

Art in America

July 2003

Robert Boyd at Schroeder Romero

Robert Boyd's "The Virgin Collection" was an impressive multi-disciplinary exhibition combining costumery, objects, photography, video and performance. In works concerned with history, fascist power, homophobia, social suppression and alienation, Boyd lampoons an array of traditional symbols that ostensibly project masculinity, femininity and purity.

The centerpiece of this fascinating installation was an elaborate, vaguely ominous white wedding gown.

Boyd wore the outfit in a video and in the opening performance at the gallery. It's a quirky garment with a conical headdress and mask, elegant full-length skirt and a top emblazoned with a comical and mysterious crest marked with the image of two crossed hammers—their heads "kissing"—and a lightning bolt. This oddball graphic appeared on many of the other artifacts on display, among them champagne flutes and photos that parody Gap ads—underscoring the way corporate marketing is the latest embodiment of popular presumptions about sex, gender and power. The show also included large photos of Boyd in costume, the artist's source. He based the gown on the religious outfits of the Nazarenos, a Spanish secret



Robert Boyd: *Like A Virgin*, 2002, black-and-white photograph, 30 inches square; at Schroeder Romero.

society of the 1700s, which came to his attention during a 1998 trip through Spain. The Nazarenos' costume came in turn from the dress of humiliated prisoners during the Inquisition.

Boyd's exhibition produced a series of inadvertent meanings and botched interpretations, effectively documenting how one historical group after another borrows and distorts the meanings of sets of symbols. He plays dress-up in an effort to celebrate drag and its knack for ironic social critique. The result was an intricate visual history of mixed messages (and mixed emotions) inflicted on a public that decides for itself whatever it is that they may mean.

—Calvin Reid

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2002

ART GUIDE

ROBERT BOYD, "The Virgin Collection," Schroeder Romero, 173A North Third Street, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, (718) 486-8992 (through Dec. 2). This scrupulously thought-through solo show revolves around the figure of a mannequin dressed in a white satin bridal gown and a pointed Ku Klux Klan-style hood. It is shot through with references to racism, homophobia, consumerism culture and family values, all of which form the artist's slippery, elusive targets (Cotter).

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2002

ART IN REVIEW

Robert Boyd **'The Virgin Collection'**

Schroeder Romero
173A North Third Street
Williamsburg, Brooklyn
Through Dec. 2

Robert Boyd's scrupulously thought-through solo show revolves around the figure of a mannequin in a standard white satin bridal gown but with an unorthodox version of a veil. It descends from the top of a pointed hood that completely covers the face, apart from two eyeholes, and it is embroidered with the emblem of two crossed hammers. Mr. Boyd conceived of the outfit when he was living in Spain. He was struck by the number of bridal shops in Seville and by displays of white-hooded robes worn by members of the Roman Catholic fraternity known as Nazarenos during Holy Week. It was a version of a costume worn by prisoners, many of them Jews, during the Inquisition. The Nazarenos turned a symbol of shame into one of penitence. It was transformed to other ends by the cross-burning Ku Klux Klan.

Suffice it to say that the cultural references imbedded in this image — among them Robert Gober's cross-dressed bridal portrait — are many and Mr. Boyd twists them in interesting ways. He applies the double-hammer marital symbol, borrowed from a neo-Nazi group, to silver wedding rings, mock-Gap T-shirts and a redesigned cover for Madonna's "Like a Virgin" album, which transformed the pop singer into a gay icon.

In short, the points at which racism and homophobia intersect with consumerism and family values are Mr. Boyd's slippery moving targets. They are encapsulated in a short film in which the hooded dress is modeled by the artist himself, a gay man who under present laws still has much to hide and can never be a bride.

HOLLAND COTTER



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Those who fondly remember Madonna's performance at the 1984 MTV Music Awards, writhing around onstage in that lacey, frilly "wedding" dress while singing "Like a Virgin," will enjoy Robert Boyd's debut exhibition, **"The Virgin Collection,"** opening at Schroeder Romero **Fri., Oct. 25,** 6-9 p.m. Like the pop star, Boyd takes a satirical look at love and consumer culture's obsession with tying the knot. Featuring pop culture ads, corporate branding, photography and an official "virgin collection gown," Boyd critiques the racism and homophobia often embedded in corporate advertising. He also skewers the Gap with a promo video titled "virginz in tees." 173A N. 3rd St. (betw. Bedford & Metropolitan Aves.), Williamsburg, 718-486-8992.

■ Brooklyn à Paris

Various venues Paris June 5 to July 13

The second part of an exchange programme between Paris and New York sees nine French galleries hosting exhibitions of young Brooklyn-based artists. Christine Ollier, one of the main organisers of the scheme and director of the Galerie Les Filles du Calvaire in Paris, hopes that this first project will herald the beginning of a spate of other partnerships with different cultural capitals.

The idea to 'shake up the international scene of the big market and of big biennial events was conceived at the Stockholm Art Fair last year, where an encounter between some of the New York and Paris galleries revealed, it is claimed, many affinities and common interests - such as a spirit of innovation, experimentation and discovery. In the last five years Brooklyn has seen a host of new, mainly artist-run spaces springing up. Similarly, many young French gallerists have recently opened spaces in the Marais area of Paris, and it is this apparent dynamism, concentrated in a particular area of the two different cities, that has drawn the partners together.

Smack Mellon Studios, a complex of studios and a gallery space in Brooklyn, are showing at the Espace Paul Ricard. Curated by the Studios' director Kathleen Gilrain, the exhibition is entitled 'Flay, Splay, Play... The Invisible Scalpel of an Anatomical Aesthetic', a reference to the obsessive habit of taking things apart which is displayed by the artists included. For example, Jennifer & Kevin McCoy's video suitcase *Every Anvil*, 2001, is a video database drawn from over 100 episodes of Looney Tunes cartoons from the 40s and 50s. You can find 'Every fall from a great height', 'Every kiss': 'Every unconscious', 'Every moment of realisation' and so on. David Baskin has taken apart his grandparents' furniture in order to cast it in urethane rubber. The casts are splayed out fiat. against the wall, an armchair in garish red, a chest of drawers in sickly pink. *A History of Unmanned Flight*, 2001, a video work by Melissa Dubbin & Aaron S Davidson, juxtaposes the elegant and effortless flight of birds with a narrated catalogue of man's laborious and mostly suicidal efforts to fly.

Artists from Roebing Hall show at the Galerie Les Filles du Calvaire. Guy Richards Smit's video *Ballad of Bad Orpheus*, 2000, is a burlesque rock opera: Orpheus, a self-obsessed lady-killer on shore leave, is stabbed to death by a jealous fellow sailor. Wounded and dying, consoled by his love Eurydice, Orpheus reproaches his killer, 'Why me, not you?'. The characters burst with suppressed emotion, parodies of themselves. Christoph Draeger

works with found images and footage: *Kuwait*, 2000, is a huge photograph of the oil wells left burning during the Gulf War that has been stamped out as a jigsaw puzzle. *Ode to a Sad Song*, 2001, shows a solitary caravan being engulfed in flames whilst a video-collage made from footage of space launches and plane crashes - both real and fictional - adds to the overall sense of carnage in Draeger's work. Sebastiaan Bremer works mostly with large-format photographs he has taken of friends and family; he covers these with a layer of intricate dots, so that the original image beneath becomes barely decipherable. The dots could be seen as another layer of consciousness - dreams, reflections, memories; in *Garupaba II*, 2000, for example, the kitchen sink in the photograph is transformed into a gushing fountain and the ceiling is hung with exotic lanterns and plants, like Ali Baba's cave.

Schroeder Romero has sent work by Peter Hendrick to Galerie Anne Barrault. Hendrick's photographs of buildings illuminated from within are taken at dusk, giving them a haunting, romantic quality. Just around the corner, Chez Valentin plays host to Momenta Art @ Four Walls, Mike Ballou presents a multi-screened sculpture for watching artists' videos. The entire contraption, which includes three monitors housed in trumpet-shaped metal casings, balances on a small wooden chair. Also at Chez Valentin was Robert Boyd's performance for *The Virgin Collection*, 2001. Wearing a wedding dress topped by a satin Ku Klux Klan hood rather than a veil, Boyd stood stock-still in the gallery holding a bouquet of white flowers. Two sinister, expressionless eyes prompted the disconcerting realisation that someone - and someone male - was actually inside the dress.

Joshua Stern's large black and white photographs (courtesy Parker's Box) on display at Galerie Michel Rein also bear Ku Klux Klan overtones. Using small wooden figures as his models and matches as their blazing torches, Stern creates scenes suggestive of disturbing violence. Showing alongside Stern is Tim Laun, whose split-screen video of an American football game seen from two different perspectives examines the way in which the world of sport is glamorised and distorted on television.

At the Espace Huit Novembre, linked to Star 67, Hide-nori Kondo also works with media representations. Taking adverts for brands such Prada, Banana Republic or Dolce & Gabbana, Kondo removes the figures from the images, leaving only bland non-spaces, empty of identity. Ghostly shadows of the original inhabitants remain, making the images doubly uncanny. Sharon Paz's complex video works draw on memory and dreams, examining psychological and social behaviour, relationships, family, identity, sexuality, desire and need. Galerie Anton Weller hosts Sean Dack and Jane Callister from Southfirst:Art. Dack's video uses footage of Kurt Cobain's concert for the release of his album *Nevermind*. Scenes of crowd hysteria are interspersed with images of Cobain and his band smashing their equipment. All this takes place in polarised colour to a dull, crashing soundtrack. The viewer is left disorientated and somehow frustrated.

Leslie Brack, Stacy Greene and Philip Riley have been sent by Plus Ultra to show at Galerie Eric Dupont. In Greene's video *Rorschach Striptease*, 2001, amateur

strippers in silhouette are mirrored to become duos of themselves as they cavort on screen. Brack's colourful collage-based paintings use imagery drawn from popular culture as in *Snoop*, 2002, a small portrait of the rap artist Snoop Doggy Dog, surrounded incongruously by a border of flowers. Riley's wall drawing is an enormous purple form, something between a jester's hat and a musical instrument, entitled *J'ai senti que tu aimais la musique* (I felt that you liked the music), 2002.

Finally, Galerie Bernard Jordan shows Joe Amrhein and Bruce Pearson. Amrhein, who runs Pierogi in Brooklyn and is a sign-painter by trade, layers texts, often taken from art journals, on vellum or glass, both as a criticism of a surfeit of theory and to tease out new meaning from the words. Pearson's paintings in carved Styrofoam are also text-based.

All this work is by turns funny, sinister, disconcerting and serious. It reveals a hive of activity in Brooklyn, which, with its proliferation of studios and alternative spaces, could be seen as the Hackney of New York. Although many of the artists draw on references from popular culture, which is arguably central to American culture and even to American art, what emerges is a wide range of concerns and approaches rather than an identifiable trend. The artists themselves are not all native to the US, adding to the breadth of experience, references and interests.

Coinciding almost exactly with the opening of the exhibitions in Paris, the French Ministry for Cultural Affairs published a report by Alain Quemin, a sociologist at l'Université de Marne-la-Vallée, on the influence of different countries on the art market and their international importance in terms of contemporary art. The report was partly based on the number of contemporary works in significant international museums and collections, as well as on how many artists and works were presented at contemporary art auctions and what prices they reached. The results of Quemin's research highlighted the slow decline of French contemporary art on the international scene. In 1979, for example, in a list of 100 names, 50 came from the US, 12 from Britain, 11 from Germany and 9 from France. In 2000, 33 were American, 28 German, 8 British and 5 French.

Christine Ollier states that one of the aims of the programme is to 'spread the French scene abroad, and allow the installation of long-term collaboration'. The exchange is perhaps an extremely canny move on the part of the French commercial galleries to give their artists a higher profile on the international circuit. Whether the American artists showing in Paris and their galleries reap the same benefits is questionable, but their presence undoubtedly brings energy to the French city.

Brooklyn à Paris took place in the following galleries in Paris: Galerie Anne Barrault, Galerie Les Filles du Calvaire, Galerie Bernard Jordan, Galerie Michel Rein, Galerie Chez Valentin, Galerie Anton Weller, Galerie Eric Dupont, Espace Paul Ricard and Espace Huit Novembre, June-July.

Clare Manchester is a critic and a curator.

ART REVIEW

"Mimic" GAle GAtes et al., through Sat 12 (see Elsewhere).

Implicit in copycat, that irrefutable playground taunt, is the truism that all behavior can be made ridiculous by taking it out of context. Drag queens, vaudevillians, clowns and artists all know, for example, that the powerless can undermine power when they mimic it. And, like Charlie Chaplin's portrait of Hitler blustering and blubbing in *The Great Dictator*, the majority of artists in "Mimic," curated by Robert Boyd, brilliantly use appropriation—art's copycat equivalent—to address and overturn a range of social hypocrisies.

Most affecting are Laurie Hogin's exquisite paintings depicting enraged white monkeys set against plush white backdrops. Far from Jane Goodall's playful simians that mimed human behavior, Hogin's monkeys are bypassing evolution's baby steps to adopt our vices and suffer from our example. Named after the trendiest neighborhoods across the nation (Chelsea in New York, San Pedro in L.A., etc.), each of the canvases marries Hieronymus Bosch with Sir Edward Landseer: The monkeys indulge in cigarettes and cocktails like characters from Cheever novels, but they also wail with eyes as inflamed as those of animal-testing victims.

In contrast, the punch-line-style juxtapositions found in Walter Martin and Paloma Munoz's Minnie Mouse tampon boxes or in Patty Chang's debased anchorwoman video are simply snippy and lack conceptual bite. Topicality aside, Yasser Aggour's photograph of a family laughing over breakfast while wearing black stockings over their heads is disquieting, while Bitter Nigger, Inc., Tana Harget's interactive installation, seduces the viewer with corporate jargon slyly selling racist constructs. And Boyd himself usurps the conspiracy of purity with photographs in which he appears dressed in various outfits that make him seem one part virgin bride and one part Klansman. In Boyd's hands, the wedding dress becomes sinister while the Klansman's robe becomes comical drag—a testament to the critical power that comes with having the last laugh.—*Ana Honigman*



Robert Boyd, *L'Age d'Or (The Virgin Collection)*, 2001.

En buena medida el arte es mímica; es la imitación e interpretación de la realidad mediante un discurso estético. La mímica tiene el poder perturbador de revelar lo oculto, de ironizar y desmitificar.

En un tiempo en que esta ciudad ha perdido el humor, debido a los atentados del 11 de septiembre, y el país entero está inmerso en la lógica bélica, la mímica parece una herramienta muy apropiada para desarticular la solemnidad del discurso del poder.

■ Regresa el humor a los movimientos plásticos en NY

Mimic, sardónico encanto

Naief Yehya

NUEVA YORK, N.Y. 10 de diciembre.— La exposición *Mimic*, que tiene lugar en la galería Gale Gates et al, es un intento por explorar este momento histórico a través del corrosivo lente de la mímica. Los 16 artistas incluidos en la exposición, curada por Robert Boyd, exploran mediante la mímica algunos de los aspectos más sórdidos de la cultura y las instituciones, como serían los vínculos entre el mercantilismo y el arte, el racismo y la industria farmacéutica, el turismo y el colonialismo, la pedagogía y el adoctrinamiento.

El visitante es recibido por "Allegories of Real Estate: The Hottest Neighbourhoods in the Nation", una serie de pinturas de Laurie Hogin, hechas al estilo de los maestros flamencos del siglo XVII, en las que los personajes son monos blancos que posan rodeados de referencias simbólicas a la "utopía envenenada" del Nueva York contemporáneo, un mundo de indulgencias, trivialidad, decadencia y consumo compulsivo, representado por los barrios de moda del país y habitado por la nueva bohemia urbana que ha infestado viejos barrios populares y los ha moldeado de acuerdo con su gusto. Hogin goza de una técnica elegante y un humor negro que emplea para cuestionar el gusto burgués con devastadora elocuencia; además, al hacerlo se enfoca precisamente en el sector acomodado de la sociedad, al cual pertenecen muchos de los artistas y el público de las galerías, con lo que su obra apunta hacia el espectador y el propio espectáculo de la que es protagonista.

También en la primera planta de la galería se exhibe la instalación "The New Fuck Me Little Daddy House", una obra multimedia que consiste en una tienda de campaña con monitores, video, música y una escenografía que evoca a los programas televisivos infantiles. El objetivo didáctico de este programa es una parodia de series como la de la brasileña Xuxa y sus imitadoras, en las que el color de la piel y el cabello de los protagonistas son parte de un juego ideológico y propagandístico poscolonial. Ventura juega con la imagen de un autoritarismo edulcorado que trata de conformar una sociedad desde la raíz. El artista sabe que quien controla el lenguaje controla la concepción del mundo, de manera que ha inventado una serie de sistemas de comunicación oral y escrita con los que pregonan el inevitable dominio de una raza superior en un universo fascista. Esta controvertida y fascinante pieza es tan sólo

una parte de una obra intrincada y compleja que no cesa de expandirse.

En ese mismo piso se exhibe también "Back Talk II", de Elke Lehman, una escultura con un pico de perico en plástico que "responde" cuando escucha voces con un eco distorsionado de las mismas, con lo que plantea que nuestra obsesión con la interactividad en el arte no es otra cosa que un deseo narcisista de vernos reflejados en una obra. A unos pasos están colgadas seis fotografías de la serie "Heidi 2", de Sue de Beer y Laura Parnes. En esta obra se fusiona un homenaje-parodia al video de Paul McCarthy y Mike Kelly, *Heidi*, con una exploración de algunas de las patologías de moda en

el mundo de la abundancia, como la bulimia y la automutilación. Las artistas se valen de efectos de *shock*, de clichés del horror gore, la ciencia ficción y la *reality TV* para crear una caricatura grotesca del malestar de la cultura.

Entre las piezas que destacan en el segundo piso de la galería está el video de Pattry Chang, "Hand to Mouth", en el que la artista, vestida formal, grita "Give it to me, baby", mientras su asistente le mete globos con helio y agua en la boca, una y otra vez, empapándola. El escenario reiterativo de sumisión gozosa y placer histórico hace pensar obviamente en el cine pornográfico y en particular en el obsesivo subgénero japonés del bukkake (que consiste en que una mujer reciba descargas seminales de decenas de hombres en el rostro). El helio hace que el tono de la voz de Chang suba en una parodia del deseo artificial que es la esencia de este género. Robert Boyd presenta dos fotografías "True Blue" y "L'age d'or", en las que un vestido de novia con una capucha el estilo del Ku Klux Klan sirve para representar las nociones represivas intrínsecas al ritual del matrimonio en la sociedad paternalista. Al fusionar estos elementos, el resultado es una serie de símbolos cruzados y visiones espectrales de deseos, frustraciones y temores en colisión. Otra de las piezas más logradas es "Bunnything", de la escultora, fotógrafa y pintora Jody Culklin, quien se ha reinventado a través de la microelectrónica y ha creado un CD ROM interactivo que mediante un ingenioso interfaz permite al visitante explorar la dualidad entre el bien y el mal mediante imágenes, clips de video y audio que aparecen en una pantalla dividida en dos: conejito bueno / conejito malo. El trabajo de Culklin es una ingeniosa exploración de la visión maniquea del bien y el mal que predomina en la era de la cultura digital.

El website de la exposición es: www.mimeticart.com. ■

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