

Joseph Lawton: *Leshan, China, 1991*, gelatin silver print, 16 by 20 inches; at OK Harris.

abstractions, it seems, the unconscious is too heavy and ancient a burden to bear. —Steven Vincent

Paul Henry Ramirez at Mary Boone

Funny, smart and extravagantly seductive abstractions wired into a circuit board that charts longing and desire, Paul Henry Ramirez's newest paintings, all of them dated 2004, romance the arabesques and curls of Aubrey Beardsley out of the loopy, tweaked dreamland of Lari Pittman. In these acrylic-on-canvas works, which range from 60 to 78 inches square, suggestive figures are often crowned by exuberant masses of curls, salaciously linked by less than innocent diagrams that smooch and hold hands, working out their monkey business on pristine white fields. Each field is built up of gesso, each layer sanded to a flawless finish, the last one airbrushed smoother than any shell.

Ramirez titles each painting *In Fluent Form*, followed by its series number. Two prominent forms occupy *In Fluent Form 5*. Conjoined ovals of smooth, pure green that overflow the upper left quadrant are held aloft by a black bracket supported like a flower on a wiry stem. A rectangular reservoir of scarlet occupying much of the lower right quadrant expresses a somewhat thicker column of red that suggestively penetrates the cloven green pillow above. At the site of contact, glistening, brightly colored blobs of eccentrically placed circles spew forth like drops of lubricant erupting from some moist encounter.

In Fluent Form 2 expresses

the controlled hysteria of Ramirez's answer to the tradition of familial portraiture. The artist presents a surrealistic narrative involving the postcoital moments of improbable creatures and their hasty spawn. A whisper-thin and shining, purple-haired, arguably female figure stands a pace away from her fantastic opposite, a gesticulating abstraction of a caterpillar rendered in impasto; the creature is stretched out on a thoroughly rumbled bed. As though sated, it casts off a shower of frantic blood-red drops, while the spouse, every inch a mammal, sports a heart in place of a head—a cunning Ramirez hallmark—and comes equipped with horizontally opposed breasts tipped with olive shapes painted in shining, foil-like acrylic. Their precipitate spawn, a gosling of slinky wires, rests between its parents on a bit of incomprehensible circuitry.

With a naughty Hello Kitty of an embrace, *In Fluent Form 4* joins two biomorphic cloudlike forms, one yellow, the other pink. They press against each other, seemingly in midair, spewing up a geyser of brightly colored disks and releasing tear-shaped drops, the immediate fruit of their joining. In celebration of the act, the yellow form sprouts tail feathers that quiver with forbidden joy. This is not perverse. Ramirez is serious about his painting. His draftsmanship is sure and fine, the palette cool and modern. First and last, each painting declares itself as an object, with occasional bands of color wrapped around the edge, as though to keep the painting from flying off the wall. —Edward Leffingwell

Joseph Lawton at OK Harris

On the streets of Luxor, St. Petersburg, Benares, Daytona Beach and Syracuse, Joseph Lawton approaches the urban landscape with a highly developed sense of place. As a result, the 18 black-and-white photographs taken between 1985 and 1999 included in this exhibition evidence an understanding of the relationship of people to each other and to the places they occupy. The 16-by-20-inch prints in editions of 12 catch the arrested moments associated with photojournalism.

The photograph of a smiling worker in *Leshan, China* (1991) suggests a photographer at ease with a witting subject. The man is seated before a masonry wall near a sidewalk, his meal set out on a folding table. Leaning back in his chair, he lifts a bowl in salutation with one hand and a cigarette with the other. Close at hand, his bicycle identifies him as a man of modest means, and he seems content with the simple luxury of dining in the road. The cinematic moment of a crowd scene occupies *Benares, India* (1989), as the faithful seek the waters of the Ganges. Lawton positions himself between the river and bathers ascending the embankment steps. Closest to the camera, one young man turns toward another with an electric sense of movement, seemingly oblivious to Lawton's presence.

Elsewhere, a determined woman, shawled and barefoot, stands at the prow of a ship in *En Route to Kalimantan, Indonesia* (1990), peering toward a horizon of water and sky, as a little boy lies sleeping at her feet. The figures of *Yangzhou, China* (1991) rehearse another distribution of the many on

ancient steps. Resembling the street scenes of *Turandot*, the steps are animated by people who smoke, gesture, talk and form a community in a moment. Photographs taken in Moscow and St. Petersburg in 1993 reflect Lawton's palpable empathy for his shopworn subjects, two years after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Boys wear military uniforms, and grown men, standing in a narrow masonry stairwell, hold each other's hands and weep.

Lawton annually returns to upstate New York to photograph the state fair. In *Syracuse, NY* (1985) a tight phalanx of three young men, cigarettes in hand, approaches the photographer, looking directly into his camera and hoping to seem dangerous. The tousled blond wears tight big overalls and is flanked by dark-eyed boys with blown-dry hair; they look like twins. In *Daytona Beach, FL* (1999), two grizzled bikers ogle the tongued butt of a woman laced into leather chaps selling beers from a cooler. As different as these subjects seem in affect and culture, they are joined by a sense of shared and vulnerable humanity.

—Edward Leffingwell

Ian Wallace at American Fine Arts

Since the mid-1980s, the Canadian artist Ian Wallace has engaged in a conceptualist practice that combines two seemingly incompatible artistic paradigms: documentary photography—often featuring sites of urban development—and abstract monochrome painting. This exhibition featured a single work titled "The Barcelona Series" (1991), comprising five diptychs with abutting canvas panels of identical dimensions. In some of these, a white acrylic monochrome

View of Ian Wallace's "The Barcelona Series," 1991, photo-laminate, acrylic and monoprint on canvas; at American Fine Arts.

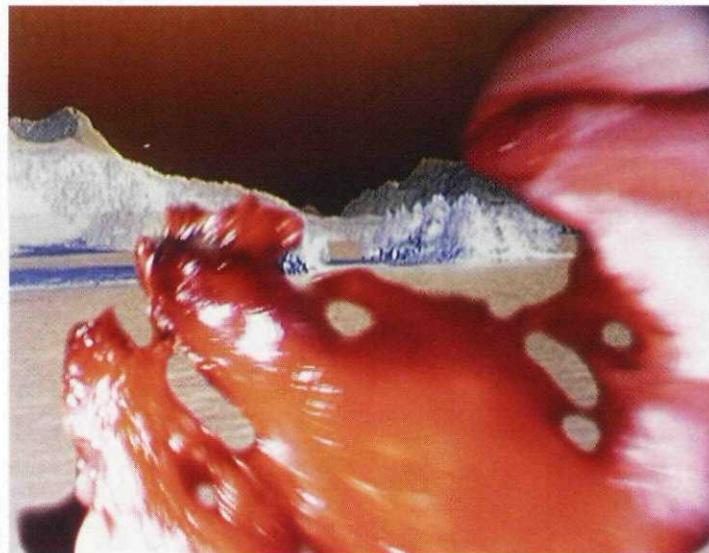


panel was paired with a C-print laminated to canvas; in others, each half of the diptych was split into its own fields of painting and photography. A monoprint strip created with inked plywood ran along each panel's edges. The photographs, all taken by Wallace in 1991, show construction sites for the Barcelona Summer Olympic Games that were held the following year.

The imagery is of skeletal edifices, debris-strewn lots surrounding steel girders and platforms, dump trucks, chain-link fences, cranes, and half-built, reinforced concrete shells. Individuals, whether shirtless laborers or hard-hat-wearing engineers and architects, appear largely as adjuncts to the incipient mammoth structures. These documentary pictures and the monochrome paintings exist side

distinction between two models of art, they also exhibit a consistent surface quality: the images have a uniform focus, as if refusing to make any particular element primary, while the muted and unvarying brushstrokes of the monochromes present an analogous all-over effect.

Although Wallace's photographs always investigate the character of a specific site (a later series joins red paintings with photographs of Times Square), in concert with the monochromes, the resulting works address more general concerns: the limits of representation, the relation between pure presence and referentiality, and what is lost and gained in the exchange of artistic autonomy for integration with the world. In the diptychs, the non-signifying emptiness of the monochromes finds an echo in the



Still from Pipilotti Rist's video installation *Herbstzeitlose*, 2004; at Luhring Augustine.



Coco Fusco: *a/k/a Mrs. George Gilbert*, 2004, single-channel DVD, dimensions variable; at The Project.

by side in an uneasy tension. The photographs detail relentless development, upheaval and urban transformation, while the paintings suggest stillness, vacancy, concentrated attention and the suspension of time. On the other hand, the photographs show, as Wallace proposed in a 1992 essay, a formalist approach to the world as a set of structures of geometric patterns and linear vectors that parallels an approach to painting as autonomous and inward directed. The effect is to transform the photograph from a transparent vehicle of representation to a self-referential object. And even as the diptychs preserve the

vacant, dehumanized urban landscape that the photographs disclose. —Jonathan Gilmore

Coco Fusco at The Project

Coco Fusco's latest effort, "*a/k/a Mrs. George Gilbert*," is an extraordinarily adept take on the history of racial politics in the U.S. and the harsh realities of global capitalism in the information age. The exhibition comprised three thematically related projects. A video projection, *a/k/a Mrs. George Gilbert* (2004), was on view in the main gallery along with "Sittings," four contact sheets of images taken with a spy camera. *Dolores from*

10 to 10 (2002), a three-monitor video display, was installed in the gallery's reception area.

As the centerpiece, *a/k/a Mrs. George Gilbert* was perhaps the most evocative and layered work in the show. The video recounts the two-month search and subsequent prosecution in 1969-70 of activist and philosopher Angela Davis. The title refers to one of the aliases attributed to her in the course of the FBI manhunt. Esthetically, the video is a rich pastiche of both cinematic and artistic references—most notably to Chris Marker's film *La Jetée* (1962)—as it overlays black-and-white newsreel footage, photographic stills, and close-ups of newspaper headlines. Interspersed throughout are staged reenactments of Davis under surveillance, punctuated by insertions of clips from various Hollywood films, such as *The Conversation* (1974), starring Gene Hackman as an FBI agent and surveillance specialist. In a voice-over that is part confessional, a fictitious male agent eerily recounts the government-sanctioned spying on Davis. He speaks about the noble cause of the agency, surveillance technology and the physical beauty of Davis's blackness.

Based on actual events, *Dolores from 10 to 10* explores the brutal exploitation of female labor. The video—its title perhaps an allusion to the classic Agnès Varda film *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1961)—similarly follows the actions of a female protagonist. The piece restages the 12-hour interrogation of a maquiladora laborer accused of attempting to unionize workers. Originally per-

formed by Fusco and Ricardo Dominguez at Helsinki's Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art and shown via live Internet feed, the work was displayed here in video form to simulate closed-circuit television. Viewers watch Fusco's drawn-out questioning and intermittent idleness as she is deprived of food, water and telephone access.

The success of these works resides in their marriage of artistic and historical references, as well as their examination of the relationship between oppression and technology, voyeurism and surveillance.

—D.C. Murray

Pipilotti Rist at Luhring Augustine

With a show that opened Sept. 11, Pipilotti Rist intended this installation as an expression of healing, a slightly belated gift of visual balm for a wounded city. Happily, its effect is more complicated than that. Titled *Herbstzeitlose* (which has been translated as *Meadow Saffron* or *Fall Time Less*), it consists of a four-track video installation and a few evocative fragments of rural domesticity: a full-scale partial facade of a scallop-shingled farmhouse, some well-worn patio furniture, a wicker basket with kindling, a rush broom. Visitors pass through an eye-warming pool of red light at the gallery's entrance before entering this arena of azure rural purity.

One video, featuring floral imagery, plays on the farmhouse wall. A second, more prominent, video is of moving water reflecting a splendid sunset, shot with a

Copyright of Art in America is the property of Brant Publications, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.