Now's the time

HUGH LANE
dublin

100 YEARS

Dublin City
Baile Átha Cliath

Now's the time

Bas Jan Ader

Jean-Michel Basquiat

Helen Chadwick

Felix Gonzalez-Torres

Keith Haring

Eva Hesse

Martin Kippenberger

Michel Majerus

Piero Manzoni

Gordon Matta-Clark

Jason Rhoades

Now's the time

Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane
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Director:
Barbara Dawson

Head of Exhibitions:
Michael Dempsey

Exhibition Curators:
Logan Sisley and Padraic E. Moore

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Contents

Now's the time

'We live as we dream – alone'.
(Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*)

Now's the time presents an opportunity to appraise the brief but visually intense lives of eleven young artists. Like George Seurat a century earlier, who died at 32, their art practices are now in the possession of history rather than voices in the current debate. They are rendered powerless in the services of interpretation and the work can only be judged on its behaviour within the classical canon. These artists successfully expounded their concerns and critical reflection on the world around them through pioneering achievements in their chosen media. They interrogated the relationship between private and public space and examined role patterns and their attributions. *Now's the time* reflects on the diversity of recent manifestations in art practice and these artists' seminal contributions to it. It also explores the infinite here and now, the zeitgeist of a generation and the transmission of these aesthetics and art forms into contemporary life, as they themselves become embedded in historic appreciation. Each of these artists has significantly added to the recent history of western art and, true to that tradition, their work continues to influence art practice today.

Our focus on these short but stellar careers is inspired by our benefactor. One hundred years ago this year, Hugh Lane founded a Gallery of Modern Art for Dublin. It is believed to be the first public gallery dedicated to the appreciation of modern art, and includes some of the most renowned pioneering works of the period. Hugh Lane was thirty two when the Gallery was established. Seven years later he drowned aboard the cruise liner *Lusitania*. Although his brilliant career was tragically cut short, through the Gallery's collection his focus, enthusiasm and support for contemporary art practice and appreciation of modern classicism lives on. As we are about to embark on our second centenary, it is fitting that we conclude our centenary celebrations with a personal tribute to this enlightened collector and magnanimous philanthropist, whose actions brought about one of the most significant cultural events in modern Irish history.

The exhibition is the outcome of a research and selection process involving numerous exchanges with artists' estates and their galleries. Their enthusiasm and support is much appreciated, as, too, is the generosity of our lenders, without whose support this exhibition could not have happened. My sincere thanks also my colleagues in the Gallery, particularly Michael Dempsey, Logan Sisley and Padraic E. Moore, who organised this exhibition, and to Lilly Wei for her perceptive and illuminating essay.

Barbara Dawson
DIRECTOR

Intimations of mortality

There is a particular poignancy to untimely death, especially if the person is young, enormously gifted and charismatic, as were Bas Jan Ader, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Helen Chadwick, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Keith Haring, Eva Hesse, Martin Kippenberger, Michel Majerus, Piero Manzoni, Gordon Matta-Clark and Jason Rhoades, the eleven artists in *Now's the time*. To die in one's twenties, thirties and even forties is a disruption in the natural order of things that is unsettling and tragic; we deeply regret that those who did so had not had more time to add to their legacy, to give us more instances of their extraordinary work. We ask, what if? What if Titian, Matisse, Picasso or de Kooning had died in their thirties as many of the artists in this exhibition did? What if Philip Guston had died before the sharp, startling shift in his style? Or, conversely, what if the eleven artists had lived longer? Would they have continued to be productive, innovative? Or would we see them quite differently, through less emotional, less sympathetic eyes? Would their subsequent work have been of interest without the aura cast over them by early death? Would what they might have created have pushed art in other directions than those it took, like the flap of a butterfly's wing in Brazil that was said to have set off a tornado in Texas? But all of that is conjecture and unanswerable. Early death, however, encourages speculations.

There is, apparently, a need, even a reflex, to cast an aura over the life and work of artists who die young, to enshrine them in some collective pantheon, in cultural memory. This aura serves as society's benediction, a form of compensation for our mutual loss, for our inability to save them. When an artist dies young, there is a special kind of mourning. It is not the same grief that is expressed for an artist who dies after a long life and rewarding career. None of the artists in this group committed suicide for certain – if the risks they took do not count as suicidal. Suicide is a special category of regret, with its special myths. Several of the deaths were sudden and dramatic and more than a few of the artists were careless of themselves to the point of self-destruction, a death wish that was also, ultimately, a life wish. Freud has written: 'Life loses in interest when the highest stake in the games of living, life itself, may not be risked'.

All of these artists had emotional and intellectual courage as well as physical arrogance; they were gamblers in both life and art and not afraid of risk, which they found stimulating, necessary. And, because we venerate youth, we reserve for them a privileged place in our hearts and our minds. Paradoxically, by dying young, they will never grow old. All iconoclasts, they have been inevitably transformed by the revisionist glow of their death, their work given an extra validation.

The concept of *Now's the time* was intriguing: to assemble works by artists who died young to see what discourse might ensue. But in addition to dying young, what do these particular artists have in common with each other? Do they possess traits in common, aesthetic and otherwise, and does the fact that they died young affect their work in paradigmatic ways? Can we scrutinise their work for signs of a death foretold?

One commonality was simply time. The majority of the selected artists had only a decade, more or less, to produce the work that would define them, their output in inverse proportion to the time they had. Most died in their thirties. Another commonality was that although young, they had already established themselves as artists of note – or notoriety – due, perhaps, to their penchant for risk, their fearlessness in life, art or both, and their value, in every sense of the word, has only increased since their death; they have become representative, a symbol of their times and the harbinger of things to come. These artists, and others like them, possessed, in some uncanny and perhaps similar combination conducive to canonisation, the right work with the right biography and even the right death at the right time. Many could afford to gamble with life, because they possessed it in bittersweet abundance, and youth, while it may court death, does not truly believe in it.

While there are discernible affinities of style and temperament – all of the artists were radical and many were social and political activists – there were also great differences. They did not belong to the same aesthetic school – how could they have? – and spanned three or four generations, separated by space, time and death. Only Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat were close, part of the 1980s New York East Village art scene, and had worked together. The rest, even when they had been contemporaries and acquainted with each others' work, had not.

Perhaps what they really had in common was the fact that they were artists and were fortunate to have found their vision early, made their breakthrough, and produced their work. While the premise of *Now's the time* is sobering, the works are not, and bring once more before us the exhilaration and grace, the candour, compassion, vulnerability, vehemence, wit, imagination and critical intelligence that characterised these artists. A fierce scepticism about life, as well as a fierce belief in it and art, illuminate their work. While the myth of the artist as a sacrificial victim is one cliché, and the myth of the artist living life avidly, fully, quickly is another, the reality, in the end, is that these extraordinary artists died unfortunately, sometimes mistakenly, all too soon.

Lilly Wei

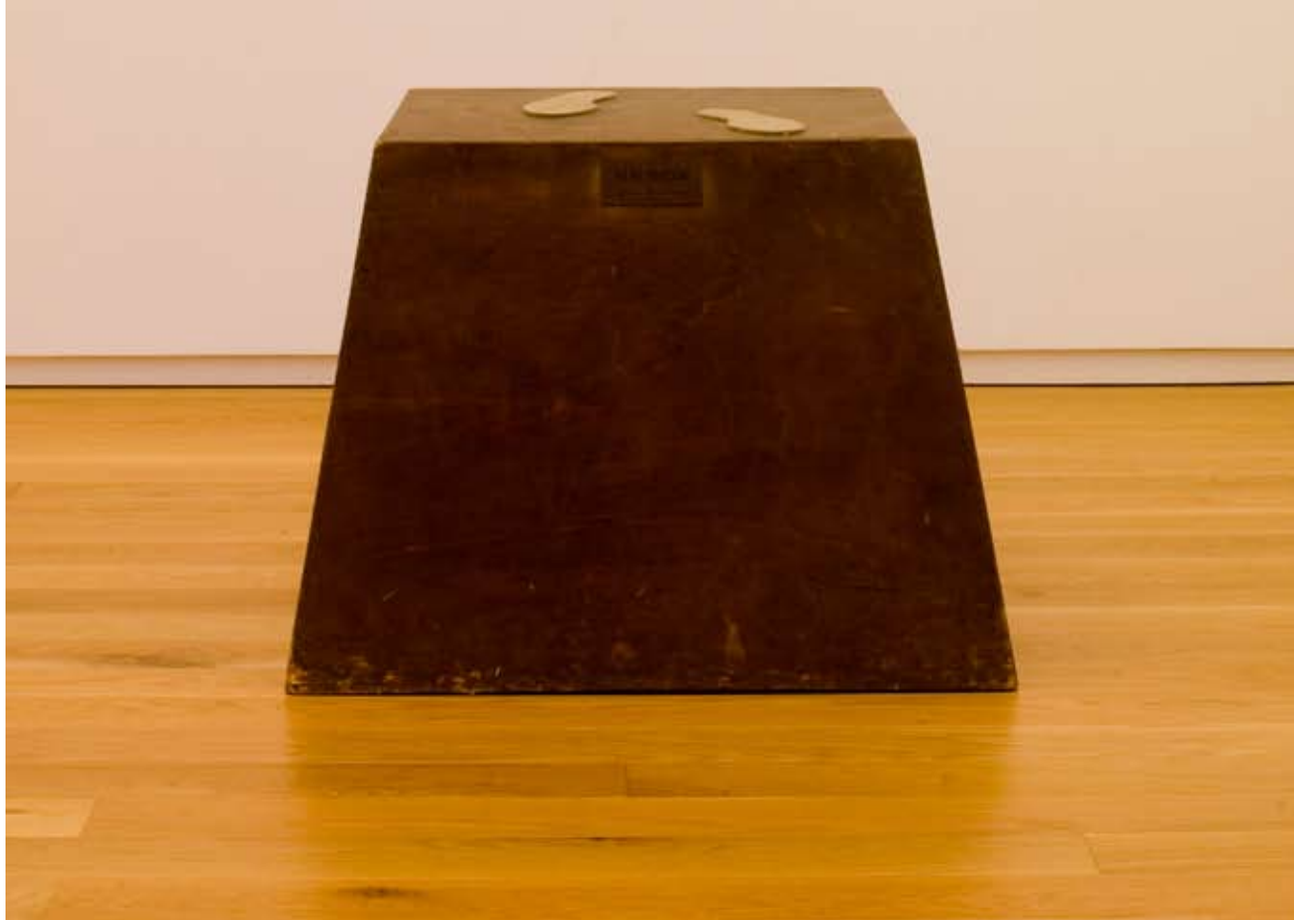
Lilly Wei is a New York based independent curator, essayist and critic who contributes to many publications in the United States and abroad. She has written regularly for *Art in America* since 1982 and is a contributing editor at *ARTnews* and *Art Asia Pacific*.

Artists' biographies and artworks

Piero Manzoni

Piero Manzoni, born in 1933, died in his studio in Milan in 1960 of acute alcoholism, although the stated cause of death was a myocardial infarction. He was 29 years old at the time, and although he began painting at 17 (he was largely self-taught) and had his first show in Soncino – his birthplace – in 1956 when he was 23, he only began making the conceptual works that linked him with the European avant-garde and anointed him a crucial figure in the development of Arte Povera after seeing Yves Klein's show at Galleria Apollinaire in Milan the following year. Manzoni created an enormously varied body of work but had only three short years to give the world the stream of ephemera and more durable works that he is known for. They mocked conventional definitions of art and further pushed back the limits of acceptability, influenced by the spirit of Dada and Marcel Duchamp, Klein, Lucio Fontana and Alberto Burri. Among these works are his now iconic cans of shit, said to be his own, a series of red, white or blue balloons filled with Manzoni's breath, and the *Achromes* that at first consisted of layers of gesso, followed by kaolin applied onto pleated and creased canvas. Later, he used stitched, unpainted canvas, felt and wadded white cotton wool as materials in his search for images that were 'as absolute as possible'. *Now's the time* features a *Magic Base*, 1961, which was conceived to convert whoever stands upon it into a certifiable work of art. It is a prototype for a large steel base from 1962 permanently installed in a park in Herning, Denmark, which Manzoni designated the base of the world. Much of what he made, despite this installation, questioned the concept of permanence and by extension, the nature of art and life.

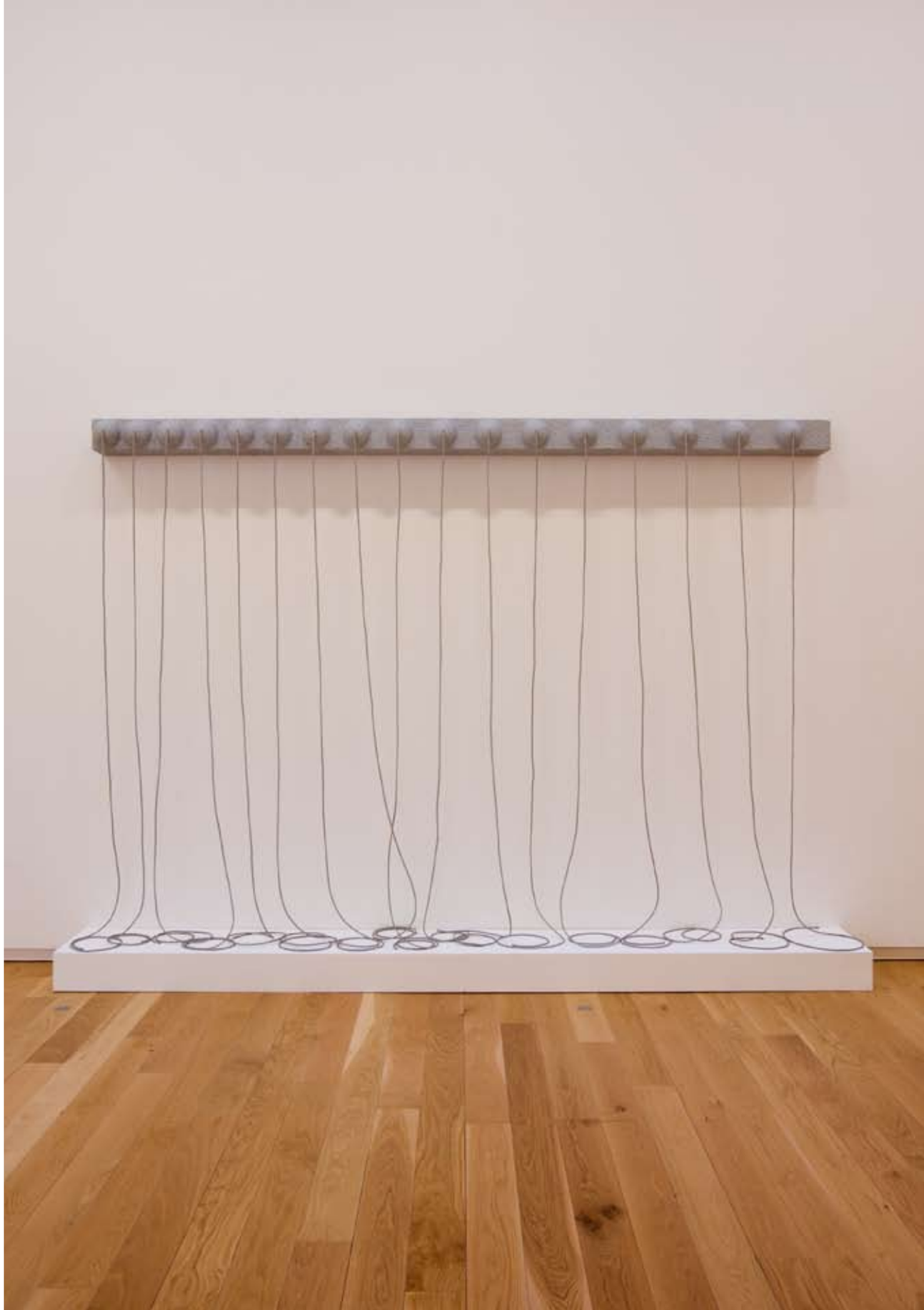
Piero Manzoni
Base Magica – Scultura Vivente / Magic Base – Living Sculpture
1961



Eva Hesse

Eva Hesse fled Germany with her parents, emigrating to New York in 1939 when she was three. Her parents eventually divorced, her mother committed suicide when Hesse was 10, her own marriage failed and her father died soon after, events that haunted her tragically short life. Symptoms of the brain tumour that eventually killed her first appeared in 1968 and she died in 1970 at the age of 34. In the last three years of her life, she worked at a furious pace, as if to outrun time, despite debilitating operations. By 1967, she had discovered latex. With fibreglass and plastics, it became the characteristic – and problematic – material of her celebrated soft sculptures, now mottled and so fragile that they are in danger of disintegration. They are eroticised, feminist versions of Minimalism – 'psychic models' of her interior life, the sculptor Robert Smithson called them – and her way of coping with emotional chaos. *Addendum*, 1967, in this exhibition, shows how she personalises the premises of Minimalism as she simultaneously contradicts them by incorporating references to the body. Made of painted papier-maché, wood and cord instead of steel, the strings drop from breast-like knobs, wavering delicately as they fall into a random swirl on the floor in defiance of Minimalism's hard surfaces and calculated systems. Struggling for recognition in the male-dominated art world of the 1960s, Hesse re-invented sculpture in the process.

Eva Hesse
Addendum
1967

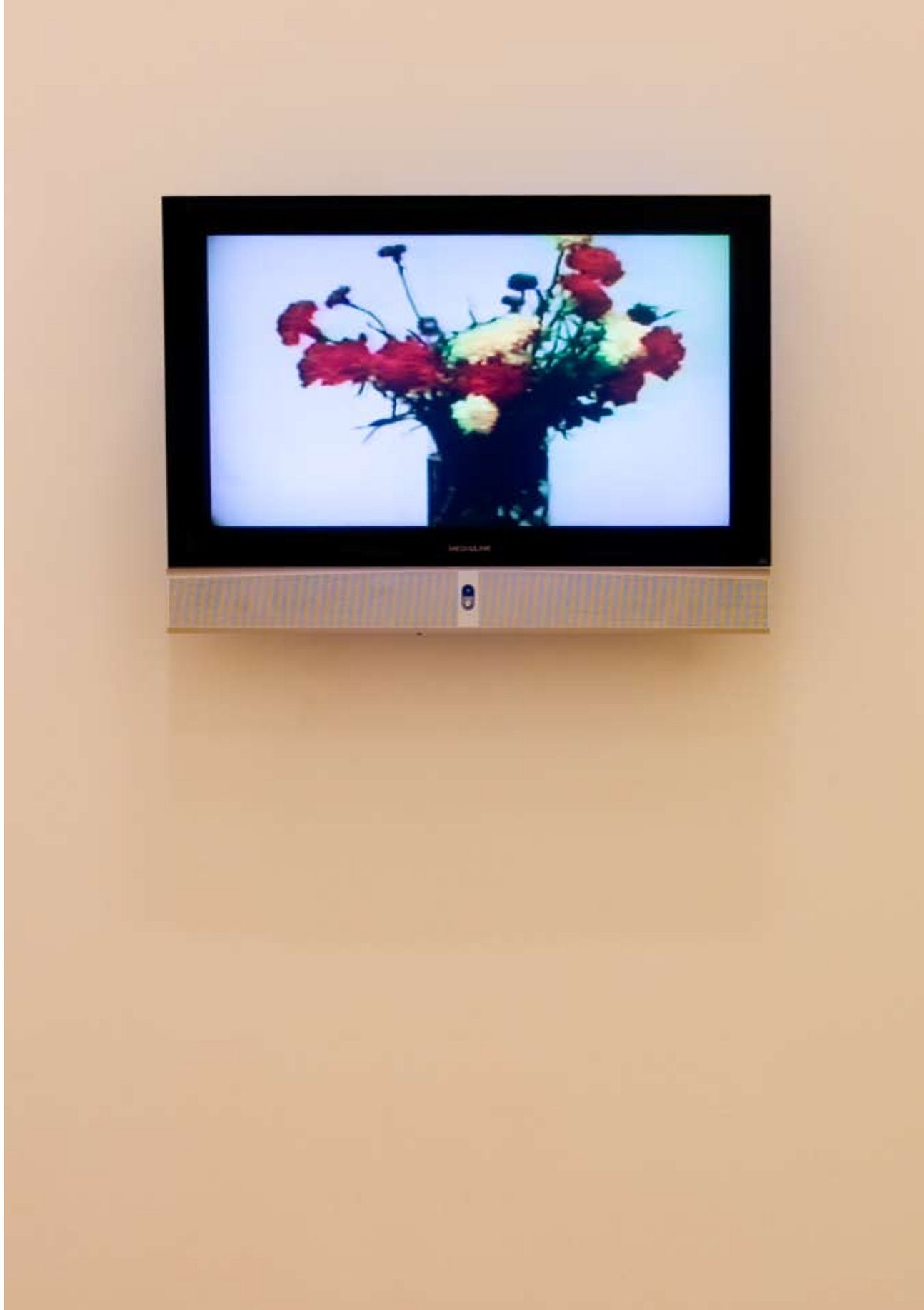


Bas Jan Ader

Bas Jan Ader, greatly admired by his peers, is not as well-known as some of the others in the exhibition. His death is the most mysterious and inconclusive of the group and there has been a surge of renewed interest in his work of late. Born in the Netherlands in 1942 (his father, a minister, was executed by the Nazis for harbouring Jewish refugees), he settled in Los Angeles in 1963, sailing there from Morocco in a journey that took eleven months. He drowned at sea – or so it is assumed – in 1975 at the age of 33 as he attempted an Atlantic crossing in a 12½-foot pocket cruiser, the smallest vessel on record to try to do so. He wanted to film the trip for the second part of a trilogy aptly called *In Search of the Miraculous*. His boat was eventually found off the west coast of Ireland, although his body was never recovered and there have been rumours about suicide. Other coincidences and strange occurrences surrounded his disappearance and as the solitary adventurer, the existential searcher, he seems a prime candidate for mythification. A conceptualist and performance artist who shared the tropes of Bruce Naumann and other artists of the period, he was also a photographer and filmmaker whose principal mode of expression was the films, photos and text he created to document his performances. Presented as installations, they are independent works of art. Ader's most frequently cited piece is *I'm too sad to tell you* in which the artist forces himself to cry in front of the camera, raising questions about the relationship of art and life, about the neutrality and intrusiveness of the camera and how it changes the nature of what it records. Falling and gravity are other subjects that appear frequently in his projects, as does a sense of loss, an actual and metaphoric search for something just beyond reach. Or so it seems in retrospect, part of how we see those who die young – with greater clarity or greater romanticism – and how they see themselves. Ader has written, 'The sea, the land, the artist have with great sadness known they too will be no more'.

Ader, who was much interested in his Dutch heritage although he chose to live in Los Angeles, is represented by *Primary Time*, 1974, a recording of a performance in which the artist, dressed in black, only his torso visible, arranges flowers in a vase, separating them into red, yellow and blue bunches, then mixes them up again, a reference to de Stijl, Mondrian, Rietveld and the Dutch flower industry.

Bas Jan Ader
Primary Time
1974



Gordon Matta-Clark

Gordon Matta-Clark, born in 1943 to the Chilean Surrealist painter Roberto Matta-Echaurren and the American artist Anne Clark, was raised almost exclusively by his mother. Exceptionally charismatic, he was a key figure in the downtown art world of the 1970s, co-founded Food, the legendary artist-run restaurant, and was a member of the collaborative Anarchitecture. He had a troubled twin brother and while he prospered, his brother did not, unexpectedly jumping out of the window of Matta-Clark's loft to his death when left alone there for a moment. That was 1976. Soon after, Matta-Clark was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He told friends that he believed the cancer was connected to his brother's suicide and perhaps it eased the profound guilt that he had always felt about this complicated relationship in which he was always the more fortunate twin. Matta-Clark died two years later at 35. He had, essentially, only those two years to produce the bulk of his mature work, spurred on, no doubt, by the sense of diminishing time. He had formally studied architecture and is best known for his large-scale architectural dissections, his 'building cuts' (*Splitting*, the magnificent *Day's End, Office Baroque*) that removed parts of the facades, floors and walls of existing structures scheduled for demolition. Dramatic, gravity-defying, they were actualizations of deconstructivist and situationist theories, using, repurposing and recycling found objects on a grand scale. In addition, there are the curiously poetic architectural sections that function like more conventional sculpture such as *Sauna Piece*, 1971, shown with a video, *Sauna View*, 1973, in this exhibition. His practice had a process-oriented, performative and relational aspect to it and incorporated puns and other forms of wordplay, its provisionality preserved on film, video and photography. With an ardent following, his reputation has steadily soared in the years since his death.

Gordon Matta-Clark
Sauna Piece
1971

Helen Chadwick

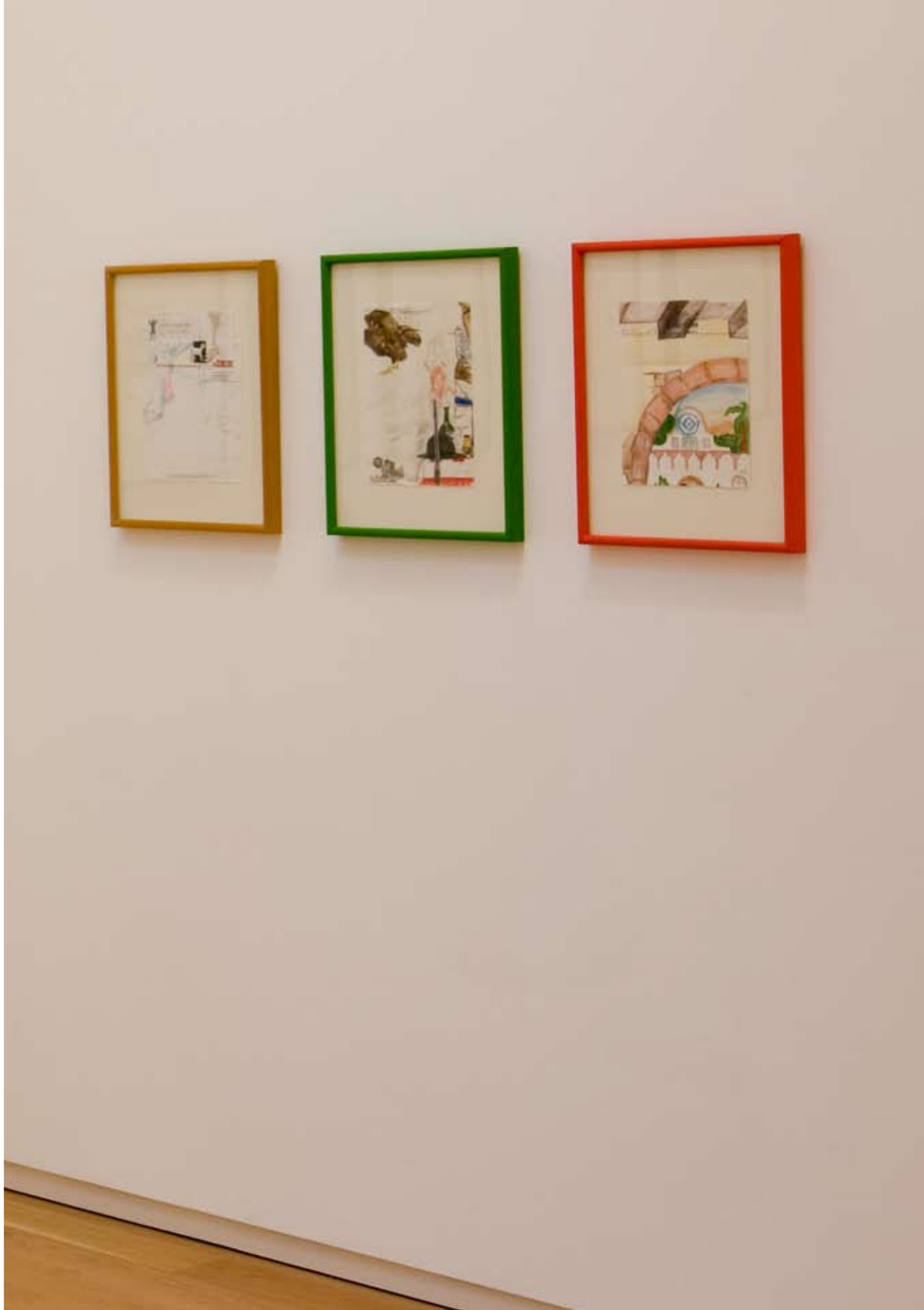
Helen Chadwick, an English artist, was born in Croydon, South London in 1953 and nominated for the Turner Prize in 1987. She has often been categorised as a feminist, and her work, frequently described as visceral, assertively and uncompromisingly addresses the image of women in society – but not exclusively so. Her materials are often organic, such as meat, flowers, chocolate, dead human embryos, and include effluvia from her own body. She is perhaps most celebrated for her then controversial *Piss Flowers* (1991–92), bronze sculptures cast from hollows made in the snow by the heat of her and her lover's urine, contrasting heat and cold, the unseemly and the hypocritical, the transient and the immutable. *Viral Landscapes* is an important series of photographs from the late 1980s in which magnified images of cells from Chadwick's body were superimposed over landscapes. Ironically, Chadwick died of a viral infection in 1996 when she was 43, older than all the other artists in the exhibition except for Martin Kippenberger. *Meat Abstracts*, from 1989, is another seminal series of large-scale photographs and depicts cut meat juxtaposed with leather and fabric remnants, contemporary interpretations of the vanitas theme. Challenging prevailing notions of beauty and the decorative, of the woman's body as an object for ravishment by the male gaze – ideas that were in the process of change – Chadwick chose to no longer represent her body in a conventional manner. Instead, she shifted to representations of the body's interior where gender was not so readily distinguishable, although she was still intrigued by themes of sexuality and gender. She has said that she was exploring human physicality through physical matter and didn't understand the difficulty that some were having with it. The rosy flower arrangements in *Wreaths to Pleasure 1 & 10*, 1992/3, act in the opposite manner: flower arrangements that suggest genitalia and other body parts.

Helen Chadwick
Wreath to Pleasure No. 10
1992/3

Martin Kippenberger

Martin Kippenberger was born in 1953 in Dortmund, Germany, the same year as Helen Chadwick, and died of cancer one year after her, in 1997. Known for a richly erratic, prodigious body of work, Kippenberger came of age in a period eager to leave the war behind, as ready for change as he was. A reflexive iconoclast, provocateur, appropriationist and hard-drinking narcissist, he had Dadaist, Duchampian ideas which were antithetical to the high seriousness of Joseph Beuys, Anselm Kiefer and Gerhard Richter. A tireless, if antic, promoter of his own image, Kippenberger once proclaimed that he was the ultimate embodiment of the art of the 1980s. In the more than ten years since his death, this most radical, most unrepentant of artists, whose irreverence extended to his own mortality, has been rehabilitated, embraced by the mainstream art world, even in Germany where he had always been largely unappreciated, and, like Matta-Clark, has become the object of veneration by younger artists. This co-opting and re-directing of the caustic, anti-establishment Kippenberger is both instructive and ironic, like the title of the 9-part work included in this exhibition, *Untitled (The invention of a Joke)*, dating from the early 1990s.

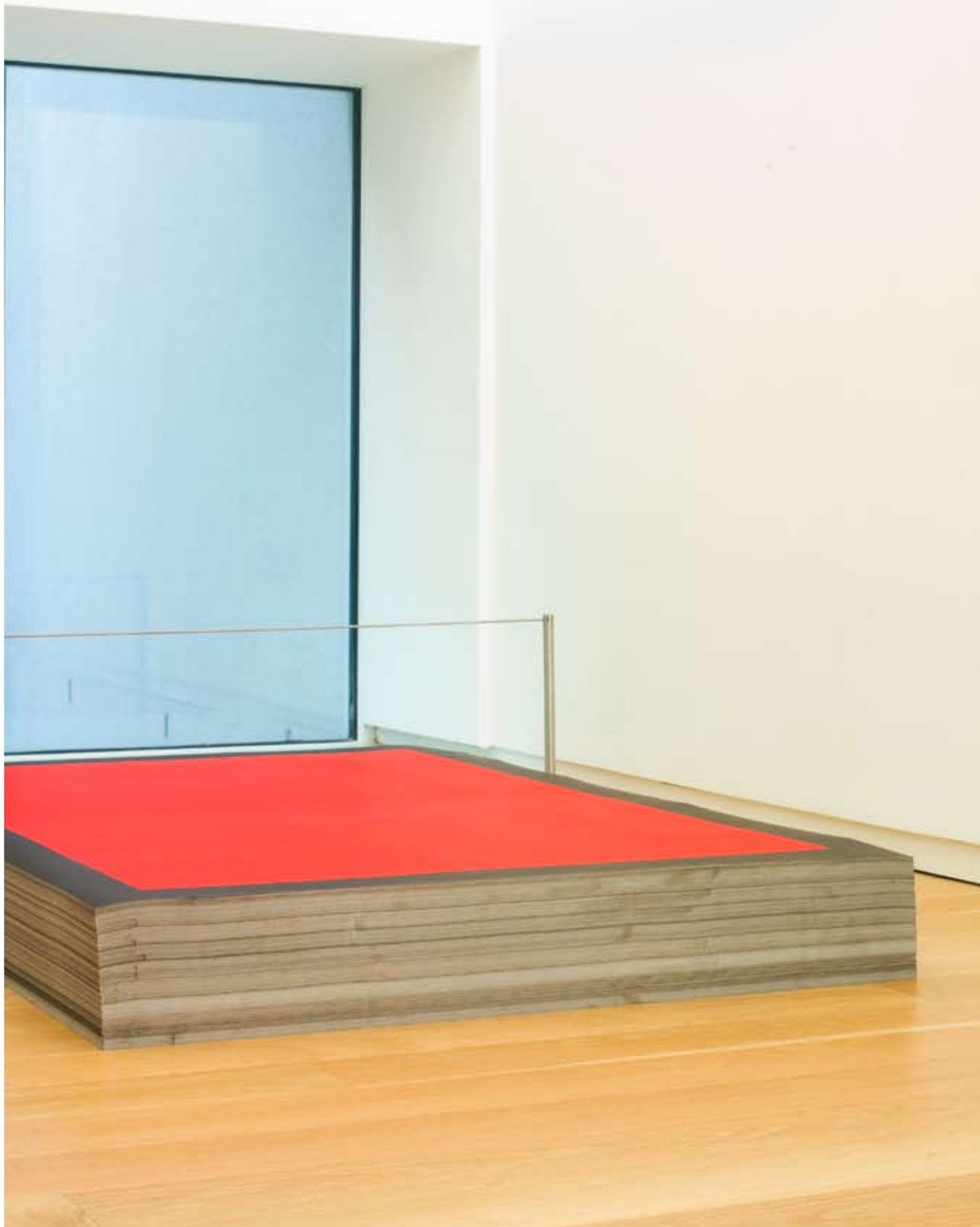
Martin Kippenberger
Untitled (The Invention of a Joke)
1991



Felix Gonzalez-Torres

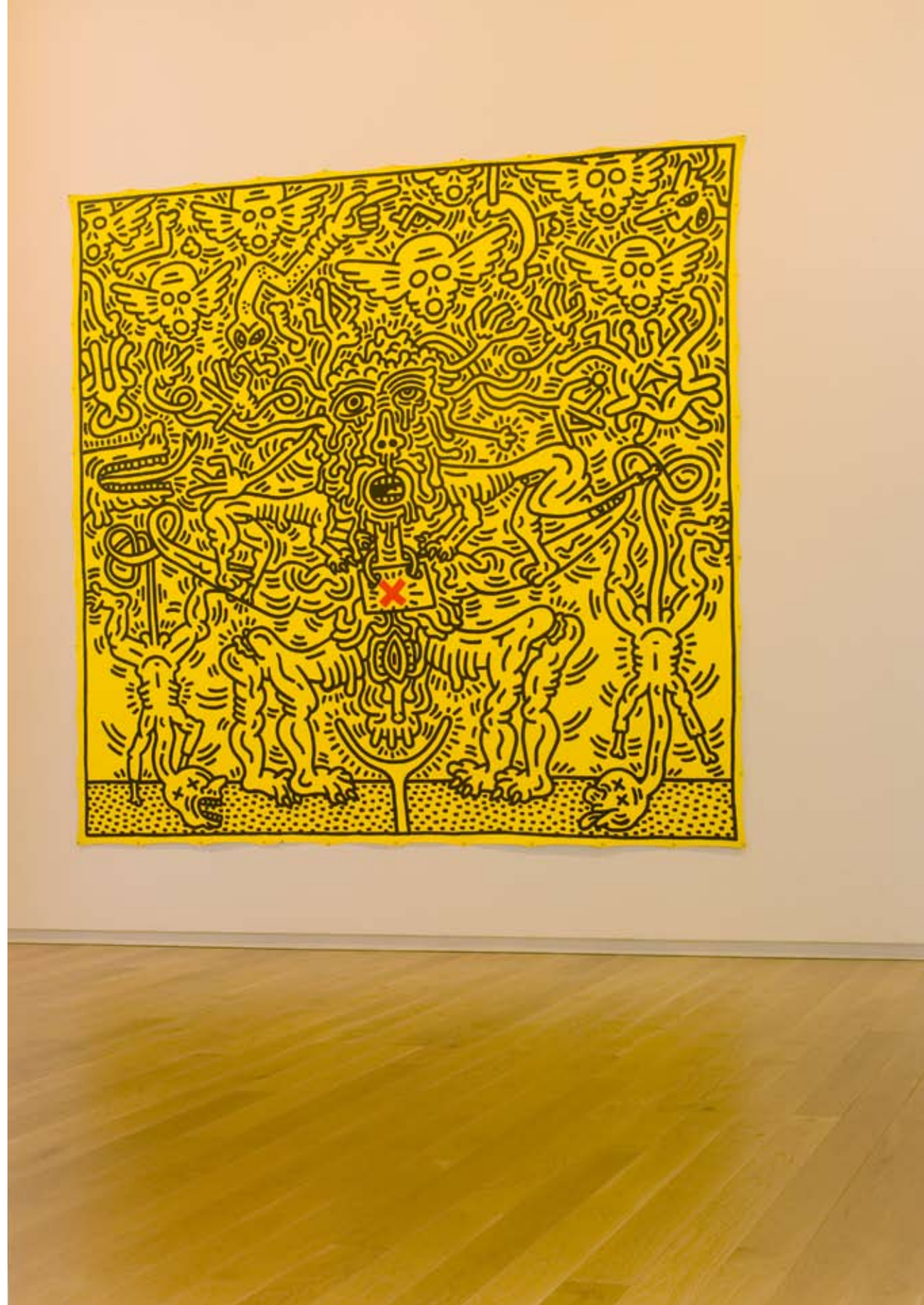
Felix Gonzalez-Torres was born in Cuba in 1957, raised in Puerto Rico, then came to New York to study photography. Throughout his career, he was deeply interested in the merging of public and private life and in social and political causes. He was a member of Group Material, a New York based art collective that sponsored cultural activism and education in the community. While his work resembled that of the Minimalists and the Conceptualists in the elegant economy of its realisation and installation, it was motivated by social action and required the active participation of the spectator. Using commonplace, mass-produced materials such as wrapped candy, beads, stacks of paper and strings of light bulbs, Gonzalez-Torres addressed themes of gender, sexuality, disease, death, renewal, love and memory. His 'dateline' pieces consisted of lists of non-sequential dates mixed with names of social and political figures and references to topical events, often related to gay politics. His mounds of candy free for the taking, piled in corners or spread out like carpets at exhibitions, were confusing at first, as were the stacks of giveaway posters, upending notions about the inviolability of the art object, its exclusivity and monetary value. His strings of light bulbs, like Hesse's soft sculptures, were a critique of Minimalism's unyielding obduracy and emblems of purity, spirituality. One of the most personal and most touching of his projects featured a photographic image of a rumpled, empty bed, the impression of two bodies visible. This was mounted on 24 billboards throughout New York in 1992, a tribute to the artist's lover, who had recently died of AIDS. Gonzalez-Torres died in 1996, at 39, of the same disease.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres
"*Untitled*" (NRA)
1991



Keith Haring

While Gonzalez-Torres lived until 1996, the AIDS epidemic decimated the gay artists of New York's East Village, many dying in the second half of the 1980s. Keith Haring, whose art is inextricably linked with that drug-stoked, heterodox period of wilful dreams and tarnished glamour, was one of them. Born in Pennsylvania, he came to New York in 1978 and set off almost immediately with a gang of graffiti artists to mark the streets, sidewalks and subways of the city, armed with chalk and what would soon became his trademark image, the Radiant Baby (he said that babies represented the future and were the image of perfection), throwing himself headlong into the city's flourishing hip-hop culture. His repertory of appealing, comic, instantly recognisable pictorial images – set into turbulent motion by 'action' lines – made him an instant celebrity, the visual ambassador of an era. His heroes, he claimed, were Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsburg, Andy Warhol, Grace Jones, Jean-Michel Basquiat and William Burroughs, with all of whom he collaborated in one way or another. As the decade progressed, Haring became more and more socially and politically active, supporting causes from anti-apartheid to children's diseases and AIDS research. Haring was diagnosed HIV-positive in 1988 and died in 1990 of AIDS-related complications. He was 31 years old and is represented here by a punchy, crowded, large yellow acrylic and oil tarp painting, *AIDS '85*, 1985.

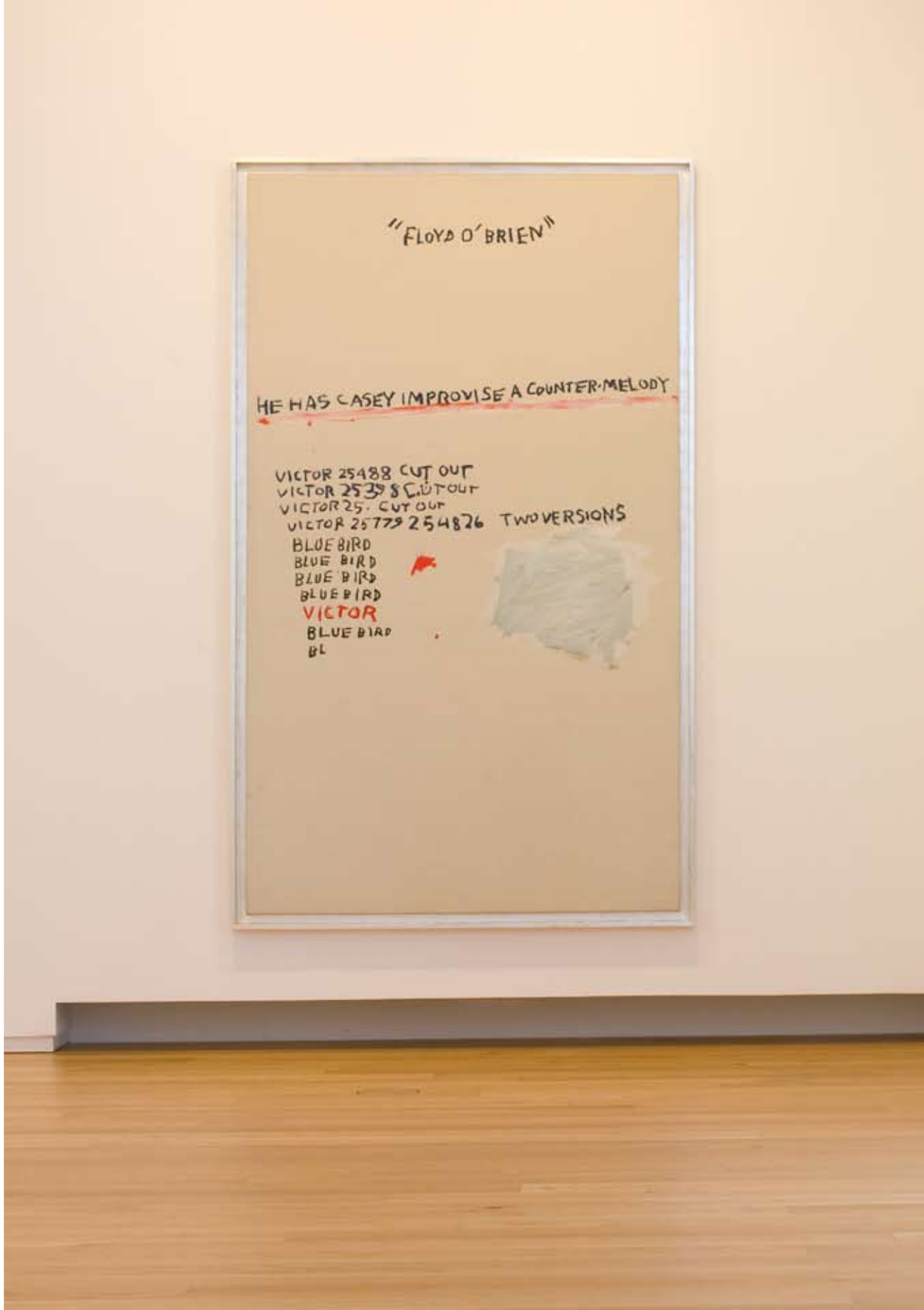


Keith Haring
Aids '85
1985

Jean-Michel Basquiat

Jean-Michel Basquiat, another precocious graffiti artist turned superstar, Keith Haring's friend and neighbour and Andy Warhol's protégé, also glittered furiously but briefly in the 1980s, dying of a drug overdose in 1988. Born in 1960, he was famous by 21 and dead by 27. Basquiat's abbreviated life exemplified the lamentable but all too familiar story of early success followed by self-destruction. Nonetheless, the hyper-prolific and breathtakingly talented young artist churned out a seemingly endless stream of paintings and drawings in the short time he had. Basquiat's assertive, often ambitiously scaled, paintings or constructions layer collaged drawings over paint. Their dissonant, jazzed-up colours and jangled strokes echo the rhythms of hip-hop or the music of Charlie Parker, who figures in many of his paintings, from *Charles the First* to a 9-foot black circle that represents Parker's LP, *Now's the time*, to which the title of this exhibition is indebted. *Grazing – Soup to Nuts, MGM 1930*, one of the paintings representing him in this exhibition, depicts a dinosaur skeleton whose front legs are human bones and whose skin is made transparent, subject to Basquiat's 'X-ray' vision. The hybrid creature is feasting and Basquiat follows the process, from soup to nuts, in a complicated system of references, as a metaphor for the exploitations of global consumption and the oppressions of colonialism. All his works are iconographic pile-ups, mixing impassioned protestations against the social and political injustices that blacks have long suffered with fierce pride in black achievement, his heroes consecrated by a signature, three-point 'W' crown.

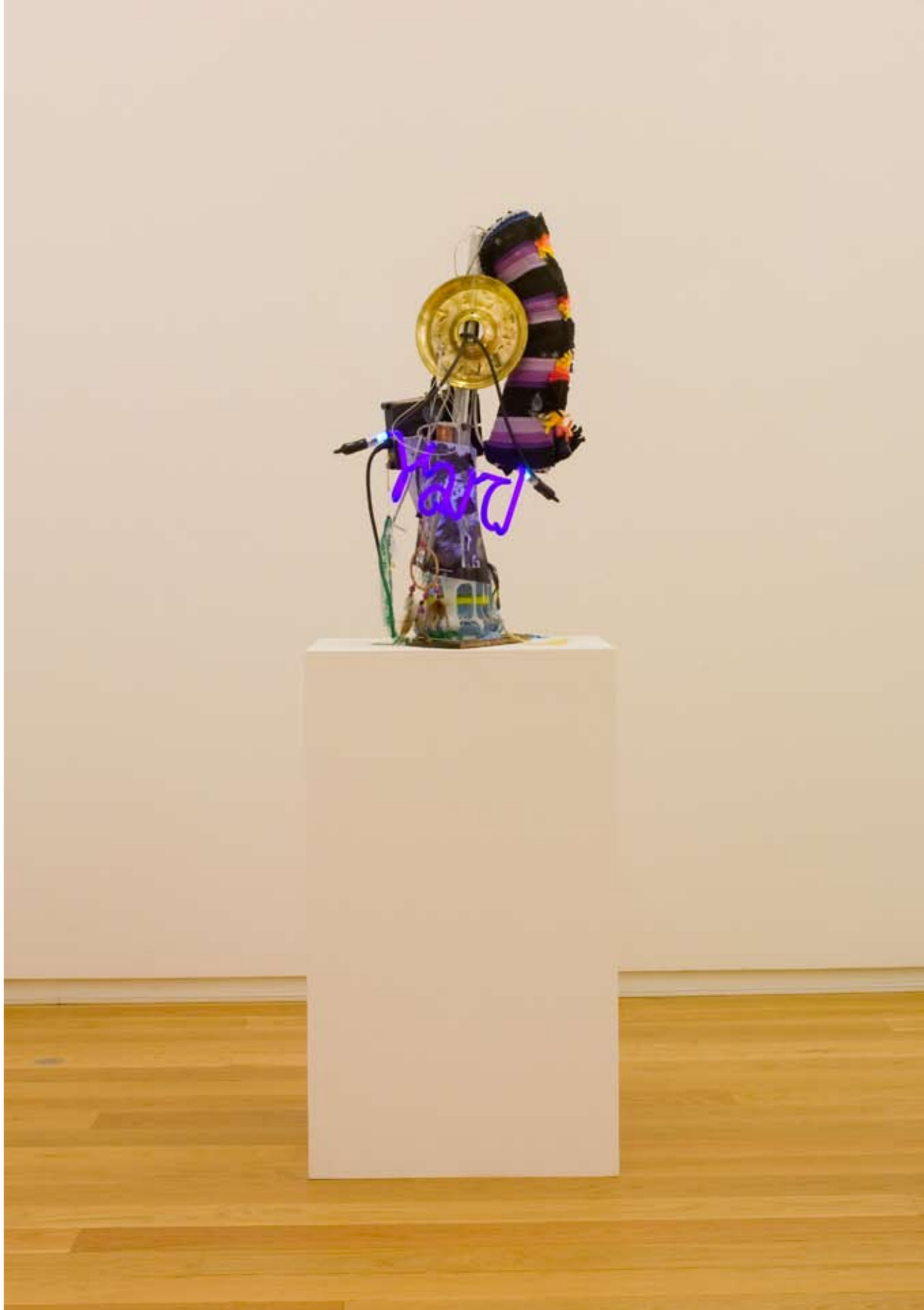
Jean-Michel Basquiat
Untitled
1983



Jason Rhoades

Jason Rhoades, born in California in 1965 and based in Los Angeles, died in 2006, aged 41, of drug intoxication and heart failure. His metaphoric leaps, his visual puns and wordplay are a vision of the American dream gone screechingly amok. Yet that vision remains optimistic, with a peculiar romanticism that is part cynical, part innocent and often rapturous. *Meccatuna*, 2003, and *Black Pussy*, 2006 – his last and most ambitious work – are part of what was to be a trilogy and his magnum opus. *Meccatuna* is a swaggering, subversive, double-edged and defiantly diverting exploration of our post-September 11th collective consciousness as American tourism greets Islam, Saudi hijackers and the occupation of Iraq that includes a replica of the Ka'aba constructed from one million Lego pieces. Another provocateur, Rhoades never resisted the urge to overload. Describing Paul McCarthy, formerly his teacher and later his collaborator, he said that McCarthy is always pushing things, not afraid to take chances or screw up yet is also very precise – which might describe Rhoades as well. Rhoades' installations – sprawling bazaars with an inventory that rivals outlets such as Walmart – appear capable of ongoing expansion. And his Pop-Dadaist, bricolage inclinations added up to an elaborate, free-wheeling, but still focused, system of associations that blithely inserted American consumerist culture into other contexts. For *Now's the time*, Rhoades is represented by a pair of Idols, small sculptures from the *Black Pussy* extravaganza. These ambiguous objects, cobbled-together combines of neon words and slightly altered mechanical parts, suggest the scatological, the fetishistic and the sacred in about equal measure, a talisman, no doubt, to the conflation and commodification of sex and religion, or what we worship now.

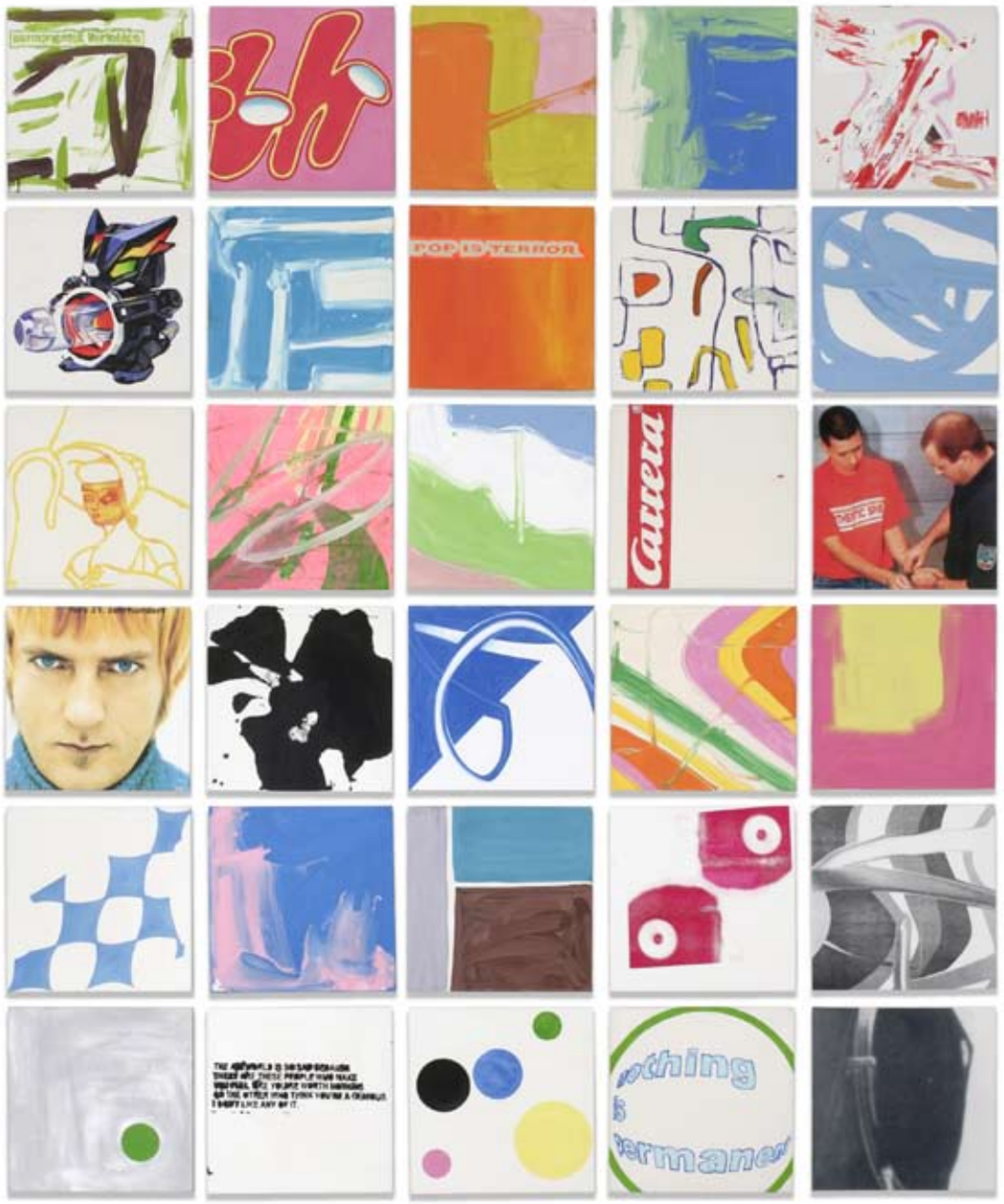
Jason Rhoades
Yard (Idol 60)
2005



Michel Majerus

Michel Majerus was born in Luxembourg in 1967 and based in Berlin when he died in a plane crash in 2002, en route home. Considered a pivotal figure among a new generation of European painters with a rising international profile, Majerus left a legacy which included an immense and remarkable body of work. Painting was his preferred medium but, like most artists today, he also worked with digital imagery, film and other media, his subjects and formulations often appropriated from pop music videos, computer games, television, advertising and corporate design as well as the history of modernist painting. Just as frequently he referred to artists such as Andy Warhol, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Frank Stella, James Rosenquist, Cy Twombly, Gerhard Richter, Ed Ruscha and David Hockney, making no distinction between high and low. Called a visual hacker by some, he revelled in the sheer availability of images at his disposal. Majerus looked for ways to create vibrant painting installations that corresponded to various modes of contemporary expression and structured his paintings like virtual spaces, arranged in discontinuous narratives that reflected the new, real-time cinéma verité of the internet. In an extended stay in Los Angeles in 2001, he began an important series of paintings, the so-called LA Paintings, which he completed in Berlin, transfixed by Los Angeles' artificiality, exemplified by the alternative reality of Hollywood and the giant billboards that relentlessly line the freeways, all selling the fulfilment of dreams through consumption. Majerus' world view, like that of Rhoades, is based on unflagging production, flux and excess. Their irreverent, destabilised representations echo certain realities of our times, such as *What looks good today may not look good tomorrow*, the title of one of Majerus' late paintings, and *Nothing is permanent*, a succinct, premonitory message that appears to balloon out of another that all the artists in this show knew all too well.

Michel Majerus
Ohne Titel/Untitled
1996-2001



Remarks on *Now's the time*

Padraic E. Moore

I

Within Western visual culture, an obsession with resurrection and excavation of earlier modern periods intensifies as we accelerate into the new century. Though the proclivity toward revivification is not novel, the causal factors behind this phenomenon alter cyclically with the passage of time. Three decades ago – as postmodernity entered what could be considered its peak – a revivalist impulse was perversely motivated by a desire to castigate and repudiate the legacy of the Modernist Project which had, for the most part, been predicated upon ideals of progress and faith in the future. Seismic shifts have occurred since this period, which was marked by an inclination to subvert, deconstruct, and renounce the organising principles of the Modern past. While it is not uncommon for contemporary generations of artists to subjectively appropriate and utilise pre-existing concepts and frameworks, these moves are spurred not by a desire to deconstruct, but a necessity to reinstate and discover ideals that have been almost entirely eliminated. Today, the hunger to question the authority of the canon, interrogate the grand narrative, and repudiate the power of the auratic art object no longer dominates. Contemporary reference to precedent is motivated instead by a necessity to conceive of a functional framework imbued with an optimistic tone. This shift is manifest in the work of cultural producers who investigate the art historical or socio-political past, as well as the work of those who cultivate 'archival aesthetics' by assembling, preserving and displaying artefacts in an act of cultural museumification. Though the legacy of many of our recent predecessors might now be registered as somehow utopian, there is a tangible tendency amongst contemporary artists to investigate the potentiality of prefigured paradigms that may be considered unfinished and, therefore, still loaded with possibility.

2

The penchant for those idioms of the past that are simultaneously reassuring and challenging can be causally connected to the impulse to heroicise, revere and perennially reappraise those exceptional producers who departed life prematurely, leaving an unfinished legacy that may be re-accessed and re-interpreted in subjective terms. Hegel claimed the hero was an incarnation of the *Volksgeist* of a particular culture and, indeed, the universal tendency to heroicise seems to intensify in the face of spiritual bankruptcy, existential crisis and a widescale demotion of the theistic *force majeure*. Even those whose declarations announced the death of God reiterate the notion that divinity, or something approaching it, can stem from the creative capabilities of the extraordinary individual. Of course, the idolisation and heroicisation of the cultural producer also fortifies and furthers an esoteric and supreme legacy of art that, in turn, justifies the intensity and seriousness so many have invested – and continue to invest – in its construction.

3

While interpretation through biography and anecdote narrows the scope for an objective analysis of an artist's work, such an approach is inescapable in the case of artists who depart prematurely. The inconclusivity resulting from untimely termination provides a point of departure for a perpetually unfolding and unfinished narrative, the constant return to which results in an immortalisation of the absent subject. Hagiography is rendered inseparable from material legacy, and it becomes impossible to read an artist's legacy without gazing through the lens of his or her early death. The legacy of the artist who departs prematurely is suspended in a twilight juncture, brimming with the optimistic promise of what the future might have held, but invariably destined to remain tainted by the patina of tragedy.
While media, fashion and technology conspire in the resurrection and occasionally necrophilic elevation of the work and personality of the prematurely deceased, the process takes place predominantly in the custodial institutions – museums and galleries where memory is rekindled, or invented. It is through the artifacts produced by exceptional creators that their cult is manifest. In addition to creating a space that approaches a fulfillment of metaphysical and incorporeal needs in a legitimately humanistic manner, the custodial institution permits the individual to cultivate a polytheistic pantheon. Artworks become vessels within which the essence of the creator's life is contained – indexes of an existence in a society overwhelmed by an excess of commodities.

4

The excitation and sensation evoked by the chattels of the prodigious dead cannot be explained by fiscal or aesthetic value alone, nor can it be drawn solely as an upshot of the mechanics of mass media, advertising or celebrity production. Even without these symbiotically functioning structures of amplification, the narrative surrounding certain objects – like some of those featured in this exhibition – results in their inculcation with a thaumaturgic value and totemic power. This partially explains why certain *objets d'art* incite practices which, though normalised, have origins in a mystical, ritualistic impulse that might seem incompatible with a rational and incredulous society. The surge of devotees traversing the globe on pilgrimages to temples where redemptory revelations may be experienced in the presence of exceptional art objects exemplifies the continued power of the art object to inspire awe. Perhaps this ritualistic response to the art objects of the prematurely departed might be viewed as a latter day equivalent to practices which surrounded the cult of the relic that proliferated in medieval Europe, whereby the bodies of saints were dismembered and disseminated to an adoring populace. Hence, the widespread societal surge in aesthetic appreciation cannot be explained solely through the affordability of travel and the promotion of fine art as a tourist attraction. There remains an underlying need to affirm the presence of the miraculous and the sublime, a fundamental necessity for an ontological transcendental order.

5

While the production and consumption of art may be seen as possessing inherently religious connotations, numerous artists have produced work in which references to liturgical rites and rhetoric appear particularly explicit. Whether producing work as a form of critique or as a means of satisfying a hunger to pioneer what Robert Smithson termed 'the art of new limits' [1], the manner in which these artists extended their practice beyond the production of discrete art objects fortified and galvanised archaic notions of art as something super-sensual.

In the cases where already explicitly religious references are compounded with the tragedy of the premature death, the narrative of the artist's life assumes an archetypal mythological quality. The omnipresence of the deceased artist via the dissemination of objects and reproductions may be viewed as a posthumous act of exploitation, but this also represents a permutation of transubstantiation, whereby artists are destined to be perpetually resurrected through semi-accurate reconstitution. An engine is thereby created for the endless revision of narratives and the authoring of new myth, without which, Piero Manzoni declared, 'art does not exist' [2].

[1] Robert Smithson "Fragments of an interview with P.A.Norvell, April 1969" (edited by Lucy Lippard) in *Six Years*; *The Dematerialisation of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1973).

[2] Piero Manzoni, "For the discovery of a zone of images. Spring 1957," *Azimuth 2* (1960) reprinted in *Piero Manzoni* (Tate Gallery, London, 1960).

6

Art cannot be a surrogate for religion, yet connections between the two emerged from the same sphere and may ultimately satisfy similar needs. Christ's premature death at 33 (the circumstances of which have become an emblematic spectacle subject to endless artistic representation) inaugurated the myth of his immortality, upon which the cult bearing his name is founded. Though there are, of course, differences, the case of Christ, like the artists featured in *Now's the time*, evidences that early death constitutes not only an appropriate narrative conclusion but also a 'profitable' career move. The cult of the prematurely departed artist is connected to, amplified, and made radiant by their compatibility of such figures with the requirements of a techno-capitalist market in which youth, genius and tragedy make for the ultimate spectacular commodity. As the scarcity of the limited commodity is confirmed, articles become charged with an adjuvant, 'extra monetary' value tantamount to the concept of 'real presence' upon which the Christian rite of communion is founded. The role of the artist within society has changed radically, yet psychic recollection of artist as shamanistic figure is retained. Furthermore, works of art or cultural artifacts have assumed an additional value in our accelerated age by fortifying the structural reality of, and giving material evidence to, chronological, linear temporality.

7

Art as salvation is not a new concept. In the 1890s, Albert Aurier proclaimed: 'One love alone is still allowed us, that of works of art. Let us, therefore, fling ourselves upon this last plank of salvation. Let us become mystics of art' [3]. In the hypermodern world this proposal has assumed additional gravity. For today, it is art that supports and permits idealism, and art alone that produces demigods and martyrs deemed worthy of veneration. If art cannot substitute for a proscriptive religion, its mythology can nevertheless be a source of meaning that is supreme because it permits space for a construction of the self. In this way art goes some way to illuminating the myopic chamber that is life.

[3] Herschel B Chipp with H. R. Rookmaaker, ' "Essay on a New Method of Criticism" by G. Albert Aurier' in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1968).

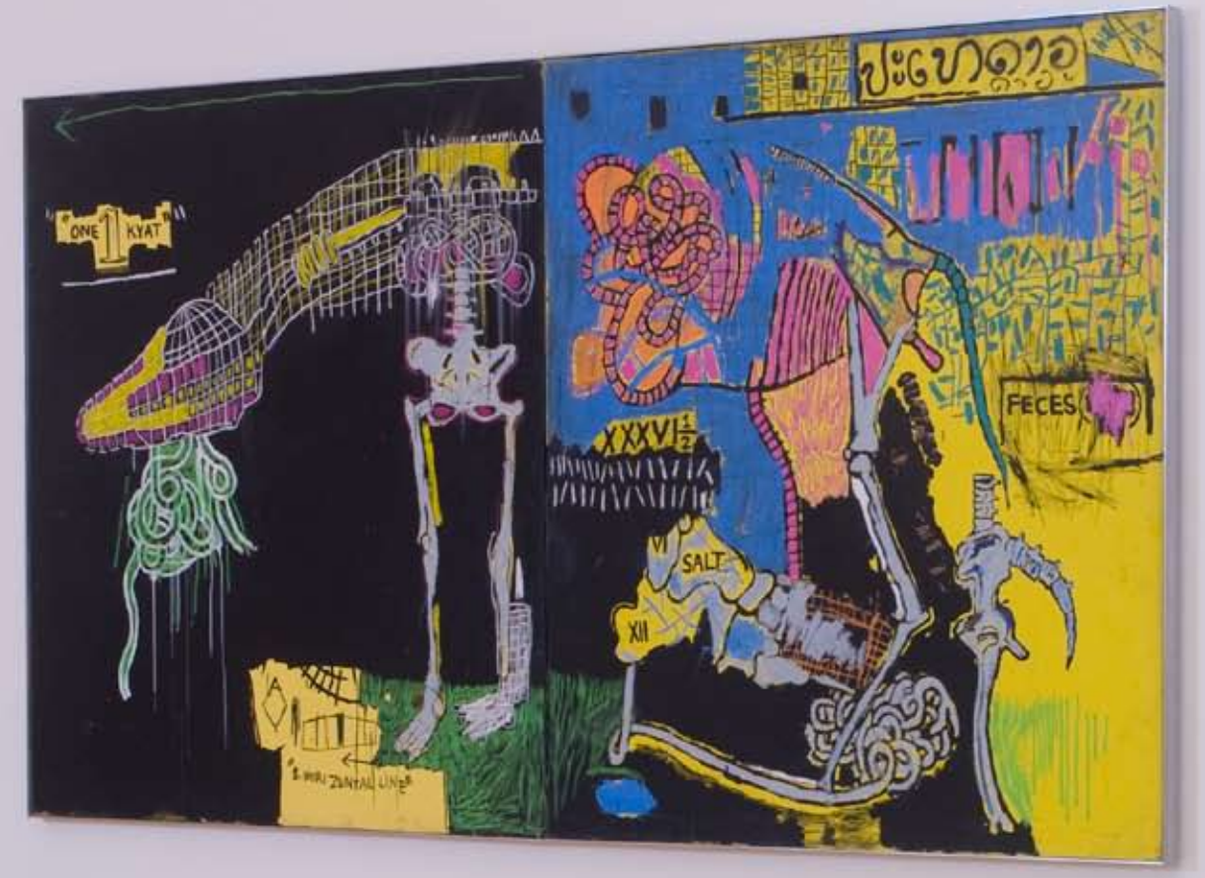
8

Today, in the wake of last wave of postmodernity, we arrive at an *impasse* whereby the ontologies of the recent past have become incompatible with the demands and methods of contemporary living. In this milieu those exceptional creators who distinguish themselves, independently from theistic gods, as originators so significant that the full potential of their contribution would only become evident long after they have departed, offer an antidote to this nihilistic void. Faith and adulation may be invested in such inspired, self-propelled authors who, in producing objects or ideas that endure beyond the caprices of fashion, inspire future generations to take part in the cult of creation, therein providing a means of temporarily consolidating a sense of community – or the illusion of one. Charles Baudelaire discussed how he gleaned solace and succour from what he saw as Modern art, remarking that it offered '*spiritualité*' and '*aspiration vers l'infini*' [4] ('aspiration toward the absolute'). Several of the artists featured in *Now's the time* had less than a decade to produce work that would be posthumously lauded as seminal and this exhibition itself reinforces the problematic situation whereby an artist's work is encountered in the first instance through the finite closure of a tragic end. However, it is not the death of these artists that is ultimately important. What is important – and worth celebrating – are the lives of the artists which are sustained and ongoing through the powerful legacy they left behind, via which we may obtain – as did Baudelaire – rare, precious moments of grace and a chance to meditate upon – and surrender to – the ecstasy of life.

Padraic E. Moore

[4] Charles Baudelaire, *Art in Paris 1845-1862; salons and other exhibitions reviewed by Baudelaire* (Phaidon Press, London, 1981).

Installation views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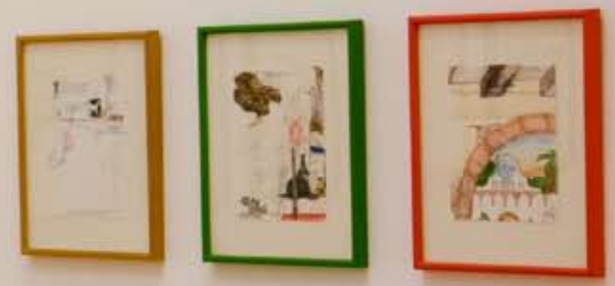

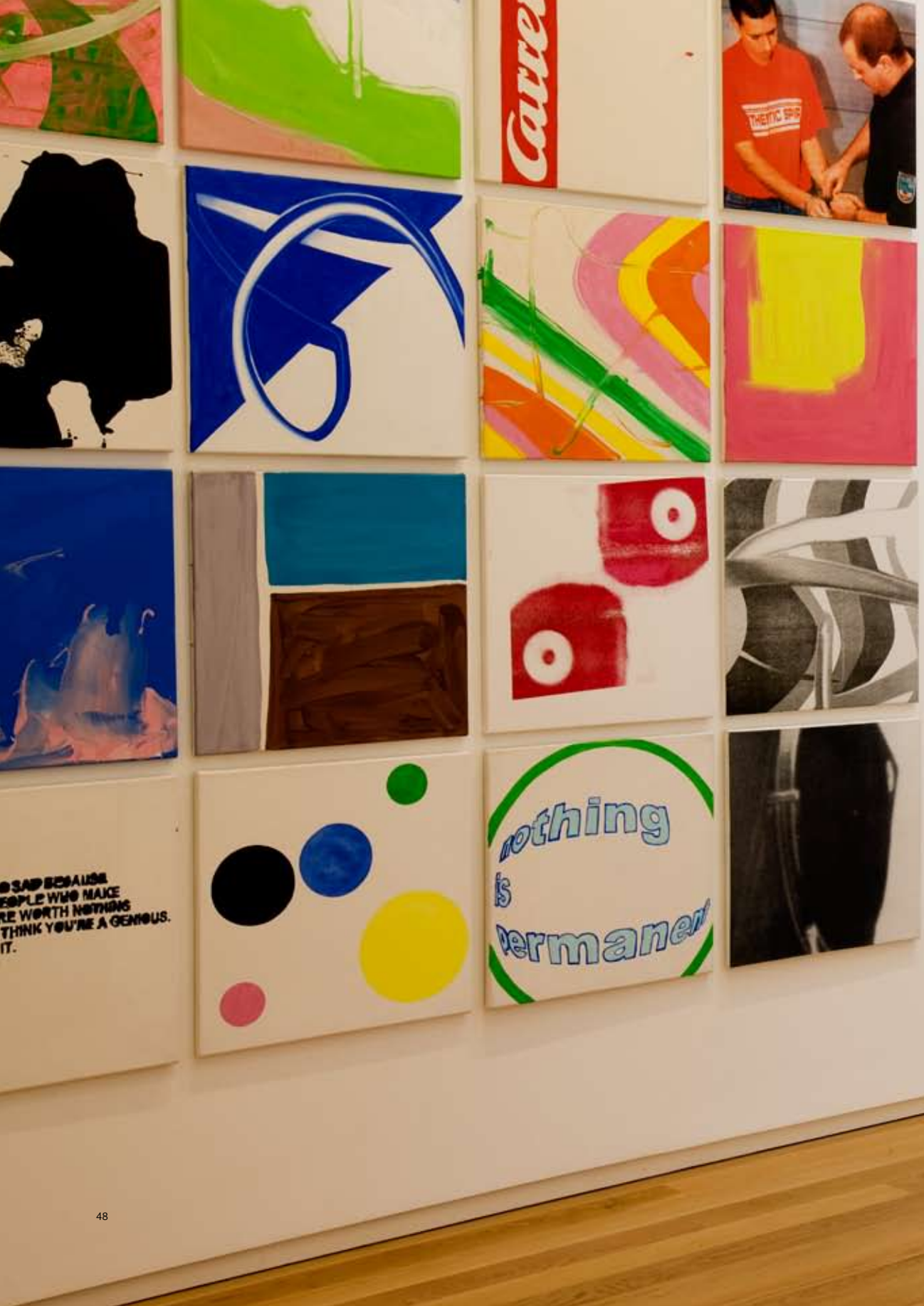
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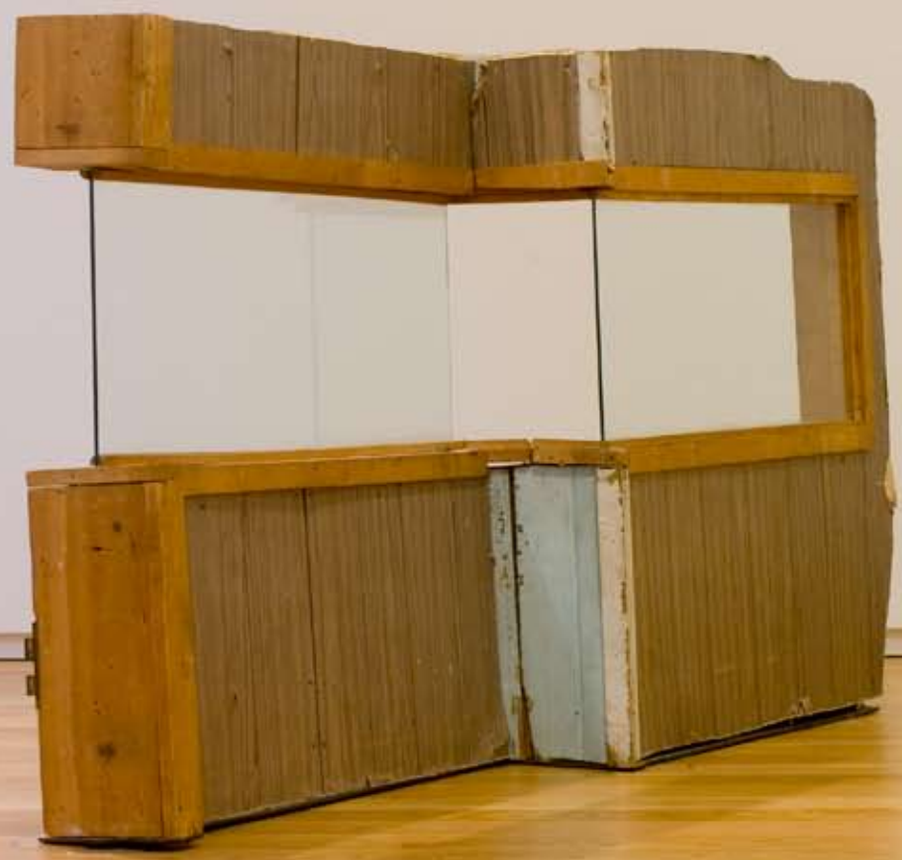

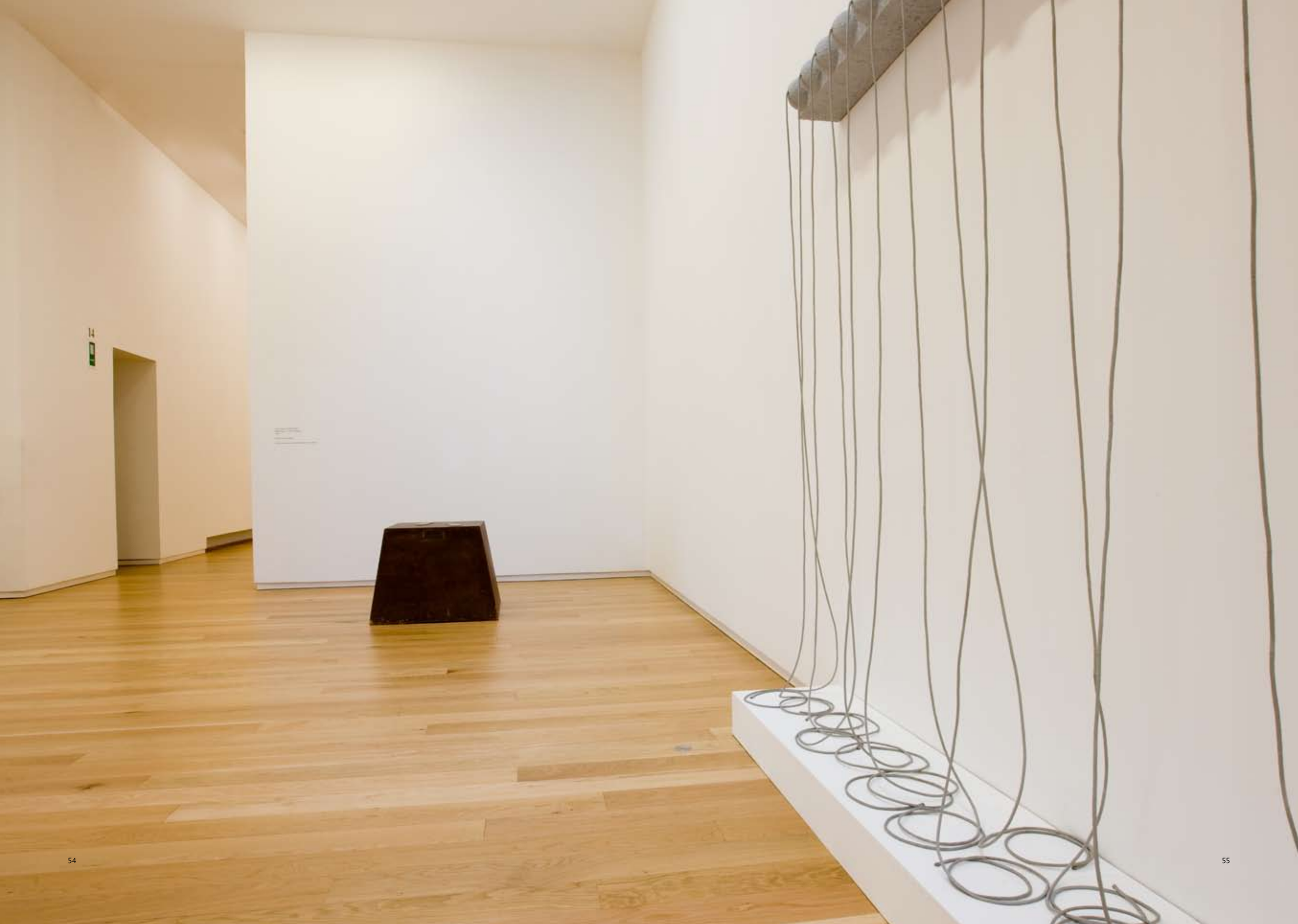

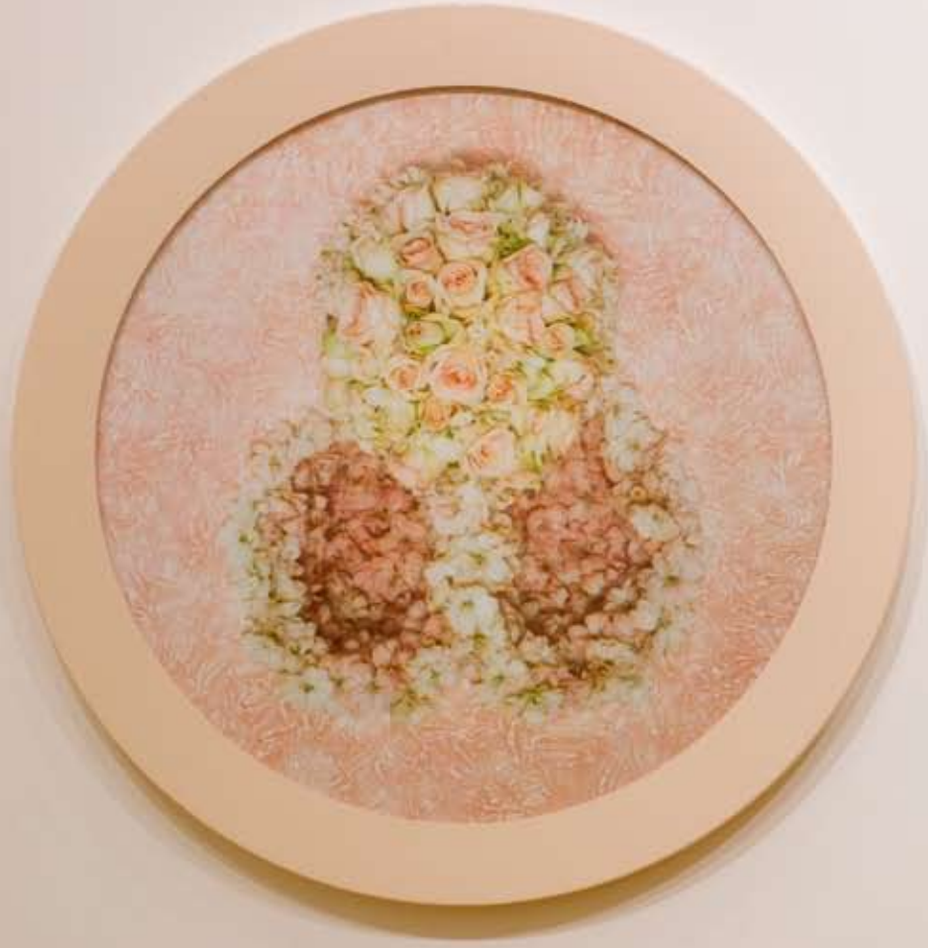

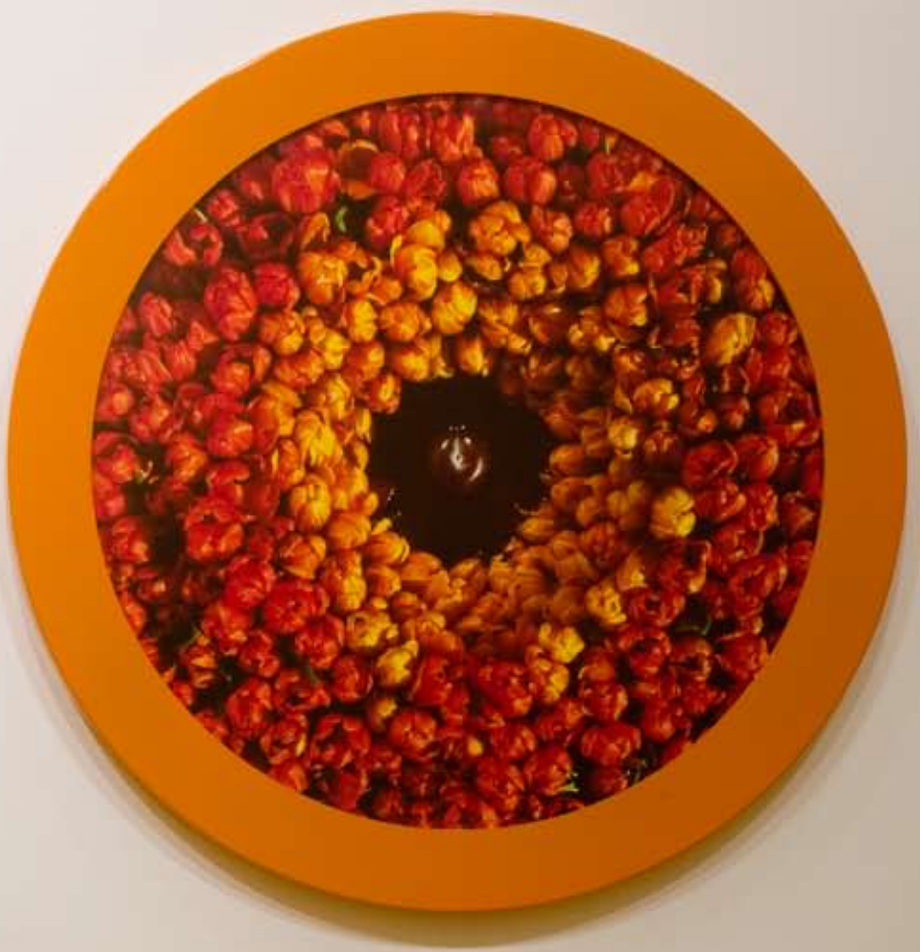

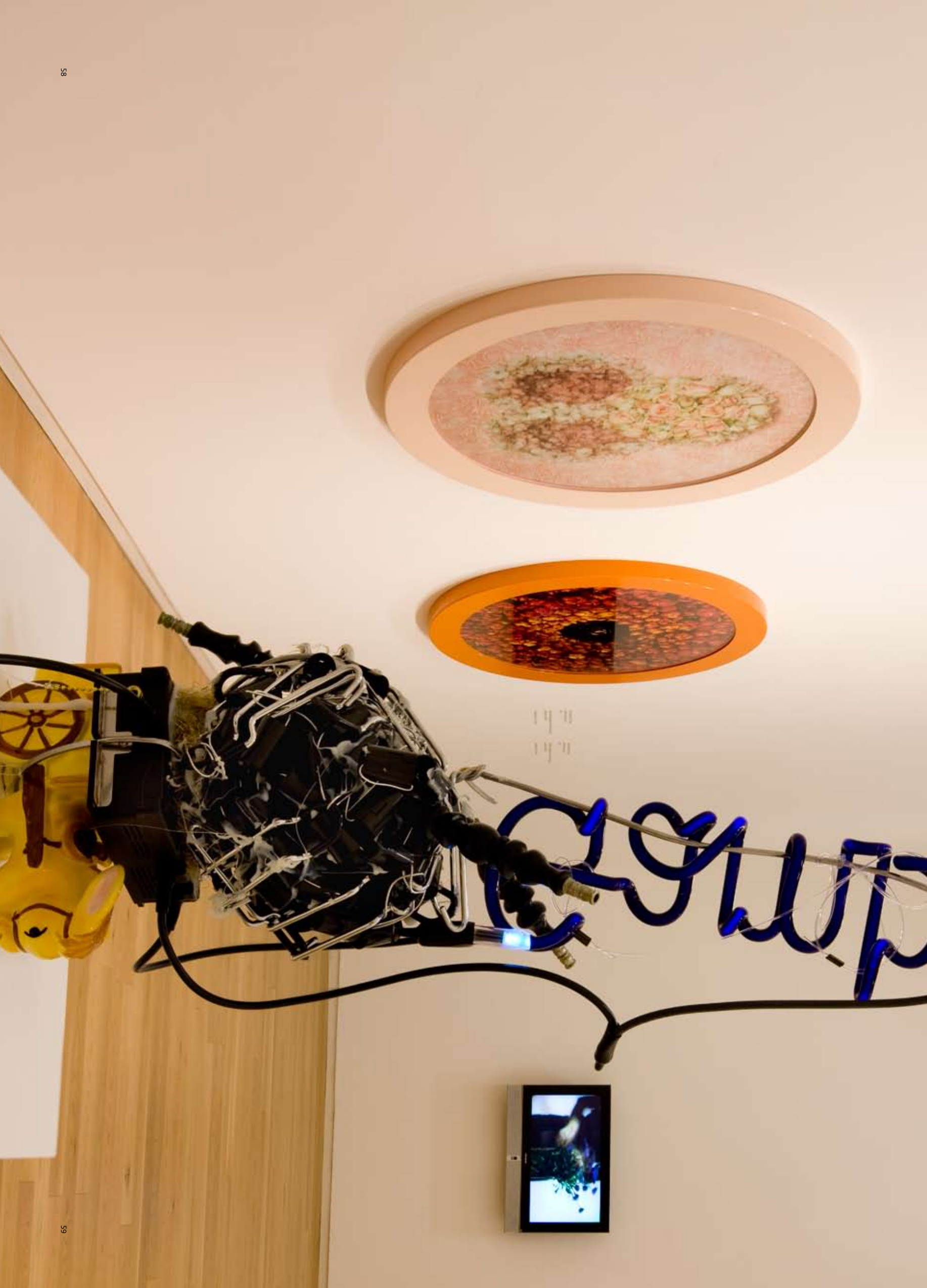

Installation views of artworks

(Left to right)

(page 44-45)
Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988)
Grazing-soup to nuts – 1930
1983

(page 46-47)
Martin Kippenberger (1953-1997)
Untitled (*The Invention of a Joke*)
1991

(page 48-49)
Michel Majerus (1967-2002)
Ohne Titel/Untitled
1996-2001

(page 50-51)
Martin Kippenberger (1953-1997)
Untitled (*The Invention of a Joke*)
1991

Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978)
Sauna Piece
1971

(page 52-53)
Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978)
Sauna Piece
1971

Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978)
Sauna View
1973

(page 54-55)
Piero Manzoni (1933-1963)
Base Magica - Sculture Vivente
Magic Base - Living Sculpture
1961

Eva Hesse (1936–1970)
Addendum
1967

(page 56-57)
Helen Chadwick (1953-1996)
Wreath to Pleasure No 10
1992/3

Helen Chadwick (1953-1996)
Wreath to Pleasure No 1
1992/3

(page 58-59)
Helen Chadwick (1953-1996)
Wreath to Pleasure No 10
1992/3

Helen Chadwick (1953-1996)
Wreath to Pleasure No 1
1992/3

Jason Rhoades (1965-2006)
Gambi (*Idol 49*)
2005

Bas Jan Ader (1942-1975)
Primary Time
1974

The following films were selected for screening on the 8th of February 2009, the final day of the exhibition.

Robert Smithson

Mono Lake
Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson
1968-2004, 19:54 min, colour, sound

Spiral Jetty
Robert Smithson
1970, 35 min, colour, sound

Rundown
Jane Crawford and Robert Fiore
1994, 12 min, colour, sound

Gordon Matta-Clark

Conical Intersect
Gordon Matta-Clark
1975, 18:40 min, colour, silent, 16 mm film on video

Sous-Sols de Paris (Paris Underground)
Gordon Matta-Clark
1977-2005, 25:20 min, b&w, sound, Super 8 film on video

The Wall
Gordon Matta-Clark
1976-2007, 15:04 min, colour, sound, 16 mm, video

Office Baroque
Gordon Matta-Clark
1977-2005, 44 min, b&w and colour, sound, 16 mm film on video

All films courtesy E. A. I. New York.

Artworks in the exhibition

Bas Jan Ader (1942-1975)
Primary Time
1974
Umatic tape transferred to DVD
25 min, 47 sec
Courtesy of the Bas Jan Ader Estate
and Patrick Painter Editions

Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988)
Untitled
1983
Oil stick on paper
127 x 244 cm
Private Collection

Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988)
Fats II
1987
Acrylic and oil stick on canvas
127 x 244 cm
Private Collection

Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988)
Grazing-soup to nuts – 1930
1983
Acrylic and oil stick on canvas
168 x 305 cm
Ludwig Forum für Internationale
Kunst, Aachen

Helen Chadwick (1953-1996)
Wreath to Pleasure No 1
1992/3
Cibachrome photographs,
powder-coated steel, glass,
aluminium-faced MDF
110 x 110 x 5 cm
Southampton City Art Gallery

Helen Chadwick (1953-1996)
Wreath to Pleasure No 10
1992/3
Cibachrome photographs,
powder-coated steel, glass,
aluminium-faced MDF
110 x 110 x 5 cm
Southampton City Art Gallery

Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996)
"Untitled" NRA
1991
Paper stack
8 in. at ideal height x 58 x 42 in.
Astrup Fearnley Collection, Oslo

Keith Haring (1958-1990)
Aids '85
1985
Acrylic and Oil on Tarpaulin
296 x 303 cm
Ludwig Forum für Internationale
Kunst, Aachen

Eva Hesse (1936-1970)
Addendum
1967
Painted papier mâché, wood and cord
124 x 3029 x 206 cm
Tate, London

Martin Kippenberger (1953-1997)
Untitled (*The Invention of a Joke*)
1991
Nine drawings on hotel stationery
29 x 21 cm
Courtesy Kerlin Gallery, Dublin

Michel Majerus (1967-2002)
Ohne Titel/Untitled
1996-2001
Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas
30 canvases, 60 x 60 cm
Estate of Michel Majerus, 1996-2002,
courtesy neugerriemschneider, Berlin

Piero Manzoni (1933-1963)
Base Magica – Sculture Vivente
Magic Base – Living Sculpture
1961
Wood, felt and metal
80 x 80 x 80 cm
Private collection,
Courtesy MaxmArt, Mendrisio

Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978)
Office Baroque #669
1977
Photomontage
175 x 105 cm
Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art
Antwerp (MuHKA)

Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978)
Office Baroque
1977
Black and white photomontage
89 x 62 cm
Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art
Antwerp (MuHKA)

Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978)
Sauna Piece
1971
Wood, glass, metal
96.5 x 203 x 30.5 cm
Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz

Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978)
Sauna View
1973
B&W video, 61:30 min
Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix,
New York

Jason Rhoades (1965-2006)
Gambi (Idol 49)
2005
Neon phrase, ceramic donkey,
transformer, various materials
80 x 40 x 32 cm
The Estate of Jason Rhoades,
Courtesy Hauser & Wirth,
Zürich & London, and
David Zwirner, New York

Jason Rhoades (1965-2006)
Yard (*Idol 60*)
2005
Neon phrase, hookah pipe, rugs,
transformer, various materials
75 x 40 x 34 cm
The Estate of Jason Rhoades,
Courtesy Hauser & Wirth,
Zürich & London, and
David Zwirner, New York

Colophon

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