



Hélène Agofroy: *Les Animaux de la forêt*, 1997, rubberized canvas, 10 by 46 feet and *13 mn Bolívar Bolívar*, 1995, video; at Le Quartier.

viewer could get the impression that Roberts is indulging in the visual equivalent of new-age poetry. But that underestimates her sophistication. She is exhorting us to see nature as a luminous mirror of our ceaseless obsession with mortality. The trees, streams and plants she renders exist near her house in Valley Center, a town in the rural northern reaches of San Diego County. As an artist's statement says, seeing nature wax and wane around her, she has become acutely aware of the fragility of life. Landscapes are radiant texts, if you take the time to learn how to read them. The notion is Emersonian or, if we look to the parallel in 19th-century American painting, Luminist. Roberts has become a vital artist in this tradition.

In one prominent group of canvases, *Trunks*, she employs the conventional rectangle. Twenty paintings, each a portrait of a tree, are arranged in a grid, yet the vertical rows are discrete sets, in categories: the trees are split, splayed, leaning or dark. Like the rest of the show, this work is about close observation and intimacy with nature. If the trees seem like surrogates for the human figure, that's not a coincidence. —Robert L. Pincus

Karin van Dam: *View of Floating Parts*, mixed-mediums installation, 1997; at Begane Grond.



BUENOS AIRES

Pablo Siquier at Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes

This survey show devoted to the work of the 36-year-old Argentinean Pablo Siquier included 25 paintings made between 1988 and 1997. Siquier's interest in formal structure is evident in his earliest works. For instance, a painting titled *8806* (the numbers Siquier gives his works also serve as titles) offers a serene, conventionally painted, blue-hued landscape with a low horizon and an overcast sky. But Siquier has obscured much of the scene by painting loose concentric circles in alternating bands of red and yellow on top of it. Although never again so blatant as in *8806*, the opposition of figuration and abstraction has remained a subtext of Siquier's subsequent work.

Beginning in 1989, Siquier's forms become almost exclusively geometric and he adopts a limited palette of monochrome hues of pale grays, pinks, blues and purples. Typically, the forms in his 1989-94 paintings take the form of symmetrical motifs that are usually centered on the canvas. Clearly inspired by architecture, they evoke columns, balconies and ornamental details. The style is schematic; the artist uses sharp shadows to make the forms look like bas reliefs lit from one side. The rigid, highly geometrical style allows the compositions to float between the abstract and the referential. A typical example is *9117*, in which

Siquier has painted a false scalloped frame around the pale green canvas. Within this border is a pattern of alternating forms (circles and crosslike formations), each of which gives the illusion of being raised a few millimeters from the surface of the canvas. The motifs intentionally evoke the Art Deco architecture prominent in Buenos Aires and the Argentinian city of Rosario, but it's important to note that in these paintings, the architectural ornaments are never fully materialized—Siquier depicts cast shadows and surfaces struck by light but not the object itself.

In his more recent paintings from 1996-97, Siquier has given up color for stark black and white and the compositions have become more complex and fragmentary. In *9619*, black stripes on a white ground create fragmentary grids, both dense and open, that are further broken up by an intermittently curvilinear structure that loops across the canvas. This complex array of black stripes can be read as an overhead view of a vast urban structure or simply as cast shadows independent of any solid forms. With a patience and rigor reminiscent of Frank Stella when he made his "Black Paintings," Siquier challenges the purity of the modernist grid. In his work, flatness coexists with depth, chaos with harmony, geometry with a baroque sensibility. The effect is somewhat like Piranesi's *Carceri d'Invenzione*, those imaginary prisons in which the human urge to construct and organize space ultimately overwhelms all rationality and logic.

[Pablo Siquier's recent work was also shown at Aninna Nosei Gallery, New York, in November.] —Mónica Amor

QUIMPER, FRANCE

Hélène Agofroy at Le Quartier

Little interested in mass or volume, Hélène Agofroy isn't a traditional sculptor. Using mundane materials and mostly planar images, including video, she makes multi-element works in which geography, local lore, children's tales and toys play a large part. At Le Quartier, she exhibited 19 pieces from 1992 to '97, installed so as to blur both chronology and the boundaries between individual works.

In the first room, *Les Animaux de la forêt* (1997), approximately 10 by 46 feet, occupied most of two walls. What looked at first like a strange wartime camouflage tarpaulin turned out to be made in a simple way. From a black rubberized canvas, Agofroy cut out the spaces between over 500 silhouettes derived from animal cookies, arranging the creatures' forms so that each touched at least three neighbors. Equally figure and absent ground, the tarpaulin concealed only itself.

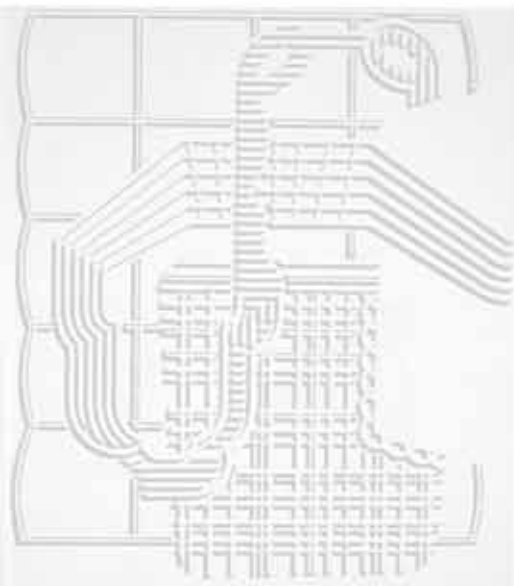
A video monitor on the floor in front of the hanging played *13 mn Bolívar Bolívar* (1995). The 13-minute tape, made on Paris's shortest metro line, depicts a train ride leaving from and returning to the Bolívar station. The camera focuses on the cartoon of a rabbit getting its paw pinched in a subway-car door, a warning to children which is displayed in all Parisian metro cars. The sound is that of the train, and we hear more than see the action, though the image jiggles when the train moves and people sometimes block our view of the rabbit. Here Agofroy juggles naming and coding systems: a video loop standing in for a subway loop, a still image for a time span, a subway station for a South American hero.

In the second room, the artist emphasized heterogeneity, mixing oversized puzzle pieces, wall patterns, an enlarged and repeated newspaper photo, wooden cubes, a flat floor piece and more. The third room featured *Arrangement* (1997), a wall work that consists of three superimposed 5-foot-wide Plexiglas maps of France, expanded versions of the plastic charts which all French children use in primary school. The maps hung on a central peg but were each differently oriented so that the blue lines of rivers and the orange masses of mountains merged into a vaguely familiar but unreadable geography, reminiscent of medical diagrams.

When Agofroy departs from manipulating two-dimensional images, she employs human agents, as in *Le Petit Tailleur* (1997). On a large table, she arranged a sewing machine, several tools of the tailor's trade, seven belts, and rolls of jacquard fabric from which seven suits had been started by an assistant on the show's opening day. The ensemble was both the set for

and the result of reenacting the folk tale referred to in its title. Mingling childhood memories, graphic intelligence and references to home labor, the work is emblematic of Agofroy's visual acumen, her refreshing lack of didacticism and her ability to refashion our picture of the world.

—Anne Rochette and Wade Saunders



Pablo Sigüero: 1679, 1990, acrylic on canvas, 78 1/2 by 53 inches; at Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.

UTRECHT

Karin van Dam at Begane Grand

In a former theater, part of a building which now houses an experimental artists' space, Karin van Dam created an environmental installation of monumental size and power by using modest and unimposing materials. It was an unstructured, jury-rigged accumulation of parts reminiscent of Jessica Stockholder's large works, but while Stockholder uses existing manufactured objects which already have an identity that can suggest meanings, van Dam makes most of her elements of big sheets of paper cut into ovals (often with empty centers) and blackened with pastel chalk. These are interspersed with slender pieces of lumber and various strings and cords.

Floating Parts, as this installation was called, stretched across a corner of the exhibition space

and seemed to grow out of the walls and ceiling—parts of which were also blackened—as if it were a living organism. The streets were suspended on thin wires, and seemed to tumble, crawl or drape to the floor, where they were met and interrupted by a variety of disjunctive materials including rolls of plastic foam, large pieces of polyester foam partly covered with black velvet or black paper, and a roll of chicken wire. The piece as a whole looked like a gigantic pop-up. It invited you to wander around and experience it from different angles. While moving, you became aware of the different intensities of black due to the changing fall of light.

Van Dam creates her installations intuitively, guided by the specific environment. Thus she never knows what the piece will look like until it has grown organically, on the spot. She started her career in 1987 with moderate-size black pastel chalk drawings. Eventually, parts of these drawings broke away from the background and developed into collages, which she framed in shallow boxes. In the next phase she freed the forms—which tended to become bigger and bigger—to exist independently in real space, with part of the drawings directly attached to the wall.

Once you know this, you see that *Floating Parts* is not so much a structure as a drawing or a collage. For this reason, van Dam has invented the term *ontbonden tekenkunst* (decomposed drawing) for her work. The background is no longer a sheet of paper or a wall, but space itself.

—Riet van der Loozen

COLOGNE

Thomas Grünfeld at Kölnischer Kunstverein

Manipulation, metamorphosis and mutilation are words with ugly connotations in a time when gene technology is making headlines. A sense of vague threat

hangs in the air. The exhibition "Déformation Professionnelle" by the Cologne artist Thomas Grünfeld (born 1956) captured this feeling of unease, and turned the fear of biological change into a certain fascination for what is beautiful in transformation.

The Kunstverein's long gallery looked like a meeting place for strange humans, animals and objects. The humans took the form of clothing from the designer Rei Kawakubo's Comme des Garçons label, which has produced intelligent, avant-garde clothing for some 20 years. The brightly colored Summer '97 collection is singular in that it plays with deformity by padding all the wrong places, making clothes that would convert the most perfect runway model into the Hunchback of Notre Dame. Hanging on mannequins, the clothes engaged in a dialogue with their animal counterparts, new hybrid "Misfits" from the series Grünfeld has been developing over the past seven years. He gets prepared skins from a taxidermist and stuffs and reassembles them himself in mismatches, creating new species that recall mythological creatures from ancient folk tales.

His earlier pieces were often small animals that could theoretically blend into a wooded environment; they were exhibited in glass cases as though they belonged in a biology laboratory. But these new beasts, such as a half-emperor-crane/half-wallaby creation, stand proudly on the floor in their exotic colors. The half-bulldog/half-flamingo looks aggressive with its long neck and tough rear end, and the ass/cock combination prances in the gallery with attitude. The works are kin to some of the art being produced across the English Channel. An interest in anatomy and mutation is shared, but in contrast to the British bad boys, Grünfeld has a more subtle elegance. (Charles Saatchi recently expanded his collection with a selection of "Misfits.")

Bringing another dimension to the exhibition, a group of evocatively biomorphic "Gummies," made of padded rubber pulled over wooden frames, seemed to slither across the floor. Usually brown, gray



Heimit Brosch: Installation view of *Durchfall*, 1997, mixed-media; at Rolf Ricke.

or beige, they suggested blobs of primordial ooze—an attractive/repulsive slime that holds the secrets of life. Today scientists can coax many of these secrets out of a dab of tissue in a test tube to generate a human being or make a plant grow the way they want it to. Tomorrow we may be able to produce entirely different creatures. Without preaching or moralizing, Grünfeld's fantasy describes some exquisitely unsettling possibilities.

—Rosanne Altstatt

Heimit Brosch at Rolf Ricke

Given the clue of its title, *Durchfall* (German for diarrhea), one might have looked at the whole of Heimit Brosch's installation—the lumpy objects, the slick or tacky surfaces, the weird pinkish light—and conjectured that this was a simulation of the experience of passing through a bowel. The fascination that still seems to hold for artists was noted a couple of years ago in an

Thomas Grünfeld: Installation view of exhibition; at Kölnischer Kunstverein.

