

tering on Joseph Beuys's notion of *Soziale Plastik*, a term often inadequately translated as "social sculpture." Included in this section was Beuys's famous *Honey Pump*, which the Louisiana happens to own; a series of "fanzines" produced exclusively by women at Bauer's invitation; a viewing/listening room for TV, video, and DJ tapes organized by Armaly; and an intervention framing the museum's collection in storage. In effect, "?" functioned as a structure for initiating *consciousness*. Not unlike certain currents in contemporary neurobiology which dispute the mind-brain duality and suggest the little homunculus-in-our-head is not really there, "?" created the illusion of an incredibly complex interaction of neural networks, of informational and social models for the production of cultural meaning. The curators remind us that culture is learning and sharing, not necessarily the things you look at in the museum.

But just as the processes of neurobiology have frustratingly failed to yield their secrets, so has the museum-as-institution resisted various attempts to destroy or obscure it. The more you try to make it into something else, the more it seems to reassert itself as the protector of art and culture. Defeating the museum is precisely what Fuchs and Gramby tried to do in their section, "Get Lost." Yet to turn the museum into a techno-rave club is not so much to address the problem of museums and culture as to defer it. Bauer and Armaly seem to be addressing a much more profound revision of cultural expectations and practices. They do not attempt to disguise the constant struggle of their artists with the comfortable sameness of every museum spectacle, a tension that was quite exhilarating to watch and was the real point of "?".

It is no accident that in the exhibition catalogue, the curators of "?" insist on referring to the museum viewer as a member of a "public"—a social milieu—rather than as part of an "audience" or herd of cultural tourists. Nor is it incidental that Cottingham constitutes her ideal "viewer" as politically engaged and empowered, someone for whom the reconstitution of history is always deeply meaningful. These are important conceptual distinctions in the curatorial reinvention of the museum achieved by

"NowHere." So it is to Louisiana's credit that it chose to portray the entire project through a series of installation views, a far better means to represent the delicate fabric that each guest curator sought to weave. But it is odd, therefore, to find in the catalogue so many miscaptioned or inadequately captioned installations, seriously misrepresenting and undermining the curators' efforts. Was it not Barnett Newman who remarked archly that the greatest enemy of art in the twentieth century is the exhibition catalogue?

MICHAEL CORRIS

LIAM GILICK

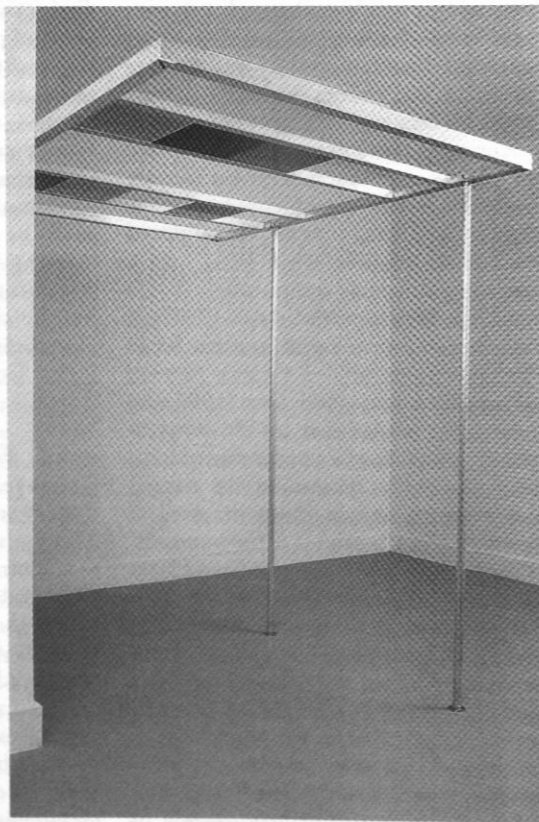
ROBERT PRIME GALLERY, LONDON
APRIL 25 - MAY 27, 1996

Liam Gillick has always been a ready spokesman for his work and for contemporary culture overall, and this frees his enigmatic art from the thankless task of explaining itself. Like much of Gillick's thinking, his overlapping of two identities as critic and artist blithely combines the past—such as during the Renaissance when only artists themselves commented on the artistic process—with some imagined future when disciplines will blur together and previously unrelated activities will be pursued in new, hybrid combinations. In this manner, Gillick's exhibition "The 'What If?' Scenario" cuts across and fuses time, asking questions that recur in his work: How does thinking about the future change what will take place? How does thinking about the past change history? And what if our sense of time wasn't linear in the first place? "What If?" is an open-ended interrogation, potentially edenic (what if Adam had resisted the apple?), but also paranoid and threatening (what if

things get worse?).

Through research, fiction, and the chance encounters of a fertile mind, this young British artist responds to such questions with an intriguing group of platform-like sculptures, typeface designs, and textile and aluminium wall cladding, which are presented not as solutions, but as hypotheses. This work is reminiscent of scientific musings, or of colored corporate diagrams, which are also the sources for a very different artist, Peter Halley, who shares Gillick's industrialized choice of colors and Day-Glo brand of modernism. But the contrast between them spells out the changing concerns of two succeeding generations: Gillick's work is noticeably less imposing, less concise, and, above all, less dependent on art history than his eighties' counterpart.

The most remarkable work on view is a pair of delicate aluminium structures (*Discussion Platform* and *Report Platform*) bearing thin sheets of colored perspex roofing tiles, which cast beautifully shaded, transparent shadows on the



LIAM GILICK, *REPORT PLATFORM*, 1996.

surrounding walls. Looking like temporary platforms for a future democracy, when everyone will be prime minister for 15 minutes, or like inexpensive portable disco cages for unisex go-go dancers, these sculptures are complemented by richly dyed orange synthetic fabric (*Communication Banners*) and semi-reflective aluminium wall panels (*Mirror Insulation Plates*), works which simultaneously decorate and disappear. This is, the artist says, "useful and deadpan" art, which you can stand with your back to; it doesn't merely occupy space, like Minimalist sculpture, but embellishes it too, like a stage set.

Deliberately hovering in a precarious ground between aesthetic reassurance and the impenetrable, Liam Gillick's work has the polish and conviction of a well-considered report marking time in a larger, unfinished experiment. Reality and fiction are co-represented and tentatively formalized into recognizable art forms—sculpture and installation—but the random combination of his vast, almost schizophrenic sources could lead virtually in any direction. It is no surprise that these highly accomplished works fit perfectly into very specific, if peculiar gaps somewhere between art, architecture, politics, and decoration. These are holes which the artist has conceptually dug himself.

GILDA WILLIAMS

ELLIOTT PUCKETTE

FRITH STREET GALLERY, LONDON
MAY 24 - JULY 13, 1996

Today it is a commonplace to speak of the living interstices of art in the postwar contemporary world, of the *entre-deux*, that condition of becoming which somehow never quite becomes. It is not a question of simply a staged doubt, but of the insubstantial yet living reality of mark-making which has come to mediate the space between the visual and the written. If a link is to be found between American artist Elliott Puckette's incised surfaces and Jackson Pollock's "drip," it would perhaps be this lack of subject matter which itself becomes the basis of a subject.

Puckette's practice is to prepare a gessoed panel, cover it with a gray-black

ink wash or gouache solution, and then to incise into it calligraphic or arabesque lines with a razor blade. By this means the hidden surface of gesso reveals itself and at the same time problematizes many of the parameters of drawing, print technique, and painting. However, like most postmodern concerns, there is an added layering of reference, not least of which is the shape of her panels—a series of classicized tendencies represented by the use of the rectangle, square, oval or ellipse, and the circular *tondo*.

A paradox is also set up intentionally by the artist in her use of somber coloration and the pleasurable rhythms of the arabesques. This reminds one of the strange interface that once existed between the aristocratism of eighteenth-century rococo and the radical romanticism of line found in artists like Philipp Otto Runge, a fact that has been heightened in the Frith Street Gallery exhibition by the inclusion of Puckette's 1994-96 series of black-on-white silhouettes.

The idea of incising surfaces in order to "reveal" has a long metaphoric art history, but Puckette's work differs in a meaningful sense from those found in the traditions of engraving, etching, and the woodcut. Whereas the main intention of the print principle is the reproduction of a reversal image, her drawings stand rather as a challenge to the postwar practice of painting. For while the aristocratic love of arabesque decoration became determined as the psychopathology of repetition in the psychological literature of the late nineteenth century (anthropologists like Max Nordau and Cesare Lombroso characterized it as a form of degenerate mark-making), by the post-Second World War period artists returned to it as an essential form of expression. One has in mind here the incised surfaces of 1940s Dubuffet, or a Tàpies, though without the concerns for *matière*, but with an ephemerality that links to Fontana. More



ELLIOTT PUCKETTE, *STEM*, 1996.

cogently, the violated surfaces of an Artaud drawing are evoked by the use of a razor blade.

The juxtaposition of this austere controlled blade and its decorative results only furthers the antipathy of means to expression, an added paradox that expands upon the drawings' condition of the subjectless as subject. Intimately installed in the Frith Street house-cum-gallery—ideal for drawing shows—the works increase their mystery and act upon the viewer by slow effect. It is a show of works which needs to be dwelt on, at the same time proving the old saw that a simplicity of means can often present the eye with a rich and lasting visual experience.

MARK GISBOURNE

10TH BIENNALE OF SYDNEY: "JURASSIC TECHNOLOGIES REVENANT"

JULY 27 - SEPTEMBER 22, 1996

If you believe the rumors, this was the Sydney Biennale we had to have. Contoured—more or less—to the bottom line of the Biennale's 1996 financial accounts, the high-tech (read: "expensive") content reputedly had to go. In these circumstances, the Biennale's title and theme seemed a thinly veiled salvo fired by curator Lynne Cooke over the heads of the Biennale board.