

flattened perspective, the somewhat awkward foreshortening, and the narrative structure of the scenes which sometimes resemble scenes of martyrdom, cause the paintings to be likened to early Renaissance fresco paintings (*Interrogation IV* can be compared to Masaccio's *Crucifixion of Saint Peter*). The similarities are disturbing, raising questions about the connection between heinous acts, high art, and visual pleasure. One of the canvases has a classical name — *Threnody*: four black women are frozen in gestures of grief, arms held up as if to defend themselves from the sight of a man's fallen body, his legs cut off by the canvas edge. These women function like the chorus in a Greek tragedy, reminding us to weep, as if the struggle against power was the struggle of memory against forgetting.

In *1 + 1 + 1* Alfredo Jarr gives us three images of our conception of the third world: photographs of children — barefoot, partially clad, malnourished, and upside down. They are from “down under” and, we — the inhabitants of where “up top”? — “the first world”? — have always marvelled at their tenacity in hanging on.

Thus comes about that we are on an upright line, but they on a line drawn sidewise. A kind of orthogonal triangle is thus formed, the position of whose upright line we occupy, but they the base; and the hypotenuse is drawn from our zenith to theirs.

Amerigo Vespucci, *Mundus Novus*

The images are obliterated in the framing devices on the floor, except in one case in which a mirror rights the image providing the viewer stands in a particular position. Nevertheless, in spite of the problems of representation and the problem of our viewing position, the children are real.

A kind of *Salon des refusés* was set up inside Documenta by Group Material. As a pun on Kassel and the notion of the ideal museum Douglas Ashford, Julie Ault, and Tim Rollins built a circular castle inside a room of the Fridericianum to house their selection of important cultural artifacts, including small works by numerous artists. Some of the artist in the castle had knocked at the door of the Kafkaesque castle of Documenta and been denied entrance, some had even been summoned to the gates and then been turned away. Ironically, the Group Material show is more appropriate to the professed theme of this Documenta than a lot of the work which did gain entry. The show revolves around the complex nexus of art, commodities, labels, and packaging: a box of Tide, women (*Style* by Nancy Spero), a company (The cover of *Businessweek*, Dec. 24, 1984, “Union Carbide fights for its life,” by Alfredo Jarr), the exhibition itself (“Pre-Production Ad for a Room by Group Material and Edward Fry, Wulf Herzogenrath and Manfred Schneckengerber on the occasion of Documenta 8,” by Christopher Williams). And, of course, it was also about representation. Both inside and outside the installation Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer continued their work mining this particular battlefield, with Holzer constantly spoiling the coherence of every set.

One way or another a lot of very good, very provocative work made its way into Documenta 8. It has the best of intentions, unfortunately, it also had the largest gap between intention and execution. Yet it raised the best of questions — the old questions: “Ah the old questions, and the old answers, there's nothing like them” (Samuel Beckett).

JO-ANNA ISAAK



Lothar Baumgarten, *El Dorado*, 1987, view of the exhibition, Kunsthalle, Bern.

## LOTHAR BAUMGARTEN

Kunsthalle, Bern  
June 5 — August 2

Perhaps right off we should clarify the relation to the “other,” if that term is not already too generalized and dominant a theme (that is to say, too abstract), and even loudly pronounced in a concurrent exhibition at the Bern Kunstmuseum as *Die Gleichzeitigkeit des Anderen*, “The Presence of the Other.” But, in Lothar Baumgarten’s exhibition *El Dorado*, that relation is not obvious, not immediately there. An image, or a face, is not presented to view. Rather that relation is obscured by what we initially see: text. We have first to determine what “other” is really *there* in the Baumgarten exhibition. Conversely, we have to find where the work/exhibition situates us. Accomplishing both will bring the two into relation, self and other, thereby discovering where and in *what* are the points of contact. Clarification, we will find, leads to contamination.

“El Dorado” — the poster has this title printed in yellow. Inside the Kunsthalle, the first gallery runs a ring of text in black and red around the room. One word is painted/printed in yellow, as punctuation but not a focal point in the room: “Aare,” the river that bisects Bern. The other names, in red and black, designate rivers of the region in Venezuela in which Baumgarten has lived and travelled extensively: the referent of every mention in this exhibition. They also place Bern, but in a relation we have to discover. That one reference “Aare,” out of place, puts us in our place in Bern, in Europe, in the Western world. It would be a mistake perhaps to presume that, written in yellow (gold), it suggests that “El Dorado” is here and now, a presence that we mistakenly place elsewhere and defer as the primitive or exotic, rather than recovering it, for ourselves, here. (That “for us” is to be demonstrated.) This first part of the exhibition rises above that shown on the floor below, but what is sublimated is material, not spiritual, and what comes to us yellow leaves a trace behind.

We have, however, to deal with the traces left here in this installation and thus classify the elements of the exhibition. There are three parts brought together under the title *El Dorado*: the upper floor of the Kunsthalle devoted to the designations of rivers; downstairs divided into two works, *La Gran Sabana*, 1985-86 and *Rio Yurani*, 1969-87. On every wall of the upper galleries text has been

arranged in different configurations of words of different size; colour (black/red/blue/yellow); type (Roman or Italic); and disposition (printed normally or mirrored as if reflected in water). Each configuration of names is a combination of at least two of these classes and they range figurally from a simple formation to a “Mallarmean” spatiality. *La Gran Sabana* comprises a number of black and white photographs of savanna, for the most part uninhabited landscape, which are spaced by bars of the distinctive pigment Baumgarten uses. *Rio Yurani* is composed of an entanglement of electrical wires, branching into blue and yellow incandescent bulbs that lie on the floor, spread among the litter of a type of redwood on which are balanced shallow bowls filled with water and in which maps have been pencilled and pigment brushed.

The photographs occupy a space between the first and last parts of the exhibition, between the names on the upper floor and the materials and maps of the lower. Are the photographs part of a progression, a mediation of the two, or are all the elements separate? Text, photographs, and maps are all representations of a sort, transcriptions on a surface. The work transports back its elements in the form of photographs, the wood and pigment, the maps and names: it is a displacement that is a representation and naming. But this displacement is already a violence, a transcription into a phonetic alphabet and writing on the level of the text, into knowledge for exploitation in the maps. The photographs open on to something else. They might simply be records but they read initially as representations of a picturesque or sublime sensibility. They do not exactly survey as much as bring into view certain elements in their span from first to last, as in the photograph read first in relation to what precedes, the installation upstairs, and the photograph seen in relation to what succeeds, the adjacent installation *Rio Yurani*. That first photograph shows the only sign of inhabitation, an abandoned shelter; the last shows the brutal effects of a labour process, the techniques of searching for gold, in which the earth is washed with powerful hoses. (This is also the cropped image on the poster. This area of Venezuela is thought to be the site of the “original” El Dorado and is also the site of current exploitation.) These two



Geneviève Cadieux, *Nature morte aux arbres et au ballon*, 1987, photo sérigraphie sur lumiflex, 3 x 6 m; photo: Louis Lussier, gracieuseté du Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.

photographs are spaced by a selection of photographs of a varied and beautiful, uninhabited landscape. But at the same time these photographs in turn are spaced, marked by the pigment bars.

The photographs could only silently voice something by which they are marked. The names and territories of the other aspects of the installations are neither evocations, commemorations, nor classifications: we miss the point if we linger there. The photographs instead are marked by what spaces them. And what those pigment bars "hide" so to speak is what actually marks the landscape and thus destroys it. In another version of *La Gran Sabana* (1978) shown at the Marian Goodman Gallery in 1985, photographs of the Venezuelan savanna were interrupted in the same manner by the names of the minerals being mined and the species thereby endangered.

This work does not simply turn us along the axis of nature and culture or evoke the other through various means even though we do not come "face to face" in any image. It establishes the north in relation to the south but not in any dialogue. Baumgarten does not represent the Other. Nowhere are the images of this other — only the signs, names of an inhabitation that evoke another mapping, another value for the land, its forms, its flora and fauna. At times it is more the portrait of a landscape, which is something that *Rio Yurani* seems to try to evoke. What is represented, however, is another relation to this landscape which marks it while being absent from it — our use of it while we inhabit another place (the "Aare" of this exhibition). Our consumption is its destruction. Our national culture hides the labour of another and the actual destruction of his or her locale and the symbolic dimensions of a way of life, just as the presence of "material" and the foreign language of the exhibition initially disguise Baumgarten's concerns.

By the various reversals of expectations in viewing this exhibition Baumgarten establishes our relation and our role. He situates us *here*, not there (in a fictitious relation to an other), and he situates us in such a way that we can read the effects of an actual relation that is hidden from us. What comes to us yellow leaves a trace, and that trace is our contamination.

PHILIP MONK

## ELEMENTA NATURAE

Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal  
7 juin — 6 septembre

Pendant que des manifestations comme *Expotec* ou *Images du Futur* faisaient la promotion des dernières inventions scientifiques, il y avait aussi, à l'écart, une exposition plus discrète et surtout plus réticente à prendre le virage technologique: *Elementa Naturae*. Organisée par Michiko Yajima, avec l'aide de Marie Perreault et de Monika Gagnon, cette exposition remettait à jour la présence encore tangible d'une nature envirognante.

Neuf artistes ont posé leurs installations autour du musée à partir des notions de l'«observable» et de l'«inobservable» et un dixième, Geoffrey James, a photographié les oeuvres en élargissant le cadre de présentation, afin de reprendre sur un même plan, autant l'objet que son propre environnement. Les autres ont choisi l'endroit selon leur projet, très en vue ou en retrait, à la limite du territoire du musée ou, simplement, en s'appuyant sur l'*institution* et cela, sans vraiment viser l'intégration à l'architecture et la permanence de l'art public. Chaque installation avait cet air (aire) d'autonomie en rapport avec son environnement propre; les éléments et les matériaux pouvaient néanmoins supporter les conditions naturelles de l'aménagement extérieur. Sans être un avantage ni un désavantage, les artistes sélectionnés avaient en général peu d'expérience sur le terrain: il y avait surtout à s'étonner de l'adaptation réussie, pour les plupart des exposants, à l'espace extérieur, et de constater à la fois l'absence de quelques-uns, reconnus pour être concernés par ces conditions d'expositions.

Prendre position face à la nature préoccupe depuis longtemps l'art occidental; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, par exemple, pensait découvrir d'un seul coup la nature originelle, ou à l'opposé, Ernst H. Gombrich démontrait le bagage culturel d'un Asiatique qui, devant un paysage anglais peignait toujours à l'orientale. Mais c'est avec l'art romantique que la nature a trouvé son expression la plus déterminante: à travers une *mimesis*, l'art et la nature sont dédoublés et présentés tous les deux comme issus de la même force créatrice. Au contraire de l'art néo-classique qui voulait faire plus beau que nature, le romantisme a dénié le travail de la composition

au profit d'une présentation naturelle du paysage. Il s'agit donc en général d'entretenir la dualité entre l'immédiateté de la nature et la médiation de l'art, entre le naturel et l'artificiel, entre l'intuition et le concept. Dans *Elementa Naturae*, nous verrons moins les grandes manoeuvres de l'inscription culturelle en pleine nature propres au land art qu'une attitude plus conciliante, se rapportant davantage à la dissimulation. Dans la plupart des interventions s'exprime un désir d'accommodation, de prendre le site comme tel, sans trop le déranger, en rajoutant même de la «nature» là où il en manque. Ici l'immédiateté correspond à cette présentation presque naturelle des choses, et pourrait à la limite entretenir l'arrière-goût d'un romantisme tardif, si ce n'était que dans chacune des oeuvres exposées se présente un degré de difficulté ou d'inaccessibilité qui ralentit, tant physiquement que conceptuellement, la lecture d'une vision immédiate.

Ainsi malgré son apparence toute naturelle, le paysage composé de mousse végétale de Francine Larivée est issu d'un travail technique à partir d'un éco-système. Par exemple, une sorte d'avent assure «artificiellement» une protection contre les intempéries, tout en limitant l'accès à l'observateur. Ce dispositif fait toutefois partie de l'installation comme telle; il est juxtaposé comme élément de structuration à la matière organique des mousses. Un grillage assura aussi un maintien sous les mousses, tout en leur donnant la forme d'un paysage vallonné, à moins que les mousses développent d'elles-mêmes un arrangement naturel, au dépend du support. Dans une autre situation d'inaccessibilité, l'installation de Claude Mongrain est juchée sur un balcon du musée (dont l'accès est interdit faute de surveillance) pour finalement choir sur le terrain avoisinant. Le jeu de pièces formé de plusieurs matériaux et adaptable selon les propriétés du lieu permet aussi une composition plus serrée, à partir du support muséal, culturel, vers une dispersion toute naturelle au sol, comme des débris que la nature se chargera de faire disparaître avec le temps. De son côté, Claude Tousignant procure à son retrait métaphysique (le pur langage des formes et des couleurs) une difficulté toute physique en rendant son *Palimpseste sur la pierre tombale de Mies Van Der Rohe* invisible, à moins de monter sur le monticule où une pierre de granit est déposée à plat. Mais le sens du palimpseste revient à l'ombre des arbres, placés à proximité et qui recouvre la pierre selon l'heure du jour ou figure un mouvement selon le rythme du vent. Ce qui avait été formalisé selon l'ordre de la nature (Mondrian, Van Der Rohe) revient par l'aléatoire perturber l'épuration et la belle symétrie du modernisme. L'installation d'Eva Brandl poursuit un travail d'évocation d'objets (une barque en cuivre, un cours d'eau simulé par une plaque de verre, une aube en acier, ainsi qu'un arbre transplanté) qui viennent défier notre imaginaire, oscillant entre l'apparition poétique, et la construction réelle. L'observateur hésite autant entre la visibilité et l'accessibilité devant un escalier en verre qui n'a pas la solidité requise pour permettre d'y accéder, et le cours d'eau en verre qui n'est pas praticable pour la barque posée juste à côté. Le réel, ainsi dénaturé par le simulacre du verre réduit l'accès aux objets à l'immobilité d'une vision.

Sur un panneau-réclame d'une compagnie spécialisée dans ce type de publicité, Geneviève Cadieux fait un double emploi de l'image commercialisée qui, à force d'être vue, n'est plus regardée, et de l'image artistique qui, elle, préfère s'isoler pour être mieux vue. Entre l'évidence et l'inusité, on remarque alors que le panneau ne fait pas partie du décor «naturel», qu'il s'agit en fait d'une image photographique sans message, suspendue entre ciel et terre et représentant, dans la partie gauche, des nuages, et dans celle de droite, un corps tendu attrapant un ballon. Si le moment précis de la saisie du ballon fait penser au déclenchement d'un appareil photo, les nuages quant à eux, constituent une réponse naturelle à la qualité photographique de l'impression noir et blanc. Une autre façon de dissimuler l'oeuvre au regard immédiat revient à Irène F. Whittome, qui a placé dans une grotte une énorme tortue en matière synthétique se dressant à la verticale. Deux entrées permettent l'accès de l'observateur; l'une, où sont déposées les