



PETER NAGY

MAGENTA PLAINS

Peter Nagy is a New Delhi-based artist and gallerist who received a BFA from Parsons School of Design in 1981. His classmates included Steven Parrino, Joel Otterson, Meyer Vaisman, and Liz Koury. In 1982, Nagy founded Gallery Nature Morte in the East Village with fellow artist Alan Belcher. Nature Morte was among one of the most important artist-run galleries of the 1980s, focused on a new type of work that blended Conceptualism and Pop Art exploring the relationship between art and commodity and exhibiting some of their generation's most promising young artists including Gretchen Bender, David Robbins, as well as Otterson and Parrino. International With Monument (Koury and Vaisman's gallery) held multiple solo exhibitions with Nagy as well as with Peter Halley, Jeff Koons and Richard Prince. Nagy went on to exhibit his work extensively, to critical and commercial acclaim, throughout the 80s and 90s. In the early 1990s, Nagy relocated to New Delhi, IN where he reopened Nature Morte in 1997. It remains to this day one of the most important and influential galleries exhibiting contemporary Indian art.

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Peter Nagy

JEFFREY DEITCH

As an artist and a cofounder of legendary East Village gallery Nature Morte, Peter Nagy launched his storied career amid the combative, hyperintellectual atmosphere of 1980s postmodernity. This retrospective survey of works produced between 1982 and 1992, all rendered in black and white, constituted a richly nuanced time capsule of a paradigm-shifting period.

To revisit work predicated on cultural critique several decades after its production is to submit it to quite an acid test. How amazing to discover that Nagy's early output, which shows the artist's penchant for mapping transformations wrought by expanded media, increased corporate power, and concentrated flows of capital, felt downright prescient today. Like Warhol, Nagy was practically clairvoyant in his observations about art and its commodification, the ballooning culture of the copy, and our ongoing anxieties about authenticity. Two persistent themes concerned dysfunction and obsolescence in relation to the canonical history of art, as well as the idea that history itself has come to an end. What a time to bring this era of Nagy's art back: in a "future" New York boarded up and in the grip of a pandemic.

The exhibition took its name from an eleven-foot-wide print on vinyl, *Entertainment Erases History*, 1983, that replicates the look of a classroom wall chart. It features a time line of the twentieth-century avant-garde, but, instead of displaying illustrations of famous artworks, it is littered with images of old electronics in the style of a Crazy Eddie discount store advertisement. One saw TV sets, transistor tape recorders, cassette decks, office telephones, even a vintage computer monitor and keyboard. But the piece reveals something else as well: It typifies Nagy's near-obsessive interrogation of the distinction between art culture and mass entertainment, which he pursued across a broad spectrum of materials. In works ranging from acrylic on canvas to enamel on aluminum—and those dispersing images and text on wool, vinyl, photo-etched magnesium, sandblasted aluminum, and photocopy paper—the experimental range of production values is matched by stylistic diversity. The artist has borrowed from Conceptual and commercial art to create hybridized objects that speak as much to the experience of the consumer as to the acquisitive instincts of the collector.

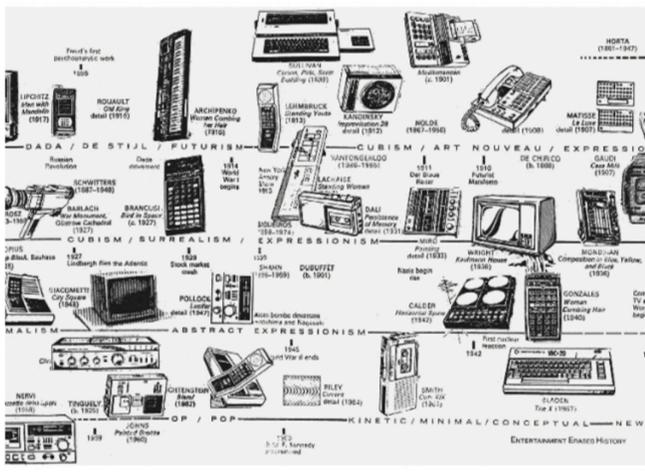
Nagy's work revels in subterfuge. In *Intellectual History*, 1984, he appropriates a map of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and substitutes a horde of corporate logos—AT&T, Atari, Canon, IBM, Xerox, and others—for the art. *International Survey Condominiums*, 1985–90, promotes playful confusion between a museum and a condo

tower. These works critique institutions, but on occasion Nagy may have also waded into the personal. Take *The Illusion of Aesthetics*, 1983, which replicates an old advertisement for Jon Gnagy, the popular mid-century television artist who demystified the process of creating art for generations of kids through his syndicated program, *Learn to Draw*. One wondered if Big Gnagy made a lasting impression upon Little Nagy once upon a time.

Yet for all of its droll observations, Nagy's art of this period is ingrained with a sense of loss, as if something profound was coming to an end. A series of graphic black-and-white paintings produced between 1985 and 1987 are collectively known as the "Cancer Paintings." According to the gallery, the artist "applied the pathology of cancer to the production of signs, creating 'cells' by sandwiching logos and other graphic elements until defamiliarized and abstracted." The works resonate as brand insignia, but disfigured—distortion itself takes center stage. *Four Cancer Logos*, 1989, a woodcut, might represent any number of contagions. Its quartet of rondels are so densely worked that their illegibility translates as our inability to see clearly—but also as productive chaos. Then and now, we revel in excess, visual pandemonium, and scrambled cultural references as our global modus operandi. Perhaps the collision of periods, styles, and differences is a necessary prerequisite for culture's advancement, for out of contamination comes a grand new cosmopolitanism.

—Jan Avgikos

Peter Nagy,
Entertainment Erases History (detail),
1983, UV print on vinyl, 6' x 11' 1".



July 16, 2020

The New York Times

ART REVIEWS

As Galleries Reopen, Two Critics Find Rewards Eclipse the Angst

Holland Cotter masks up on the Lower East Side and SoHo; Jillian Steinbauer discovers eco-feminist art taking root in Chelsea.

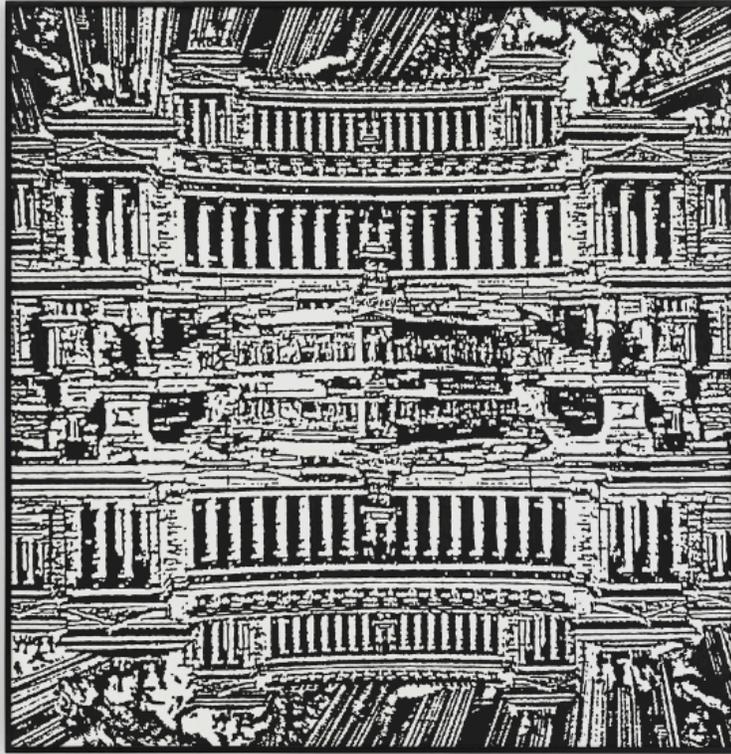
Holland Cotter

July 16, 2020

Peter Nagy at Jeffrey Deitch Gallery, 18 Wooster Street; deitch.com.

I was saving Peter Nagy's retrospective at Deitch in SoHo for another trip. But it was open (with masks and gloves on offer near the door), so I went in. I'm glad I did. It's great.

American-born, Mr. Nagy has lived since 1992 in New Delhi, where he runs one of the most influential contemporary galleries on the subcontinent. He initially founded that gallery, however, with a fellow artist, Alan Belcher, in Manhattan's East Village in 1982. And the Deitch show (a collaboration with a Lower East Side gallery, [Magenta Plains](#)), surveys the art Mr. Nagy produced between that year and his move to India.



Peter Nagy's "Sopra Tutta Italia" (1989), acrylic on canvas. Peter Nagy and Jeffrey Deitch, and Magenta Plains

The context for the work's creation — an art world of V.I.P. privilege, brand-name aesthetics, and hyperinflationary sales — is familiar, though on an unthinkably exaggerated scale, today. And Mr. Nagy caught it, back then, to a T. In graphically striking black-and-white prints and paintings, he conflated the floor plans of museums and luxury condos, rendered art and advertising indistinguishable, and, using proto-digital technologies, turned images of metastasizing cancer cells into chic décor.

The work, on view through Aug. 15, looks slicingly cool and sizzingly prescient at Deitch, a gallery which, since the 1980s, has done its fair share to create the cultural order that Mr. Nagy — and Mr. Boskovich, and Ms. Mundt, and Mr. Galanin, in their different ways — bitterly critique. Will this old order be restored post-pandemic? Or will the social and economic upheavals still very much in progress change everything? We'll find out, one masked, socially distanced reopening at a time.

July 24, 2020

ARTnews

Peter Nagy on Decades as an Artist and Dealer Both: 'You Don't Realize How Fast the Art World Can Spin on a Dime'

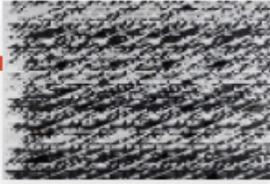
BY ANNE DORAN  July 24, 2020 3:52pm

Installation view of "Peter Nagy: Entertainment Erases History" at Jeffrey Deitch, New York.
GENEVIEVE HANSON/COURTESY THE ARTIST, JEFFREY DEITCH, AND MAGENTA PLAINS

Over the past four decades, **Peter Nagy**, whose iconic work of the 1980s is the subject of an exhibition at Jeffrey Deitch gallery in New York through August 15, has been both a successful artist and a successful commercial gallerist. Articulate about his own work and its influences, he's also able to speak incisively about the art world of his time, especially its movements and its personalities, its palmy days and economic downturns.

Nagy's own gallery, Nature Morte, now located in New Delhi, began in New York's East Village in 1982, when Nagy and co-founder Alan Belcher opened on East 10th Street. The two had met while working at a Midtown print production house the year before, Nagy as a typesetter and Belcher doing paste-up and mechanicals. "The production house was on 57th Street," Nagy told me, "and on our lunch hour we started going to galleries together. There were a lot more galleries on 57th Street in those days. That's how our friendship started, and our tastes were similar. We were very into Piero Manzoni, Yves Klein, Lucio Fontana. In 1981, nobody was looking at art by those guys, so we bonded over that."

Related Articles



New Delhi's Nature Morte Gallery to Stage Pop-Up Show in New York in April

This American Life: Cady Noland's Art Feels More Prescient, Incisive, and Urgent Than Ever

At the time, Nagy was living in the East Village, where a few artist-run alternative spaces—including PS 122 and Kenkeleba House, a collective directed by artist Joe Overstreet—were already ensconced. “It was a basement apartment on East 3rd Street between First and Second Avenues—the same block as the Hells Angels clubhouse,” Nagy said of his address at the time. “One of the guys who owned the building, Bill Stelling, opened FUN Gallery with the actress Patti Astor. They showed Fab 5 Freddy and Futura 2000 and Kenny Scharf. We started going there, though we didn’t particularly relate to that work. Then one day, out of the blue, Alan said, ‘Maybe we should start a gallery.’”

Belcher was living with a boyfriend, Peter Sandy, who had a restaurant called the Paris Commune on Bleecker Street. Sandy said he’d loan the duo money, and after some searching they found a storefront on 10th Street for \$500 a month. “At that point,” as Nagy tells it, “we started thinking about who we could show. I had gone to

school with Steven Parrino and Joel Otterson; Alan already knew Kevin Larmon and James Brown. So there it was. We had no fucking clue what we were doing, but it was small and it was easy. By then, FUN had moved down the street, Gracie Mansion was running her gallery out of her bathroom, and Dean Savard and Alan Barrows had come along and started Civilian Warfare, which opened on the same day as Nature Morte.”

Not long after opening, a then-23-year-old Nagy told *New York Times* reporter Grace Glueck, “Artists are basically our audience. While the new Expressionist figuration has taken over in SoHo and on 57th Street, we look for other types of work, to show there are alternatives.” Among the artists the gallery would go on to show were Gretchen Bender, Cady Noland, Haim Steinbach, Barbara Bloom, Keith Sonnier, and Louise Lawler.

As Nagy recalled recently, “No one was more surprised than me to see [the East Village art scene] mushroom the way it did. But we certainly benefited. Suddenly there were articles in the *Times*, a whole issue of *Flash Art* devoted to the East Village. At first we were the odd man out because it was all graffiti art, with Gracie Mansion’s kitsch—Rodney Alan Greenblatt and Rhonda Zwilling— and Civilian Warfare’s punky agitprop by artists like David Wojnarowicz thrown in. Robert Pincus came in one day and we had some of David Robbins’s neo-conceptual, post-Pictures photos up. Pincus went through the show, sniffed, and told us no one was ever going to be interested in conceptual art again. We were like, ‘OK, never mind.’”

Nature Morte wasn’t an outlier for long. A small cadre of like-minded galleries soon opened, including Cash Gallery, International With Monument (whose inaugural exhibition included works by Nagy and Belcher), Piezo Electric, Pat Hearn Gallery, and Jay Gorney. Though each styled itself differently, they all specialized in coolly critical art—known by names like Neo-Conceptualism, Commodity Art, and Neo-Geo—influenced by the work of the slightly older Pictures Generation as well as consumer culture and punk rock.



Installation view of "Peter Nagy: Entertainment Erases History" at Jeffrey Deitch, New York.
GENEVIEVE HANSON/COURTESY THE ARTIST, JEFFREY DEITCH, AND MAGENTA PLAINS

By 1982, Nagy was producing work himself—punkish, media-aware appropriation art of the kind now on view at Deitch. "I had begun making art by the time I graduated from Parsons," he said, "large-scale, black-and-white drawings influenced by Futurism. Then I started making collages of images from magazines. They were made to be Xeroxed, turned into pure information that could be endlessly reproduced and given away or published in that form. I was very influenced by the handbills for punk shows you'd see pasted up around the city. Of course I was aware of SAMO and Keith Haring, [and] though I came to their work late, I was paying attention to Barbara Kruger and Louise Lawler."

One of Nagy's first collages to be Xeroxed was *Entertainment Erases History* (1982), a timeline that used tiny pictures of famous artworks cut from his old *Gardner's Art through the Ages* text book. Slowly, he started pasting Xeroxes of collages onto cardboard or wooden boxes or canvas—a move that eventually necessitated the purchase of a Xerox machine. "Before that," he remembered, "I would make like four trips a day to Steve's Copy Shop on Waverly."

The first paintings based on Xeroxes were Nagy's "Cancer" series, begun in 1984. "That was the year that both my father and my grandmother died of cancer. I started to take clip art and mash it all together. I had studied logo design in college, and the idea was to make logo-like images that were imploding, malignant."

The "Cancer" paintings comprised Nagy's first solo show at International With Monument gallery in 1985. Even as he continued to produce photocopies of collages like *International Survey Condominiums* (a collage based on floor plans), he said, "The 'Cancer' paintings began to morph into images based on Rococo and Baroque architecture—I was interested in the psychology of decorative art. What kind of society craves Rococo exuberance?"

With the digital age having arrived and still in its early stages, Nagy started to think of his works as coded information, variously readable or corrupted. "The irony is that they're handmade paintings that look like they might be computer-derived," he said. "I was interested in the degradation of the image and the information the image contained. I also thought there was additional information to be gleaned from that degradation. I was really into this idea: making copies of copies and noticing how long the original information maintained its integrity the longer I continued."

Nagy and many of his peers were interested—presciently—in how images might be deployed in new combinations and recombinations. "We were all obsessed with that," he recalled. "It sometimes seems to me that artists like Wade Guyton or Seth Price are our grandchildren."

In 1988, Nagy switched representation to Jay Gorney gallery, which had just relocated to SoHo along with a number of other East Village galleries including 303, American Fine Arts, Pat Hearn, and Deborah Sharp. Now an artist with a thriving career, Nagy had three solo shows with Gorney, the last in 1992. By then however, the art market, roiled by the crash of '87, had collapsed.

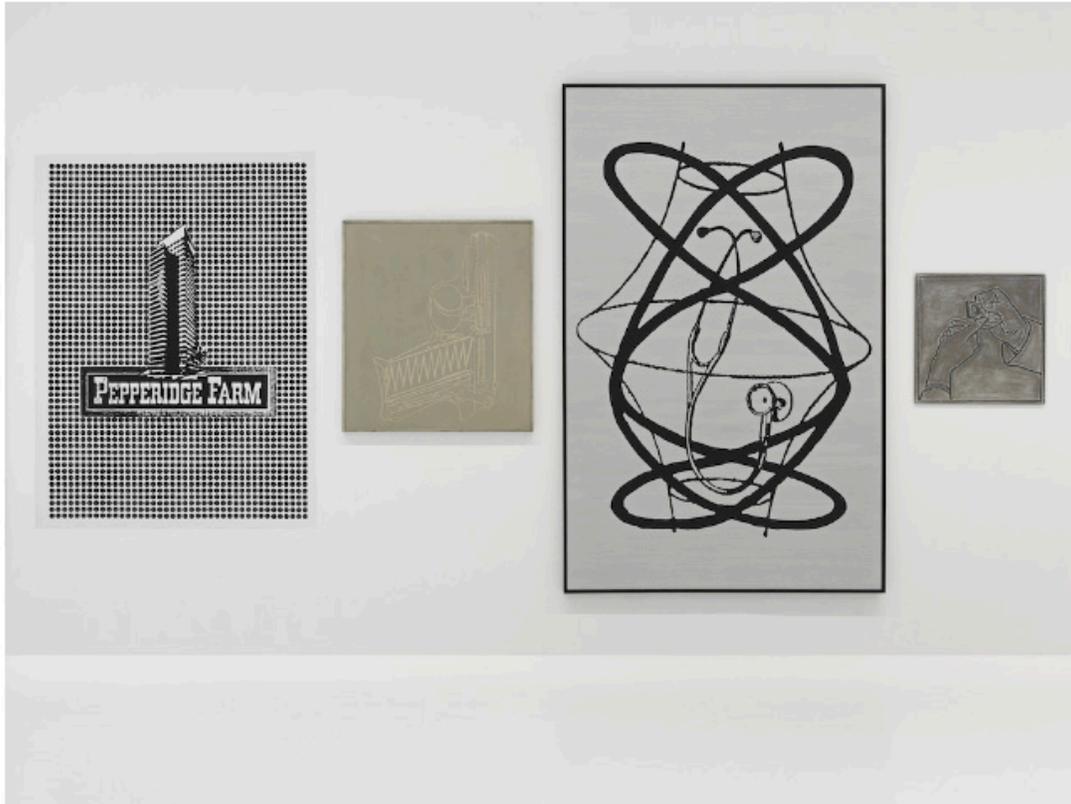
“Until you’ve lived through it a couple of times,” Nagy said, “you don’t realize how fast the art world can spin on a dime. In 1987, we were selling everything we were making, having exhibitions in Europe, buying clothes at Comme des Garçons—and thinking, ‘This is great! This will be our life!’ I remember the consultant Anne Livet introducing me at that time to older artists like Joseph Kosuth and Keith Sonnier, and those guys looking at me like, Yeah, kid, *you’ll see.*”

“There were a few years of rolling pennies,” Nagy recalled. He had closed Nature Morte in 1988, shifting his attentions to his own art. (Belcher, born in Toronto, had returned to Canada some time earlier.) But while he had no desire to reopen a gallery in New York, “I was still traveling a lot—to Tokyo, to Istanbul, to Paris—and thinking in the back of my head that someday I’d like to have a gallery someplace else.”

One of his trips was to India and, in 1992, knowing not a soul there, he moved to New Delhi. For the next five years, he shuttled between New York and India. “I was making color paintings,” he said. “Then I did a show with Nicole Klagsbrun in New York in 1997 of tabletop assemblages that combined my paintings with works by others. That was my last solo exhibition in New York [until the current one at Deitch].”



Installation view of “Peter Nagy: Entertainment Erases History” at Jeffrey Deitch, New York.
GENEVIEVE HANSON/COURTESY THE ARTIST, JEFFREY DEITCH, AND MAGENTA PLAINS



Installation view of "Peter Nagy: Entertainment Erases History" at Jeffrey Deitch, New York.
GENEVIEVE HANSON/COURTESY THE ARTIST, JEFFREY DEITCH, AND MAGENTA PLAINS

A few months later, he opened Nature Morte New Delhi. Nagy's original vision for the gallery was to present an even mix of Indian and Western art. That is what he did for the first year, but the plan proved prohibitive. "I did manage it for the first season, with shows of work by Gretchen Bender, Joseph Kosuth, Stephen Mueller, Stefano Arienti, and others. How we accomplished it without email is a mystery. Email didn't really start working in India until around 2000. Until then you were either on dialup—sitting all day while it went *dink-dink-dink-dink-dink*—or communicating by fax."

By the second year, trying to incorporate Western artists into the program had proven grueling. But at that point Nagy had become more familiar with Indian contemporary art and, at the same time, a market was emerging for art from around the globe. Even so, it was a heavy lift. "Sales didn't really kick off until the fifth or sixth year of the gallery being in business," Nagy said. "Over the next few years, suddenly, all of these people were showing up looking for Indian contemporary art."

By then, Nature Morte artists like Vivan Sundaram and Bharti Kher had developed an international audience, and the gallery started courting collectors at international fairs like Art Basel (where in 2006 it was the first Indian gallery to participate), the Armory Show, and FIAC. Then came the global financial crisis of 2008. "Lehman Brothers collapsed three weeks before FIAC, so it was *wheel!* Down the slide again."

Running Nature Morte left Nagy little time for his own work between 2005 and 2018. But over the past two years, with the gallery's fortunes relatively secured, he has been making art again. A show of new pieces is planned for next year in New York at Magenta Plains gallery, which now represents him (and is the co-organizer of the Deitch exhibition). "They'll be color paintings, still diagrammatic but with a lot of decorative art motifs mashed together," Nagy said of the new work yet to be seen. "Like the works in the current show, but put through a Bonnard blender."

Mousse 72 TIDBITS

Trademark Artist: Peter Nagy

by Wendy Vogel

Entertainment Erases History (2020), Peter Nagy's latest solo exhibition at Jeffrey Deitch in collaboration with Magenta Plains, New York, takes its name from one of Nagy's Xerox works produced in 1983. The unlimited-edition Xerox of a black-and-white collage lays out a timeline of modern art movements from Dada to New Realism, replacing icons of artworks with images of the era's cutting-edge technology, like camcorders, synthesizers, and digital watches. The work seems a sort of manifesto for Nagy's practice, championing art as part of an informational infrastructure. Four decades ago Nagy established himself as an artist and gallerist, promoting a post-Pop generation of artists who were delivering ironic jabs at mass media and commodity fetishism. Today he is the owner of Nature Morte gallery in Delhi, one of India's leading galleries. The survey at Deitch revisits his work of the 1980s, positing him as a savvy artist-philosopher of media tactics before the digital age.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Peter Nagy, *Four Cancer Logos*, 1989

Courtesy: the artist; Jeffrey Deitch, New York; Magenta Plains, New York

Peter Nagy graduated from New York's Parsons School of Design in 1981 with a degree in communication design. After meeting fellow artist Alan Belcher at their typesetting job, the two bonded over their shared tastes and decided to open Nature Morte gallery in the East Village. In an early interview, Nagy listed historical influences such as Eduardo Paolozzi, Robert Indiana, Yves Klein, and Op Art¹—a European-leaning late-modernist roster at odds with both the 1980s market enthusiasm for Neo-Expressionist painting and the graffiti art favored by other East Village galleries like FUN. At the time of its opening in May 1982, Nature Morte was one of the few art outposts in the pre-gentrified neighborhood. Its commitment to artists invested in poststructuralist theory and media critique—while still desiring access to the upper echelons of the art world—put it in dialogue with nearby commercial spaces such as Cash/Newhouse and International with Monument. The latter venue showed, among others, Peter Halley, Jeff Koons, and, later, Nagy himself.

Nature Morte supported a new Pop conceptualism that connected the Pictures Generation with its immediate descendants: Nagy and Belcher's peers. Artist David Robbins, who showed there, described their micro generation between Boomers and Gen X as the "children of Barthes and Coca-Cola." These artists watched the 1960s revolutions and the Vietnam War play out on TV, and would be the first to regard television as the "linchpin of a contemporary informational infrastructure."² If the Pictures Generation—a group of artists associated with the gallery Metro Pictures, such as Jack Goldstein, Louise Lawler, and Robert Longo—was concerned with deconstructing filmic imagery through appropriation, the Nature Morte crowd leaned *into* mass media's seductive qualities. They showed works like Jennifer Bolande's sculptural photographs, Steven Parrino's punk take on the monochrome, and Gretchen Bender's stacked-monitor installations splicing advertising imagery.

Nagy's earliest works—his Xerox series—borrowed from the paste-up techniques of his day job in design and the post-authorial attitudes of the Pictures Generation. In these infinitely reproducible collages, he used logos as his primary material. "People don't have anything to express, except the trademark," he said. "We're being fed information all the time."³ The Xeroxes include *e.s.t. Graduate* (1984), which superimposes the folksy logo for Pepperidge Farm packaged baked goods over a high-rise building and a field of dots. A version of *e.s.t. Graduate* made it into the politically driven artist collective Group Material's presentation *Americana* at the Whitney Biennial in 1985. In *The 8-Hour Day* (1983), Nagy pokes fun at his own profession as a gallerist-artist: the hours on the face of a watch are demarcated by tiny icons of works by contemporary artists such as Keith Haring and Georg Baselitz.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Peter Nagy, *Pangea*, 1989

Courtesy: the artist; Jeffrey Deitch, New York; Magenta Plains, New York

March - April, 2020

AD

PETER THE GREAT

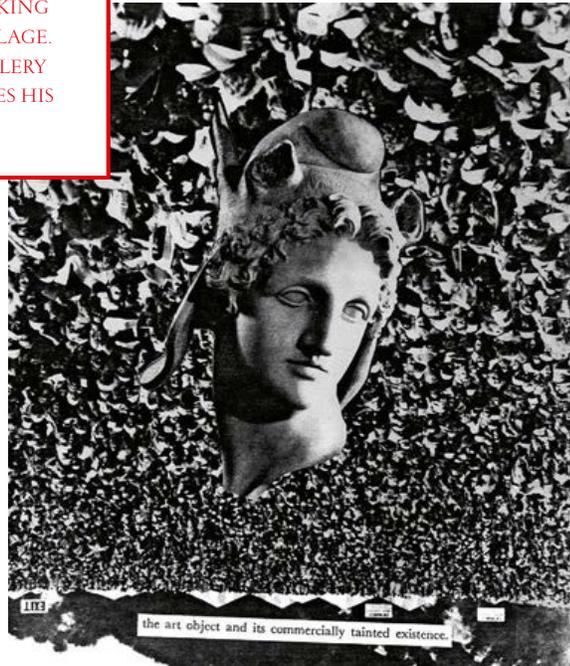
BEFORE HE WAS ONE OF INDIA'S LEADING GALLERISTS, PETER NAGY WAS AN ARTIST WORKING IN MANHATTAN'S EAST VILLAGE. A NEW SHOW AT UBER GALLERY JEFFREY DEITCH CELEBRATES HIS PREVIOUS LIFE

In the 1980s, when Nature Morte—Peter Nagy's legendary East Village, New York gallery—was championing a new kind of neo-conceptual-meets-pop art, its founder and gallerist was also, in parallel, working as an artist. His work during this period reflects the spirit of the city back then.

This month, a new exhibition focuses on that work, which Nagy produced between 1982 and 1992. Titled 'Entertainment Erases History', the exhibition features black-and-white works that use seriality and repetition to build a clever criticism of traditional methods of representation. This includes his anti-commodity 'Xerox' works of the early 80s, his 'Cancer Painting' series, and later architectural paintings, museum floor plans and tongue-in-cheek timelines of contemporary art history.

For the 'Xerox' series, Nagy photocopied multiple collages made from advertisements, logos and found images. Visitors to Nature Morte back then fondly recall the bin in the back of the gallery with works-on-paper for sale, which included his "Xeroxes". The process of "xeroxing" transformed the collages into physical objects while ensuring their unlimited reproduction. In the exhibition at Jeffrey Deitch, they are presented in their traditional format, as well as enlarged on vinyls to take on the mantle of "important works".

This collection of Nagy's work takes off from the agitprop of artists such as Barbara Kruger and Louise Lawler, reflecting the dominant trends of the decade: from the beginnings of a digitized information culture to the infatuation with logos and branding; the obsession with photo-mechanical reproduction techniques and the degradation of information; the development of a hyper-inflated art star system; the rise of institutional critique; and finally even the juggernaut of globalization on the distant horizons. Many of the works are being shown only for the second time, having premiered in galleries and museums in the 1980s and rarely seen since. **▲** *Entertainment Erases History* will be on at Jeffrey Deitch, 18 Wooster Street, New York, from 6 March to 25 April 2020.



TEXT: DIVYA MISHRA. PHOTO COURTESY OF PETER NAGY AND MAGENTA PLAINS.

Fash Art

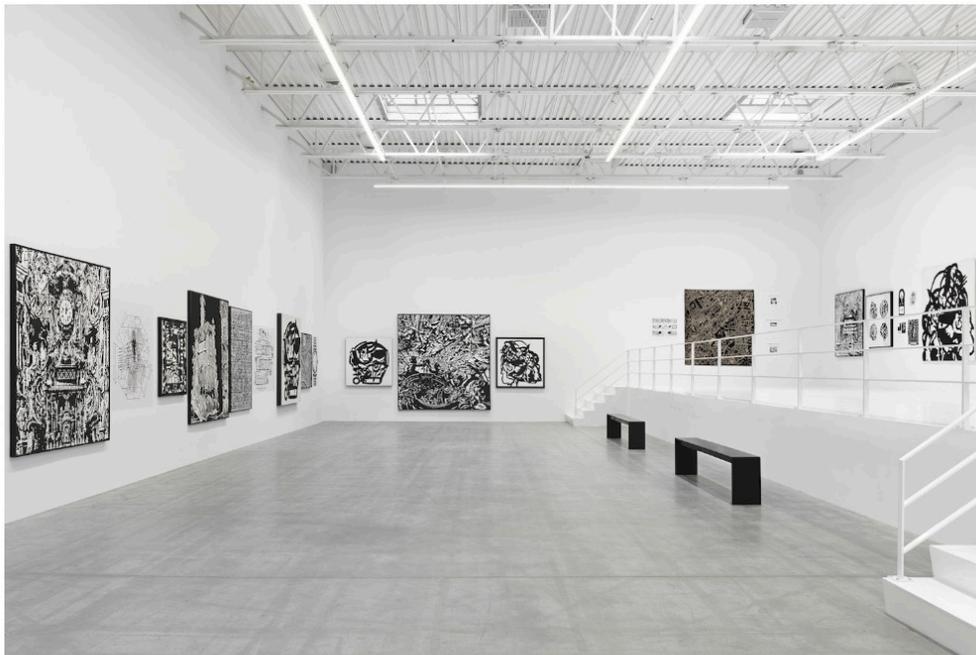
March 26, 2020

**FLASH
ART**

• ON VIEW BY FLASH ART

26 March 2020, 1:00 pm CET

On View by Flash Art: Peter Nagy “Entertainment Erases History” Jeffrey Deitch / New York



① 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Peter Nagy, *Entertainment Erases History*. Exhibition view at Jeffrey Deitch, New York, 2020. Photography by Genevieve Hanson. Courtesy of the artist; Jeffrey Deitch, New York; Magenta Plains, New York.

Jeffrey Deitch, in collaboration with Magenta Plains, presents “Entertainment Erases History”, a historical exhibition of works by Peter Nagy. “Entertainment Erases History” focuses on the iconic decade in Nagy’s career in New York between 1982 and 1992. The works on view —entirely in black-and-white— critique traditional methods of representation by adopting a minimalist spirit of seriality and repetition. “Entertainment Erases History includes Nagy’s anti-commodity *Xerox* works of the early 1980s and progresses into the *Cancer Painting* series and later architectural paintings, museum floor plans and tongue-in-cheek timelines of contemporary art history.

Deeply self-conscious with a flair for wit and irony, Nagy’s works reflect the spirit of New York in the 1980s. Connecting with the propaganda tactics of artists such as Barbara Kruger and Louise Lawler and artists in the Nature Morte community such as Gretchen Bender, Ross Bleckner, and Steven Parrino, Nagy’s works reflect the trends of the decade. From the beginnings of a digitized information culture to the infatuation with logos and branding, his practice tackles the obsession with photo-mechanical reproduction, the degradation of information, the development of a hyper-inflated art star system, and the rise of institutional critique.

Vogue India

March 12, 2020

VOGUE

16 shows you need to visit
this summer for the best
of South Asian art

BY RAHUL KUMAR
12 MARCH 2020

Even amid cancelling biennales and fairs, South Asian art remains active. Find the best of art shows between March and April closest to you

Entertainment Erases History by Peter Nagy



Lost by Peter Nagy

© Deitch and Magenta
Paints

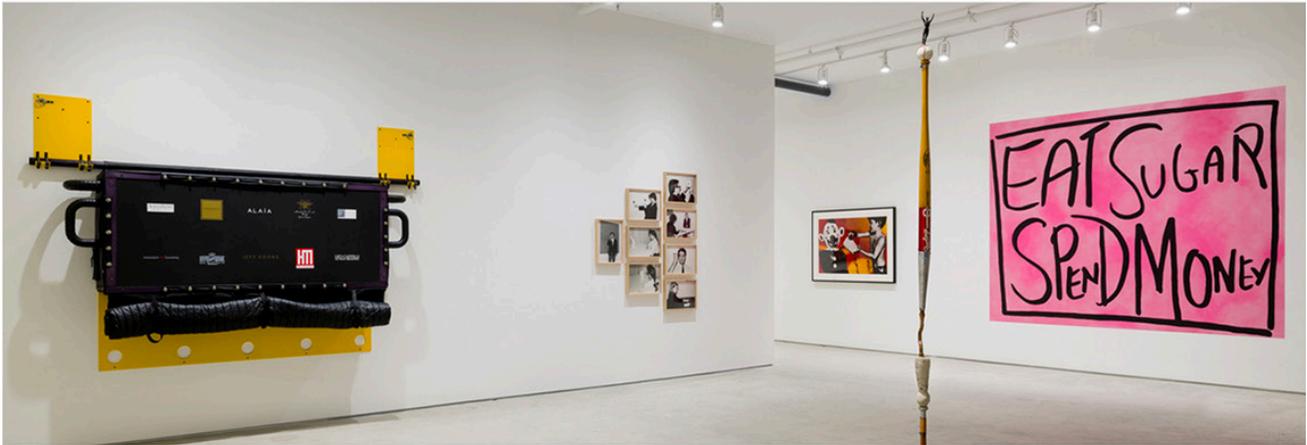
It is rare for an artist to double as a gallerist successfully. Peter Nagy has accomplished this from the early stages of his career, beginning in New York and later in New Delhi, India. The show focuses on the iconic decade in Nagy's career in New York between 1982 and 1992. The entirely in black-and-white works critique traditional methods of representation by adopting a minimalist spirit of seriality and repetition.

March 6 to April 25, Jeffrey Deitch, 18, Wooster Street, New York, Deitch.com

Frieze

December 22, 2016

FRIEZE.COM



REVIEW - 22 DEC 2016

Every Future Has a Price

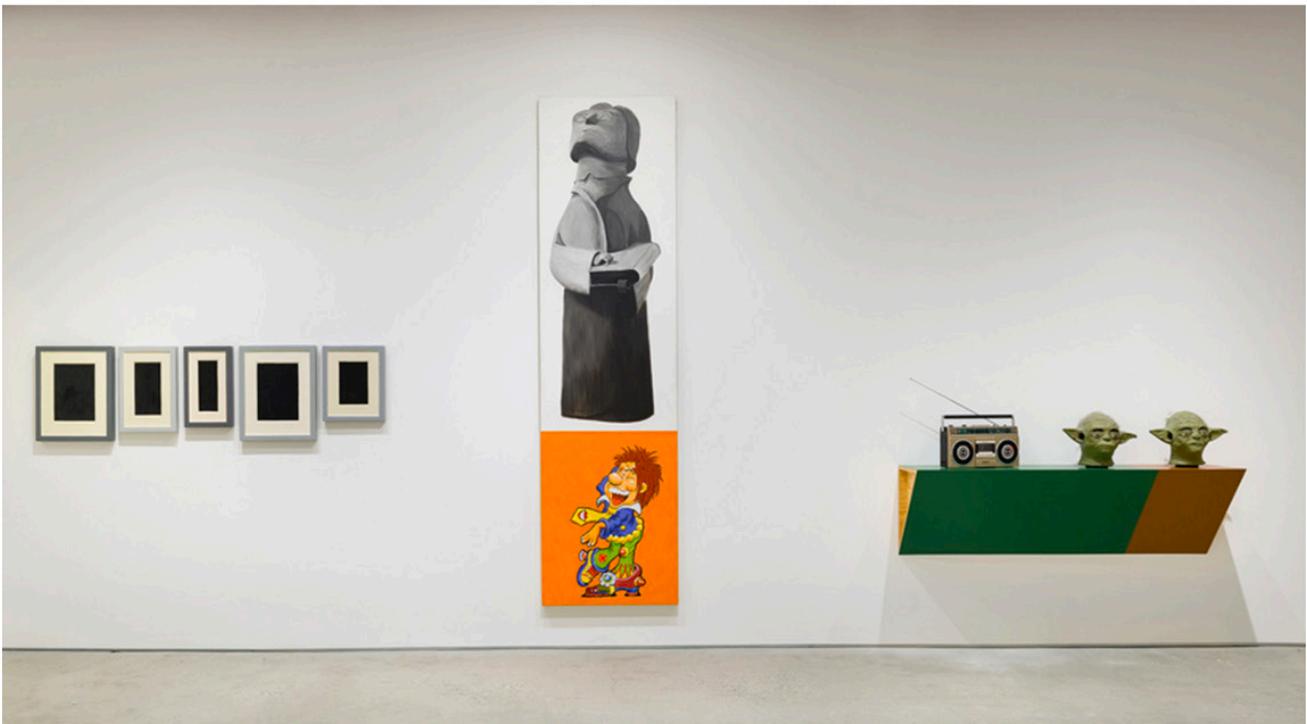
Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York, USA

BY ANDREW HULTKRANS

Organized by Anne Livet, in collaboration with Alan Belcher and Peter Nagy (two artists who co-founded Nature Morte, a fertile gallery of the period), the original 'Infotainment' (1985–87) was a touring exhibition honouring an early-1980s East Village movement in New York that emerged in the wake of the 'Pictures Generation'. Often thought of as 'Pictures Plus', the 'Infotainment'

group borrowed the style and strategies of mass-media culture, but evinced a modernist insistence on the art object. It is as if this slightly younger generation of artists realized it was possible to enlarge the Marlboro man and put him in a gallery, then, having digested that revelation, decided to apply the resulting sensibility to traditional artistic media.

Elizabeth Dee's expanded remounting of the exhibition, titled 'Every Future Has a Price: 30 Years after Infotainment', after a 1988 essay by artist/critic Ronald Jones, is notable for displaying, in a vitrine near the gallery entrance, one of the two or three best lines of instant art criticism I've ever encountered: 'We think op art is highly underrated, Bridget Riley. That's corporate psychedelia, the orgasm of modernism.' The quote is from Nagy, interviewed in *REAL LIFE* magazine, and for it he has my undying respect and gratitude.



All images: 'Every Future Has a Price: 30 Years after Infotainment', 2016, exhibition view, Elizabeth Dee, New York. Courtesy: Elizabeth Dee, New York

Far from orgasmic, the 'Infotainment' scene, which feels very transitional from this historical distance, was more like furtive foreplay with mass-media culture, which would eventually climax with the splashy neo-pop ejaculations of Jeff Koons and Takashi Murakami. As with the earliest sound films of the late 1920s and early '30s – in which actors huddled closely around standing lamps and potted plants to deliver their lines into concealed microphones – viewers of the remounted 'Infotainment' can clearly identify the baby steps towards a new paradigm in aesthetics and marketing. How else to process Haim Steinbach's *Un-Color Becomes Alter Ego* (1984), consisting of two Yoda heads and a boom box, which the artist deploys in a similar manner to that in which Andy Warhol used Campbell's Soup cans? The objects, dusty and dirty, suggest Mike Kelley-like abjection, but offer a visual foreword to the gleaming, lacquered kitsch of Koons's *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* (1988), a work similarly devoid of apparent 'meaning'.

Peter Halley, whose work always struck me as corporate minimalism, brings characteristic, hotly coloured coolness to *Rectangular Cell with Conduit* (1983), a tri-tone, two-field painting, half of which employs Roll-a-Tex, his beloved textured architectural paint. Philip Taaffe's large painting *Undercurrent* (1983) echoes Nagy's love of op with undulating waveforms, which vibrate the eye to the extent that the viewer feels seasick. Gretchen Bender's *Wild Dead* (1984) – a two-channel, four-monitor video work – cycles through random television clips from the era, an animation of the word 'VIDEO' being cut with a razor to reveal the word 'DROME' underneath, and primitive, proto-CAD wireframe computer graphics by artist Amber Denker. Of all the pieces in the show, *Wild Dead* feels the most of its time, delivering public-access television aesthetics corroded by postpunk desolation.



But it is Cindy Sherman who literally takes the cake (and the show) with her photograph *Untitled* (1987), a low-angle close-up of the obscene detritus of a two-year-old girl's birthday party, complete with crushed chocolate cakes, noodles of brightly coloured frosting and a puddle of vomit, all strewn over an aqua-hued rug that renders the objects on its surface as nautical flotsam and jetsam. The piece works equally well as representation, abstraction, painting or photograph, and it rewards long contemplation. This, unfortunately, is less frequently the case with works by the other 'Infotainment' artists, who are often just 'tracking the thrill', as Bender described it, of the tsunami of media images in which we all swim, hoping to build life-savers and rafts that would both look good on the surface and allow them to keep surfing the wave.

ANDREW HULTKRANS

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Art Agenda

art
agenda

December 1, 2016

by WENDY VOGEL

December 13, 2016

“Every Future has a Price: 30 Years after Infotainment”

ELIZABETH DEE, New York

October 29–December 17, 2016

The 1980s was inaugurated with the 24-hour news cycle: CNN transmitted its first broadcast on January 1, 1980. Five years later, independent curator Anne Livet—in collaboration with Nature Morte gallery founders Alan Belcher and Peter Nagy—organized an exhibition called “Infotainment.” Traveling to several U.S. cities, it featured the work of East Village artists interested in media critique and Conceptual strategies. “Every Future Has a Price: 30 Years After Infotainment” at Elizabeth Dee features 40 artists from the “Infotainment” generation, including 18 from the original traveling exhibition. Opening in late October, the show was positioned as a timely response to the news barrage of the election cycle.

In today’s post-truth hellscape, *infotainment* seems like a charming anachronism. With the election of Donald Trump, 1985 feels simultaneously far away and very near. The “Infotainment” artists, working under the administration of the U.S.’s first celebrity-turned-politician, Ronald Reagan, were united in their attention to authorship critiques and media theory. They eschewed the East Village tropes of Neoexpressionism and graffiti-inspired work, as well as a dogmatic approach to appropriation. But the biggest revelation in this show is the sheer variety of practices they employed, from painting and sculpture to video and printmaking.

Still, photography is a cornerstone of the show, as are figures associated with the Pictures Generation, like Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman, and Laurie Simmons. A handful of works were influenced by Prince’s techniques of re-photographing advertisements. They include Jennifer Bolande’s *Cascade* (1987), a Duratrans banner of a sunset that pools into a crumpled bunch on the floor, and Frank Majore’s moody, layered Cibachrome print *With a Twist* (1987). Rather than recirculating commercial imagery, however, Majore borrows from editorial strategies, bringing together blurred, ghostly images of a martini, a model, and a cityscape, all soaked in scarlet light. In Sarah Charlesworth’s stunning photograph *Rider* (1983–84), a black-and-white image of a décolletage-baring brunette is cut into the shape of a horse, set against a sea of luscious red.

The work is clearly indebted to the 1970s cutout works of Sherrie Levine, who is herself represented with an example from her “Knot Painting” series (*Untitled [Golden Knots 7]*, 1985). Here, Levine highlights manmade plugs in plywood with metallic paint. In drawing attention to the plugs that disguise the wood’s defects, the artist extends her critique of artistic authenticity to the artifice of “natural” materials. Elsewhere, the painting selections demonstrate an eclectic range of techniques, from Neo-geo stars Ashley Bickerton, Peter Halley, and Philip Taaffe to Thomas Lawson’s brushy, pathos-ridden *Don’t Hit Her Again* (1981), based on a newspaper photo. In Julia Wachtel’s *Free Speech* (1984), the artist photorealistically depicts a black-and-white image of a folk art carving of a bible-toting preacher perched above a greeting-card cartoon. One of the exhibition’s



1 View of “Every Future has a Price: 30 Years after Infotainment,” Elizabeth Dee, New York, 2016.



2 View of “Every Future has a Price: 30 Years after Infotainment,” Elizabeth Dee, New York, 2016.



3 View of “Every Future has a Price: 30 Years after Infotainment,” Elizabeth Dee, New York, 2016.



quirkiest objects is by Meyer Vaisman, who co-founded the influential gallery International With Monument, and left the New York art world in 2000 for Barcelona. He used an inkjet printer to create his 1989 untitled painting-as-assembly, featuring black-and-white reproductions of vases printed onto round canvases, which he then painted in acrylic. Vaisman here challenged the divide between painting and décor.

A number of artists on view are indeed underrecognized today, or have shifted course within the art world—not least Belcher and Nagy. Belcher, who decamped to his native Toronto in the mid-1980s, shows *Duane Reade (Be All That You Can Be)* (1984), a grid of images of drugstore products attached to mirrored plexiglas. Peter Nagy, who today runs Nature Morte in New Delhi, offers two abstract canvases (*Glioblastoma* and *Parasitical Clown Dough*, both 1987) reflecting on the “cancer” of media consumption. The dense black clusters in these paintings share the imperfect line quality of photocopies, nodding to Nagy’s earlier Xerox works of street signage. Gretchen Bender, the sole video artist in the show, died in 2004. Though there has been a recent resurgence of interest in her work, such as a 2014–15 exhibition at Tate Liverpool, she has yet to become a name on par with media pioneers like Nam June Paik. This is an oversight. Her stacked TV-monitor piece, *Wild Dead* (1984), feels electric in the Trump era. AT&T logos, line drawings, and the logo from David Cronenberg’s dystopian film *Videodrome* (1983) swirl against a deep black, punctuated by video-game shooting sounds.

We can learn a lot from the “Infotainment” artists—especially from the ones who “dropped out” of the art world. Despite its lip service to social issues, taken as a whole, this work is largely concerned with elevating critical discourse within its own community. That attitude is revealed in a 1983 interview with Nagy and Belcher, published in Thomas Lawson’s *Real Life* magazine. It began with the following exchange:

PN: I live breathe think sleep art.

AB: There’s nothing else to do now.

PN: It’s been ghettoized but it’s self-preservation.

AB: Everybody has their ghetto.

This statement suggests a lack of class and race consciousness, despite the fact that the “Infotainment” generation did broach topics like gender inequality and the AIDS crisis. Even so, the artists often yoked their politics to a cool aesthetic temperature, countering the hot market for contemporaries like Jean-Michel Basquiat and Julian Schnabel—whose works notably appeared as décor in the 1987 movie *Wall Street*. (A review of the movie by Ronald Jones, “Every Future Has a Price,” provides the title for the Elizabeth Dee exhibition.) In retrospect, it’s clear that a resistance to painterly figuration does not automatically align artists with the underclass. This historical revisionism may account for the inclusion of direct-action ephemera from artists like Group Material and Guerrilla Girls, who were not in the 1985 “Infotainment” show.

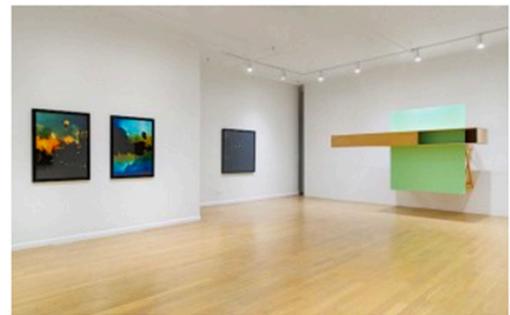
The work of “Infotainment” deserves reappraisal, but artists in the Trump era must take care not to neatly map radical strategies of the past onto the present. More importantly, they must understand that revealing the mechanisms of spectacle is no longer effective politics. As infotainment has given way to *InfoWars*, the public sphere has been atomized by fake news, algorithmic projection, and hateful rhetoric. 24-hour news has ceded its place to the 24-hour newsfeed. Artists today have a responsibility of understanding this new media landscape, and in positioning their works as critical interventions in a widening field of cultural production.

Wendy Vogel is a writer and independent curator based in New York.

4 (Left) Thomas Lawson, *Don't Hit Her Again*, 1981. (Right) Meyer Vaisman, *Untitled*, 1989.



5 View of “Every Future has a Price: 30 Years after Infotainment,” Elizabeth Dee, New York, 2016.



6 View of “Every Future has a Price: 30 Years after Infotainment,” Elizabeth Dee, New York, 2016.



7 View of “Every Future has a Price: 30 Years after Infotainment,” Elizabeth Dee, New York, 2016.



8 View of “Every Future has a Price: 30 Years after Infotainment,” Elizabeth Dee, New York, 2016.

Art in America

May, 2010

Art in America**PETER NAGY'S LONG INDIAN SUMMER***By Rupert Goldsworthy*  May 17, 2010 10:59am

In 1982, during the heyday of the New York East Village scene, artist [Peter Nagy](#) founded Nature Morte Gallery with Alan Belcher. Along with Pat Hearn Gallery, International with Monument, Jay Gorney Modern Art, and American Fine Arts, Nature Morte spearheaded a movement in practice identified with Postmodernism and Postconceptual strategies; this influence is still being felt today. Nagy and Belcher ran the gallery in the East Village for six years, until 1988.

In 1992 Nagy moved to India, and in November 1997 he restarted Nature Morte in [New Delhi](#). The gallery was located at a number of different spaces during its first five years there. In 1999, Nagy started working with New York-based Indian gallery Bose Pacia. He contributed catalog essays and curated summer shows until they formalized their relationship in 2003. Soon after, Nagy opened a permanent space, Nature Morte (in partnership with Bose Pacia) in Delhi, and in 2008 Nagy opened a branch in [Berlin](#).

RUPERT GOLDSWORTHY: Peter, how did you open the Nature Morte Gallery?

PETER NAGY: I founded Nature Morte in New York in May 1982 [with Alan Belcher] and ran it there for six years [it closed in July 1988]. I moved to India in 1992 and started Nature Morte there in November 1997. I used four different spaces in the first five years of the gallery there. I started working with Bose Pacia-writing catalog essays, curating summer shows-in 1999 and we formally teamed up in 2003, enabling me to open the permanent space we still have in Delhi in December 2003, with my second solo exhibition of Subodh Gupta's works in New Delhi.

GOLDSWORTHY: In 2008 you opened a space in Berlin. What prompted you to add Berlin to your itinerary?

NAGY: We first started thinking about a European branch of the gallery in 2006. We were doing a lot of art fairs and had strong interest in Indian art from European collectors. Berlin seemed like the best opportunity because it is both a contemporary art hub and extremely affordable compared with other European cities. We opened Nature Morte Berlin in November 2008 with a show of photographs by Dayanita Singh.

GOLDSWORTHY: How do you find the audience and response vary between showing Indian art in Germany and New York?

NAGY: Unfortunately, contemporary art from India still hasn't entered the mainstream market or dialogue in the United States. The market for it there still remains almost entirely NRIs (Non-Resident Indians, as we say). India is still too remote for most American collectors to relate to, although of course there are always exceptions. But the mainstream European art world has become quite involved with Indian art, as they have a much closer and older relationship with the sub-continent. There have been many large survey exhibitions of Indian contemporary art in museums all over Europe and these greatly influence the collectors and the gallerists.

GOLDSWORTHY: Your first show in Berlin was the work of Dayanita Singh who has seen institutional success in Europe-and on the East Coast of the US. Are there particular genres or subjects by Indian artists that Europeans show greater interest in? Is it the more "identity-related" work, or post-colonial themes?

NAGY: Most of the Western curators are looking for a type of art coming out of India that corresponds to what is considered "progressive" art practice in the West itself. They are able to find such works in the practice of artists such as the Raqs Media Collective, Bharti Kher, Anita Dube, Amar Kanwar, Jitish Kallat, Sonia Khuranna, and others. Unfortunately, these curators (and also critics and gallerists) often approach Indian contemporary art with very little knowledge of India itself, so they tend to misinterpret or even ignore artists that may have great relevance to the Indian context but seemingly little to the international context. But, hey, cultural translation is one of the obvious pitfalls of the globalization of the contemporary art world.

GOLDSWORTHY: Are you also working with Berlin-based Indian artists who are NRIs?

NAGY: We primarily represent artists who live and work inside of India, though we do represent a few diasporics (such as Seher Shah and Bari Kumar, both of whom live in the US). We also do projects with international (read: not Indian in any way) artists, but these are one-off exhibitions and we can't represent such artists. In Berlin, we are trying to mix things up, so that it is a more vibrant context, which the Indian artists themselves appreciate. In June, we are doing a show with the Berlin-based artist Julia Staszak (a hybrid project where she creates an installation to house other artists' works) and we have done a solo show with the American painter Stephen Mueller. But our concentration will always be on Indian artists.

GOLDSWORTHY: Nature Morte began as one of a group of 1980s East Village artist-run galleries now lionized for its organization and history. And NM is one of the last remaining names from that group, although it exists in a very different context now. Is there now or has there been a similar type of artist-run/alternative gallery movement in Indian cities that you find interesting?

NAGY: Hardly at all. There have been a few "collective" organizations that mount art exhibitions (such as Open Circle in Mumbai and SAHMAT in Delhi) but they don't run a permanent space. The only thing that comes close is the Khoj Residency Workshop in Delhi, which is part of the Triangle Arts Trust and under the leadership of Pooja Sood (a critic/curator, not an artist), and which runs a permanent building that sponsors residency projects resulting in exhibitions, and mixes Indian artists with international artists who come to Delhi. It is India's one true "underground" art space.

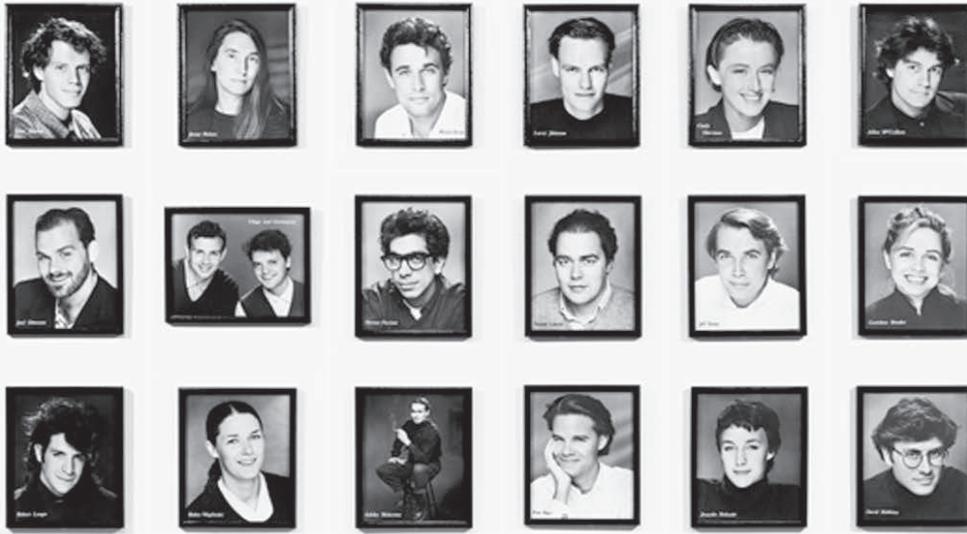
GOLDSWORTHY: How do you see the future of Indian art emerging in relation to the global market?

NAGY: I think Indian art has much greater "legs" on the international scene than, say, Chinese contemporary art. Of course, I'm biased. There is an astounding diversity in the art practices in India today. This diversity reflects the diversity of the country itself but also means there's something for everyone. Almost all of the artists are fluent in English and the art world is conducted almost entirely in English, which gives the Indian artists greater access to the international art world but also enables a more immediate and satisfying encounter for people coming to India.

Artforum

October 1999

ARTFORUM



PETER NAGY Dual Nature

EVEN IN THE MIDST OF THE THRILL OF IT ALL, it was apparent that two contingencies—one demographic, the other economic—laid the groundwork for the making of the “East Village Art Scene.” First, the postwar baby boom, which peaked in 1959, led to an outpouring of art-school grads in the early '80s. Sometimes it seems as though a majority of my generation, having grown up in the fertile '60s, pursued careers in the creative arts, and the New York art world simply couldn't accommodate this glut of brash, snot-nosed artists eager to exhibit their goods, and consequently burst at the seams. Second, the boom market enabled a generation of artist-entrepreneurs not only to start their own galleries but to keep their doors open and flourish.

I graduated from Parsons School of Design in 1981, having majored in communication design and feasted on art-history and critical-theory courses in general. At the time, I was working as a typesetter in a small ad and magazine shop on West Fifty-seventh Street and one day Alan Belcher walked in to do pasteups and mechanicals. We bonded almost immediately over Malcolm McLaren's latest project, Bow Wow Wow, and soon started going to galleries together on our lunch hour. Our favorite artists at the

Peter Nagy is an artist and proprietor of the present-day Gallery Nature Morte in New Delhi. With Alan Belcher, he cofounded the original Nature Morte in 1982.

David Robbins, *Talent*, 1986, eighteen black-and-white photographs, 10 x 8" each. Edition of 100.

time—Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni, Yves Klein—were still underdogs, and we were both excited by obscure foreign Pop, such as Eduardo Paolozzi, Richard Hamilton, and the French *Nouveaux Réalistes*. Our tastes were remarkably similar.

At home, I was sharing an East Village basement with Doug Bressler, a friend from Parsons who was in the band 3 Teens Kill 4 alongside David Wojnarowicz, and our landlord was Bill Stelling, cofounder of the Fun Gallery. I had started making art, and prowled the galleries of SoHo and uptown incessantly. One day, Bill invited me to an opening at the storefront space he had recently started with Patti Astor. I was completely alienated by both the hip-hop crowd and the graffiti art, but appreciated the Mickey Rooney/Judy Garland “let's put on a show” attitude of it all. Belcher and I started to talk, spotted an East Village storefront only to lose it and find a better one, and, with the help of some cohorts from Parsons and about \$500, opened Nature Morte on May 15, 1982. We chose the name because we liked its

postpunk feel (something akin to the name Joy Division) and figured that all art was really just a still life anyway. Gracie Mansion was mounting shows in her bathroom, Civilian Warfare opened on the very same day we did, and, as much to our astonishment as everyone else's, the galleries started popping up around us like mold spores.

Think back and you realize that this was a pivotal moment for the art world in general. The first waves of European neo-expressionism had arisen just a few seasons earlier, Mary Boone and Julian Schnabel were electrifying the scene, and established galleries were opening huge new spaces. I had been influenced by the Joseph Beuys retrospective at the Guggenheim in 1979–80.

IN THE '80S THERE WAS A POLITICAL AND CONCEPTUAL APTNESS TO FUSING THE ROLES OF ARTIST AND DEALER THAT ACCOMPANIED THE TURN TOWARD RETHINKING REPRESENTATION ITSELF.

It brought a physical type of Conceptual art to the forefront and gave contemporary art its blockbuster potential. At the time, I associated Beuys's social sculpture with Michael Asher's experiments in institutional critique in Los Angeles in the '70s. With my education in advertising, publication design, and packaging I was gravitating toward museum work, so it seemed natural to fuse my interests into an art gallery. At that point, the commercial gallery seemed to be a direct route to action, a way to forgo the hassles and dependencies associated with alternative spaces, and the nonprofit foundations with all their paperwork and advisory boards. I had been impressed with Colab's “Times Square Show,” ABC No Rio, and Fashion Moda, especially with their do-it-yourself spontaneity and their success at drumming up attention in the mainstream press.

My generation came of age in the early '70s. We had been aware of the '60s—the hippies, the acid, the antiwar *continued on page 167*

NAGY/EAST VILLAGE *continued from page 129*

movement—but we were too young to join in. We watched it all on TV, saw the era unfold on the pages of *Life*. But by the time we could participate (i.e., when we finally had the part-time jobs that let us buy our own clothes and records), times had changed. Glitter and glam were the rage, and a new rebellion based on style and a much more personal set of issues (sexual, psychological) was at hand. Fashion was important—really important—and by the time we arrived at the East Village scene (by way of disco and punk, let's not forget), seasonal innovation and patricide were the established cultural norms. I make this point to get at the mind-set of my generation at the beginning of the '80s. We were accustomed to the comfort food of novelty, nonthreatening and perfectly in line with the paradigm of change for change's sake that was symptomatic of all areas of cultural production (not just the garment industry). No wonder the art and fashion worlds continued to schmooze along until they became virtually indistinguishable. Change was necessary, fun, and good, but it didn't mean that the basic structure of things was likely to topple. The punks unfortunately had to learn the same lesson the Surrealists had learned forty years earlier: You could change your own life and your aesthetics, but that would have little effect on society as a whole.

These, then, were the conditions that created a new neighborhood for art that, in retrospect, seems to have anticipated "grunge" in many ways, if grunge is defined as the hybrid of hippie and punk. The spaces were small, by any standards, the walls were often left unplastered, and lighting was decidedly ad hoc, but the scene wasn't "anti-art" in any sense. In fact, most of us running these galleries aspired to a Fifty-seventh Street professionalism, lusting after computers in those days before there were even fax machines, let alone e-mail. We welcomed our acknowledgment by the establishment as we opened our invitations for each of the four nights of festivities inaugurating the new Museum of Modern Art in 1984. We loved art and its institutions: That's why we had started our own. Once the money started to come in, we gleefully layered on the *Commes des Garçons* and *Yohji* before heading off to restaurants like *Indochine*, *Hawaii Five-O*, or *Hasaki*, and we welcomed the big-name collectors and their limos to the scruffy neighborhood (kudos to Patti and Bill of Fun, who got the ball rolling by precipitating Bruno Bischoffberger's early arrival). In the end, it's really the collectors whom we all have to thank for creating the scene. They responded enthusiastically to this hothouse youth culture and created a buoyant speculative market (which continues today) for those fresh out of their June gowns. Those were the giddy, drug-enhanced days in which a new generation greedily

accepted art history's mantle, and I, for one, never imagined they would come to an end so soon.

With twenty-twenty hindsight, it's easy to see how specious and fickle the outpourings of both attention and money were, and it's easy now to point up the hubris of those who believed that the rules of the game were changing forever. Alan Belcher and I never imagined ourselves to be revolutionaries; rather, we naively found ourselves in the right place at the right time, a moment in which, as I still believe, true progress was being made in the visual arts (though this was happening mostly in SoHo). Belcher and I identified strongly with the Metro Pictures school of art: media-derived, critical, and ironic. Consequently, we loathed the initial definition of the East Village by way of Gracie Mansion's kitsch (had seen it all before at Holly Solomon's on West Broadway) and Civilian Warfare's Urban Punk (now seemingly the most true-to-the-neighborhood aesthetic). We felt vindicated only by the arrival, and subsequent success, of International With Monument and Cash/Newhouse, and were proud to be peers in the court of Collins and Milazzo. It was Collins and Milazzo—that cross between Deleuze and Guattari and Ozzie and Harriet—who deserve the most credit for creating the intellectual East Village. They not only brought together (over Tricia's home cooking) the like-minded young artists and gallerists of the neighborhood, but virtually built the bridge connecting the Pictures generation with its spawn.

Personally, I learned volumes from my experience in the East Village, up to my eyeteeth in it as I was. The anxiety of making it into the history books was erased, as the history books themselves were democratized, opened up for seemingly anyone to write in. It's surprising just how many "East Village" shows were mounted around the world, usually instigated by outside forces, but occasionally from within the neighborhood itself, for there certainly hasn't been a glut of geographically inspired curating since (no shows anywhere, to my knowledge, on "The Marais" or "The Galleries of Bergamot Station"), which points to the fact that the audience outside saw the East Village scene as more cohesive and homogenized than did those of us within it. Just as the history books expanded to record more names, we became acutely aware, at an early age, of the rapid turnover of artists required to fuel the novelty-driven market (I'm often reminded of Robert Pincus-Witten's essay "The Scene that Turned on a Dime" [1986]). Anyone involved in the scene can think of dozens of artists and dealers who seem to have disappeared from the art world completely—far more, in fact, than those whom we know to be still active.

One thing that distinguished the East Village from SoHo or the uptown galleries was the prominence of the artist-dealer. One would guess that most people who start their own galleries had, at some point in their lives, entertained ideas of making art themselves. (Such ambitions, if they weren't totally abandoned in high school, were usually crushed during college.) So the notion of the artist-dealer, which might seem so surprising, was really to be expected. There wasn't any great new twist behind the rise of the East Village scene. It was just another chapter in a long history of artists taking matters into their own hands to get their works out there (from the *Salon des Refusés* [1863] to Oldenburg's Store [1961–62] to the "Freeze" show in London

[1988]). But in the early '80s there was a political and conceptual appropriateness to fusing the roles of artist, dealer, and curator that accompanied the turn toward institutional critique, toward rethinking representation itself, and toward the inclusion of hitherto marginalized voices not only in the art world but in the society at large. I liked (and still like) the notion of bringing other artists' works together into still lifes, as well as the manipulation of meaning through montage and assemblage.

Our success in the East Village of the '80s as both artists and dealers forced us to choose one role or the other, and I, among others, opted for the role of maker over seller, since there seemed to be no end of gallery attention and collector enthusiasm. But as we all know now, the bubble burst, and there was a mad scramble—by the artists for teaching positions and by the galleries for still younger artists with even fresher work. I have since gravitated back to running a commercial gallery (in New Delhi, India), but I seem to be the only one who has done so. Certainly the fact that I moved to the other side of the world and encountered an art scene full of possibilities and potential akin to the East Village in the early '80s helped. It would have been difficult to muster the gumption to put it together again in New York. I am conscious of being penalized for being a dealer: Artists aren't supposed to be interested in the market (ha ha), and my choice is, apparently, seen by some as opportunistic and manipulative. In New York people often ask how I can be an artist and run a gallery at the same time (though the emphasis seems to be on availability of time rather than on ethics). I counter that no one would question were I to head the painting department at Yale while continuing to make and show my work. As it happens, I'm not particularly interested in academia and would rather work with mature artists on the presentation and promotion of their work. I would find it nearly impossible to offer much encouragement to the new crop of art students each year. I prefer the combination of market, media, creativity, and personality that comes together in a gallery.

Was my outlook and attitude forged in the crucible of the East Village? Undoubtedly. I suspect I will always choose the entrepreneurial, peripatetic path over the security and routine of higher education. Though the art world makes a pretense of fetishizing the most radical young work, I don't see any real risk taking or rule breaking when it comes to museum curating or gallery running (save for Matthew Marks spontaneously generating a new art neighborhood and Gavin Brown's recent venture wherein honesty wins out over sobriety). Perhaps the greatest contribution of (and, for many, the biggest problem with) the whole East Village thang was that it foregrounded, then obviated, the notion that bohemia wasn't necessarily antithetical to a culture of glamour and prestige; and this led directly to today's gluttonous market (in all areas of cultural production), which forces any underground to the surface so quickly that the very concept of an underground ceases to exist. It's tempting to see the East Village as the last gasp of us-against-them bohemia, of an underground that held its ground, if ever so briefly. But, then again, maybe that's the way most people reminisce about the moment when they passed from adolescence into adulthood, from innocence into maturity, from being a nobody to being a somebody. □

artnet

October 12, 1997

artnet[®]**“SO MUCH DEATHLESS” — ROGER BOYCE**

By most accounts the artist Peter Nagy was one of the few intellectuals of the notoriously anti-intellectual East Village scene of the mid-1980s. He cofounded Nature Morte (with Canadian artist Alan Belcher), which along with Meyer Vaisman's International With Monument was one of the few galleries there that specialized in conceptualist, Post-Modernist work. His own art -- graphic museum floor plans marked with corporate logos -- perfectly articulated the period's awareness of the corporate capture of culture. Then, after a few shows in SoHo (which were notable for applying a kind of black-and-white Ben-Day "cancer" to Pop imagery), Nagy grew his hair long and moved to India.

So it was with some interest last summer, after a five-year absence, that Nagy reappeared in New York via a fairly quiet though ambitious exhibition at Nicole Klagsbrun's last public space (since closed) on Mercer Street in SoHo. Entitled "So Much Deathless, a Curated Installation," the show mixed both high and low -- deathless referring to spiritual transcendence and so much being a colloquialism employed by English-speaking Indians to convey the superlative. The show featured a number of altar-like groupings of various objects, including Nagy's own works in combination with Eastern religious antiquities, modern western furniture and works by other contemporary artists.

With these multidimensional assemblages, Nagy quixotically seeks the goal of philosophers, mystics and alchemists from time immemorial -- a reconciliation of opposites. There are moments when he comes close. In *The Three Jewels*, a trinity composed of three miniature versions of Brancusi's *Endless Column* (as channeled by Richard Pettibone) is set before a photograph by Lynn Davis of the Buddha Sukhotai and rests on an anonymous French deco console with wrought iron legs. The console is stylish and airily insubstantial, yet serves unaccountably well as a pedestal for Brancusi, well known for the pains he took with his own bases. The Buddha himself benefits mysteriously from the grouping, though he figuratively turns his back on the whole business -- Davis has photographed him from behind.

Sukhmani is a multi-layered low relief that begins with a wall painting that consists of a vivid field of light red cadmium patterned with outlines of a hand, simple charms of human presence that are reminiscent of cave art. On this field Nagy places three stretched canvases, stacked one atop another, each smaller than the other, painted in Nagy's trademark all-over patterning, a kind of multi-colored camouflage design. Atop this low-relief ziggurat of paintings is a small votive figure, made of plaster and sporting a turban. This must be *Sukhmani*. Encircling this figure is a corona of almost 20 works by another artist, Sandra Hirshkowitz, who makes stretched paper disks that resemble the heads of drums (Hirshkowitz's shallow drums are reminiscent of the Sufi *dombak*: a flat, resonant, trance inducing drum). Each disk is embroidered with gold thread in a geometric pattern. From their centers hang a hank of golden hair growing in a long tress, Mongol style. Like *The Three Jewels*, *Sukhmani* may be favorably compared to the best of free verse, the sum being greater than its parts.

Nagy's larger, more sprawling assemblages, such as *Abstract Schematic* and *Malkouns*, refuse to congeal into unitary works. They remain big loose puddings embedded with tempting eye/mind/heart candy. Among the various elements are Stephen Mueller's painting *Envoy*, a 28-by-28-inch innerspace odyssey inspired by tantric Buddhism; a nicked schist Shiva lingam borrowed from Helen Marden; a Gilbert Rhode mahogany and puffily upholstered chest of drawers; and Nagy's own disarmingly clunky

raku stupa and his 44-square-inch, deliriously psychedelic Mudra. The abundance is so.....deathless. As Andre Malraux says of God, "a great creator of form, although he has no style."

Orientalism is defined not as a style per se but as a fascination with certain subjects. As a Postmodernist, Nagy focuses on mappings of cultural identity. In this omnivorous project, his topics are multivalenced symbolic pattern and design, the ornamentation of rococo and baroque, of architectural detail, corporate signage, microscopy, Islamic geometry and Buddhist and Hindu iconography. In his earlier work, Nagy took a smorgasbord of images and collapsed their unruly dimensionality into a mercilessly flat, photomechanically reproduced black-and-white. Nagy is too intelligent an artist to have been unaware of the drained, embalmed quality of these paintings.

Nagy deserves credit for this fearless attempt, with this new body of work, to present life as it is -- paradoxical, disorderly and infinitely perverse. To paraphrase Witold Gombrowitz; "Take reality apart into elements, build illogical new worlds of it and in this arbitrariness is hidden a law, that the madness that destroys our external sense leads us into our internal meaning."

Flash Art

Issue 129, 1986

Flash Art

From Criticism to Complicity

*After the pictures generation**by Peter Nagy*

"Pictures," installation view at Artist Space, New York (1977). Courtesy of Artist Space, New York.

From *Flash Art* n°129, 1986

Peter Nagy: *In what ways does this new work depart from or elaborate upon work done by the "Pictures" generation of appropriators (that being the group associated, early on, with Metro Pictures: Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince, Troy Brauntuch, etc.)? Haim, would you address that question, because your work is in many ways an elaboration of those strategies...*

Haim Steinbach: To respond to this question, it's important to bring in a bit of history. In 1979 I did an installation at Artists Space titled *Display no. 7*; the work consisted of an arrangement of objects and artifacts on shelves and counters around the gallery space, ranging from a high-tech kettle propped on a minimal wall-box, to the picture magazines and brochures displayed on the receptionist's desk. Whereas most of the "Pictures" generation artists have been lifting images to make their work, I have been using objects. The discourse this art has been engaged in questions the position of the subject in relation to the image/object. There has been a growing awareness of the way that media affect our viewing of reality in a pictorial fashion. In a sense, the media have been turning us into tourists and voyeurs outside our own experience. The "Pictures" artists have been involved in questioning their own position as producers of art in relation to the mythic baggage of subjectivity and individuality, of which they have become acutely self-conscious. There has been a shift in the activities of the new group of artists in that there is a renewed interest in locating one's desire, by which I mean one's own taking pleasure in objects and commodities, which includes what we call works of art. There is a stronger sense of being complicit with the production of desire, what we traditionally call beautiful seductive objects, than being positioned somewhere outside of it. In this sense the idea of criticality in art is also changing.

Ashley Bickerton: If we're going to draw a difference, it's going to have to be between the original program, as outlined by critics such as Douglas Crimp and Craig Owens, and the tendencies now beginning to emerge with the younger artists. A key operative word that may be useful right now would be "truth": I feel the "Pictures" group was after a particular deconstruction or breakdown of the process of the corruption of truth, whereas at this point I feel we are utilizing that process of corruption as a poetic form, a platform or launch pad for poetic discourse in itself. Through tactile choices and presentation, the art object has now been placed in a discursive relationship with the larger scenario of the political and social reality of which it is a part. In a self-conscious and ongoing dialogue with the social, political and intellectual climate of the time and place it will operate in, and with the entire process of its absorption. Much of the work produced by the "Pictures" group was essentially deconstructive and task-oriented in its spectacular didacticism. It was a cool approach to hot culture, whereas this new work of which we speak has more to do with information in general, specifically the schism that exists between information and assumed meanings, particularly how the formal elaboration of information necessarily affects its possible meanings. This work has a somewhat less utopian bent than its predecessor.

PN: *So, we've learned some strategies from the "Pictures" generation.*

AB: We've consciously learned and incorporated strategies from a lot of art-historical sources. I tend to think that right now, at least from this vantage point, with the wash of contrary information we have witnessed in the postwar period, with the comings and goings of all sorts of different isms, we're now able to step back and merge, in fact to implode a variety of different strategies and epistemologies into the total art object that is capable of speaking of its own predicament as well as in general. This would oppose it to the directed programmatic operative of original "Pictures" practice.



Jeff Koons, "Two Ball Total Equilibrium Tank (Spalding Dr. J Silver Series, Spalding NBA Tip-Off)" (1985).

PN: *How integral are notions of leftist politics or cultural subversion in the work?*

Philip Taaffe: Well, I think the best way for me to address that is to present something I've prepared very recently, a kind of aphoristic diagram in the form of an imaginary logbook. This is loosely based upon the HMS Bounty incident, and it's entitled *Mutiny within Bounty*. This is the logbook entry for Day One: "Our condition is driving us to polite distractedness. We don't like it and we will no longer put up with it. We know how to run this ship and we are taking over. Our journey must accomplish nothing less than the establishment of paradise on Earth. We've been

endlessly mistreated by our culture, superabundance is bringing us nowhere, and we refuse to allow this situation to be perpetuated. We're not buying and we're not selling. We're casting our oppressors adrift on board a bronze raft, and we're getting the hell out of here. We're going to where we can celebrate our new destiny in peace and freedom, to where our only possessions are our minds, our hearts, our aspirations, and whatever we find when we get there." Day Two continues: "Everyone seems to agree that our approaching destination looks frighteningly familiar. We may have to find someplace else."

PN: *And what perhaps is that approaching destination?*

PT: It's our future, the goal of our procedures, how we are able to evolve our methodologies and our thinking, where we are placing ourselves, where we find ourselves going.

Peter Halley: I think that Marxian thought really has to be integrated into one's thinking, but I identify myself more with a New Left position, in which an absurdist or existential position is integrated with Marxian concepts. In addition, I'd like to bring in figures like Marshall McLuhan, who are also involved with a kind of political thinking. I think it's difficult nowadays to talk about a political situation: along with reality, politics is sort of an outdated notion. We are now in a post-political situation. As an artist, one ends up aspiring to make an art object that is a situationist object, in and of itself, in the way it's put together. Rather than addressing topical issues, I think that a work of art has to address critical issues; the topical political issues of the day, to the extent they exist, are certainly of concern to people as individuals, but in a work of art it is the structural questions behind those topical issues that are important. For me, the most political component in a work of art — and it's a component that the work of everybody on this panel shares — is the idea that the work be conceived in such a way that anyone could do it. That's what I've always admired about Andy Warhol or Frank Stella — that one has a sense that one could actually participate in the making of the work. Finally, I find myself strongly interested in addressing postindustrial issues: the issues of the situation of the suburbanized middle classes that are in even worse shape isn't of interest, but those situations seem to me more clear cut. It's precisely the ambiguity and the sort of unknown quality of life in the subdivision that seems worth addressing.

PN: *In my own case, as well as that of Meyer Vaisman, the activity of running a gallery has a similar situationist advantage. It seems to me that (and perhaps this accounts for the great success that so much of this work has achieved so quickly) in each of the individual works of art, there are two separate dialectics operating: on one hand, the work is appealing to an audience primarily composed of artists and intellectuals, and on the other to an audience primarily composed of collectors and dealers. I'm wondering how conscious the artist is of designing a work of art for audiences that are, in fact, very different, very far apart.*

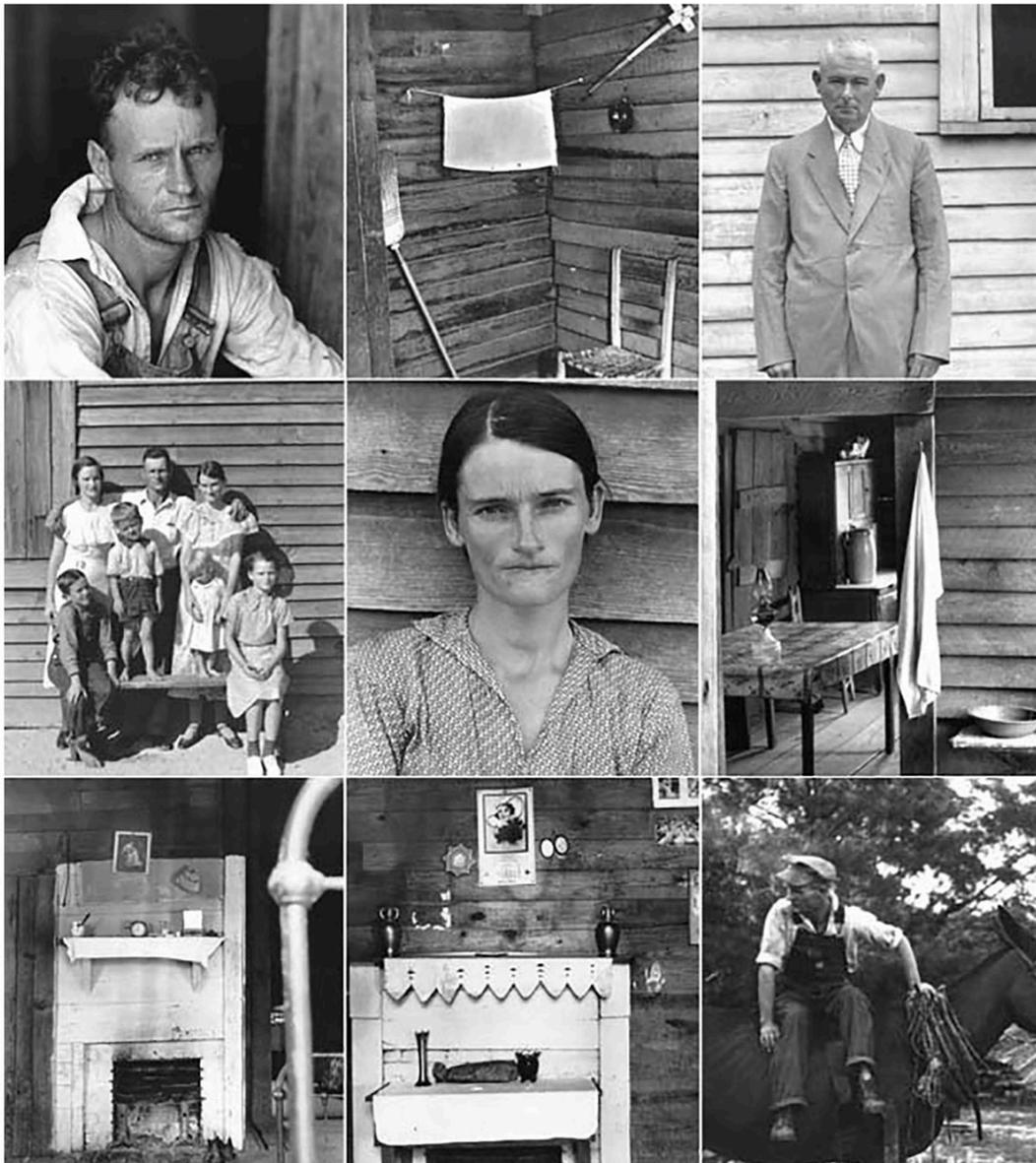
HS: In my case, I spend a lot of time shopping, and I find the commodities that I look at to be very often addressed to a general audience, of which I am a part. On one hand there is an art context, out of which I come, and through which I think about what it means to present an object with another object or with another form. On the other hand I use groupings or arrangements of objects that are already pre-set for a general audience.

PN: *So you're saying it's pretty unconscious on your part.*

HS: I am conscious that in many ways today the distinctions between an elite as opposed to a more general audience are becoming blurred. There is an equalizing factor at work in the way things are produced now giving an illusion of a shared freedom, of one audience. This kind of dynamic interests me, and I attempt to deal with it in my work.

PT: Generally, I'm opposed to a difficult level of hermeticism within a work. I want the work to be as open as possible. I want my work to be freely experienced.

Jeff Koons: To me, the issue of being able to capture a general audience and also have the art stay on the highest orders is of great interest. I think anyone can come to my work from the general culture; I don't set up any kind of requirement. Almost like television, I tell a story that is easy for anyone to enter into and on some level enjoy, whether they enjoy just a little glitter of it and get excited by that or maybe, like with *Equilibrium Tanks* (1985), they get a kick out of the sensationalism of seeing basket balls just hover. The objects and the other images that are interconnected to the body of work have other contexts and, depending on how much the viewer wants to enter it, they can try to get more out of it and start dealing in art vocabulary instead of just sensational or personal vocabulary, and start to deal with abstractions of ideas and of context. So, I purposely always try at least to get the mass of people in the door, and if they can go further, if they want to continue to deal in an art vocabulary I hope that would happen, because by all means I am not trying to exclude high-art vocabulary.



Sherrie Levine, "After Walker Evans" (1981).

shadowy expanse of the sea beyond. Then a sudden feeling of faintness made her stop; and the misery of her childhood, the disappointment of her first love, the departure of her nephew, and the death of Virginie all came back to her at once like the waves of a rising tide, and, welling up in her throat, choked her.

When she got to the boat she insisted on speaking to the captain, and without telling him what was in her parcel, asked him to take good care of it.

The taxidermist kept the parrot a long time. Every week he promised it for the next; after six months he announced that a box had been sent off, and nothing more was heard of it. It looked as though Loulou would never come back, and Félicité told herself: 'They'd stolen him for sure!'

At least he arrived — looking quite magnificent, perched on a branch screwed into a mahogany base, one foot in the air, his head cocked to one side, and biting a nut which the taxidermist, out of a love of the grandiose, had gilded.

Félicité shut him up in her room.

She entered into her death agony. Her breath, coming ever faster with a rattling sound, made her sides heave. Bubbles of froth appeared at the corners of her mouth, and her whole body trembled. A blue cloud of incense wafted up into Félicité's room. She opened her nostrils wide and breathed it with a mystical, sensuous fervor. Then she closed her eyes. Her lips smiled, her heartbeats grew slower and slower, each a little fainter and gentler, like a fountain running dry and an echo fading away. And as she breathed her last, she thought she could see in the opening heavens, a giant parrot hovering over her head."

What I mean is, just when you think you've got it, it gets you.

Another example: It was with his circle paintings that Olivier Mosset introduced himself to the public in Paris at the end of the '60s as a member of the radical artists' group BMPT, an acronym for (Daniel) Buren, (Olivier) Mosset, (Michel) Parmentier, and (Niele) Toroni. This association was to prove somewhat problematic in light of Mosset's real concern, for the circle paintings were in danger of becoming misconstrued as a logo. Mosset resolved this dilemma by borrowing the stripe pattern used by his colleague Buren, not in the sense of merely copying it, but as an object lesson.



Richard Prince, "Untitled (Cowboy)" (1980-1989).

PH: My relationship to previous geometric art has both an analytical and synthetic aspect. It's analytic, because I think of my work as being a deconstruction of themes in Mondrian or Donald Judd — for example, that Mondrian is a response to a growing geometricization of culture and of the city in the '20s and '30s, and that Judd is a response to mass production in its most developed form in postindustrial culture. It's synthetic, because I'm not so much appropriating motifs from such art as hyperrealizing them — in other words, taking themes that have a certain reality in one social setting and sort of boosting them up into another reality. I'd like to use a couple of examples: if you take a glowing transcendental image in a Rothko, in my work that is replaced by Day-Glo. I also often say that I've taken Barnett Newman's zip and made it into plumbing.

PN: *Finally, much of the new sculpture can be understood specifically in terms of the idea of the anxiety of the object, whether consumer commodity, fetish, or art object. I'm wondering if this anxiety is actually the anxiety of late capitalist culture, and the anxiety of the situation of the artist within late capitalist culture, as well as perhaps the anxiety of the collector's complicated and conflicting relationship within capitalism.*

HS: The anxiety of late capitalist culture is in us: in the futility we experience in value systems when faced with our reality; in the futility we find in moralizing as a way of determining what's good or bad. Is there such a thing as a consumer object, or is it our relation to it that concerns us?

JK: As far as the relationship to the object, in a capitalist society we're repaid, for the work that we do, with objects. And in the objects we can see personality traits of individuals, and we treat them like individuals. Some of these objects tend to be stronger than we are, and will out-survive us. That's a threatening situation to be confronted with.

AB: It's not just sculpture that is concerned with this development. After years of pulling the object off the wall, smearing it across the fields in the Utah desert, and playing it out with our body secretions, the artwork has not awkwardly but aggressively asserted itself back into the gallery context: the space of art — but this with an aggressive discomfort and a complicit defiance.

PT: Environmental art can no longer be as significant a gesture as it was in the early '70s, and now in order to bring about a psychologically compelling situation, a more densely subjectified, interiorized understanding of how to approach making work is called for.

PH: I think of process art as the last gasp for the idea of life in a work of art, and that these new works are much more static and have gone past that.

PT: But I think we've gotten to the point now where it's been proven that painting cannot be killed, you can't kill painting. It won't die, and we have to accept that fact.

SL: I think there is a long modernist tradition of endgame art — starting with dada and the suprematists, if you like, and a lot of artists have made the last painting ever to be made. It's a no-man's land that a lot of us enjoy moving around in, and the thing is not to lose your sense of humor, because it's only art.

(Edited by David Robbins)

Popcorn Brie

an interview
with the directors
of Nature Morte Gallery

by Rex Reason

Peter Nagy: Wouldn't it be great if Leo Castelli were like Burger King, and you had a Leo Castelli in every town across America.

Rex Reason: Franchises... well, it's like that now with him.

PN: Yeah, and then we need a farm system. It could be so big! One in Indianapolis, one in Cape Cod. The farm system would be set up so that young artists could get experience in other parts of the country and then slowly feed into New York...

Alan Belcher: The only problem at this point is that there is a lot of work being shown, written about, and sold that is very quickly appreciated; it's either very graphic or aggressive or colorful or pleasing, illustrational, and it just pops off of the wall instantly and people say, "Oh, yeah, this is a really nice painting," without thinking about it twice. But maybe this is just the first step.

RR: Towards what—the grand democratization of art?

AB: Perhaps.

PN: Often the seed of art comes out of the lower class or middle class, and an intellectual elite approves it. The elite fabricates the career. At this point, the New York Art World in 1983 is the ultimate cliché of the

American dream. Keith Haring is the Henry Ford of the 1980s.

RR: But that is evidence of a profound change, of what kind of success an artist wants to have or what kind of artist to be. All these middle class kids going to art school and learning about art in universities are then shot out into a world in which they simply graft their art aspirations onto their middle class aspirations. It's the diminution of the adversarial culture. They reject nothing. This happened almost without art knowing it.

PN: Hopefully, the dogma of art will rise above the dogma of business.

RR: I'm not sure it does. Art gains much of its meaning from the tension caused by its "otherness" and opposition to prevailing conditions.

PN: The need for opposition changes, and I'm not sure that's art's role anyway. I've always thought if there were a utopia it would be when everyone is an artist and everyone is looking at every aspect of life as art... a total work of art as your life, which many artists have done—Beuys, Warhol. Maybe the only really concrete way of achieving utopia is if everyone's a Joseph Beuys!

RR: Who's going to clean the streets? The people who naturally love doing that?



Peter Nagy, *Adam*, 1985.

AB: *We* have jobs during the day.

PN: Due to massive hype and exposure, the art world is on the verge of becoming something it's never been before. More in the vein of popular culture, movies, television, fashion. It's competing for that segment of *Newsweek* magazine, that four-page color spread.

RR: There's a statement attributed to you guys, "In the Fifties everyone wanted to have a car, in the Sixties and Seventies everyone wanted to be a rock star, and in the Eighties everyone wants to be an artist."

PN: Yeah, or a gallery owner.

AB: A painter.

PN: In '78 you open a nightclub, in '82 you open a gallery, a dayclub. The whole change in atmosphere can be attributed to Mary Boone-ism and Julian Schnabelism. It's the mass movement of popular youth culture from music into art. The whole music thing coalesced in the late Seventies, and now our stars aren't Debbie Harry and Joey Ramone, they're Keith Haring and Futura 2000. Music flopped into art. Mary Boone gave confidence to a lot of young artists. Artists were taken more seriously, getting more press, so at least it seemed like the market, the whole environment was much more open to younger artists, to unknown people, because of the success of the biggies.

The general excitement in the art world over all...

AB: Of course you get a lot of schlocky work because you have more people looking at and thinking about art that had never previously done it. But it also means that soon in the future we'll be able to have art everywhere.

RR: How do you feel about trademark-ism in art: objects that are instantly recognizable as made by a certain artist?

PN: It's very important. It's the way our whole society functions.

AB: I think it's great. Especially now with such a large population.

PN: It's certainly necessary for survival. We're both artists and we have a gallery, but we tell every artist we handle, "Look, you're going to have to be as much your own dealer as we're going to be. You've got to hype your career just as much."

AB: If not more.

PN: We don't want you just sitting home making paintings.

RR: Not to be gloomy, but what is that attitude's effect on art? Trademark-ism indicates to me that an artist constrains creative development to the issues raised by the last series of pieces, conceptual serialism... further variations on the last theme in order to support its place in the market.

PN: My background is in media, and I've always seen that as a necessary part of it—so you could get that necessary feedback so you could go out and make more. It's just economics.

RR: The trademark is so you can *sell* it so you can make more. To say, "Oh, it's just economics" is to sweep it under the rug—and definitely relegate the content and quality of what is made to economic concerns, which I think is newish, certainly "after-Warhol".

PN: You're advocating a quicker turnover of the product?

RR: I'm saying I'd rather make William Wegman's drawings than Robert Longo's: there's an infinitely greater area of play that one gives oneself access to.

PN: You feel the artists' desires should be the bottom line.

RR: Yes, as far as the content and range of art is concerned.

PN: I don't see trademark as being that limited. Beuys has a trademark, but it's more of a material or an essence. There's always been a lot of trademark in art: Duchamp, Man Ray had a lot of it.

RR: No! They were completely not about that. The variation in the look and content of the object was for them much broader.

PN: I disagree. And Sherrie Levine introduced a further confusion, she took on this sort of martyr position: when you don't have to worry about being original, you're completely liberated. Copies of copies of copies is generative, and regenerative. And most of those artists who are strongly trademarked are doing other things which you never see, like Twombly's 3-D collages.

AB: Warhol's *Piss Paintings*.

RR: Are people "expressing" themselves all over the map?

PN: People don't have anything to express, except the trademark. The void is inside us. We hardly have original thoughts all the time. We're fed information all the time.

AB: We're filters.

PN: We're hardly ourselves. You make an object to fill the void. You're nothing inside so you make a concrete object to see yourself. It's the concrete self.

AB: Especially if you die tomorrow. But you're not just filling it, you're saying something about it as well. And a gallerist just picks out of the atmosphere bits one relates to.

PN: You look for things that remind you of what you never remembered before.

RR: You're known as having a policy of no-policy, as far as aesthetics are concerned.

PN: That harmed us during our first year because the media didn't have a label they could pin on us. We knew that we didn't want to show what was being seen in most galleries, which was neo-expressionist figurative paintings. The 90% of that that you see is pretty useless. So from the beginning that was our only direction—we knew we weren't showing neo expressionism. We were going to concentrate on other media and other imagery, and mix things up. Pluralism certainly didn't die with the Seventies.

AB: Our policy of no-policy is one of survival: we feel that if we become known for a certain type of work, then people will only come to see us for a few months, and then never come again. We want a long shelf life.

PN: But we are getting more focused—it takes a gallery a few years, especially when you've started out really fast like us, it takes a few years to coalesce into a style. We're on our

way to having a definite outlook.

AB: It's becoming more apparent: we tend to go for either the primitive or the slick, or hard-edged.

PN: Serious, intelligent work: those are our artful requirements. We never wanted to show cliché East Village art—kitschy religious art or punky aggressive paintings. Even though 90% of our artists are working in the East Village, they're certainly not making that kind of stuff.

RR: How do you find your artists?

AB: They find us, mostly. Friends of friends.

PN: We still look at slides, and it's getting a little out of hand, but we feel it's something we have to do, to at least let people know there's an outlet. FUN won't look at anything.

AB: Our shows are planned through April, and we've got most of the people we want to work with, so even though we're looking at slides, it's a little futile.

PN: Even if we liked the work we couldn't deal with it for a year.

RR: Do you see yourselves as functioning as filters for the gallery system?

AB: That's one of our motives: one of our principles is to show new people previously unshown, and then having them get shows in other galleries afterwards. Also having

dealers, collectors, writers, coming here and knowing they're going to be competing with each other.

PN: We don't have a stable. We don't sign people.

AB: Basically we always want to have fun showing work—if we had to keep showing the same people we'd just hire someone to run the place.

PN: We're not threatened by people stealing our artists.

AB: We're all for it—if they steal it just makes us valid, it proves we're showing what people respond to.

RR: But of course this completely plugs into the extant gallery system. It's the food chain—artists are plankton, you guys are minnows, and so on.

AB: But it's working.

PN: We didn't feel revolt against that system. Basically that system has a lot of good in it, and it takes care of a lot of artists.

RR: In order to draw meaning from the incredible variety of objects, styles, and aims that constitutes pluralism, doesn't pluralism presuppose such an intense and constant involvement with the art world that it continues and accentuates the ghettoization of artists? Kosuth said the only people who pay attention to art are artists, anyway, so let's just admit it and make art for artists, and that spirals upwards to esoterica.



Alan Belcher. \$51.49. 1985.

PN: I live breathe think sleep art.

AB: There's nothing else to do now.

PN: It's been ghetto-ized but it's self-preservation.

AB: Everybody has their ghetto.

PN: Golf, whatever. The only way in which pluralism works against us is with the collectors—they may see two things they like next to four things they don't like. That doesn't make them shell out the money too fast.

AB: The product really needs packaging and promotion to sell it. And if it's not shown a lot and written about, then it's not packaged.

PN: As far as ads go, the art world is the pits right now.

AB: It's all just type.

PN: Mary Boone, Sperone Westwater... it's the same little format every month. We have lots of art magazines from the Sixties and the ads were art in themselves.

RR: What's the difference between art and any other product?

PN: In the marketplace, nothing. Art is something different when you're making it and when you're admiring it—the difference is in the quality of the consumption.

RR: So in the marketplace the art object is without pretensions to meaning?

PN: Pretty much.

RR: Maybe there's not enough time anymore for the deep stuff—things keep moving faster and faster.

PN: That's the natural flow of society—things get more and more complex, weirder and weirder, faster and faster. You have to learn to just groove on it.

RR: Do you invest less and less of yourself with each microrevolution?

PN: Yeah. The key to survival is staying on top of the wave.

RR: Surfing.

AB: Stay on the board.

RR: You guys are so modern. What do you look for in an object? What qualities?

AB: Right now we like either black, white, and gray, or generic color.

PN: We're pretty anti-color.

RR: By generic you mean red as "red" rather than modulations of it?

AB: Yeah.

PN: So many people bring us slides that are just like Salle, Basquiat, or Roberto Juarez. These poor kids are out there going to the galleries and they say, "This is what I have to do to have a show." So they run home and paint them. We don't want that—we want stuff we've never seen in a gallery before.

RR: And what do you think is the

best art? What influenced the shaping of your taste?

AB: Right now, we like pretty classic late modern stuff: Pop Art, Paolozzi, Indiana for logos, Duchamp, Manzoni, Beuys, Klein. Scarpitta's a favorite of mine.

PN: We think Op Art is highly underrated, Bridget Riley. That's corporate psychedelia, the orgasm of modernism.

AB: We started the gallery because we really just wanted to get our voices in.

PN: And chose the name "Nature Morte" for its Fifties-jazz, pseudo-continental appeal. Ersatz European. Franco-American Chef Boy-ar-dee.

AB: We wanted to be the Leper Gallery.

PN: But then I thought of the Waller Gallery.

RR: Great!

AB: We gotta get MasterCharge. I want to see the stickers in the window.

PN: We'd love to build a sliver.

AB: Coop Nature Morte, Cafe Nature Morte, Cinema Nature Morte Quad.

PN: Brie popcorn. See, that's what I mean about trademarks: the image is succinct but the meaning can't be battened down.

October, 1983



Mary Agnes Smith: *Nature Morte sign*.