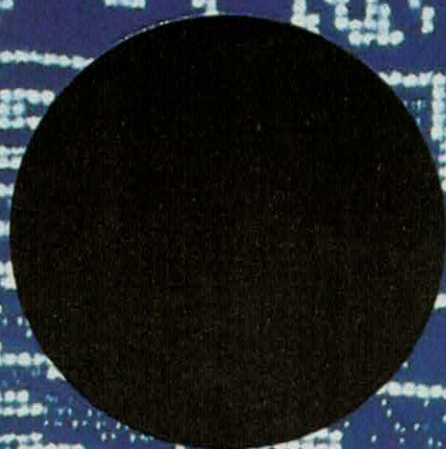


ARTFORUM

SUMMER 1991 \$7 SEP 15

I N T E R N A T I O N A L





Arrangement, *Pierres à bâtir et plaque d'égout* (Arrangement, building sewer plate), 1969, stones and sewer plate. Installation view.
From "Supports/Surfaces."

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Olivier Zahm
by Diana C. Stoll.

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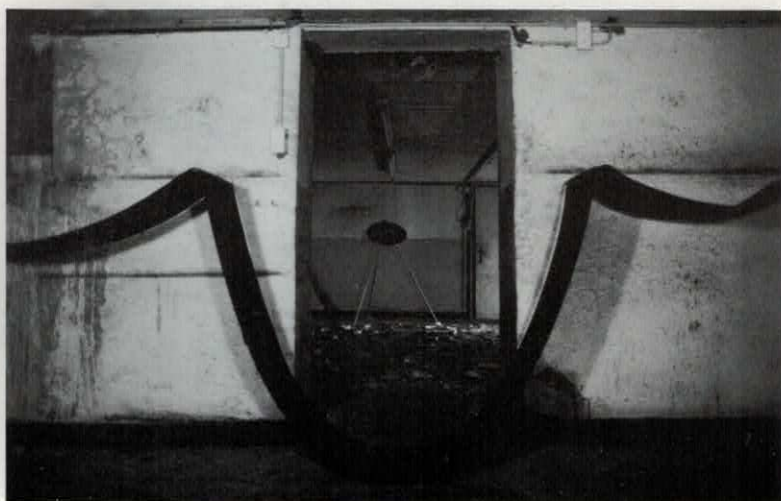
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The *Supports/Surfaces* group was formed around 1968, and exhibited in the Midi region of France, in Italy, and most notably at the ARC (Musée de Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris) in the fall of 1970. It was during this latter exhibition that the group was termed "*Supports/Surfaces*," a name invented by the artist Vincent Bioules. But by 1974, a year marked by the exhibition "*Nouvelle Peinture en France*" (New painting in France), the group had already begun to split up, and each artist's practice began to follow a personal path. Hence the works assembled here represent only the period from 1966–74.

The *Supports/Surfaces* artists found themselves confronted, at the end of the '60s, with the languishing abstraction of the School of Paris, and the neodadaism of *Nouveau Réalisme*. Most of the artists of the group—Claude Viallat, Daniel Dezeuze, Noël Dolla, Toni Grand, Bernard Pagès, André-Pierre Arnal, André Valensi, Bioules and Saytour—lived in the south of France and associated with members of the Nice school (Arman, César, and Ben). Their interaction with the Parisians Marc Devade, Louis Cane, and with the magazine *Tel Quel* and its editor Marcelin Pleyne served to fuel the evolution of their abstract formalism, oriented also by their discovery of American Color Field painters, Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis, and Jules Olitsky, as well as Jackson Pollock. They rebelled against the Duchampian idea of antiart and tried, by aligning themselves with the social and political revolt fueled by Marxist/Leninist thought, to restore to painting its symbolic dimension, with the help of psychoanalysis and semiotics. For Pleyne, art was "an object of recognition," an exposition of its con-



Roman Buxbaum, *Times*, 1990–91, mixed media. Installation view.

stituent materials. Cane and Dezeuze wrote, in a manifesto published in the magazine *Peinture et Cahiers Théoriques* (which they founded along with Devade and Bioules): "... the effect of recognition is produced by a dialectical moment between different elements: surface (format/support), mark (graphic tool and gesture), medium (from which color, turning in upon itself, shows that it is not a medium). These various elements work in multiple combinations, moving toward an infinity."

The deconstruction of the painting, the exposing of the frame or even its suppression, become literal concepts. Dezeuze constructed wooden ladders of a soft veneer, unrolled from wall to floor; Dolla used rags soaked in dye and hung them out like laundry in his *Structures étendoirs*, (Hanging structures, 1967); Cane cut cloth into pieces and arranged or sewed them into collages, in *Sol Mur* (Floor wall, 1972) or stamped his name onto the cloth: "*Louis Cane Artiste Peintre*" (Louis Cane artist painter, 1968). Viallat also used a stamp or a stencil to print his famous shape on canvas, sometimes along with pieces of string or wood that curved into the space. Grand worked with a variety of assemblage techniques. Valensi whitewashed his canvases with an oily carbonic substance, Arnal creased and folded them, whereas Jean-Pierre Pincemain used boards or pieces of corrugated iron permeated with color. At an open-air exhibition in the summer of 1970, Bioules made use of a street in Coaraze (near Nice) for his *125 carrelers teintés* (125 tinted rulers), which were termed "brushstrokes in space." When the canvases of Devade (the most theoretical of the group) are mounted on frames, their diluted ink colors bear witness to a crux of *Supports/Surfaces*—the challenge to perspec-

tivist illusion by the fusion of color and support. "Painting is neither an investment of the object (narcissism) nor a grasping of a limb (fetishism)... it is rather a tearing, a digging."

—Anne Dagbert

Translated from the French by Diana C. Stoll.

ZURICH

ROMAN BUXBAUM

GALERIE

BOB VAN ORSOUW

This work by Roman Buxbaum was installed in the two basement rooms under the gallery. After being empty for many years, the cellar was damp, dank, and dusty, and Buxbaum left the space as it was for this installation entitled *Times*, 1990–91. On the dirty floor of the first room, viewers saw a circle of 250 portraits of celebrities of the Aargau area from the first half of the century. The effigies of these once-prominent citizens were actually the envelopes of newspaper printing plates that had been discarded as useless. The circle was ringed by three easels, each bearing an oval plate of black glass reminiscent of a headstone. Indeed, the plates were engraved with three different kinds of script, deriving from the invitation to the Nazi's "Degenerate art" show.

On the front wall in the second room 41 pages from a calendar were displayed; during the years 1921–61, these pages had been used for notes by an executive named Hunziker at the BBC firm in Baden, near Zurich. In a meticulous script, he outlined the events of world politics as well as personal matters. The outbreak of World War II appears next to the dates of Hunziker's



Ilya Kabakov, *Die Zielscheiben (The targets)*, 1991, mixed media. Installation view.

wedding, his vacations, his broken arm, or the pope's death. On the opposite wall, Buxbaum hung a red wool ribbon with Hunziger's signature and "1921-1961" embroidered onto the opposite ends, thus resembling a grave festoon. The word "Zeiten" (times), made from printing plates, lay on the floor. This installation focused on an era that, like few others, has been marked by great tragedies, upheavals, and revolutions. Yet what remains of all that? Portraits of VIPs, unknown today; penmanship somehow linked to the esthetics of the Third Reich; and some diary pages that note the outbreak of the most dreadful of wars as scrupulously as the onset of a common cold.

These found objects became shreds, shards, quotations—albeit quotations without references. Their meanings, now autonomous, created an infinite loop of the beginnings of thoughts that no longer distinguish between a beginning and an end, between earlier and later, between important and unimportant. This is the process emerging in today's highly technological society of communication. Little by little, it is replacing the old Cartesian view of the world—a view based on detachment, hierarchy, and objectivity. Today, we can no longer maintain protective distance from the world; we have become part of this impenetrable universe.

—Noemi Smolik

Translated from the German by Joachim Neugroschel.

VIENNA

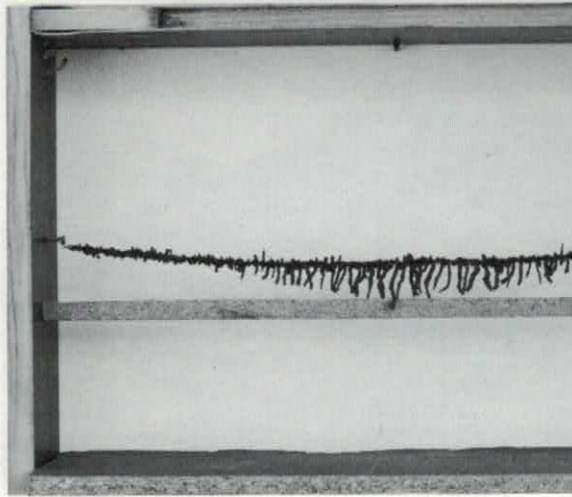
ILYA KABAKOV
GALERIE PAKESCH

The viewer as marksman, the show as a rifle range, the paintings as targets? This may be

a rash response to this installation entitled *Die Zielscheiben (The targets)*, 1991 by Ilya Kabakov, where he has spread rocks, crumpled newspapers, and wooden cudgels as weapons on the floor. A few shards are already in the paintings, the "targets." However, Kabakov does not want this installation to seem all that clear-cut—for it to be taken simply as a banal civil-war scenario or as a dissident barricade against the perestroika stormers. This is an internal esthetic matter, i.e., iconoclasm, the storming of images. The three compartments, rigged up as shooting galleries with unfinished plank partitions, are not without a militant character, against which, the artist assures us, art has been immune for a long time now.

Commentaries in the works reveal the artist's concerns—art and its inability to capture certain contents and visions in forms and words. For these themes, he reactivates a narrative mode that had been taboo in Modernism. In the early '70s, this one-time illustrator of children's books found an adequate formulation for his concerns in albums—fold-out collections of single or multiple pages with illustrated tales and narrative captions, often with ambiguously contradicting images à la Magritte. Mostly, we see a little man who is obsessed with big ideas that resemble those of the Modern avant-garde. In these pictorial histories, Kabakov attempts to track down the myths and dead ends of Modernism. He does so through a parodistic retelling of a story that often entangles the viewer in an irritating net of ambiguities, unraveling enigmas only to reveal new enigmas. This multicausal narrative structure is deployed not merely as a metalanguage, but also as a means of contrast, as an antidote for an avant-garde that has run its course. This structure conceals his yearning to reintegrate art and his life in a meaningful way.

This installation follows a seemingly auto-



Carl Emanuel Wolff, *Shelf with Coral Necklace*, 1990, wood.

biographical background. However, the first-person narrator who speaks to us from the pictures is fictitious. The first of the three targets shows a figure in front of a house and, underneath, the words, "I was born in this house on March 12, 1931." The next station shows the thoroughly bleak room in Moscow that the narrator inhabited as if in a prison cell during 1961. "I feel as if this room has become a part of me since that time; it is always here and is still alive within me." The third station, depicting the Berjansk street where the artist has lived since 1976, distills his state of misery, and in doing so begs the viewer to "please take rocks, throw, throw, smash, shatter everything connected with me and my life."

If we compare this installation with Kabakov's earlier works, we are struck by the directness of the new pieces. There is something unconditional, indeed ineluctable about these intricate examinations, playing with semantic gaps between image and text, on the tar-black floor of a rear-court gallery, between the crude wooden partitions. Yet this work does not startle the viewer, for it partakes of the more political tone that has now come to art.

—Markus Brüderlin

Translated from the German by Joachim Neugroschel.

DÜSSELDORF

CARL EMANUEL WOLFF

TOM BACKHAUSS

The idea of the object derives from both the symbolic and the individual realms. The symbolic elements uncover a collective knowledge and understanding of reality, which can lead to the misinterpretation of

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