

Universal Experience: Art, Life, and the Tourist's Eye

at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

Postcards, snapshots, and tchotchke souvenirs comprise the essential triumvirate residue of any vacation. Curiously, it is through the collecting of these endlessly reproduced, low-cost images, miniatures, and tokens that we can prove our travel experiences to be singular, private, and unique.

My fanny pack in place, I felt comfortable poking about curator Francesco Bonami's exhibition, locally dubbed the "Tourism Show," which occupied every room of the M.C.A. Chicago this spring, and offered almost exclusively photographs and video. Eiffel Towers abounded. There was the Coliseum, the Matterhorn, the Pyramids, a gondola standing in for Venice, and a misty view of the Empire State Building. Less specific but no less familiar were images of exotic sunsets, gentle gardens, a giant Buddha, bus stops, "primitive" masks, balloon animals, maps, and exotic indigenous costumes. In naming



Paola Pivi, *Untitled (Donkey)*, C-print (71 x 88 in.), 2003. Collection Florence and Philippe Segalot, New York. Courtesy Galleria Massimo de Carlo, Milan.

the exhibition "Universal Experience," Bonami was positing that tourism has so pervaded our globalized lives that these images are no longer just for the elite world traveler, but are constituent of our very identities, a theory that was best served here by the work of Hans-Peter Feldmann. The images in his collections of postcards—the Eiffel Tower, beach sunsets, and bucolic landscapes—are so familiar and easily consumed as to seem to be projected out of our own imaginations.

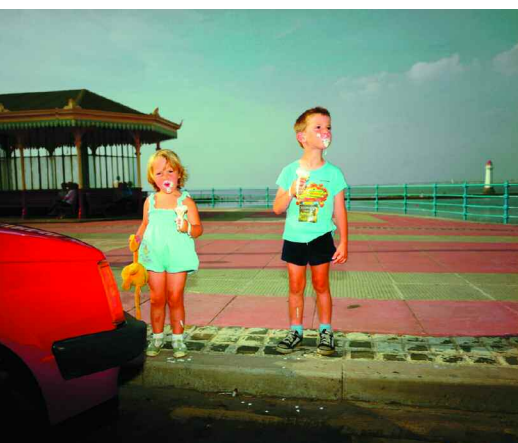
However, other works prove that this proliferation of tourism has gotten a little complicated. All is not what it seems. Alexander Timtschenko's pictures of the new Las Vegas suggest that some Americans would rather visit Venice and Paris from the comfort of their own state-side casinos. In another geographic shift, Maurizio Cattelan trooped the art world out to see his copy of Los Angeles's "Hollywood" sign on the far side of a stinky landfill in Palermo.

In his catalogue essay, Bonami states that the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center made us all into tourists as we looked, horrified, at the burning towers. A pre-9/11 video by Johan Grimont, which offers a rough history of terrorism, eerily presages the pervasive fear that now suffuses global travel. This discomfort is made literal with a wide

swath of acid orange carpet, an installation by Rudolph Stingel, which tinges the atmosphere with an unnamable anxiety. Tourism may now be as potentially horrific and kitsch as Jeff Koons's stainless steel *Kiepenkerl*, a shiny peddler who looms over the visitor on a plinth in the atrium. And travel may be as unsettling as the subjects of Doug Aitken's impressive 11-screen video, who are all adrift in that drifting discontinuity of jet lag.

But a reassuring specificity of place always shines through, or creeps in. In her beautiful black-and-white photographs of American cities, Catherine Opie captures urban personality: one Chicago view is of the humble self-park spiral behind the grand John Hancock Tower, typical of this city's mix of commercial pizzazz and gritty practicality. Dinh Q. Lê depicts his native Vietnam as an inviting tourist destination separate from its troublesome American war, urging us to "Come back to Saigon! We promise we will not spit on you." "Universal Experience" was itself an extended vacation, leaving the visitor fatigued, yet very satisfied with its abundance and variety, both exotic and familiar. This show will now act as an historical marker in the art world, documenting the reality of cultural globalism in the early twenty-first century.

—Kathryn Hixson



Martin Parr, from "The Last Resort," series of 10 C-prints (each 20 x 24 in.), 1983–86. © Martin Parr/Magnum. Courtesy Daiter Contemporary, Chicago, and Rocket, London.

In brief

Bob Blackburn

Bill Hodges Gallery, New York.

Seven carefully structured but unlabored charcoal drawings from the late 1950s—a decade after Blackburn (1920–2003) established his seminal Printmaking Workshop, and before his own work took an abstract turn—depict a massive female nude in academic poses and bathed in soft light. In *Grey Nude*, one of the nine lithographs also on view, the figure dissolves into the surroundings, her contours blurred by an encroaching gloom. —Stephen Maine

Tobias Putrih

Max Protetch and P.S. 1, New York.

Putrih created the extraordinary-looking sculptures in his "Macula" series by building up, layer by layer, amoeba-shaped outlines that he carved from 360 large sheets of ordinary corrugated cardboard, varying the shape slightly for each layer so that the hollow forms bulge or recede in certain areas. The sculptures, raised on cardboard bases, bring to mind Chinese scholar's rocks or distorted human torsos standing on stilts, but Putrih manages to temper these solid forms with a gossamer effect not usually achieved with this material. How? When you look at the sculptures from certain angles, you see right through the furrows in the cardboard's corrugated folds, making the "rocks" appear almost translucent.

—Stephen Robert Frankel

Jackson Pollock

Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin.

"No Limits: Just Edges" provided an illuminating glimpse of Pollock's work on paper, which, during his lifetime, he chose to include in almost equal numbers as paintings in solo shows. The early pencil, ink, watercolor, gouache, and collage works are studies but the later works are autonomous explorations of fluid materials (such as poured enamel) on porous paper. A surprising aspect of this work is his experimentation with atypical supports—packing paper and pattern books, classic French hand-made paper and delicate Japanese paper—and all kinds of drawing mediums including ballpoint and felt-tip pens. —Amanda Coulson

NEW YORK



Martin Kippenberger, *For Oblomov's Daughter*, paper, ink, and pencil on stationery paper (11 3/4 x 8 1/4 in.), 1995. Private collection.

Martin Kippenberger at Nyehaus

March was Martin Kippenberger month in New York, a chance to reconsider one of the bad boys of German art in the 1980s when Germany was big and bad indeed. Kippenberger stood out from the crowd—which included Georg Baselitz, A. R. Penck, and Anselm Kiefer—as uncontrolably mordant, perhaps the ultimate nihilist when it came to big-ticket topics such as painting and the future of society. His gigantic, lacerating self-portraits (in a concurrent show at New York's Lühring Augustine Gallery) don't leave much of anything left standing, so it's not surprising that Kippenberger drank himself to death by 1997. The Nyehaus exhibition showed that Kippenberger is best taken in small doses. It contained a selection of work done in the 1990s, some forty brilliant drawings done on hotel stationery, in which the corrosiveness is mixed with a not quite redemptive sense of humor, tossed off in a variety of styles, from Baroque to Pop-expressionist. Unlike his paintings, which seem intent on picking a fight with everyone in the room, the drawings are about

poking at inner defenses, telling yourself jokes to keep going, and sometimes making a mark just because it looks great. The drawings shared the space with exhibition posters, a form Kippenberger turned into Conceptual art, and with photos, maquettes, and a video of his global subway project for which he built several "entrances" around the world, including a wonderful wooden structure in the wilds of the Yukon Territory. The doors to this subway to nowhere were emblazoned with a logo he designed, a parody of the Soviet hammer and sickle, with the letters NHN (for "Nobody helps Nobody"). Call it his epitaph.

—Lyle Rexer

Pat Steir: at Cook Fine Art

The eleven untitled drawings on view, dated 2004, may have caught the surging runoff of the well-known "Waterfall" paintings Steir initiated in the late 1980s. Horizontal in format, they feature lightly penciled grids underlying elaborate splashes of ink and acrylic, and suggest a valence of order and chaos. (Also on view were five works from 1991's *Winter Group*, columnar in gray-to-black, white, and burly reds, relating directly to the earlier paintings.) Innumerable radiating droplets attest that the fluid mediums were released from a considerable height, and, in their evocation of process, prevent the works from looking static.

But the simplest ones are stagey and



Pat Steir, *Untitled*, ink and pencil on paper (15 x 20 in.), 2004. Courtesy Cook Fine Art.