

Art in America

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Warren Neidich: *Brainwash*, 1997, video still; at Steffany Martz.

mirror and always sketchily rendered. It's as if the truly contemporary soul could only be known at a remove, in the difficult contemplation of his own busyness.

The Moynihan show was perhaps the most beautiful and stimulating of the fall season. At Miller, people unfamiliar with his work found themselves responding to an art not just of craft but of character, lyrically advancing upon them a kind of ethic of the painterly.

—Gerrit Henry

Warren Neidich at Steffany Martz

Despite the primacy of the scientific method in this century, can art, with its nonempirical

approach, produce fruitful ideas about brain function? Trained as a neurobiologist, Warren Neidich presented mainly photographs and videos exploring the relationship between perception, cognition and culture in his second solo at Steffany Martz.

In the five-monitor video piece *Brainwash*, Neidich plays with the way we process visual information. The side-by-side monitors picture hypnotically moving, black-and-white vertical stripes. After a time the camera moves back to reveal the image's source, a spinning cylinder which the artist told me is an optokinetic drum, a zoetropelike device used to diagnose problems of the cerebellum. The drum is held at arm's length by a seated man facing a table. At one point, the camera comes in for a close-up on his eye, in which we see reflected the still-spinning drum. Spectators are drawn through several more such shifts in viewpoint; the tape ends with fluctuating views of the horizon at the beach.

In two other works, which were paired to form an installation, Neidich used alphabet cereal to suggest the potential chaos that lurks behind language systems. *Sleep* consisted of two video monitors sitting on the floor. Images of a young woman with pink hair and a young man with dyed-blond hair occupy the adjacent monitors, as they sleep in fields of alphabet cereal. The edible letters are scattered on their faces and seem to spill from their mouths. Collectively titled *Awake*, 12 framed, wall-mounted photographs each show a bowl of milk with cereal letters spelling a word or part of a word. For example, "cock" was paired with "eyed," and "pupa" hung next to "anti" and "pupa." The significance of the words remained cryptic.

From My Eyes to

Your Ears, three photos presented vertically, also features alphabet cereal, this time painted black. The bottom picture shows hands selecting letters from a pile. The center image shows a man looking onto a grassy yard through a window covered with a haphazard formation of letters. The top picture presents the same scene without the man; the viewer takes his place. Headphones convey the voice of a man telling about his life.

Creating art that effectively examines visual and linguistic processing systems is a tall order. Sometimes the internal logic of Neidich's projects is not readily accessible; however, pieces such as *Brainwash* cleverly guide viewers to consider their own cognitive limits.

—Cathy Lebowitz

Bryan Crockett at Fotouhi Cramer

Bryan Crockett's first solo show, "Necrophilia," wasn't exactly about deviant erotic acts. Yet it was aptly titled, since he estheticized what appeared to be tangles of entrails freshly gutted from a corpse. Crockett achieved this effect with elaborate inflated sculptures made of dull-colored latex balloons; he cinches, twists and loops them together into complex, spewing formations. His large piece in the last Whitney Biennial was one of that exhibition's hits, but it didn't have the grisly quality of the work seen here.

In this installation, Crockett created a tomblike atmosphere by darkening the gallery. The only light emanated from video projectors and dim spotlights. Since the show traced the "life span" of the ephemeral works that Crockett literally breathes life into, and since they were preserved in the gallery in various states of decomposition, the sepulchral setting was appropriate. The show hinged on three sculptures and various forms of related documentation, such as large photographs, photograms and video projections, that captured the works' degeneration over time. The videos were continually played forward and backward, each at a different speed, to suggest a different bodily function: breathing, digestion, and a penis alternately becoming tumescent and flaccid.

The displayed sculptures

were not recognizable from the videos. The sculpture seen in its early youth in the breathing video dangled from the gallery's ceiling, its decomposition arrested by epoxy resin. In this state it looked even more anthropomorphic than in the video; a bulbous red head sat atop withered limbs and its "lungs" more closely resembled pendulous breasts. Crockett crammed the latex mass from the digestion video—along with a Polaroid of the sculpture in its prime—into a spherical glass flask hanging from the ceiling at eye level and illuminated by a sickly blue light bulb. The balloons will eventually turn to dust inside the sealed urn. The erection sculpture was in a state of suspended animation inside a small decompression chamber that made it expand and contract as if hooked up to a respirator.

In the back gallery, Crockett created a "living" work that progressively dwindled and drooped over the course of the exhibition. It was a dense grouping featuring a splay of long phallic balloons with cinched "heads" and clusters of small pearlescent balloons forming a trail that wound to the bottom of the piece. A glass container underneath the sculpture waited like an open grave.

The works lent themselves well to Crockett's theme, a potent commentary on the ways our society deals with physical decline and death—through graceful acceptance or artificially assisted denial.

—Stephanie Cash

Susan Otto at Silverstein

In her first New York gallery show, artist and writer Susan Otto presented two video installations and one large wall work that consisted of black-and-white photographs of drawings. Titled "A Woman Without Mercy," the exhibition was modest yet psychologically engaging as it confronted myths of femininity and romantic love.

Hanging on the wall was part of a project in which the artist asked 300 men to make a drawing of a snake and to write on it their name, age and occupation. Otto photographed the drawings, selected 56 of them for the exhibition, and framed and installed them in a grid. The predominance of gaping

Bryan Crockett: *Untitled*, 1997, mixed mediums, 144 by 80 by 96 inches; at Fotouhi Cramer.

