

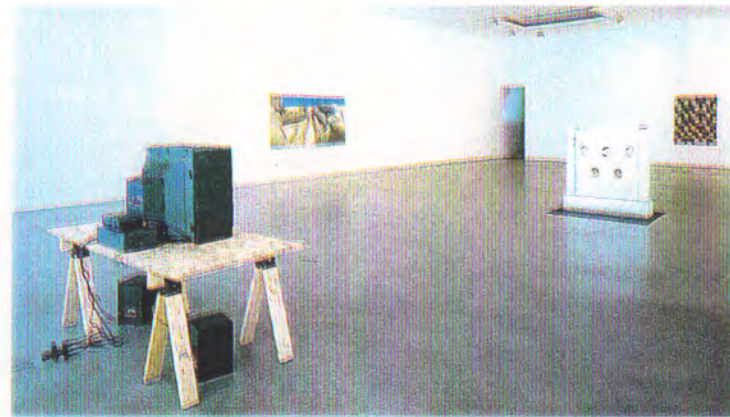
**ANNI ALBERS,
ROBERT BECK,
CADY NOLAND,
JOAN SEMMEL,
NANCY SHAVER**

MATTHEW MARKS/
MITCHELL ALGUS/
CURT MARCUS
GALLERY, NEW YORK

KATY SIEGEL

How to deal with the art of the past—especially the recent past? As we fumble around for alternatives to the old do-away-with-dad modernist model (passive-aggressive postmodernism—i.e., replicate, don't wrestle—was a nice try), three current shows take the lead, serving up yesterday three different ways.

As ever, context is everything. Joan Semmel looks like two different artists in the group show ("Anni Albers, Robert Beck, Cady Noland, Joan Semmel and Nancy Shaver: Black and White Photographs 1975-77") curated by Robert Gober at Matthew Marks and in her jewel of a solo ("Joan Semmel: Self-Images") at Mitchell Albus. Albus has earned a certain cachet mounting gently revisionist shows of left-out artists like Gene Beery, Nicholas Krushenick, and Harold Stevenson; here you see Semmel's paintings the way you might have seen them back in '78, in an intimate space on the fringes of SoHo. At Marks, Semmel and Shaver are thrust into the



Below: Joan Semmel, *Sunlight*, 1978, oil on canvas, 72 x 96". Above, left to right: Robert Beck, *Untitled (The Spike Buck)*, 1995, 24-inch monitor, DVD player, DVD disc, audio receiver, speakers, and wood, 53 x 74 x 36". Joan Semmel, *Intimacy-Autonomy*, 1974, oil on canvas, 50 x 98". Cady Noland, *Stand-In for a Stand-In*, 1999, cardboard, wood, and paint, 55 x 53 x 12". Installation view, Matthew Marks. Right: "Nancy Shaver: Overall, 1975-1999," 1999. Installation view, Curt Marcus.

present by Gober's grouping and the insistent *housness* of the clean and monumental flagship Chelsea venue. Marcus falls some-where in between, presenting a straight-up survey, "Nancy Shaver: Overall, 1975-1999."

Semmel's self-portraits (three canvases at Albus and two at Marks, all dating from the mid- to late '70s) take on the traditional, objectified female nude. More complexly, she also plays on modernist flatness, long associated with a masculine mode of intellect and rigorous empirical refusal. Semmel assertively models her body's curves and rolls, choosing poses that push depth; in *On the Grass*, 1978, she props herself up with one arm, looking down at the perpendicular ground. And while she began her nudes in the early '70s in monochrome colors—purples, blues, etc.—by the time we reach the works on view at Albus, she is using a flagrantly naturalistic palette. (In her current work, she abandons that palette, working in a figurative, but more fanciful vein.)

If Semmel's older work asks to be reseen in the light of younger artists such as Lisa Yuskavage, so Shaver's resonates with the work of artists like Kiki Smith, Mike Kelley, and Gober himself (and, curiously, she comes off in some sense as an early appropriator). While Gober fills the second room at Marks with Shaver's 1975-77 photos, flatly depicting found children's clothing, primarily T-shirts emblazoned with labels and slogans like "Stinker," photos that are both conceptually witty

and visually engaging, the work on view in Shaver's semi-retrospective at Curt Marcus is uneven. The better pieces combine found objects to capture an abstraction: For example, in *The Civil War*, 1989, she covers a rectangular support with blue and gray striped fabric, pulling and distorting the cloth at its north and south sides. But I don't like the many pieces (such as *Figure #6*, 1997) that consist of the stuffing and wrapping and stacking of sacks and boxes. Here Shaver tries too hard to be pathetic yet auratic, combining the unrelievedly leftover and the fondly regarded.

**WHY THESE SHOWS
OF NEGLECTED ARTISTS
NOW? THIS GENERATIONAL
KINK ALL
MAKES SENSE IN LIGHT
OF GOBER'S BRILLIANT
INSTALLATION.**

Why these shows of neglected artists now? This generational kink all makes sense in light of Gober's brilliant installation at Marks. Seen from the artist's perspective, Anni Albers's weaving *Black-White-Grey*, 1927, becomes the repressed homemaker; Robert Beck's video *Untitled (The Spike Buck)*, 1995, the stolid, violent father; with Cady Noland's *Stand-In for a Stand-In*, 1999, stuck in between. On either side, two Semmel couples bracket this tug-of-war. The second room holds the Shaver series, and in a tiny third room, the whole show is encapsulated: a study for the Albers, one Shaver tiny tee, and Semmel's painting *Bathing Andy*, 1975, a huge little boy, naked.

Semmel has never looked weirder. The

famous *Intimacy-Autonomy*, 1974, looks cold and blue here, more autonomous than intimate: The little space between the figures seems like a gulf, echoing that between the Albers tapestry and the Beck buck. Gober, curator of the recent past, has intervened. Noland's puritanical device is an after-the-fact maquette of her 1993-94 series of aluminum stockades. This "stand-in" (and you have the feeling the Noland is standing in for Gober himself here) doesn't open, implying a figure forever trapped. Gober's own family romance, to which he has occasionally alluded in his work, intersects with the historical romance of art, and while he critiques the narrowness of the former, he restores a certain breadth to the latter.

Marcus presents a standard, responsible survey, but Albus and Gober give us something more complex. All three are valid ways to see the art: biographically, historically, and critically (respectively). Albus pays homage to the artist and the past, Gober to the viewer and the present.

In a culture driven relentlessly by change, we need to be reminded that generations coexist; unlike butterflies, one group of human beings does not disappear when a new one emerges. There is a shortage of mid-career artists who have received the attention to maintain a serious oeuvre: critics set them adrift, and then complain when the career meanders. So let's see more of artists we've seen before—more of the recent past. Some will claim that, with these historical shows, galleries are usurping the function of museums, but perhaps the trend will force museums to acknowledge the rights and the wrongs of their own recent history. That would be interesting. And in any event, it's nice to see a little now-and-then, now and then. □

Katy Siegel is an assistant professor of contemporary art history and criticism at Hunter College, CUNY.



Jack Barkovely is editor of Artforum.

Opposite page, clockwise from upper left: Jeff Wall, *A Hunting Scene*, 1994, Chromaline transparency, aluminum display, case, and fluorescent light; Cary Leibowitz / Candyass, *Depression Penants* (detail), 1990, two four parts, 9 x 24" each; Calvin Klein men's briefs named and signed by Andy Warhol, 1982; Dieter Roth, *Soft Nipples*, 1970, cheese, red acrylic paint, Plexiglas, and wooden pins, 9 x 9"; Edition of *Birthday*; Photos: Paul McCarthy, *Olefa Roth, Selfburn/Lowdown* (Selflower/Lintower) (detail), 1969-98, two towers with glass shelves containing chocolate and sugar sculptures, each tower on 98 1/2 x 39 1/2 x 39 1/2"; Photo: Christian Kurz and Alexander Trautlin; Cady Noland, *Carful of Action*, 1986, cars filled with car parts, 55 x 40 x 30"; Karen Kilimnik, *Calvin Loves Kate*, 1994, acrylic and crayon on paper, 40 x 27"; Penelope Spheeris, *Wayne's World*, 1992, animation still from a color film in 35 mm, 95 minutes; Wayne Campbell (Mike Myers), Photo: Photoist; Christopher Munch, *The Hours and Times*, 1992, production still from a black-and-white film in 35 mm, 60 minutes. Left to right: John Lennon (Ian Hart) and Brian Epstein (David Angus)

Editor's Note

Enough About You

It must be something about round calendar numbers. Over the past ten years I've kept my editorial cards pretty close to my chest, but as we prepared this special issue of the '90s—a period that happens to line up neatly with my tenure at *Artforum*—I couldn't resist throwing my lot in with our thirty-plus contributors and conducting my own desk-chair tour of the decade. After all, everyone knows all critics want to be artists, and all editors, writers . . . Now there's a *mea culpa* for the guilty-me decade.

1 We're Not Worthy As long as we're indulging in parsing the decade's art and culture into tidy ten-point hit parades, I'll confess that, for me, the '90s became the '90s when the PR-perfect '80s turned abject. The "loser thing" (the phrase comes from Rhonda Lieberman's article in the September 1992 issue, my first as editor) seemed to happen everywhere and all at once:

Vik Muniz's "stuttering" opened in SoHo; "Just Pathetic," Ralph Rugoff's West Coast roundup, made its way from LA to New York; filmmaker Richard Linklater's sublime driftwork *Slaeker* showed up in theaters; and Karen Kilimnik, taking dictation from a chorus of unlikely superegoic voices—teen idols, demi-mobes, and supermodels—opened her first SoHo show. Of course, culture doesn't stick to best-of-decade rules; by the time we officially signaled the tempo change in that first issue, the loser thing was cresting for those of us who had caught it as it swelled. To me, the '80s were already going slack by 1988, the year that Cady Noland wheeled a cart of junk into John Gibson's Broadway gallery. Noland always said she liked Minimal sculpture, but only in poor condition—a Flavin with a nice-dinged-up mount? She redeemed her anti-finish fetish when she laid out a grid of ornamental panels à la Carl Andre, named it *Dirt Corral*, and explained its purpose: to gather dust.

2 Formless: A User's Guide

Meanwhile, Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois (did they feel the undertow even in those ivory climes?) were making high theory of equivalently lowly . . . "operations." While sternly disavowing any connection between

art-world abjection and their rereading of the century's art through Bataille's *informe*, the 1997 English-language volume that followed on their revelatory 1996 Pompidou show became obligatory reading even as the misrecognition left us all a bit—scattered.

3 The Hours and Times What makes us abject, which is to say, what makes us low? The good? The great? In the '90s, mostly the famous. Then-twenty-nine-year-old director Christopher Munch turned out this 1992 jewel of a chamber piece, in which John Lennon (Ian Hart) and his manager, dandyish Brian Epstein (David Angus), spend a brilliantly fictionalized weekend in a Barcelona hotel suite. Set against the incipient rise of Beatlemania as Lennon joins the firmament, leaving the worldly Epstein to his mortal lot, this sexually charged elegy to unconsummated fascination is surely the decade's subtlest meditation on celebrity and desire.

4 Andy's Calvins Because wherever we go, he's already been there. Because in the '90s, when much that is art is Pop art (and all of it's *neo*), he reminds us why he invented the idiom in the first place. When Calvin sent Andy the first pair of briefs from his debut underwear collection way back in '82, Andy promptly stretched them up, signed them, and presented them to Madame Schlumberger. In short(s), with one preemptive stroke he put his signature on the branding miracle of the '90s. Remember when men's briefs were jockeys, the way photocopiers were Xerox machines and canned soup, Campbell's? Well, we know now that Calvin changed all that, but Andy knew it back then. Damn! Why didn't we think of that?

5 La Terrain Vague Ptehistory again: If the '80s were dominated by those twin headlines, Neo-Ex and Neo-everything-else, the quieter promise of that decade would be answered in the next by those poets of the peripheral, photographers Andreas Gursky and Jeff Wall chief among them, who made the dead zone, the non-place, the in-between their curiously affecting focus. The artist of this decade as he was of the last, Wall made art *out* of the new art history

(one of that revived discipline's deans, *Artforum* contributing editor Thomas Crow, returned the favor in his 1993 feature), but more important—Crow again—in anticipation of its discoveries. If Wall has laid "secure claim to having discovered the suburban *terrain vague* as a diagnostic feature of modernity"—but one revisited motif among many in his work—he has done so via the technological possibilities of his medium, and it is by way of the evolving interface between the photographic and the art historical that he, like Gursky, has made that modernist "moment" adequate to our own.

6 Gerhard Richter, David Reed, Bernard Frize, et al. Photography about painting—but also the other way around. I don't care what people say, I like paintings that look like photographs—especially when they're abstract.

7 "The One Thing That Can Save America" In his 1975 poem, John Ashbery (with Warhol), the other necessary imagination of our quotidian present) puts the afterlife question this way: "Where then are the private turns of event/Destined to boom later like golden chimes?" When I heard the news of Dieter Roth's death, I knew the artist only as the maker of the endlessly fascinating forty volumes I had thumbed nonstop as a clerk at Printed Matter early in my New York tenure; in the US at least, his reputation remained little more than cultish rumor—Jason Rhoades's drive-around homage, trunk full of cheese; the long-lost *Soft Nipples*, thirty-three plastic containers of *fromage*. (Paul McCarthy tracked the multiple to a Hancock Park garage where it had languished undisturbed since 1970 in order to photograph it—just under the wire, as it happened—for our special October '98 issue.) By the time I visited Europe for the Venice Biennale, almost a year to the day of his death, Roth's ascension was absolute. Represented there by *Solo Scenen*, his final multimonitor installation, the artist presided over the international event, an eccentric and beloved paterfamilias.

8 Pulp Fiction All symptom—and perfect Pop. Not that approval matters: We honor Tarantino just as much when we refuse his art

as when we embrace it. Plus, who can resist a guy who rolled the credits for his previous bloodbath to that Nilsson tune "Put the Lime in the Coconut and Call Me in the Morning . . . ?"

9 Revision Quest Even in our extended ironic present, where indulging in perversely sectarian tastes can seem the real thing, I know I'm going to regret this one: Color Field painting, long scapegoated after Greenberg's Reign of Terror, has been my favorite guilty pleasure in the '90s. Imagine my surprise to find this heretic taste confirmed by the likes of Laura Owens, Monique Prieto, et al. The prize in this category goes to Jeffrey Deitch's Green Mountain survey, and a handful of welcome revivals: Nicholas Krushchick, Jogn Semmel, and Harold Stevenson at Mitchell Algué; Paul Feeley at Lawrence Markey; and Robert Overby and John Wesley at Jessica Fredericks.

10 Editorial License Honorable mentions to Gabriel Orozco for putting those oranges on the window sills of that beige brick apartment building across from MOMA (we've all looked out over the sculpture garden at those rounded bays, but Orozco's discreet intervention made the everyday strange and left us at once more self-conscious and somehow lighter on our feet); to Catherine David, who, after much predictably reactionary huffing and puffing by the press, made the Documenta she wanted (and with a checklist to return to: Ed van der Elsken and Robert Adams, anyone?); to Matthew Barney for breaking the mold (I'm still not sure what I really think, but I wouldn't miss an episode); to Nan Goldin (who started as a demimonde paparazzo and turned herself into an adjective); to Todd Haynes for *Velvet Goldmine* (and for the return of glam); to T.J. Clark for his inspired 1994 *October* essay, "In Defense of Abstract Expressionism," and its triumphal "vulgarity." And finally to Tony Koster, the publisher who has sustained *Artforum* for the past twenty years (this special issue marks his 200th) with integrity and restraint, allowing the publication to evolve and reinvent itself even as it maintained a standard that is very much his own. This issue is dedicated to him. □

DEC 1999 - "The Best of the 90's Issue"