



#### David Austen

Installation including objects lent by the Antiquities Department of the British Museum 1997

explainable. What begins as an informative intent on the part of the curators is turned into a conundrum by the artists. And this is quite appropriate, for how else to deal with such an inappropriate request than to make a work from the very notion of it?

On the whole, 'Antechamber' feels like an exhibition that has backfired, proved its own folly and so, despite itself, pointed out certain complications. Most of the works in it feel overburdened. Stephen Pippin's *Optical Disillusion (Terrestrial TV II)* is a case in point. A formica-clad structure, the size of a piece of large domestic furniture and of abstract, pseudo-futuristic shape, holds within it a television that rotates steadily and constantly. On the screen of the television is a fuzzy image of a globe of the world rotating on its axis at the same rate as, but in the opposite direction to, the television. The

television thus pretends to rotate around a static globe showing different aspects of it. It is a very succinct and eloquent work that is careful to keep its point intimately tied to its nature as a sculptural object. It is irritating, therefore, that it should share a space with a set-up of a television, a satellite dish, and a couch on which people are invited to sit and flick through the hundreds of television channels that the satellite supplies. It would be sad to think that this might be taken to be the subject of Pippin's work rather than simply a condition of the world in which the work is made.

The only work in 'Antechamber' to say something more than obvious about the nature of its origins is Francis Alÿs's presentation of a project in which he has worked with four sign-painters from Mexico City: Enrique and Rodolfo Huerta, Juan Garcia and Emilio Rivera. Alÿs, having made images that were influenced by the signs of the city, gave the images to the sign-painters to make new versions. Then, Alÿs made new originals from these versions and gave them back to the sign-painters in order to perpetuate the project. Finished works are inseparable from the process that leads to them in Alÿs's presentation of the project; an installation that combines paintings and small drawings with photographs and other objects in such a way as to most eloquently describe the complexities that lie behind influence, authorship and originality. ■

Juan Cruz is an artist.

### ■ Irredeemable Skeletons

Shillam + Smith 3 London March 24 to May 16

Probably the ugliest work in 'Irredeemable Skeletons' was Luca Buvoli's *Point of View #13. Exercise in Perspective*: a wobbly, freakish thing fashioned out of bits of Plexiglas, clothing and wire. It is not surprising to find it in a show, subtitled 'the ones that got away', that gathers works which for varying reasons – and the reasons are really the issue here – have remained hidden from view, or seldom, if ever, exhibited. In Buvoli's artist's statement, he explains that he had kept it out of sight because it was,



Francis Alÿs  
Installation 1997



Installation view  
Irredeemable Skeletons  
1997



indeed, 'too ugly', and had it quarantined in a cardboard box, 'moved from studio to studio without being opened'. Reading this, I felt a kind of tenderness for poor ugly *Point of View #13*, unloved by myself and even by the very author of this fiasco that was unfit for human eyes, and I began really to look at it with attention. It became fascinating, and I remembered my opinion that art criticism and curating, at its best, lets you see things you wouldn't have otherwise, and better still, lets you come to love works you would have probably ignored altogether. In this sense this show, somehow about failure, curated by Carmel Buckley, Mark Harris and Peter Lloyd Lewis, was a success, in that it stretched beyond most group outings which merely bring together a bunch of works, and truly gave you a very specific, almost narrow, vantage point from which to observe them.

What saved the show, moreover, from being a kind of exercise in 'what's wrong with this picture?' was not only a few worthwhile finds that the curators managed to unearth, but above all the broad variety of artists' responses. Some submitted works planned for shows that never materialised (Rose Finn-Kelcey's architectural model *Nipped in the Bud*, 1996, for a cancelled exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art), or precursors to later, more accomplished pieces (Kathe Burkhardt's *Untitled [Victim]*, 1980), or old works only documented in magazines and never presented as full-fledged art objects (Joel Fisher's *Soap*, 1971) or pieces that were just 'too weird', as Susan Hiller describes her *The Aura (Studies in the Visible World, I)*, 1975. 'Irredeemable Skeletons' also provided an occasion for Simon Patterson

finally to see his *Ballots*, 1992/97. Originally created via fax for an exhibition in Milan, it represented not so much a skeleton as a ghost, a work the artist knew existed but had never seen in the flesh. And although a few artists declined the invitation, either because they claimed not to have any misfits cluttering the studio, or because they preferred not to reveal the duds – not even with the apology of being in this sort of 'reject show' – it is curious that all 24 artists had a work which fit the brief: something they themselves persistently doubted, or which they couldn't pin down, but which they couldn't part with either. The curators seem to have tapped a common ground, almost as if this set of widely disparate artists were just waiting for the chance to anchor a work which had found no legitimate place in the art system and was languishing purposelessly in the studio or in thin air, as if anonymous.

What is a work of art without an audience is finally the question here. Moreover, to the curators' credit, their device managed to overcome most curatorial chestnuts about grouping artists by generation, nationality, race or gender; 'Irredeemable Skeletons' truly slices through all those worn sub-sets and addresses the process of producing work, and the potential pitfalls of making art. And while, to be honest, it was a modest exhibition, and, as could be expected, uneven at best, for these reasons it nevertheless deserves recognition.

Probably the most emblematic piece, and among the most memorable, is Fred Wilson's *Untitled (Ponder)*, 1997, a porcelain assemblage of a broken, decapitated animal figurine with a lovely rose, a fragment of some

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**Henrietta Lehtonen**  
*The Nest –*  
*Reconstruction of the*  
*nest I built five years*  
*old. At the age of 18*  
*I started to study*  
*architecture 1995*

other dismembered, fragile knick-knack, standing in for the head. You can just see this dusty, silly, homeless piece occupying some forlorn studio shelf, like a parasite, and yet in its London incarnation, properly exhibited, it looks uncanny and connects to Wilson's earlier *Mining the Museum* project, wherein statues of varying origins were combined to form hybrid cultural artefacts. Also of interest was Carmel Buckley's *Gemlos – 2*, 1983-97, a tiny sculpture of two talisman-like carved heads which the artist wanted you 'to carry around in your pocket – a sculpture that would live with its owner'. The idealism of the artist to connect intimately with her collector contrasts with the 'failure' of this piece (ultimately, anything small qualifies, a pair of dice, a rabbit's foot, an eyeshadow compact) but does not detract from its intent – and 'Irredeemable Skeletons' was the occasion to say it. And Charles Long's felt banner, which puns 'Art is Not Words. Art Must Be Felt', redeemed my opinion of this artist: after all, if this witty jab at Beuys is the worst thing he's got abandoned in the studio, he must be pretty good. Or maybe he was cheating ...

I was reminded of an interview with Louise Bourgeois, who spent the bulk of her life ignored by the public, surrounded by the 'skeletons' of her own persistence. 'When the dealers finally began to look me up', she said, 'all my work was there. It was on the shelves ... untouched, gath-

ering dust'. Her studio full of unexhibited sculpture attests to her conviction, her resilience in the face of success or failure as unrelated to the scope of her life's work. Compare, say, to Andy Warhol's quip, 'When I die I don't want to leave any leftovers': all the irredeemable skeletons in his closet, consistent with his practice, would ideally have been marched out and sold to the highest bidder. The relationship between artists and the destination they hope for their works speaks volumes about their overall pursuits. Finally, 'Irredeemable Skeletons' accidentally suggests that artists inevitably spend more time with their lesser works – 'the ones that got away' actually cling fast to their makers – and acknowledges the risks and embarrassments involved in any art practice. ■

**Gilda Williams** is an art critic and editor at Phaidon Press.

## ■ It always jumps back and finds its way

**De Appel** Amsterdam April 4 to May 25

Why is it that young curators seem mainly intent on showing young artists? Is it a question of generational affinity, or a symptom of the hype that surrounds the promotion of artists under 35 – the yBa syndrome. (You don't hear so much about 'young American artists'; on the contrary, in America it tends to be the older generation that continues to receive most of the attention.) The six young European curators, ranging in age from 24 to 30, who have just finished their training course at De Appel in Amsterdam chose 12 artists for their final presentation, all but one of whom were born in the 60s. Now, one would have thought that, given the chance to show off their skills as curators, they might have opted for a more considered selection based on a certain theme, perhaps mixing new and old work for example. After all, given the chance to curate your ideal show, wouldn't you want to show some of your favourites, or at least those artists whom you consider important? But importance does not seem to be the issue at De Appel. Rather, what seems to have been inculcated into these young trainees is an entrepreneurial desire more in keeping with fashionable trends than with art historical research and curatorship. In comparison to last year's batch of trainee curators, who at least set out to transgress the boundaries of acceptable behaviour in art (the show involved acts of theft and wanton destruction), the current show seems quite tame. Indeed, it is not all that dissimilar from your average art college degree show – a motley, improvised grouping of inexperienced artists.

There is supposed to be a theme of sorts, that of the experience of time, which is obliquely alluded to in the title. Time, of course, can mean many things – memory, waiting, speed are some of the terms mentioned by the curators – but most of the works could just as easily be

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