

(though as Japanese-Americans their experience must be recognized as profoundly different from that of African-Americans). In *Environmental*, for example, a large-scale video installation from 1993, stock footage from Warner Brothers' Pacific War propaganda films is juxtaposed with postwar American TV commercials. Here, the same language used to pitch housewives an array of scientifically developed cleansers, deodorants, whitening toothpastes and "Stars and Stripes" band-aids, is also employed on the foreign front as American armed forces act to "rid the world of the yellow scourge." A cutting social commentary, the work is also marked by wry humor, as in the moment when a dive-bombing kamikaze pilot on the big screen is countered by a squadron of animated mosquitoes from a Raid commercial on the TV monitor. Indeed, throughout the exhibition there is a playful sensibility that conjures up childhood innocence, particularly that of the Yonemotos' own childhood, when the ideal of suburban modernity—clean, friendly, efficient—seemed to be open to all who considered themselves American.

Born of an deep understanding of how our experience of the present is continually informed by our memories, and how even the most painful memories necessarily carry with them a degree of nostalgia, the Yonemotos' work refuses easy judgments and political stances. Their appropriation of Hollywood iconography, in some cases literally restaging specific scenes from B-grade melodramas, can be viewed as both a bittersweet homage and a Brechtian strategy of self-reflexivity. Remixed and recontextualized, these seemingly familiar scenes subtly subvert our own media-saturated consciousness. Playing upon our expectations, they bait us with comfortable genres and entice us down seemingly well-trodden paths only to suddenly veer into uncharted territory where nothing is quite what it seems to be.

This strategy is made explicit in *La Vie Secrète* (1997), which presents an old home-movie screen with a large hole cut in its center. Peering through the hole, the viewer looks down into a small video monitor behind the screen only to be confronted with an image of the back of her own head. Thus, in seeking the hidden mechanism of spectacular culture, we instead discover a hidden part of ourselves. Like Fassbinder, whose films

sought to reveal how fascist tendencies originate in the individual, not society, the Yonemotos determine that the construction of identity begins first and foremost in our own hearts and heads.

Favoring poetry over dogmatism, and displacement over belonging, the Yonemotos' is a subtle yet potent art of resistance—both to the spectacular forces of control and to the forces that would tear the spectacle down.

Charles LaBelle

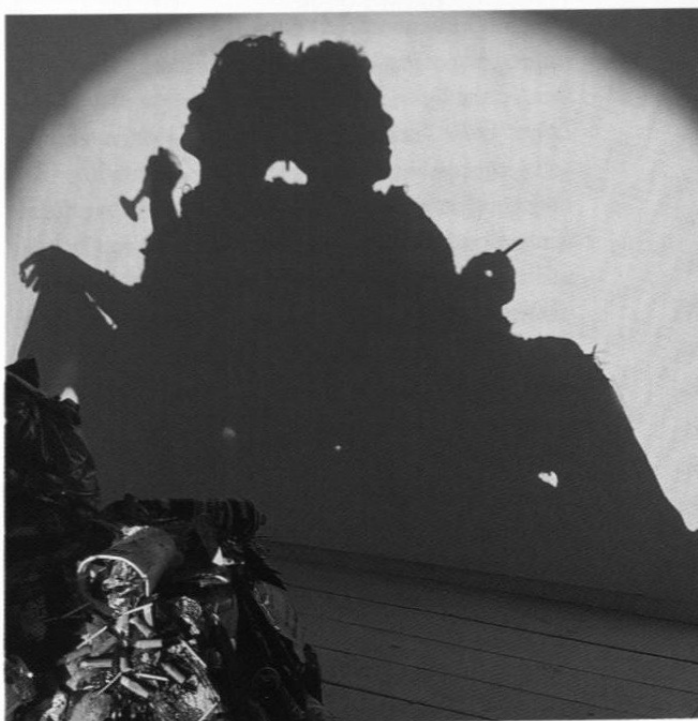
Tim Noble Sue Webster

modern art !nc, London

November 20 - December 20, 1998

Shadows are meant to be nasty, sinister things, deathly doubles in the symbology of philosophy, psychology, folklore, and film. In Plato's cave, shadows performed the illusory, deceptive world of life prior to enlightenment. "The shadow" was Jung's term for all that is hated, feared, and disowned, all that is repressed in the unconscious. Jack-o'-lanterns were originally called "Jack-o'-the-Shadows, or Death Itself." And consider the chiaroscuro world of *film noir*, the darkened doorways in Fritz Lang's films: the shadow is menacing

TIM NOBLE AND SUE WEBSTER, *DIRTY WHITE TRASH (WITH GULLS)*, 1998, INSTALLATION DETAIL, RUBBISH, SEAGULLS, PROJECTOR, 257 x 236 x 107 CM.



HU XIANGCHENG,
WITHOUT FORM NO. 2, 1998,
110 x 77 CM.

and tenacious, the evil twin of life-affirming light.

Until Sue Webster and Tim Noble, that is, inverted the shadow's symbolic consistency. Here, the shadow is "light," the rosy underpinning of otherwise grotesque surroundings, redemptive, playful, and loving.

Light and color play a kind of supporting role, with one of their signature neon wall sculptures flashing W-O-W, Las Vegas-style, in bright yellow. The centerpiece of the exhibition, however, is the sculpture *Dirty White Trash (with Gulls)* of 1998, a heap of supermarket cartons that are the remains of six-months' worth of foodstuffs consumed by the artists during the time it took them to make the sculpture. A strong white light blasted on this room-size mound of trash (complete with two ravaging stuffed seagulls) reveals an astoundingly lifelike, meticulously detailed shadow portrait of the pair, lying back-to-back like bookends, one against the other. The image is so lighthearted and relaxed as to make your heart sing: her head tilted slightly, betraying a smile, the champagne flute carelessly lifted; he, smoking peacefully in torn jeans and ruffled sneakers, happily seated behind her.

This shadow play is among the most successful contemporary romantic images since John and Yoko's bed-in. The effort it took to make this complicated piece is a testament to the artists' working together, as if the image on the wall toasts their union as well as our delight in viewing the results. One might be tempted to see this love affair as all surface, like a shadow, doomed to disappear at the flick of the light, but it doesn't feel that way at all. *Dirty White Trash* is a giant labor of love, a technically impressive, almost miraculous feat: how do they get that knee to look so knee-like? What bit of fringed tat protrudes to create her fluttering lashes, and how did they even make the detailed knuckles in the hand? This is a work you spend a lot of time with, with great pleasure, trying to unravel the mystery of love.

A particularly eerie episode of the '50s television program *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* recounted the story of a neglected old woman who would sit and rock in her chair for days, *Whistler's Mother*-like, her shadow projected perpetually on the wall, waiting for visitors who never arrived. Upon her death, the heirs discover that her shadow persists on the wall, like some ghastly stain. Gradually the shadow rocks again, rises from the chair, and even-

tually murders the new inhabitants. I imagine Sue Webster's and Tim Noble's shadows having similar supernatural powers, secretly existing after gallery hours, after the projector light is switched off. Somehow this image of the couple would remain, until the pair stands up, turns to face one another in the shadows, and embraces.

Gilda Williams

Shanghai Biennale

Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai
October 20 - November 20, 1998

Shanghai is in the throes of utter transformation, and to such a degree that one can say it's becoming Haussmannized. The parallel to nineteenth-century Paris extends to the burgeoning of avant-garde conditions in China's largest city, despite the dubiousness of a term such as "avant-garde" in the Occidental world. In China, a minority of artists are embracing the modern notion that art must be contemporaneous with social developments. While these artists may be in advance of popular and state-sanctioned definitions of art—basically inkbrush painting and calligraphy—they are also guarded about non-Chinese philosophies of art. In this light, the question of modern-versus-traditional artists is not so cut and dry. Moreover, unlike the Paris of Louis-Philippe, there is no marketplace for art beyond government commissions.

So it is interesting, at least to my Western eyes, to see the second Shanghai Biennale premised on the continuing development of inkbrush painting. That the exhibition seemed conservative was, at least in part, the point. That the emphasis on a

