade each time they are to be seen. The three pieces in the exhibition, *Wall Sculpture*, *Wall Sculpture II* and *Leaning Boards*, all from 1974, did however need to be made new because they had disappeared. Mapston was, in 1974, a young and to some degree successful British artist. At the age of 20 he exhibited these three sculptures at the Lisson Gallery; this was soon before his complete departure from the art world. Given the fact that Mapston stopped making art, that the work he did make has been all but forgotten and that these particular works have been remade with modern materials and do not therefore bear the cultural accreditation conferred by the patina of age, there is a very real sense in his case that one is looking at 'new work'. Made of timber and MDF, the structures hint at the possibility that they may be leaned against or rested upon, a possibility which is not very inviting given the hard-edged nature of their construction. These are not ergonomic models but structures which have been completed with the proviso that

laure genillard gallery

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