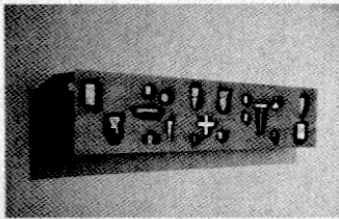


Ambienti
Palazzo delle Stelline,
Milan



MIMMO PALADINO, INSTALLATION VIEW (DETAIL), 1991.

In "Ambienti," curated by Pierre Restany, a long vaulted corridor, once the mess hall of a 16th century orphanage, has been divided into seven perfect cubes, offering a selection of European artists—mostly painters—seven modular installation spaces. *Ambienti* is a term meaning at once "interior" and "environment," and all the installations here carry with them a corresponding notion of architecture or geometry. Curiously, the square shape of the space, in particular, is repeated throughout, turning up in Piero Gilardi's square mats of foam rubber, Omar Galliani's square table mirroring square canvases, Luigi Ontani's square photo-emulsion canvases acting as a backdrop for his cinematographic self-portraits. Milan Kunc's Gulf War-inspired living room and Andreas Schulze's Kafkaian office both use the module as a prototype for commenting on familiar interiors, this time using furniture to mark the geometric center.

In contrast, the long table in Mimmo Paladino's installation has been seemingly lifted from the center of the room and tacked onto the wall, protruding towards us from the far wall. Reference to Leonardo's *Last Supper* (just two doors down the street) is reinforced by odd-shaped cut-outs on the surface: the bread, glasses, plates, and hands on the celebrated fresco. The miraculous, gravity-defying furniture makes the room magic as well, at once the shrine for a levitating altar and the nostalgic site of a peasant's banquet. Suggesting not only the history of art but the historic use of these rooms as orphan's eating quarters, Paladino has constructed the most subtle installation among those

presented here.

Like the shoebox dioramas in elementary school, the sameness of the shell permits readings of otherwise imperceptible differences and affinities among the artists; thus, "Ambienti" is more than the sum of its parts. Curator Restany is both heavy-handed (not only must the work be an installation but it must conform to a given shape) and understated, not choosing the work itself but simply offering a box in which to show it. As Robert Nickas had done in the exhibition "Red," whereby all the work happened to be of a preselected color, it would seem that a successful device in contemporary curatorship is the imposition of an arbitrary common denominator—a color, a size—to sort out an otherwise cacophonous pluralism.

Gilda Williams

The Museum of Natural History
Barbara Farber,
Amsterdam



LAURIE PARSONS, BOX OF PHOTOS, 1991. ASSORTED MATERIALS, 5 X 17 X 27.2

Fully deploying the domestic charm of an Amsterdam canal house gallery, Robert Nickas turned the space into a small museum of American curios, a precise arrangement of neat ideas (neat as in both US campus parlance and orderly) which borders on the precious, both valuable and over-refined. Taking a line from Broodthaers for a walk, Nickas presents himself as disingenuous collector *manqué*, who, unable to purchase such works himself, shows them in the most amicable of atmospheres to other potential lovers.

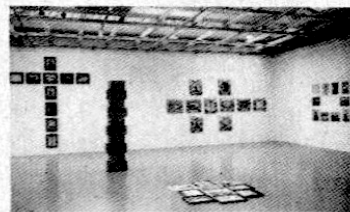
As usual the richest work is by the women; one shouldn't try

to build stylistic bridges between them, but Gretchen Faust and Laurie Parsons provided some of their best work, both based on a frail, hopelessly unmain-tainable perfection. Faust stood in the garden and attempted to make a perfect circle out of the white silk that covered her, which naturally followed her every movement, thus dooming her thrust for grace. Looking like a Katarina Fritsch shroud come to life, Faust did her so little so simply that its importance went out in expanding ripples, the beautiful surface of our aspirations radiating from her. Parsons showed her best work yet, a thing of jarring brilliance that demonstrated the limitations of some of her previous work, the suspiciously aesthetic structure of her found objects. On the floor she simply presented an open cardboard box full of photographs of her life, taken by friends and family at events over the years through which one could happily rifle, assembling this collage portrait of the artist as a young American. This is the final full stop for all those artists using found photographs, which will seem somehow shy and shifty after this bold gesture. The fact that this piece is for sale, presumably to any stranger, is its real strength, as metaphor of the artist selling part of their life every time they lose a work, and as blatant exposure of the voyeuristic, fetishistic spirit of possession that motivates the collector. To own the artist, to become the artist, is made explicit as the psychic mechanism of purchase.

The simplicity, the naturalness of Amsterdam seems to have infected the artists, even Jessica Stockholder, who often seems to have too much on hold in stock, whose urge to overflow threatens her own judgement, shows her most basic stuff, back at the right volume again. Felix Gonzalez-Torres is elegantly erotic as always, two cocks, er, clocks nuzzling up in failed synch, and Fred Fehlau is equally austere, his twin mirrors like a colon in an essay on the philosophy of perception. This museum is an invitation, it is a pleasure and gradual revelation to accept, a clearly spoken sentence amongst the quiet canals.

Adrian Dannatt

20th Century Art in Belgium, Flanders, and Wallonie: A Point of View
ARC, Paris



JEF GEYS, 100 MODEL PAINTINGS. OIL ON CANVAS, 30 X 40 CM. EACH.

This cycle of exhibitions on a national theme is an ambitious step, though the museum has steered clear of attempting a comprehensive perspective on what is a particularly delicate subject matter by sticking to a more or less objective overview. The title of the show itself is not without significance: the very fact that a glance in this direction should have been chosen as a commitment is uncommon enough to merit a mention. The 300 works brought together bear witness to a century's creativity in Belgium. Taking four emblematic pieces by Knopff, Ensor, Rops, and Wiertz as its starting point, the selection concludes with the Panamarenko generation. The choice of works has been made with painstaking care and attention with regard for the representation of correspondences and currents of sensibility from one artist to the next. The historical tack taken by the exhibition makes for cogent progress towards a definition of Belgium's cultural iconography and imagination as the nation's own. It is difficult not to mention certain outstanding ensembles brought together especially for the occasion (Magritte, Spilliaert, Vantongerloo, Nougé) and, closer to the present, Marien or Broodthaers. The contemporary section, however, comes as a disappointment in its inflexibility despite the options open to it (Panamarenko, Vercruysse, Geys, Wéry, Charlier, De Cordier). The links with baroque, the tendency towards kitsch or the surrealist or oneric world being dealt with by a number of current Belgian artists are all but conspicuous by their absence.

Françoise-Claire Prodhon
(Translated from French by Christopher Martin)