



Installation view of "Icarus: The Vision of Angels" show, 1986. Left: Alexander Graham Bell, *Hydrodome HD-4*, 1922. Center: Murray Favro, *Sabre Jet, 55% Size*, 1979-83.



Installation view of "Icarus: The Vision of Angels" show, 1986. Left: Murray Favro, *Flying Flea*, 1976-77. Center: Alexander Graham Bell, *HD-4*, 1920-22.

## "Icarus: The Vision of Angels"

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts; 49th Parallel

Man's will to fly, to exceed the bonds of the earth, is a persistent dream. "Icarus: The Vision of Angels," co-curated by France Morin and Ronald Feldman and mounted at their respective galleries, was an attempt to capture some of that fancy for flight held by artists and scientists. The curators' task was perhaps as ambitious a project in its way as the many early aerodynamic efforts it documented. Their choices were excellent; however, when an exhi-

bition's topic is as broad as that of man in flight, one cannot help but twitch a bit in the curatorial back seat. In this spirit I must express dismay at the omission of Stelarc, the Australian artist who has suspended himself by fish-hooks to physically experience the pull of gravity, and whose *Third Arm*, 1977-82, a computerized prosthetic device, is technologically important enough that NASA has expressed interest in the possibility of adapting it for use in space exploration. Otherwise, this was a supremely educational and well-selected exhibition.

In a manner fitted more to aerospace museums than New York galleries, this show spent a great deal of effort and space in chronicling and reconstructing man's attempts at flight. Since space museums must get tens of thousands more visitors a year than our hyped-up little art market, the inclusion here of the Wright brothers, Amelia Earhart, Igor Sikorsky, and Alexander Graham Bell, among others, must have been a real crowd-pleaser. Since I, for one, always thought Ferdinand von Zeppelin was a rock musician, this show was helpful in politely instructing those of us with a less scientific bent. (He was, of course, the inventor of the rigid airship.) And, vice versa, it's wonderful to think of those innocent tourists who were exposed to Chris Burden through the exhibition's documentation of his 1973 performance piece *Icarus*.

While the quest to rise above the clouds is one of both science and poetry, the mixture of the two may have been more appropriate than actually that smooth. This is less a criticism than the statement of an interesting

problem. What became strikingly obvious from the juxtaposition of artistic renderings and scientific models in this show was their extreme discrepancy—the impracticality of a conceptual art versus the mundane clunkiness of the inventors' objects. Perhaps we need to see contradictions such as this, if only to understand the full genius of one such as Leonardo da Vinci, whose pan-disciplinary brilliance obscured the distinction between science and art.

The clumsiness of the inventor was endearing here, with something of the charming foolishness of the child who insists the world is flat. And though these crude early flying machines have an innate beauty of their own, there seems something incomparably magnificent in Yves Klein's great leap into the void, the 20th-century artistic gesture nonpareil. The idea alone is an inspiration beyond any homemade, rinky-dink junk our crackpot heros strapped themselves into. It was the idea that was transcendent in this show, whether conceived by the inventor, the artist, or writers such as Antoine de Saint Exupéry and Jules Verne. What they share is the same hopeful spirit that drove Icarus to fly too close to the sun, that led an American schoolteacher into space, and that brought millions of us out into the night so that we might catch a glimmer of Halley's comet.

—CARLO MCCORMICK