

OHIO

New New York

Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art
11427 Bellflower, Cleveland, 216/421-8671

"New New York" offered works by ten artists who are currently exploring a variety of Postmodernist issues, including the appropriation of images, the exhaustion of the "aesthetic" tradition, the difficulty of defining originality, and the urge to locate a socio-political role for art beyond the gallery/museum context. By appropriating and copying Modernist art, these artists challenge its authority and subvert its philosophical base.

Peter Halley, Haim Steinbach, and Annette Lemieux directly challenge Modernist aesthetics. Lemieux, for example, purchased a cheap plastic relief from a department store and then covered it with white paint, creating a sort of J.C. Penney's Malevich. Halley and Steinbach experiment with formalist compositions (Halley's non-relational designs, for example, have precedents in Minimalist painting), but by introducing elements of kitsch both artists violate the most hallowed canons of formalist aesthetics. Their work often fails as it necessitates accommodations with Modernist art and thus does not sufficiently separate itself from the older tradition.

Far more original and thought-provoking are the socio-political works of Nancy Chunn, Andres Serrano, Clegg & Guttmann, Kevin Larmon and Vikky Alexander. Chunn uses large simple shapes, such as a pair of mechanical gears shredding a map of Lebanon, to create visual allegories for current political situations. Serrano's photographs of crucified animals and the juxtaposition of a bound, bloodied woman opposite an indifferent Catholic cardinal provide potent commentaries on Church attitudes toward women. Larmon uses postmodern visual modes to convey his political subjects. His small, dark, cryptic paintings—having little recognizable imagery—are made of self-destructive materials, indicating a fatalistic response to the possibility of nuclear holocaust.

In other Postmodern expressions, Barbara Ess creates blurry, Neo-expressionist pictures with a pin-hole camera. Marcus Leatherdale appropriates Renaissance imagery, but updates it with contemporary models to create beautiful black and white photographs.

The diverse methods of the artists in "New New York" suggest that Postmodernism is not a school or a movement but an attitude which demands the rethinking of Modernism. One wonders whether Postmodernism truly represents a rupture with the past, or is it just another "ism" in an age and culture dedicated to newness? "New New York" was thus both a provocative examination of Postmodernist art and an expose of its inconsistencies and contradictions.

Price range: \$500 to \$4,500.

William Robinson



NANCY CHUNN, "Lebanon," oil on canvas, 6' x 6', 1984. Photo by U. James Uee, courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts.