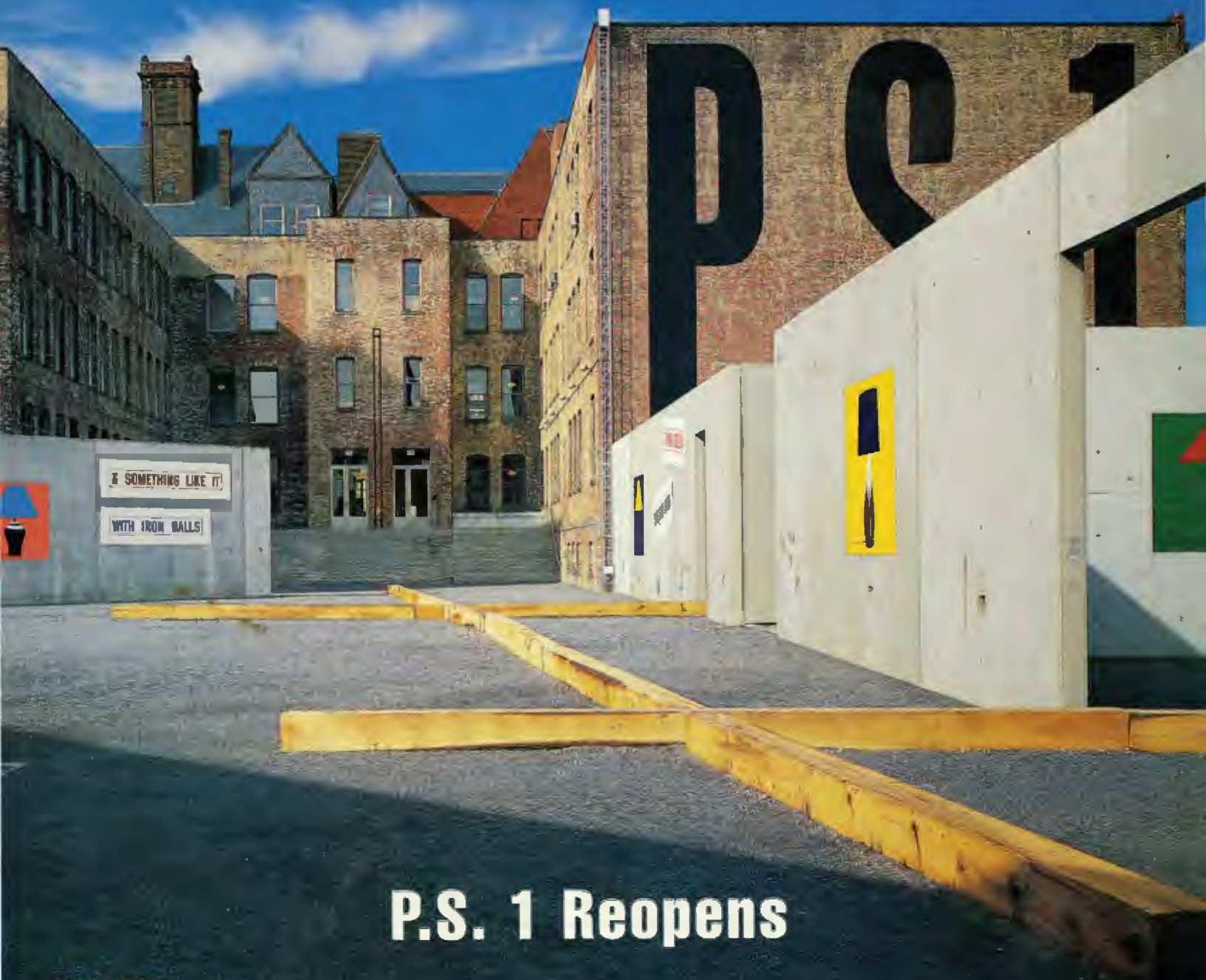


Art in America

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building block. The reflexive nature of the print echoed the artist's 1996 show here of prints and the woodblocks that generated them: wood becomes paper, which then bears the imprint of wood. While Anderson encourages the material and the spiritual to share space in his sculptural work, such connections and interdependencies are forged more profoundly in his prints, which evoke a simple, yet inexhaustible organic completeness, a cycle of deeply satisfying integrity.

—Leah Ollman

LOS ANGELES

Sherrie Levine at Margo Leavin

This handsome show surveyed Sherrie Levine's work of the last several years. It also supported a reading of appropriation art that views it in a less critical, more complicated relationship to its sources than early postmodern theory would have it. Addicts and connoisseurs are this work's intended audience. Levine rewards the initiated and trained viewer with elegant, precisely crafted visual vehicles for ideas that may be communicated by specific art referents, but ultimately concern many of the central preoccupations, fictions and ideals of modern art. In this exhibition, her hybridizing practice transmogrified the signature motifs and styles of other artists in an exploration of the nature of the signatory subject itself, the "I" of the creative act.

Four separate groups of work were included, each based on a different set of readymade objects and techniques selected from the catalogue of modernist art and design. Claude Monet's "Cathedrals" provided a basis for a suite of computer-generated Iris prints made by scanning reproductions of individual paintings from the series, translating this visual information to digitized form, then reconfiguring it into abstract colored blocks. In size and tonal range these prints approximate the paintings that served as their already once-removed sources. However, the all-over Impressionist facture of the "Cathedrals," produced under Monet's assembly-line painting system, is replaced by the uninflected output of an overtly mechanized process. Levine's rigid geometries also call up the work of geo-abstractionists like Josef Albers. Seriality begins to

look more like compulsive repetition than strategy, and questions of originality and influence seem to be raised only to leave them begged.

The three other groups of work were sculptures. In addition to displaying the complex and often contradictory genealogies that Levine delights in, all embody the notion of "not-quite-sameness" that supplies the work's primary fascination. *Buddha* was exhibited in its full edition of six highly polished, curvaceous cast bronzes modeled on Duchamp's prototypical *Fountain*, but crossbred with Arp and Brancusi. Invoking another Duchamp work, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, Levine's *Chimera: After a Broken Leg*, was represented by six from an edition of 12 wall-mounted Plexiglas boxes which each encase an object that vaguely resemble some "tribal" mask. It turns out to be a leg splint of molded plywood designed by architect Charles Eames and fabricated by the U. S. Department of Defense during the 1940s. Finally, *Small Krate Table*, a previously unexhibited suite of six unfinished ash sculptures from 1993, scales up a Gerrit Rietveld furniture design into something that seems caught between sizes and modes, neither clearly functional nor purely sculptural. All of these works appeared as striking variants of Levine's meditation on our need to retain a sense of connection with our objects of past cultural production. As such they had particular resonance in Los Angeles, where consumption makes captivating spectator sport.

—Virginia Rutledge

LONDON

Sarah Lucas at St. John's Lofts and Sadie Coles HQ

These concurrent exhibitions were Sarah Lucas's first solos in London in three years. Her repertoire of confrontational self-portraiture and genital punning has been acclaimed for its ribaldry, appropriate in a country that makes a pastime of sexual innuendo. Lucas's jerry-built assemblages of everyday materials reveal a debt to the aggressiveness, irreverence and idiomatic freedom of early Acconci, Oppenheim and especially Nauman. In the St. John's Lofts installation, the scurrilousness that has characterized her

works acquired an unexpected profundity. It was as if the sculptures were props in a sordid B-movie whose bleak logic rewards sexual license and smoking with death.

Several moving photographic self-portraits implied a grudging introspection, as if she were feeling a need to question her facade of toughness. *Human Toilet* is an overhead view of Lucas sitting naked on the bowl, abjectly clutching to her chest the detached toilet tank. In the theatrical *Self-Portrait with Skull* a bronze *memento mori* is set in front of her crotch as she sits on the ground, casually dressed, with legs outstretched; her penetrating stare and half smile add an unsettling intimacy.

With a touch of the fairground macabre, other exhibits included a circular steel cage with lockable door and a cardboard coffin, its askew lid revealing a glowing fluorescent light within. Adding to her series of anthropomorphic furniture, *Down Below* was an old metal bathtub, its drain doubling as a vagina from which flesh-colored paint seeped onto the gallery floor in a traumatic image of self-induced abortion. Two other large works brutally summed up the horizons of masculine libido. The dilapidated Ford Capri of *Solid Gold Easy Action* was fitted with a workable hydraulic lift that, when switched on, caused this archetypal macho British car to move repeatedly up and down in a crude representation of strenuous fucking. *Chuffing Away to Oblivion* was a freestanding cubicle about 10 feet square; its interior re-created a men's smoking room papered with lurid newspaper pages and busty pin-ups. The accounts of scandals and images of topless women had been shelacked to appear yellowed from years of cigarette smoke.

Lucas's intense and unpredictable tone was missing from "Bunny Gets Snookered" at Sadie Coles HQ. Eight headless Bellmeresque mannequins were clamped to chairs carefully arranged on and around a large billiard table whose pockets doubled as female genitalia. This gendering of club-room paraphernalia was too ambiguous to generate much sexual charge, and the work's resemblance to Sherrie Levine's 1991 installation of ornately carved billiard tables, appropriated from Man Ray, was an unhelpful distraction. More intriguing were three large black-

and-white photographs of similar mannequins set up in Lucas's studio. These images may be instances of the minor genre of artists' studio photos, but they were powerful enough in their own right to recall Brancusi's contemplative photographs.

—Mark Harris

IVRY, FRANCE

Philippe Richard at Crédac

Although Philippe Richard regularly shows abstract paintings, this exhibition revealed how the vision of painting entertained by



Philippe Richard: View of "Months and Years," 1994-95, acrylic on driftwood; at Crédac.

this 35-year-old French artist goes far beyond the canvas. Titled "Months and Years" (an allusion to Proust), the exhibition consisted of two parts. The first involved pieces of driftwood which Richard had collected during a visit to Iceland. While Icelanders traditionally carve proprietary marks on such wood, Richard used it as a support for his paintings. Surprisingly, the motifs he has developed on conventional canvases—zigzagging lines, circles, dots, lozenge shapes—fit quite naturally onto this unusual medium, although the irregular shape and surface of the driftwood disrupts one's reading of the painted geometric forms.

At Crédac (Centre de recherche, d'échange et diffusion

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pour l'art contemporain), the dozens of pieces of painted wood were laid end to end on the floor in a series of parallel rows. The pieces in each row were arranged by size, graduating from thin to thick. Standing at the "thin" end of the installation, the viewer's sense of scale was confused. With the largest pieces farthest away, the rules of perspective seemed inverted and one could only guess at the dimensions of the more distant elements.

In the end, this accumulation of painted objects had to be approached as sculpture. As one walked around and through the rows of driftwood, the appearance of the motifs kept shifting. What looked like a dot from one angle, became a line from another vantage point. As individual elements kept changing, so too did the relationships among the different units.

The second part of the project also had its origins in Iceland. There, Richard made 180 paintings on paper, each of which was placed in a bottle which was then thrown into the sea. (Prior to being set adrift, the paintings were shown at the Reykjavik Municipal Art Museum.) The act of gathering driftwood for paintings was thus balanced by an offering of other paintings to the sea. This part of "Months and Years" is evoked by a video which is less a documentary than a pictorial work in its own right. The camera shows us how the painting-filled bottles, sealed in watertight yellow bags, fan out over the ocean, their changing arrangement creating a pattern comparable to that of the visitors circling around the piece of driftwood at Crédac. By divesting himself of his work and allowing it to be dispersed around the planet, Richard invites us to imagine a vast composition as large as the earth itself. —Eric Suchère

PRAGUE

Stanislav Kolibal at Veletrzní Palac, Center for Modern and Contemporary Art

It would be easy to interpret the work of Czech artist Stanislav Kolibal solely in terms of Western modernism. His often reductive formats, for example, bring Minimalism and Arte Povera to mind, and his sculp-

ture has received due attention on the international art circuit. In fact, however, Kolibal has developed along a trajectory somewhat different from the familiar late-modernist model. Restricted under socialism, he was unable to exhibit in his native country for 18 years, although he had shows abroad in such art capitals as Tokyo, New York, Paris and London.

A handsome retrospective of 229 works at Prague's new Center for Modern and Contemporary Art paid homage to a vision that remains individualistic, even idiosyncratic, despite its frequent intersections with the international mainstream. Divided into five chronological sections, the exhibition highlighted key developments in Kolibal's prolific career, from his early experiments with space and illusion to his current investigations of architectural construction.

At the heart of Kolibal's work is an interest in paradox. A display of small figurative sculptures from 1954 to '61 reveals his early explorations of stability and instability. Stylized torsos reminiscent of ancient Cycladic figurines bend and contort, maintaining equilibrium in defiance of gravity. In 1963 Kolibal began working with abstract forms in wall pieces and freestanding sculptures done mainly in plaster, a material that the artist saw as a tabula rasa because of its whiteness and mutability. *One Supports Another* (1964-65) and *Labile* (1964), both floor constructions in which independent elements depend on one another for stability, exemplify Kolibal's continued investigations of balance. Other works juxtapose a language of reductive geometry and the incongruities of the physical world. In *Cloud (Incomplete Square)*, 1967, the right-hand edge of an otherwise perfect rectangle looks torn; in *Where To, There Isn't Anywhere to Go (Shattering End)*, 1969, a long aluminum plank rests unassumingly on the floor, then "shatters"



Sarah Lucas: *Self-Portrait with Skull*, 1997, C-print, 68% by 48 inches; at St. John's Loft.

when it reaches the gallery wall. Such anomalies fill Kolibal's work with a purposeful tension and ambiguity, setting it apart from Minimalism, which tended more toward austerity and precision.

Kolibal's current sculptures, which he calls "Constructions," evolved from a series of geometric drawings done in 1988-89. Finely crafted from either plywood or iron, these monumental sculptures are more architectural than sculptural. Vertical planes and semicircular segments converge, forming impenetrable mazes, whose closed-off interior spaces contrast with the openness of their surroundings. Here the antagonistic relationship between internal and external serves as a potent metaphor for Kolibal's own isolated situation during the socialist years.

—Susan Snodgrass

Stanislav Kolibal: *Construction No. XVI*, 1992, welded and assembled iron, 41 by 74% by 90% inches; at Veletrzní Palac.

