

ETC



## Prize of the National Gallery for Young Art, 2005

Prize of the of National Gallery for Young Art, 2005, Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum of Contemporary Art, Berlin. 2 September - 16 October 2005

Maria Zimmermann Brendel

Numéro 73, mars-avril-mai 2006

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/34913ac>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Revue d'art contemporain ETC inc.

ISSN

0835-7641 (imprimé)

1923-3205 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Zimmermann Brendel, M. (2006). Compte rendu de [Prize of the National Gallery for Young Art, 2005 / Prize of the of National Gallery for Young Art, 2005, Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum of Contemporary Art, Berlin. 2 September - 16 October 2005]. *ETC*, (73), 64-66.

Tous droits réservés © Revue d'art contemporain ETC inc., 2006

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

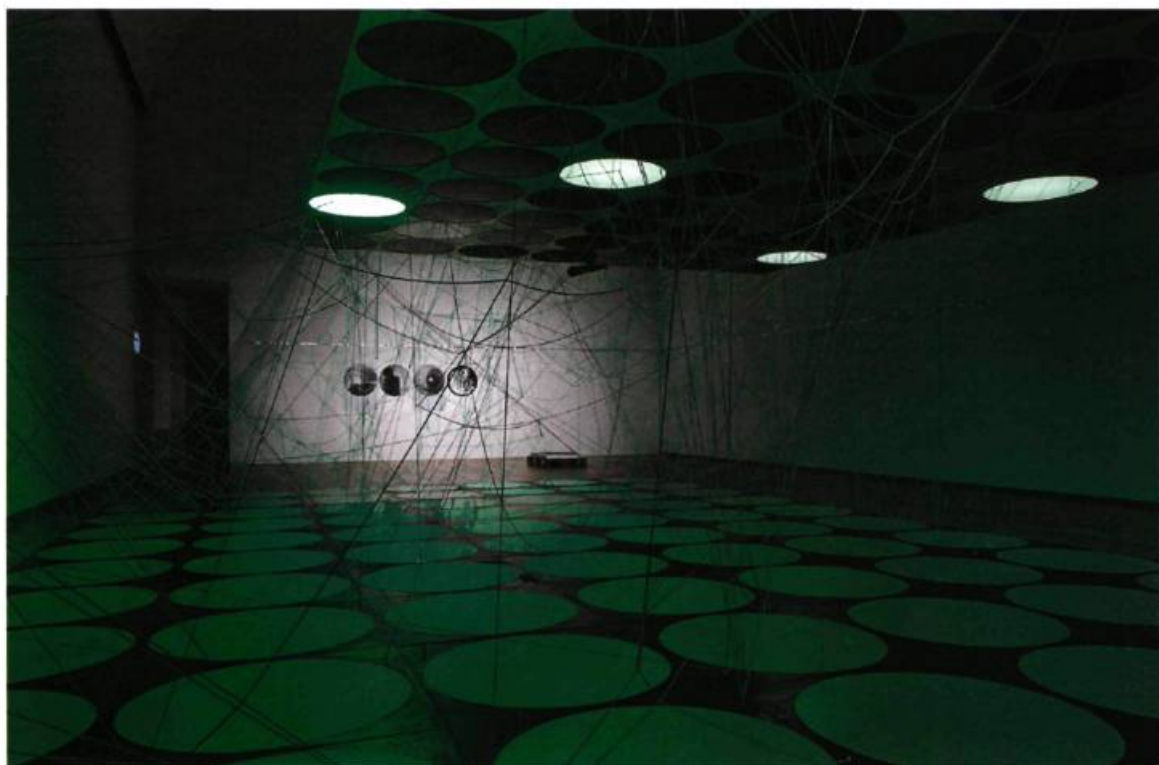
<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>



## ACTUALITÉS/EXPOSITIONS

Berlin

### THE SOCIAL COMMITMENT OF YOUNG ARTISTS<sup>1</sup>

*Prize of the National Gallery for Young Art, 2005, Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum of Contemporary Art, Berlin. 2 September – 16 October 2005*

What we need, Nietzsche said, are mental ships sailing toward unexplored shores.<sup>2</sup>

The four artists nominated for the *Prize of the National Gallery for Young Art, 2005* (50 000 Euro) were John Bock (German), Angela Bulloch (Canadian-born/British), Anri Sala (Albanian) and Moncia Bonvicini (Italian). A first jury selected them from over 130 competitors, and a second jury awarded the prize to Bonvicini for *Never Again*. Bonvicini installed 12 swings made of chains, rings, black leather and metal studs. Each artist was given a large room in this former train station modelled after Paris' Musée d'Orsay. The social commitment the Young Artists have inscribed in their work is remarkable and is enhanced through excess to forcefully affect. Their art is wrought from a radical creativity imbued with a nerve-racking melancholy that is able to open spaces for mental ships to embark. Space is the generative force in all four installations – space as action, interaction and mental habitat.

Of Bock's art only traces were to be found : a boarded-up window, broken glass, a wig and other strewn pieces. A small monitor on the floor became a gathering point as it played a video of his grotesque action-theatre. It records his hour-long performance on the day of the opening. His was a delivery of a

torrent of words, better yet a thunderstorm accompanied by virulent action. He smashed a window as a way of entry/exit, hence the broken glass, which, in Bock's understanding, "is defenestration as cash flow." His loud action-theatrics entitled *PestKOP in black rebel motorcycle club* seemed at first nonsensical. Listened to carefully, his quick word delivery, using street parlance and four-letter words, pointed to problems in society. He lamented the insularity of the individual, who searches for identity and self-realization, caught between competition and despair. He critiqued the increasing economic and class disparity, science, art and high-tech. Bock's is an aesthetic of the absurd, combining the witty and the shocking. Popular among a younger crowd, he is a new Buster Keaton of cinema, a Josef Beuys of art as protest and an Antonin Artaud of theatre. Significantly, Artaud opened the stage for anarchical performances. He also dedicated a work to the "Pest" (plague) in 1933, which served as an inspirational source for Bock. The PestKOP (pest-head), John, who had worn a large wig, left the museum crying out slogans in the style of Artaud. On the nearby canal, a boat waited for his exuberant, Fellini-style departure. He sailed off in the company of three women clad in costumes he designed, leaving behind the world of art. Bock initiates a meeting point of speech with visible form, forging an active relation of language, body and so-

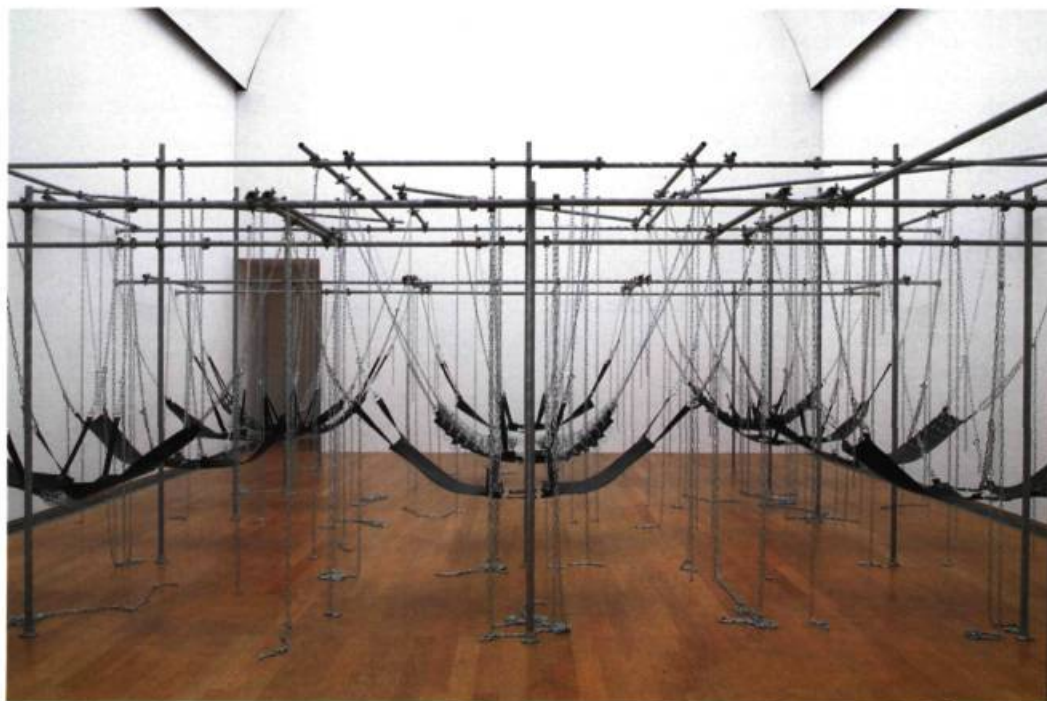


cial reality. In this performative of the extreme he became momentarily an intermediary to force, or explosion into knowledge, which viewers then can find in the video/traces he left behind.

In entering Angela Bulloch's gigantic light-and-sound installation, *The Disenchanted Forest x 1001*, I was halted by a sudden darkness. Standing with other visitors, unable to see or proceed, dissatisfaction was voiced, for the waiting seemed unnecessarily long. The 'blackout' slowed us down in preparation for an art of digital seduction. Darkness gave way to light. Hazy pink light illuminated the central platform onto which one could step and enter the disenchanted forest. The play of light was accompanied by electronic music, which Bulloch commissioned Florian Hecker to compose. "Sound provides a sculpted background," Jean-Luc Godard once said – a statement realized in this high-tech choreography where the phantasms of trees were the dancers. Pink light gave way to green, turning the strings of thread that connected floor and ceiling of the platform into a magic of 'natural' perception of trees, spiderweb, a jungle. A circulating light beam spotlighted tiny metal plates on the walls, markers used by Berlin's forestry department to record the decreasing number of trees. Bulloch brought 1001 plates into the museum as artifact, as exhibit. Nature is classified, systematized, exhibited as precious item – clearly an ecological concern – and mourned by language, the disenchanted. "Collecting is not what is good but what is rare," the 17<sup>th</sup> century author Jean de La Bruyère noted, a rarity (of trees) we cannot afford in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Herein lies the potential of this installation, in the field of tension. The tension derives not from the parallels of perceptive nature and artifice, light and sound, and digital intensities but from the knowledge that emerges, that nature's magic, her enchantment, is being mourned in the cover-up of excessive high-tech production and in collecting her markers : x 1001.

In Anri Sala's DVD projection *Long Sorrow*, a black

musician plays a saxophone. Clearly audible in the corridor, built especially for the projec – its dark plastic floor serving as a pointer to the artificial habitat – the 13-minute screening (in continuous loop) was emotive. His tune soon turned into a bothersome repetition as the young man stands, framed in front of an open window. In the distance, we see high-rise apartments. The far-distanced view brings to mind Alberti's pictorial space, rational and in one-point perspective – "that decisive effort of an objective representation of visual reality," wrote Erwin Panofsky.<sup>3</sup> But here the video camera brings into focus a social reality, a failed urban/architectural dream. The scene takes place on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor of a visibly deteriorating housing tenement, built in the 1960s as many were in Western European cities, in the *banlieue* (suburb) many of us know from recent French newscasts. The once *villes nouvelles* on the peripheries house thousands of people of immigrant extraction, Turkish, Arab and/or African as in Berlin's Märkisches Viertel, known locally as the 'long sorrow.' To this Sala turns our attention: for to bring into view is to bring into language. Like those in London or Paris, this once stony dream of architects has become a site of social segregation where high youth unemployment is the norm rather than higher education and integration. Those tight and drab living spaces have turned into ghettos where children have little alternative than to model themselves on the fighting position of the older youths who, in France, have expanded their territory in revolt. When subjects are neglected by the corridors of political power the "definition of self, depends on redefining boundaries and habitat." They "deterritorialize" and "reterritorialize,"<sup>4</sup> in an explosive fashion as a way to transgress social confinement effectively. Disiz la Peste, a black French rap singer captures a hopelessness in his lyrics: "And France cares little what I do/forever in its mind/I'll just be a young man from the banlieue;" and another rapper, NTM, asks : "How long will this last ?/It's been years since everything could explode."<sup>5</sup> *Long*







*Sorrow* provides both a perspective and a discursive grid that cross geography and history and – where art and contemporaneity loop into view – with the hope that the sax player does not represent a lost generation. Most importantly, Sala's sorrow-traction is an artistic framing where the power lies in its force to adjust the viewer's mental milieu, in the practice of "space" and in discourse, as Michel de Certeau would have put it.

Perhaps the greatest draw of Bonvicini's *Never Again* is its invitation to playful abandon. Rarely have I seen so many people having so much fun in an art installation, climbing into swings while pulling on the chains, or being pushed into sway and photographed by their companions. The museum wrote of Bonvicini as having revolutionized art in its function. Art is now to be experienced physically and on a large scale. A mediated view, however, may not convince us of the prize-worthiness. The sheer rawness of construction of metal poles and chains combined with black leather can make for a wrong perception. *Never Again* must be experienced for its affect to be felt. The apparent simplicity and decidedly low-tech, shifts importance to the bodies of viewers who can spread their desires and memories in the large space, and in the excesses of 12 swings. The construction-site atmosphere falls away as soon as the powerful, eerie sounds of the chains are heard, and the meticulously crafted swings are seen, each being uniquely different. This installation becomes a site of visual pleasure and bodily fascination. No visual reproduction can adequately convey the experience of lying in one of the swings of tightly braided leather belts, or in one made of a thick leather piece that has been perforated by holes, or in pushing the dangling chains aside in order to proceed through this playground. The art moves, and we are moved by it. This is richly suggestive material. One could apply the label "somasochistic aesthetic" (s/m). The s/m perception, however, is generated, I contend, more by the desires of the mind and by the power and act of imagination for there is nothing explicitly sexual.

Like in a Hitchcock movie, everything is hinted at, nothing acted out. The strong visual pleasure this art gives through movement, sound, interaction and meticulous craft can be understood as working to ward off imaginary perversion of the cognitive certainty of bodily senses, only by exposing it in the void of the swings we are to fill – as guises of possibility. What are the possibilities, sexual pleasure associated with pain, torture, bondage and humiliation as articulated in the writings of Sade and Masoch? Masoch, as Gilles Deleuze reminds us, focused on sexual pleasure derived from humiliation, violence or torture, while Sade thought in the form of institutionalized possession and violence<sup>6</sup> – this art's interpretative possibilities? And for both Sade and Masoch, language was understood as reaching its full potential when it acts directly on the senses – as here in a visualized language, tangibly felt. Perhaps this basic sensual need of touch, sexual play and interaction, so close to the human condition, may have been the deciding force for the jury to decide on *Never Again*, a title that was fragmented in the installation. *Never* was written on one wall, *Again* on the opposite, and in between were the swings-and we-in space, time and possibility, of play, thought and interaction.

MARIA ZIMMERMANN BRENDL

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This text is dedicated to J. W. Brendel, in gratitude.
- <sup>2</sup> Günter Abel citing Nietzsche in his opening-lecture on "Kreativität", the XX Deutscher Kongress für Philosophie, Technische Universität, Berlin, September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Abel argues for a radical creativity to 'forcefully' effect change.
- <sup>3</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renaissance in Western Art* (New York: Harper), 1969, 122.
- <sup>4</sup> Tom Conley, "Oronce Finé and the Self-made Map," Timothy Murray and Alan K. Smith eds, *Repossession, Psychoanalysis and the Phantasm of Early Modern Culture* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press), 1998, 82.
- <sup>5</sup> Alan Riding, "In France, artists have been sounding the warning bells for years," *The New York Times* 24/11/05.
- <sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books), 1991, 14 ff.