

Margherita Manzelli

Studio Guenzani, Milan

December 1996 - January 1997

"La Terra Fredda" (The Cold Earth) is Margherita Manzelli's latest investigation of self-expression as penance for unspecified mental crimes. The exhibition comprises nine sizeable oil paintings—depictions (we are told) of anonymous female figures, though in fact they are all self-portraits, each woman possessing the artist's bony nose, broad forehead, high cheekbones and long, dark hair. These women would be beautiful—in an austere Victorian way—if not for their demeanor, which is not merely pale or pallid, but an iridescent, deathly white bordering on green: their legs are riddled with varicose veins; calf muscles taut and stringy, chicken-like; their fingers long and gnawed.

Le conseguenze sono inevitabili (The Consequences Are Inevitable) depicts a woman standing naked in a hall, back toward us, head sharply turned to fix the viewer with a challenging, mysterious stare. The woman's body is sadly masculine—tiny drooping butt, steeply sloped shoulders and prominent shoulder blades like wing stumps—with the exception of her belly, which is enormously bloated from either pregnancy or malnutrition. The paint ranges from art-school quality, thickly and hurriedly brushed on for the carpet and walls, to superbly refined strokes for the body and face. It is the woman's stare that disarms us: what does she know that she's not telling? What secret act is she remembering that brought about these "inevitable" consequences?

The expression of disdain is shared by every painted woman in the show. *Cagna—e cane* (Bitch—and Dog) portrays a defiant woman seated on a chair, legs thrown apart, feet confidently ensconced in red spiked heels. Resting her head upon this woman's lap is another woman with the same face, whose expression is a curious mix of devotion to her master, the "bitch," and a sprightly independence. The "dog"-woman's body, clothed in a full-length high-collared dress, is eerily transparent: she is a phantom memory, a ghost. Other paintings of women laid out on deathbeds or kneeling on stools beckon us into versions of Miss Havisham's boudoir. As much as these women are located in private interior spaces, the titles betray an obsession with inner psychological pain, a clash of



wills: *Le possibilità sono infinite* (The Possibilities Are Infinite); *Il dominio trasformato—nessun amore* (The Transformed Domain—No Love); *La natura ci tradisce* (Nature Betrays Us).

At the exhibition's opening, the artist herself stood literally glued to the gallery floor. She was dressed somberly, funereally, and stared at the ground without talking or smiling for the entire four hours of the gathering. It is because of this acting out of pain that the work becomes somewhat sadistic. "The paintings are not mere representations," she seems to be saying. "They are me—there is no separation between my art and my life." This strategy, which inevitably causes the viewer to feel helplessly voyeuristic, renders the broad metaphors of aging and loss into something too close to the artist for comfort, her enigmatic attempt to seduce us becoming powerfully disturbing.

Jen Budney

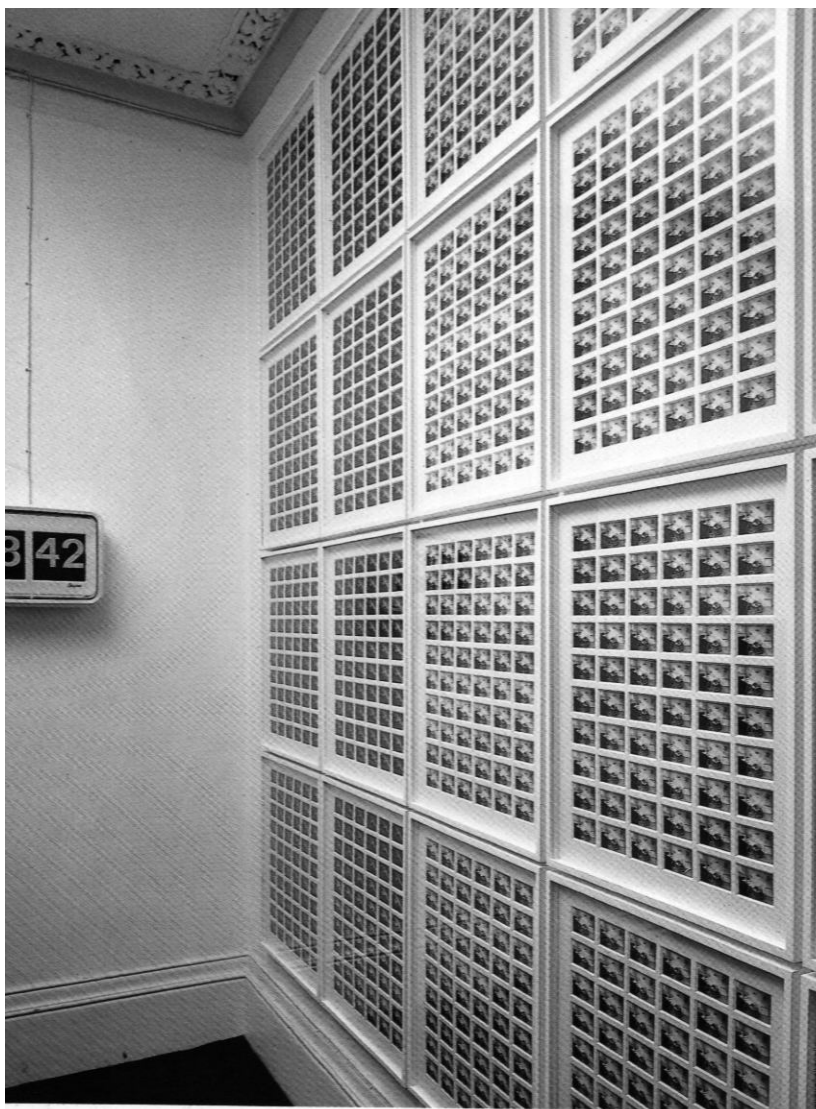
Darren Almond

White Cube, London

February 7 - March 8, 1997

What makes London spark these days and actually worth its reputation as a happening town is that almost every exhibition, no matter how pokey, has at least one surprise gem in it, often by an artist

MARGHERITA MANZELLI,
BITCH—AND DOG, 1996, OIL
ON CANVAS, 150 x 150 CM.



DARREN ALMOND,
TUESDAY (1440 MINUTES)
(WITH CLOCK), 1996,
PHOTOGRAPHS, EACH
FRAME 64.5 x 54 CM. PHOTO
STEPHEN WHITE.

nobody's ever heard of. Last summer in an otherwise forgettable alternative group exhibition held in a row of abandoned shops, sculptor Darren Almond furnished one such jewel with a work called *A Real Time Piece* (1996): a wall-sized projection of the artist's studio transmitted by satellite across London with a greatly amplified industrial flip-clock marking time with vicious, thunderous regularity. Empty and still, the studio seemed to be waiting for the artist's return, growing dark with impatience. This ordinary room with a desk, chair, and window was oddly dramatized; expectation set in as you watched what was, essentially, a giant, insanely elaborate clock. Nothing happened—time rolled on unimpressed as usual. The sun set, the room glowed, and it became, like Warhol's *Empire*, a beautiful, changing, 24-hour "painting," a site you could switch on and off or visit without even having to hail a cab.

It caught everyone's attention, not least galleryist Jay Jopling's who is no dullard when it comes

to clocking in new talent. In the art context, *A Real Time Piece* became a grand allegory of the irrevocable life sentence condemning a young artist to his studio, whiling away the hours like Bruce Nauman in his lonely performance of *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk Around the Studio* (1968)—a real-time documentary about the monotony, the frustration of studio life, and the temptation to escape. On the other hand it could also be looked at exclusively as a work of design, as if the artist had really just set out to design a clock (the title folds around this idea too, as either "A Real-Time Piece" or "A Real Time-Piece"). Almond has managed to design the most boring object possible, and transform it into a kind of transparent, completely immaterial yet living thing: a projection.

This design connection was curiously reiterated in his recent White Cube show, which featured another larger-than-life industrial object, *Untitled* (1997): a giant ceiling fan, rotating very slowly and extending its "arms" to the gallery's four corners as if to embrace the space's full geometry. Almond could be compared here to another artist-designer, Donald Judd, who (in his 1965 essay "Specific Objects") commended the "new" sculpture for being void of any "transitional areas." In contrast, Almond's sculpture is *only* about transition: the fan crossing from the regular geometry of the circle to that of the square; from one practical application (ventilation) to another (drawing the gallery's contours like a giant protractor). To see *A Real Time Piece* reconfigured at White Cube from the satellite image, and just as beautiful, presented as hundreds of single-frame photographs rolling like a wave across the colors of the day, it became a kind of allegory of the artist's own unwitting shift from art to design and back again.

Gilda Williams

"Material Culture"

Hayward Gallery, London

April 3 - May 18, 1997

Given the shift today toward the readymade, or at least the readymade system of signs embodied in material culture, there aren't many young British sculptors around any more, but there are a lot of object makers, whose development over the last twenty years "Material Culture: The Object in