

October 2005

FlashArt

SYDNEY

2006 Biennale of Sydney: Zones of Contact

Jarrod Rawlins

"Politics in aspic," a close friend said of the 2006 Biennale of Sydney's "Zones of Contact," and try as I might I cannot disagree with him. Artistic director and curator Charles Merewether, along with the staff, made a big biennale. To the casual observer "Zones of Contact" seemed to be more about numbers than problems or solutions. From the 44 countries visited by Charles Merewether, the 85 artists placed in 16 locations, through to Antony Gormley's impertinent installation *Asian Field*, this edition of the Sydney Biennale, molded in aspic or not, was the art hi-

story biennale, a treatise for the underrepresented with an adjunct exhibition. "Zones of Contact" resulted in a political and sociological semblance where, to quote the catalogue, "zones in daily life" — war zone, hot zone, danger zone, no-fly zone, border zone, strike zone, combat zone, comfort zone, forbidden zone, erogenous zone, symbolic zone — are symbolic of our contemporary lived experience.

Such a broad framework resulted in a disjointed and self-conscious exhibition. The various zones did

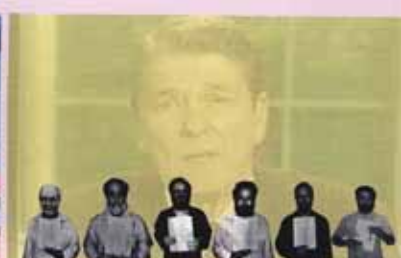
not interrelate or exchange, not that it was essential that they did, however, this biennale failed in its address of the contemporary lived experience that was "fragmentary, inconclusive, without totality" precisely because the attempt to represent those geographies, discourses, and politics that are considered underrepresented by the Western institution was misrepresented. Here the artists who were working as the 'underrepresented' actually live and work in the center.

Excluding the incoherent zoning, there were intermittent examples of work that confidently announced

their own more plainspoken concerns, objectives and histories. Albanian born Adrian Paci's *Noise of Light*, a six meter high chandelier hung from the ceiling at Pier 2/3 under the Sydney Harbour Bridge, was powered by ten noisy and polluting petrol generators that were started every half hour or so.

Continued on Page 50.

From left: Sharon Lockhart, *Pine Flat*, 2005. Still from 16mm color film, 138 mins. Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York, Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, and Neugerriemschneider, Berlin; Laurent Gutierrez + Valérie Portefaix, *Back Home with Baudelaire / Journey*, 2004. C-print on transparency, 120 x 240 cm; The Atlas Group / Walid Raad, *Hostage — The Bachar Tapes (#17 and #31)*, 2001. Video. Courtesy of Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London.



SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

SITE Santa Fe's Sixth International Biennial

Christopher French

In a year when even the previously themeless Whitney Biennial adopted a curatorial point of view, Klaus Ottmann's decision to forego an overarching theme for the 2006 SITE Santa Fe Biennial was clearly an oppositional stance. Unlike recent SITE Santa Fe Biennials, which assembled a laundry list of artists to illustrate

a curatorial concept (Robert Storr's "Grotesque," Dave Hickey's "Beauty"), Ottmann selected a small number of artists (13, as opposed to 54 in Storr's 2004 effort), according each artist their own gallery, with most presenting one large work or installation. Throughout "Still Points of the Turning World," he

privileges the present tense, that is, the artist at work, over the object that is the result of the artist's effort. Language and architecture are central to the best works; both elements serve as barrier, maze, filigree, design, rubric, and pentimento for artists as divergent as Cristina Iglesias, Jennifer Bartlett, Carsten Nicolai and Miroslaw Balka. Ottmann describes his approach as seeking "a temporary still point between Presence and Presentation." Such time-based distinc-

tions between the creative act and its residue mesh with the laconic assertiveness of sculpture, which is this exhibition's strong suit. Ottmann's careful attention to exhibition layout makes for a provocative series of transitions, beginning with Iglesias' *Santa Fe (Celosias I)* and *Santa Fe (Celosias II)*, which imbeds a 16th century Jesuit explorer's ruminations about arid Santa Fe's viability as a habitable landscape into the fabric of two mazelike spaces composed entirely of bricks. Bookending this ceramic sprawl are two works by Miroslaw Balka, for whom words and structures are equally runic metaphors.

Continued on Page 50.



From left: Carsten Nicolai, *Telefunken-anti*, 2004. 2 CD players, 2 audio CDs, 2 flat-screen monitors. Courtesy Galerie Eigen + Art Leipzig/Berlin; Cristina Iglesias, *Santa Fe (Celosias I and II)*, 2006. Ceramic pieces, approximately 6 x 7 x 2 m each. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

SYDNEY from Page 49.

Kazakhstan's Almagul Menlibaeva's installation was comprised of two videos I will never forget, *SteppenBaroque* and *Apa*, which were displayed on monitors sitting on a bed of soil and viewed from a makeshift scaled down roadway. Naked women dance, roll and swirl in rivers and snowscapes in what Menlibaeva describes as "Punk Romantic Shamanism." Paci and Menlibaeva both work within the bounds of contemporary sociological praxis by using an aesthetic as critique or commentary as opposed to the more familiar documentary mode found throughout "Zones of Contact."

At Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art, Călin Dans' *Emotional Architecture 2—Sample City*, where a man roams Bucharest carrying a door on his back, was one of the more engaging video works found in "Zones of Contact." With many video works lasting more than 30

minutes, the documentary mode became ineffectual and counter intuitive in the biennale context because the installation of the works did not allow for effective shared viewing. Fighting for headphones and beanbag space did not invite patient engagement with complex and sensitive subjects.

At the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer installed 72 robotically controlled fluorescent tubes on the ceiling of the foyer. Controlled by three computerized surveillance systems, the lights of *Homographies* spin 360° tracking your movement through the space. Light relief from the numerous documentaries, this work was a novel one-liner critique of the surveillance heavy world we have created. Similarly engaging but more complexly layered in its relationships with the viewer was Damián Ortega's *Inverted Power*, where from a crucifix shaped frame hang house-bricks on strained rubber ropes. Ortega's work, along with Milica Tomić's *Container*, at the Hyde Park Barracks Mu-

seum, showed the possibility of contact with local histories, politics and sociologies in a compact and reticent form. Tomić's *Container*, a shipping container filled with bullet holes, became a monument to a reported event where the US Army in Afghanistan shot at a shipping container filled with captured Taliban after the captives had requested some airholes.

"Zones of Contact" was an academic exercise. Idealized as a platform for the underrepresented, the resulting exhibition was obvious and conventional in its intention, and notably disengaged with local issues such as Sydney's recent race riots and other pertinent social and political zones in Australia. Where are the immigration zones, the racist zones, the mandatory detention zones? —JR

From left: Yelena Vorobyeva & Viktor Vorobyev, Kazakhstan Blue Period (detail), 2002. Photographic installation; Mladen Stilinović, An Artist Who Cannot Speak English Is No Artist, 1993. Acrylic on synthetic silk, 140 x 240 cm.



Flash Art News

Editor and Publisher:
Giancarlo Politi

News Editor:
Aaron Moulton
news@flashartonline.com

Flash Art News Hotline
+39 02 8905 4784

Flash Art News welcomes all information our readers consider newsworthy, and invites you to use our hotlines to communicate exhibitions, events, controversies and publications to us.

SANTA FE from Page 49.

Bottom, a video of footage from the Majdanek concentration camp, and the chain-link necklace of obituaries in the work *Sza*, are bound together by similar takes on anonymity and identity in the face of mortality. Carsten Nicolai's sound, light and shape extravaganza translates radio static into a pulsing visual cacophony that can be seen in a double-sided projection and felt via throbbing speakers strategically placed under contoured memory foam. One of the highlights, it segued quite naturalistically into a room filled with four large Jennifer Bartlett panel paintings arranged on the walls like North-South-East-West coordinates. Bartlett's paintings orchestrate language the same way Nicolai structures sound: in *Thomas Bernhard* (2005) words mingle with branches of a tree, forming an in-filling sky of luminous ruminations that, like many of the best works in this show, are full of musings about the essentially solitary nature of life and death. Even Robert Grosvenor's *Quadrum*, echoing the high

modernism of a Noguchi stage set, seems at ease here, but painting's essentially passive nature disadvantaged Peter Doig's six very large pictures of figures in an atomized, tropical isolation redolent of colorful, bucolic melancholy. Video seemed similarly challenged. Wangechi Mutu and Stephen Dean solved the space-time dilemma outlined in Ottmann's presence concept by asserting video as the activating cornerstone of an installation. Mutu ensconced her video *Magic* within a network of water-dripping bottles and handwritten wall texts. Dean bisected his gallery with a double-sided wall: one half displayed *Grand Prix*, a pulsing, color-saturated demolition derby video sequence; the other showed dart boards obsessively reconstructed into hypnotic patterns. The show's one outlier, the performance-based artist Jonathan Meese, presented an expressionistic painting-and-photograph *mélange* and two bronze sculptures, static components that contradicted the very notion of 'presence.' Ottmann's choices may seem idio-

FYI

The CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts announced that **Jens Hoffmann** has been appointed to the position of director of the institution. Hoffmann was previously director of exhibitions at the ICA in London. **Anthony Huberman** is moving to Paris to become a curator at Palais de Tokyo. **Charlotte Laubard** has been appointed director of the CAPCMusée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux. **Giovanni Carmine** appointed curator Neue Kunst Halle St. Gallen. **Fabrice Hergott** has been chosen as the new director of Musée de la Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. **Aaron Betsky** has been named director of the Cincinnati Art Museum. Betsky had been director of the Netherlands Architecture Institute for six years. Christian Boltanski and Yayoi Kusama were among five who have won the eighteenth annual **Praemium Imperiale** prize given by the Japan Art Association. The prize carries an award of about \$131,000 each. In Philadelphia, **Pew Fellowships** of \$50,000 have each been given to the following: Pepon Osorio, Nadia Hironaka, Scott Rigby, Tobin Rothlein, Robert Smythe and Geoffrey Sobelle.

syncratic, but taken as a whole they argue fairly coherently for art as a regenerative, structure-based language capable of generating meaning from context. While his show highlights the extent to which the creative act is inimical to the containing contexts of contemporary display institutions, it also revives the existentialist tenet that art is motivated above all by the prerequisite condition of solitary struggle. —CF

Stephen Dean, Target, 2005. 12 paper dartboards, 89 x 89 cm each. Courtesy Galerie Xippas, Paris.

