

The title *Motherhood* (an uncommon expression in German these days), fosters an impression of care and tenderness. But as what is going on is unclear, the scene generates a mood of subtle violence.

ness, set within the framework of social interaction. But the bitch does not pay attention to her puppies, and while they greedily suck her teats she stretches across to the man. Perhaps she cannot look after her puppies because the man is pulling her towards him by her collar. However, as what is going on is unclear, the scene generates a mood of subtle violence.

In their book *Arts of Impoverishment*, Beckett, Rothko, Resnais (1993)

Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit observe: 'The characters of *Waiting for Godot* are sacrificed to the representation of their waiting'. The images in Jermolaewa's videos are representations of inescapable hopelessness. Whereas in Beckett's plays the 'panic' of endless waiting is sublimated into dialogues which appear like set phrases, the detached observation of Jermolaewa's video lends the banal scene a dramatic quality.

In her video *Solo*, a little pink toy rabbit moves towards a camera that is lying on the floor. He stops when his toy body rubs up against the lens. A simple melody accompanies this scene. After a couple of minutes, the loop starts again. In the conventional sense of the word, a solo makes someone the focus of audience concentration. Jermolaewa's *Solo* reduces this idea to an absurdity – the mechanical movements of the toy rabbit and the distance between it and the camera make a solo impossible. Only when the synthetic fur of the rabbit rubs against the lens does one suddenly get an impression of his individuality, and the drama of this mechanical creature becomes

evident. Since the rabbit is a toy, the sequence develops into a metaphor for the regimented disciplining of children. With the belly of the toy rabbit rubbing against the camera, one might also associate the scene with sexual abuse; as the spectator, one becomes a voyeur of an incident, which is not meant to be seen.

In the 15 second loop of *On/Off* – in which an erect penis turns a light-switch on and off – voyeurism is transformed into a kind of twisted humour. It continues endlessly. On, off, on, off, but ultimately it translates as nothing more than the old in/out.

Martin Pesch  
Translated by Imke Werner

## Joël Bartholoméo

Galerie Alain Gutharc, Paris

Joël Bartholoméo's video installation, *Desire* (From the Latin *Desirare* 'regret the absence of') (1999), makes me think of *Raging Bull* (1980). Not because it includes an image of someone boxing, but because it isn't really about boxing at all. In *Raging Bull*, fighting is a metaphor for punishment and violent self-destruction. The atavistic brutality transforms the ring into a church, a place where Jake La Motta, whose fighting also expresses obsessive jealousy and sexual insecurity, reaches out for penance and absolution.

*Desire* also uses boxing as a way to explore visceral fears, drives and desire. It depicts the artist's flirtatious encounter with a Swedish art student he met on a teaching stint, a young redheaded painter who also likes to box. 'I wanted some contact with this girl... I asked her to punch me' he explains. In the three clips of the resulting piece, a smiling young woman mimics the movements of a boxer. In contrast to his previous narrative works, in which a dramatic, even violent, moment results from some humdrum daily reality, this piece is a luminous, multi-dimensional and multi-sensory experience.



Joël Bartholoméo  
*Pas Mieux/Toujours  
Pas Mieux  
(Not Better/Never  
Better)*  
1996  
Video still

Joël Bartholoméo's *Desire* makes me think of *Raging Bull* (1980). Not because it includes an image of someone boxing, but because it isn't really about boxing at all.

Four projections flicker simultaneously on the walls, drowning the gallery in a warm, reddish glow which suggests blood, heat, seduction and passion (the girl's hair is dyed red, she is dressed in red, and behind her hangs a red, abstract painting). These sequences, which depict her giving and receiving punches, create an impression of richness, fluidity and languor, which is underlined by the slow,

imprecise, motion of the camera. As she gracefully bounces up and down in slow motion, boxing becomes a way of flirting and moving together in a kind of charged erotic dance. Along with the choppy, rhythmic motion of the camera, the girl's spinning movements, and her thrusting punches, pants and gasps have a techno beat that reflects a palpating, animal sexuality.

This evocative work represents a rupture with Bartholoméo's earlier more boring, yet somehow riveting works. For nearly a decade, he made brief videos about his everyday life – moments spent alone, or with his wife and their young twins. Unscripted and unheard, the sequences look like generic home movies and yet are also reminiscent of films by Andy Warhol or Eric Rohmer. But rather

than the jarring motion, lack of focus and sudden blurring typical of amateur home-movies, the movement in Bartholoméo's films consist of long takes that often leave the 'actors' out of the frame.

*Desire* has a much more tenuous connection to real violence than his little narrative films. Like them, this installation was funny and troubling, touching on the nuances of relationships, notions of giving and receiving

pain, sadism and masochism, anxiety and longing. In the end, Bartholoméo's object of desire appears to be inaccessible, like a virtual dream or a fantasy. The work, which at first seemed amusing, became oppressive;

the jerky, epileptic moments disturbing. It is a bloodless violence, and, as in his previous works, Bartholoméo holds back enough to make the experience intriguing and frustrating.

Laurie Attias

## The Visionary Landscape

Christopher Grimes  
Gallery, Santa Monica

The Romantics repeatedly mined the analogy between nature and psyche, the agitated gesture of the artist functioning as the relay between them, flickering at the threshold of mind and matter. It is perhaps curious that landscape, as a genre, is now considered one of the most genteel and anodyne – outside the mall and DIY television, it claims very few earnest practitioners. The school of ironic landscape, however, is now a fully established genre, but hardly inspires much more enthusiasm.

Underlying this particular practice is an ultimately didactic impulse devoted to revealing the cultural basis of our natural categories; to pull the wool from our eyes, as it were. Yet this is a lesson that art has some serious trouble imparting, and one that is likely to get lost in the lush packaging in which the ideas are usually presented in.

Most of the artists in 'The Visionary Landscape' wisely pre-empted this bad faith reasoning with genuinely fantastic visions of nature as a convoluted headspace. Their take is, for the most part, aggressively mediated – theirs is more an art about art than anything else. But what distinguishes these works is the sheer exuberant excess of their means, an aesthetic pile-on that runs the gamut from Caspar David Friedrich to Walt Disney. Where painting is concerned, this translates into an additive process – signs and gestures are patiently layered, deposited on the canvas surface one by one. Sharon Ellis exemplifies this approach in her painting *The Four Seasons* (1999), which condenses a range of painterly

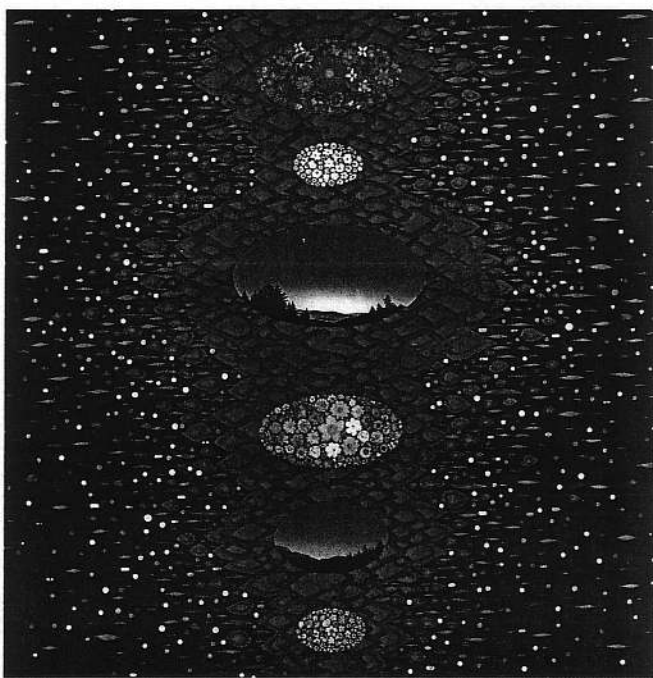
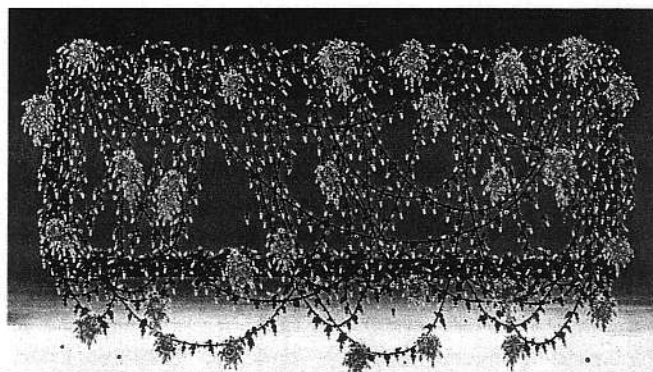
effects – sunbursts and storm clouds, raindrops and snowflakes, green and red leaves – falling through a composition minutely subdivided by the twisting, veiny black branches of a perfectly symmetrical and uncannily brain-like tree.

Similarly systematic are Marcelo Pombo's paintings, although his medium of choice is enamel, a comparatively stubborn and inflexible substance that he exploits to great effect in a series of manoeuvres that oscillate between mimesis and wanton psychedelia. Fussy brushwork alternates with almost aleatory passages where the paint is pooled and swirled into a dark marbled skyline, and then dotted with raised and

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shimmering droplets of rain. Roxy Paine, meanwhile, takes this accretionary conceit full circle with a pristinely primed canvas that appears to be sprouting clusters of mushrooms – but which, in fact, are painstakingly painted plaster castings. Perhaps playing off Rauschenberg's famous seedbed work as well as his monochrome white paintings, but without any of the same allegiances to 'the real', this piece makes a strong case for the return of illusionism through the back door of hallucinatory experience.

Conversely, Jaci Den Hartog's piece *Strolling Down Bamboo Lane* (2000), is made entirely of organic materials: a long cane of bamboo, lined with small succulents in two rows along its top. Extending from



one corner of the gallery to its centre, the shoots become progressively thinner away from its base, a perspectival effect that humourously confirms the conceit of its title. It makes very little difference whether this nature is real (as in this show) or artificial (as in her previous work); either way it is proposed as an intellectual experience.

A rough historical context is sketched out in the gallery's back-room. Between, on the one hand, Tony Tasset's full-scale photographic

pantomime of Robert Smithson digging up dirt, *Robert Smithson (Las Vegas)* (1995), and on the other, Sergio Vega's classically elegant pen and ink ruminations on the Garden of Eden, *The Expulsion* (1999), we find ourselves deep in allegorical mode. Subsequent to the Fall, so the story goes, Adam's transparent language of Names would quickly degenerate into an opaque demonic babble. It makes perfect sense to resuscitate these biblical themes in relation to the subject

elo Pombo  
lo de Flores  
rectangle of  
Flowers)  
el on panel  
1999  
62 x 88 cm

d Tomaselli  
Scanner  
1999  
hills, leaves,  
and collage  
on panel  
32 x 132 cm