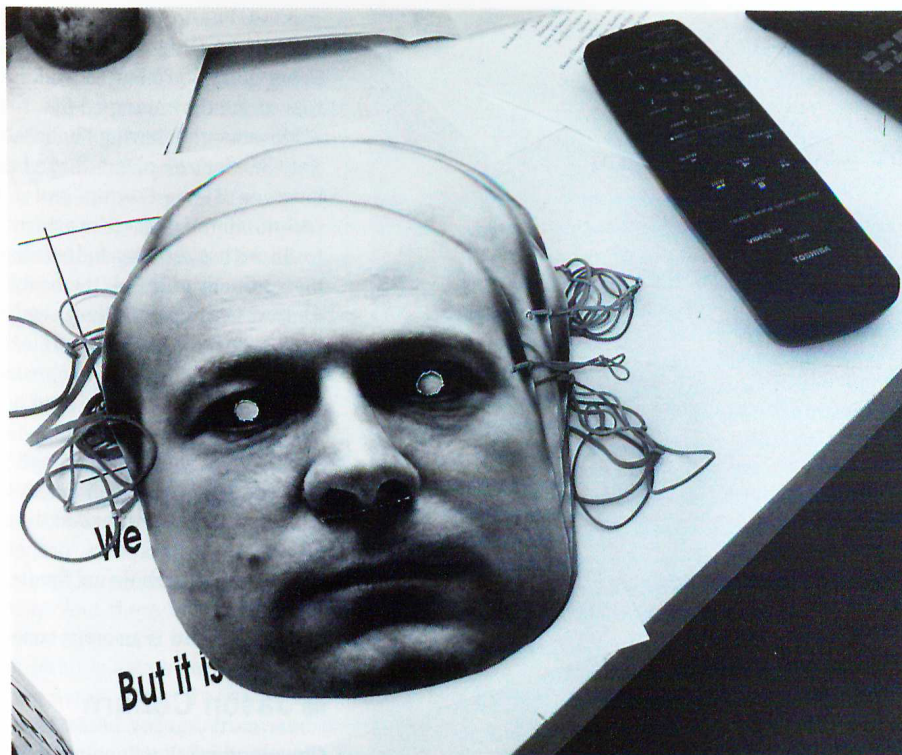


Giorgio Sadotti
Giorgio's face 1996



offer. At once cinematically intimate, spiritually immanent and, by virtue of its size and medium, attention-grabbing, Viola's piece serves to dramatise the Cathedral's ancient stones and shuffling vergers in such a way that the tourist-visitor can feel naturalised within the building's apparently otherworldly, un-20th-century time-frame.

Soon, however, *The Messenger* will be leaving on a pilgrimage of more conventional venues, probably never to return. At present there are no plans to re-install it in the Cathedral although there is talk of it finding a home at the Baltic Flour Mills, the huge new contemporary art space about to be established (Lottery willing) in nearby Gateshead. In many ways that would be sensible. The Baltic could provide appropriately cavernous accommodation and there would be no silliness about male nudity. Of course, the piece would lose much of its present resonance and power. However, as a permanent fixture in the Cathedral it would rapidly turn into a late 20th-century appendage of Bishop Cosin's font cover. It would come to seem intrusive and theatrical in the wrong sense. And that would be sad. ■

Paul Usherwood teaches art history at the University of Northumbria.

■ Be Me

Interim Art London September 8 to October 12

September 29

Nobody knows how to spell my name right, I've discovered. It's 'Giorgio', like the perfume, not some Anglo-Italian hybrid 'Georgio', like Neo-Geo-rgio. So far, of the 31 people I've asked to 'Be Me' – each for one day during the month-long run of the show, somehow producing my exhibition for me – most of them haven't even been me enough to get the name right. Here I've given myself over completely, throwing away my first major solo exhibition

and then tossing my whole identity in with it, and I get the feeling everyone's just too damn busy being themselves to 'Be Me'. I wonder if this hasn't been one giant miscalculation, as if maybe I can't afford it. Actually it's mostly millionaires who pay others to be them: to be them driving their cars (chauffeurs), to be them mind-ing their children (nannies), to be them writing letters, getting rid of unwanted people, answering phonecalls (secretaries), and so forth. Howard Hughes had stand-ins pose as him, to throw the FBI off his scent, keep them from tracking him down. And I remember a chapter in Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller* where a tycoon hires countless look-alikes to 'be him', to ward off kidnappers, to mask his love affairs, to confuse his enemies. He eventually loses himself, caged in a kaleidoscopic tangle of self-effigies, killed by multiple murderers and mistresses. Evidently it's an expensive, risky business, maybe beyond my reach. Maybe it was ingenuous of me just to ask for people's time for free. Maybe I wish I'd just played it straight.

I thought I was the one making the sacrifice here, but no, it's all of them, fitting 'being me' into their crammed schedules. Sacrifice: maybe that's why food keeps coming up, menus for sacrificial meals, rotting vegetables and banana peels. And what about the artists who used their be-me day to sneak their own damn show into the gallery! The title was 'Be Me', not 'Use Me'! On the other hand, those are the ones who've done the most so far, so I guess I should be almost grateful. And then there's these gate-crashing participants, trying to hustle their way into the show on the sly, these wanna-be-me's sending postcards, leaping uninvited onto the bandwagon and not really contributing much. And every day I call the gallery or I come down in person, dreading to see what I look like now. It's like I'm clutching some very, very slowly developing Polaroid which takes 31 days to sharpen up into a self-portrait, and I still can't see a thing.

Gilda Williams is reviewing the show for *Art Monthly*, so she came by today, poked around for a while, watched

at Saint Wendon's College of
 Design Library
 109 Charing Cross Road, London, WC2H 0J



Jason Coburn
Sadallover 1996

a few of the videos people have made. She kept asking me questions like 'So what have you been up to while everybody else was being Giorgio?', but actually, I've had far too much to do. No one seems to understand the effort this has been, the anxiety for me to trust these people – some are good friends, artists or otherwise, but most are just acquaintances, a few I barely know – to remember to do their day, to bother being me. I've made myself quite vulnerable quite publicly, actually, not just hanging out my own dirty laundry but other peoples' as well, not knowing what they'll let loose, plus having to claim it as my own. I think Gilda found the idea curious, like maybe it had 'potential', but she was overwhelmed by the abundant laziness on display, all the rush-job faxes sent from distant, exciting places where people were obviously consumed with being themselves. I could tell she'd missed the point, and saw it as a kind of failed experiment, as if I'd left 31 petri dishes full of expectation out on a windowsill and only the most ordinary mould was weakly coming alive, some dishes just sitting there all dusty and empty. But I still think the idea is good; after all, the whole 20th Century managed to do away with the artist as a mere object-maker and celebrate her or him above all as a personality who led an exemplary Great Life. Well, I've just single-handedly ushered in the 21st Century by ditching the artist's personality as well, so there! But sometimes I wonder though, whether anything's left.

October 9

Things have perked up on the old Polaroid, so to speak, so Maureen Paley asked Gilda to come back, to make sure she hadn't gotten the Wrong Impression. Everyone's really come through in the end, turning my show into a sort of community homage to Giorgio. It's almost embar-

rassing, but I do appreciate it, and not just the highlights, like Gregor Muir's text about spending the day being Giorgio Armani; Patrick Brill's video as me giving a tour around my cramped flat, narrating my 'real sense of achievement' in having handcrafted every last thing in it; Katy Sender's elephant-shaped disco ball, a kind of cross between Gloria Gaynor and a Mexican *piñata*; Silke Otto-Knapp's spaghetti-western slide show – something to do with me being half-Italian. These strong, showy pieces finally offset all the beautiful, invisible works, like Andrew Cross's day spent weeding the gallery garden, a truly sacrificial, meditative piece; or Liam Gillick's haircut at my hometown barbershop in Manchester; or others who ironed shirts, read books or listened to Radio 1 on my behalf. I feel elated, like at the end of a surprise birthday party, where just the idea was enough – and plus the party was good besides! The petri dishes have sprouted wings and are sailing down Beck Road like miniature flying saucers, propelled into orbit. And all I can say is, well, Be Me up, Scotty. ■

Giorgio Sadotti is an artist based in London.

■ Jason Coburn

Cleveland London September 18 to October 8

It's raining in Cleveland, but you won't get wet. This rain is metaphoric, the kind that requires you to sit alone, glumly staring through the window. The relative tranquillity on this side of the glass induces a stillness on your part, yet the rain is sufficiently wet to dampen your spirits. This is the position that Jason Coburn would have his audience adopt. And so we do: I climb up onto the folding stool, look out of the window, and listen to the sound of rain falling from the speakers on either side of my face. I have just completed the work *Only the Lonely*. Or perhaps it is completed by the people who walk past and glance in at me, as they inevitably do. They also tend to notice the words 'ONLY THE LONELY' Letrasetted onto the window in pink. Suddenly, the outside world is no longer a passive scene: I have now become the forlorn display – an acutely embarrassing turn of events. The onlookers hurry past. I want to tell them that it's raining in here, that it's okay; it's an artwork. But they wouldn't understand. Nor does it help that my I'm-looking-at-art expression, like most people's, bears an uncanny resemblance to my I'm-sad-but-don't-worry-I'm-not-going-to-cry expression. So here I am, sitting on a stool from which my feet don't touch the ground, concentrating on the sound of rain, and gazing out of the window. Did I mention the window? The fact that Coburn has narrowed it? I am seated in a vertical letterbox about the width of a large bucket, so when people scurrying past glance in, they have enough time to clock me, but not sufficient for this uncomfortably tight instant to unravel through exchanged glances. There is zero possibility of a relationship forming; I am that which is to be hurried away from, and no more. They will forget me just as quickly as they can.

Nor is this the end of my problems. *Sadallover* is the next installation: a re-creation of that which can drive people to kill either themselves or others. Coburn provides statistics: 17 cases of homicide in London between 1994 and 1996. What could possibly do this to people, I wonder? The answer, of course, is *other people*. Specifically, neighbours. Noisy neighbours, to be precise. 'Now,