

ARTWEEK

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BUSINESS AS USUAL

San Diego / Judith Christensen

Corporate values (professionalism, organizational ability, efficient production, negotiating to win and the bottom-line judgment of profit) have shoved traditional humanistic values into the corner of a box canyon. The corporate influence over the movement of the political machine, though veiled in thickly layered shrouds, is paramount. In such times, the title of Installation's current nineteen-person exhibition, *Corporate Crime/Malicious Mischief: Power and Mediation: A Fin de Siècle Tautology*, promises a provocative polemic on a timely topic.

The viewer first encounters Peter Frank's discussion of possible connotations of the slash (/) in the exhibition title *Corporate Crime/Malicious Mischief*. By posing the question, "What if we read '/' as 'is,' 'as,' 'against,' or 'countered by?'" Frank stimulates a directional discussion. Unfortunately, the exhibition as a whole does not sustain the dialog. Instead, the viewer encounters a morass of issues and comes away confused.

National and international politics and politicians, the border, the lure of easy credit, the nature of advertising, the role of corporations in museum exhibitions, the

role of art and of the artist in today's culture, the nuclear age and the fine line (if there is one) between life and role-playing are some of the mélange of issues dealt with. It seems we do live in an age of abundance—not an abundance of well-being, as

our president would like us to believe, but of subject matter. The artist is image-rich. Turn on the TV, open a newspaper or magazine, drive down the street or open the kitchen cupboards. The world is inundated with burning issues, unjust situations and

malevolent manipulations. Unfortunately, in such a climate, the artist runs the same risks as does the media when it highlights the perils and pitfalls of contemporary culture.

First, given a set of premises which allows question-raising about the status quo, making the art is easy. With such an excess of suitable material, the artist need only appropriate some images, cut and paste, deconstruct and reconstruct. When the process works, as it does in Michael Corris's pieces, Peter Nagy's photocopies and Félix González-Torres's photostats, the result is smart art—the punch is quick, clean and direct, but fleeting. It allows us to forget too quickly.

The second risk is that of dissipation. The curator, Armando Rascón, presents artists "whose respective practices maintain a veritable trajectory and commitment toward social change and transformation," yet the plethora of issues examined in the exhibition aims concern and energy in a multitude of disparate directions. *Corporate Crime/Malicious Mischief* is a virtual focus rather than an actual one. The viewer does not leave with new or renewed conviction, but feeling distracted, unfocused—experiencing

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Business as Usual, continued

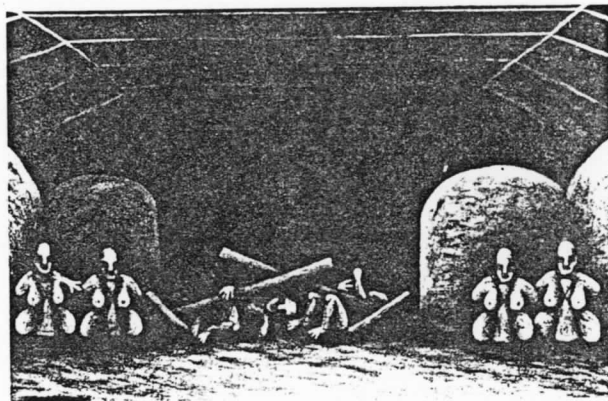
feelings that demotivate and debilitate rather than stimulate and activate.

Lutz Bacher's photographs, Michael Peppe's *AD*, and Peppe's and Lynn Hershman's videotapes do have staying power. The vigor of Bacher's photographs rely on an ancient technique—using a comic touch. Although reactions to the variously captioned photographs of politicians differ in intensity, at least a few of the pieces are

bound to excite a chuckle and leave an unforgettable impression of the subtle, yet obvious, ring of truth embodied in the work.

Peppe exhibits an adeptness for intertwining a swarm of ideas into an integrated, functioning hive. The list of issues inspected in *AD*, which begins with "Got a problem? Bring it to the Friendly People. People touching people . . ." would be nearly as long as the piece itself. Yet the message—we are being manipulated deftly and smoothly—is readily apparent and the delivery powerful. *Information Whiteout*, Peppe's and Hershman's videotape, deals with an overwhelming range of issues in a dadalike format. Utilizing an off-screen piano and conga and drumming on a table plus spoken and sung vocals, arm and hand gestures and expressive facial contortions, the Peppe medley explores the illogic and unreason of the evolving complexities of contemporary life.

It may be that everything that's wrong with the world actually can be linked to corporate crime/malicious mischief, but to require the viewer to make the leaps needed to fill in the gaps is to expect too much of the viewer and too little of the work. The stronger work in the exhibition demonstrates that a range of possibilities can be investigated and integrated successfully and still be a vital stimulant for thought and commitment. □



Mark Van Proyen, *Blood and Soil*, 1965, oil on canvas, 48" x 72", at Installation, San Diego. Photo: White Line Photography.



Lutz Bacher, *Jokes*, 1986, black and white photograph, 40" x 65", at Installation, San Diego.