



PATRICIA PICCININI,  
*CAR NUGGETS: THEY'RE  
 GOOD FOR YOU*, 1998, HIGH  
 DENSITY POLYSTYRENE  
 AND AUTOMOTIVE  
 PAINT, 3 PARTS,  
 EACH 90 x 80 x 80 CM.

Patricia Piccinini's "Truck Babies" are born of this erotic scenario. Over the past five years her work has comically married genetic engineering and digitized vivisection with media culture in mock nurseries, posing, for instance, a doll-like popular TV star in large glossy posters with her digitally generated, almost featureless progeny called "L.U.M.P." Piccinini's latest litter of travesties has arrived as if delivered by the stork, disavowing the reproductive system (cultural rather than biological) that engendered them. At the far end of the gallery her two bulbous infant trucks, in pastel pink and blue fiberglass, sit together on the floor, vacantly gazing up at a bank of five monitors. Running repeatedly but out of phase on each of these screens, a sequence of five pretty Japanese teenage girls, posed against alternately pink and blue studio backgrounds, giggle and play with their hair while they dispense nebulous Ally McBeal-style mottoes which sound like parodies of management training mantras: "Sometimes the highway's not the fastest route" and "See with your heart, drive with your mind."

The artist picked up her actors in the shopping malls of Sinjuku and Shibuya during a residency in Tokyo. Like the fake "sightings" of truck babies out and about in the otherwise normal traffic on the city streets (montaged into five digital prints hanging opposite the monitors), these girls are charming fantasies generated within the streetscape conduct of teen consumer culture. Even on the street, however, the truck babies remain relatively inanimate and characterless. They could never be mistaken for anthropomorphic children's toys, such as Thomas the Tank Engine, because they have been made by and for disenchanted adult eyes. While they refuse any possibility of play, and hence seem oversized and obtuse, the babies' exag-

gerated blankness mirrors the sort of unblemished, naive optimism portrayed in the moral advice provided by their teenage babysitters.

But there are rust spots in this slick surface of consumer confidence. In an anteroom to the nursery are three lumpy, almost malformed versions of the truck babies. Displayed on bright-blue carpet spots with the poise of fashionable biomorphic furniture, and about the size and shape of beanbags, these *Car Nuggets* (1998) blend and contract a cluster of vaguely familiar features of car bodywork into a seamless metallic motion blur, derived from details glimpsed in speeding traffic. But as the artist admits, this is more like food processing than futurist abstraction. If the chicken nugget is junk food, then the *Car Nugget* is a sort of excremental toy that makes fun of the sophisticated technology (3-D computer modeling) used to work up the high-density polystyrene form from its origin in a hand-modeled plasticine blob. "Bloody" is the word Piccinini uses to describe the rich burgundy automotive luster on this fetal matter. The organic associations are almost gothic. Is this a laboratory experiment successfully hatching a new designer species, or are they aborted sexual fusions of metal and skin? These iridescent objects of desire utter surprisingly dark speculations on the process of creation.

Edward Colless

## Cerith Wyn Evans

Asprey Jacques, London

March 26 - April 24, 1999

On November 2, 1975, Pier Paolo Pasolini was bludgeoned to death in the seaside outskirts of Rome. His 17-year-old murderer (described by some as a hustler) then ran Pasolini's body over, transforming the Italian poet, journalist, director and novelist into an extremely dramatic corpse, a victim, perhaps, of his own, lifelong devotion to the outcast.

Iconoclastic and revolutionary, Pasolini could never resolve the contradictions of his difficult life. Among Italy's most respected twentieth-century intellectuals, Pasolini worked with such giants as Fellini and Bertolucci, and created cinema classics like *Teorema* and *Mamma Roma*. Yet his films were

far too literary, later too pornographic, to fit the Cinecittà mold. An outspoken moralist, Pasolini was nevertheless despised by both church and state, targeted by the law beginning in 1949 with suspicions surrounding his small-town cohabitation with two young boys, and culminating with his arrest in 1962 following his parody (in the film *Rogopag*) of Hollywood-style Biblical epics, which further enraged his venomous enemies within the church.

A devout Marxist, he was expelled from the Communist Party for his homosexuality, which the Party branded as one of the "more ruinous aspects of bourgeois society." Anti-clerical and politically radical, he was—perhaps surprisingly—opposed to abortion, recalling happy memories of drifting in his mother's amniotic fluid, appalled at the horrible prospect of being murdered while peacefully floating there. Despite being open about his sexuality, he was also critical of the sexual revolution; he equated its rise in the 1960s with high capitalism, drawing parallels between the consumerist strategies of forced obsolescence and the routine replacement of ever-newer lovers.

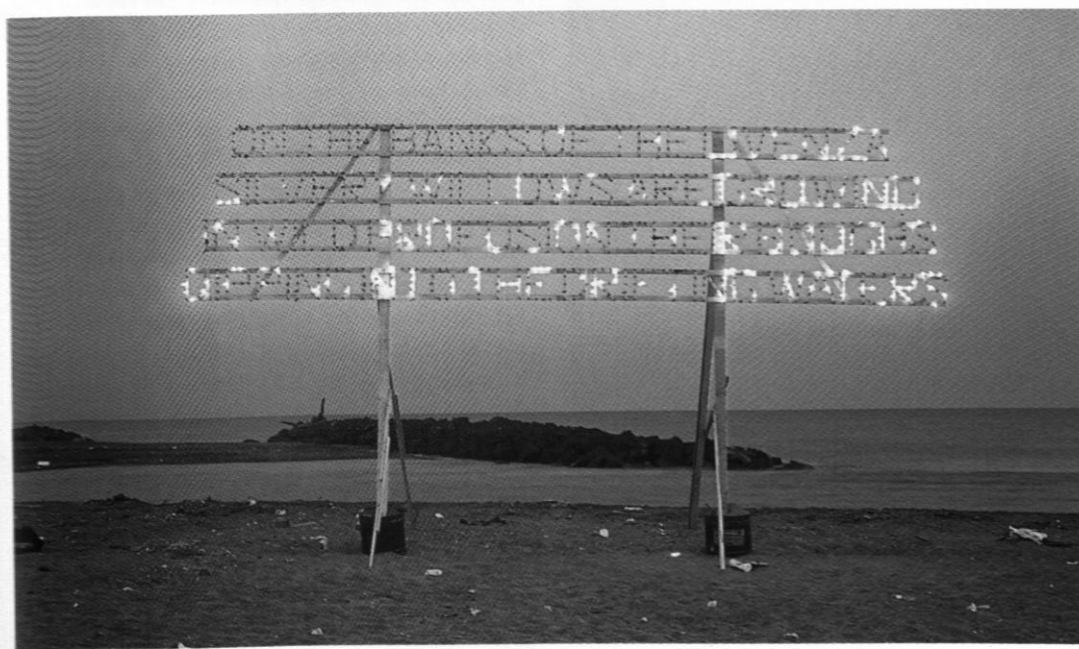
A great, if difficult hero for Cerith Wyn Evans to pick for his exquisite, 16-millimeter film of 1998, *Firework Text* (Pasolini). Near the site of Pasolini's violent death, landmarked by a hideous, vandalized concrete monument of sorts, Wyn Evans constructed an impermanent sign made from wood

scaffolding and fireworks. Recalling Ilya Kabakov's beautiful poem-against-the-sky at the 1997 Münster Sculpture Project, *Firework Text* paraphrases from Pasolini's *Oedipus Rex*, describing the willow trees along the river of his hometown. The lines of text flare up briefly and brightly, and then disappear in pink smoke against a deep blue sky.

The film has the same anti-narrative quality of Pasolini's films, the same non-hierarchical plot structure. The sign burns unsystematically; the film does not draw to a climax when the lights are extinguished but sweeps silently on, panning the rubbish dumps, the tanned Italian crew, the cheap vacation housing, the setting sun, the scattered art world aficionados gathering on the beach. The sign is then erected in a manner that can only be described as unmomentous, and consumed again; the night is even darker this time, when the last words vanish in the sea sky.

In the back room, a circular, red neon sculpture—like a halo, or an electric crown of thorns—bears the inscription in Latin, "We go round and round in the night and are consumed by fire." The Italian poet's own love of language—a primitive yet literary, mystical and timeless kind of dialect—is resurrected in what is finally a fitting epitaph.

Gilda Williams



CERITH WYN EVANS,  
*FIREWORK TEXT* (PASOLINI),  
1998, SUPER-16 FILM,  
15 MINS.