Esther Ferrer: *Zaj, Theory and Practice*, 1994; at the Fondation Cartier.

that had her balancing one of her shoes atop her head with deadpan composure. She assiduously countered theatricality, and the austerity of her person and props set off the baroque proliferation of her words. Although Ferrer at various times identified herself as a feminist, a foreigner and an anarchist, she spoke from constantly shifting narrative loci, and so never came across as the subject of her performance.

Ferrer deployed multiple strategies to keep us thinking and laughing. She treated words as individual wholes, as distinct as the tools in a mechanic's case. The word "silence" opened a long passage during which she kept on mouthing her text in all seriousness but without sound. She repeatedly blurred the boundaries between written and spoken language by voicing such devices of punctuation as caps, commas and underlining. She used counting, permutations, phonetic and etymological connections and common sense to create excruciatingly long lists, enumerations so abundant in their flow of images and references that they overran the conceptual hierarchies by which we make sense of things.

Employing time as exactingly as language, with the clock doubling as a metronome, Ferrer systematically interrupted the performance's flow. For instance, she walked out in the middle of a sentence, to return 70 seconds later and speak the next word without a hint of a hiatus. She broke into singing an eight-tone scale or into shouting a political slogan in the midst of otherwise even-toned recitation. Her mien remained steady throughout. This evenness partly accounts for her undeniable presence, which kept her audience riveted, even when she froze for a good minute, becoming a perfect still of herself. Poignant in her peculiar mix of seriousness and absurdity, intensely curious, Ferrer offered us a rare moment of refreshing laughter.

—Anne Rochette

Cathy de Monchaux at Jennifer Flay

Cathy de Monchaux's weirdly ornamental works consistently move counter to recent sculptural practice. One rarely sees sculptures propelled by drawing, yet de Monchaux's ornate drawings yield the patterns for the sheet-metal plates which are the visible skeletons of her pieces, all wall-mounted. Many of her baroque works' numerous bolts, ribbons and knots answer to fetishistic excess and not to structural necessity, and there is more rhyme than reason to their complex contours and symmetries. Occasionally softly powdered with white chalk, her sculptures are fed by the sorts of illustrations found in 19th-century millinery catalogues, engineering texts and heraldic dictionaries. Her often sexually charged titles intimate self-disclosure, which is belied by the works' abstract form.

For her second exhibition at this gallery, de Monchaux showed five sculptures. Four were small and in keeping with her past work. The two 19-inch-high elements of *Dangerous Fragility* were hung mirroring each other across the 30-foot width of the gallery, so that we could barely see them simultaneously. Both parts are constructed in a similar manner: 12 brass sheets, similar in their baroquely jagged contour but differing slightly in size, fan symmetrically outward from a vertical axis and are interleaved with soft, bellowslike folds of finely tanned and dyed pigskin. Eight thin black ribbons are laced from sheet to sheet. The two elements seem like two states of the same thing. In one the metal sheets are spaced evenly to create an ungainly object, whose dark green pigskin draws us in while its spiky metal curlicues keep us at bay. In the second, the metal plates open widely away from the center, exposing a pink leather interior, something like the soft belly of a splayed creature, its pleated, generative core.

Dangerous Fragility bracketed *Wandering about in the future, looking forward in the past*, a large-scale and ambitious work de Monchaux conceived for the gallery's main wall. She Sheetrocked the wall's central window and covered the two remaining windows with identical grids of translucent painted glass panes. The panes are held in place visually by four vertical and four horizontal stripes of black ribbon. The ribbons pass variously through 16 buckles in front of each glass grid while another 16 buckles attach them to the wall.

Exactly in between the glass grids, de Monchaux affixed a narrow element which extended from floor to ceiling, suggesting a giant soft slit in the wall. Made from thin sheet-metal plates and pink pigskin that is folded labia-like, it is cinched to the wall—at eight points on both sides—by pairs of ribbons, with four more ribbon pairs radiating from both top and bottom. The pigskin puckers into numerous tiny folds where the ribbons attach. All the ribbons pass through wall-mounted buckles and end in neatly tied bows. Though the 88 buckles differ in shape, each comprises three machine-cut components, in steel, brass and white-enameled brass. There are numerous echoes from part to part and part to whole and myriad axes of symmetry. *Wandering . . .* is more graphic than three-dimensional; de Monchaux uses the wall as a blank page for her binding gestures, which take on a ritualistic character.

Non-representational sculpture is rarely sexy. But de Monchaux's abstract works are formally tight and bristling with eroticism, as though Richard Deacon had crossed paths with Kathy Acker.

—Anne Rochette and Wade Saunders

COLOGNE

Mercedes Barros at Gabriele Rivet

For the past five years, the Zebú, a strong, proud breed of Brazilian cattle, has frequently appeared as the central motif in the chemically manipulated photographs and video installations of Mercedes Barros, a Cologne-based Brazilian artist. The Zebú, castrated and genetically altered by man, represent all endangered species and natural environments imperiled by humankind's dubious quest for progress.

Michel Würthle: *Sometimes One Was a Little Strict with the Dudes; That Was the Human Factor*, 1993, pen and ink; at Bruno Brunnet.

In her most recent installation, Barros shifted her focus from the cows themselves to the ranch hands who slaughter them. In the center of the gallery,

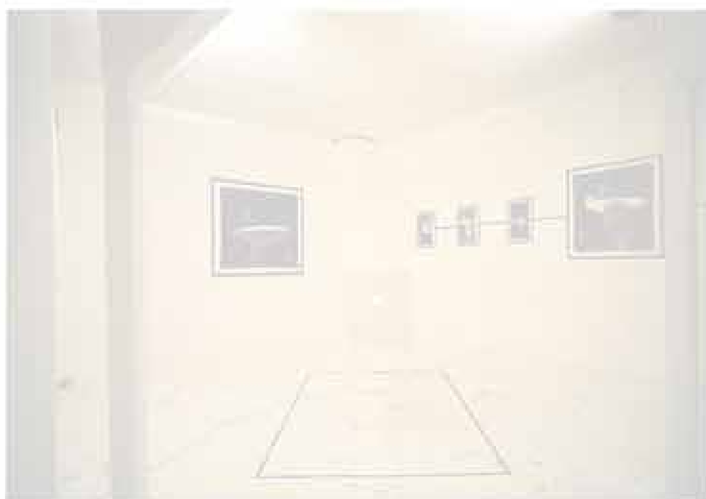
she installed a sterile white box covered in vinyl tiling and supported by four spindly legs. The box was reminiscent of a hospital surgical theater or the rooms of a slaughterhouse where the freshly butchered meat is prepared for sale. Peering through a small opening at the front of the box, the viewer saw a video of the tormenting and slaughtering of the cows as the ranch hands laugh and tell jokes. The similarity to the sensationalistic CNN reportage of atrocities in Bosnia, Rwanda, Korea and other war zones is obviously intentional, as is the art-historical reference to Christ as the Man of Sorrows, abused by the Roman guards before his crucifixion. (Hidden religious motifs are common in Barros's work.) Viewers of this macabre installation experience the brutality of the executioners and become accomplices to the acts of humiliation and degradation.

Along the walls of the gallery, surrounding the box, Barros arranged a number of ghostly, solarized portraits of the ranch hands, with biographical texts and identification numbers radiating out of their straw hats. The texts reveal the secret lives and aspirations of these men, who refer to themselves in their fantasies as professors, poets and mathematicians. Reading between the lines, the viewer comes to recognize that the men are just as victimized by and trapped within their fates as the animals they slaughter.

The title of the installation, *Porteira*, a Portuguese word meaning gate or border, makes direct reference to the precarious interface between nature and culture. The lives of ranch hands are compared with those of cattle to reflect each other and finally become interchangeable.

In turning to video as a medium for her message, Barros brings the images of her apocalyptic photographs to life. Unlike Damien Hirst's mysterious chambers containing curious, unexplained bloodbaths, Barros's installation provides all the evidence viewers need, without becoming sensationalistic or lurid. In an earlier installation, Barros put viewers in the position of cows headed for slaughter, channeled through a wood-faced corridor where ranch hands, seen in eye-level monitors, harass them as they pass. This work was on view in Frankfurt's L.A. Gallery through October, in conjunction with the Book Fair's Brazil theme this year.

—*Gérard A. Goodrow*



Mercedes Barros: *Porteira*, 1994, mixed-medium installation; at Gabriele Rivet.

BERLIN

Michel Würthle at Bruno Brunnet Fine Art

It's no secret that Berlin is not yet a city for galleries and collectors, despite the remarkable invasion of dealers from the Rhine region in the last two years. The first to arrive was Bruno Brunnet, who had previously worked for Michael Werner in Cologne. From the start Brunnet has been a maverick in this city. That has to do with the fact that he showed the anti-art of the Kippenberger circle when it was was still largely unknown here, and that Brunnet is by Berlin standards unusually forceful and commercially aggressive. Even the name—Bruno Brunnet Fine Arts, in English—seems from a Berlin standpoint a kind of provocation.

Brunnet recently showed a cycle of 80 drawings by Michel Würthle, "Notes of an Armed Bartender: At the Exil, 1972-1979," accompanied by a sumptuous book. The event also amounted to a coming-out for Bruno Brunnet, since it revealed where the dealer's own Berlin roots lie. Brunnet was for three years himself a waiter at the Kreuzberg bar/restaurant Exil, where, he writes in the book's foreword, he served as "friend, banker, conversation partner, waste basket and secret-sharer of many artists."

The notebooks of his former boss, Würthle, open in 1972. The Exil was then owned by Oswald Wiener, the Viennese writer, who appears in one drawing sitting in the bar like a tomcat in human form. To judge from Würthle's sketches, the Exil was a place of battles and ecstasies, flashing encounters and painful, precipitous falls—a kind of stage for artists wrestling publicly with their "genius." Too lively a participation in the artist's lives could be the ruin of the business, of course; this is the conflict that the bartender must constantly surmount.

Würthle's sketches seem halfway like amateur drawings, uncertain in their perspective, sometimes clumsy in the rendering of anatomy. At the same time they are quite subtle in the assemblage of motifs and the succession of the sheets. There are borrowings from Grosz and Heinrich Zille, but Würthle's main concerns are clearly not stylistic. Splendid wide views alternate with secretive vignettes. One caption reads, "Around 1978 in the Exil"; the drawing shows a pug-nosed dwarf observing the dining artists from a frame inserted in the middle of the page. A quatrain below says, "Waiter Bruno marvels/ at the buying power of the/ artist clientele, and/ imagines his own Act I."

The texts, a grotesque mix of German, Viennese dialect, Italian and English, form part of the bar's ruinous decor. They cover the furniture or are used to darken the background. They run like antique inscriptions around the frame or present variations on the title of the work. The tradition of the literary drawing is wildly crossed with the techniques of the comics, as when the bulbs of the wall lamps stretch into the scene like erect penises.

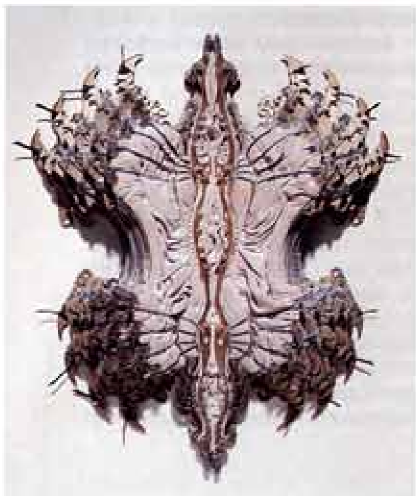
These notebooks amount to a striking and witty commentary on a scene where the connection between art and life was exhaustively probed, night after night. Afterward Würthle opened the celebrated Paris Bar, where today one is likely to spot playwright Heiner Müller or find an artist like Damien Hirst emptying a vodka glass or two. And next to him Bruno Brunnet—of whom one wonders if the purchasing power of armots still makes so strong an impression.

—*Ulf Erdmann Ziegler*

TOKYO

Junichi Kusaka at Kamakura

Two years ago, in a small sub-basement rental gallery, this young artist showed a clever display about the price of land in Tokyo: he sold 1-cubic-centimeter vials of earth from some of the toniest addresses in



Cathy de Monchaux: *Dangerous Fragility*, one of two parts, 1994, mixed mediums, approx. 19 by 15¾ by 7 inches; at Jennifer Flay.