

PAINTINGS, PUZZLES AND PERFORMANCE

Los Angeles

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Guy de Cointet defies description, explanation, evaluation. His primary concern seems to be building a Warholesque shroud of mystery around his background, intent and personal life, an aspect of his personality that, to me, is appealing.

At Cirrus de Cointet shows three paintings, each consisting of four separate canvases hung one below the other with the topmost canvas being the title. At the opening Viva gave a dramatic narrative performance involving the paintings, a stool, a pointing stick and primarily herself. She became the object of all attention in the room, the objects acting as effective props.

She read a first person account of bizarre, humorous and confusing experiences from a group of papers which became mixed up during the reading, causing her to pause often in mid-sentence while she shuffled for the next page. As she read, she manipulated audience reaction not by the verbal content of her text, but by her frequently emotional and entertainingly dramatic presentation and engaging appearance. The highlight of the performance was her insistence upon using the paintings to clarify (?) her narrative. She pointed to specific areas of the painting as if they were a visualization of the idea she was expressing verbally, and of course, they were not.

The paintings, I am told, have a coded meaning known only to de Cointet. The story seemed to be Viva's stream of consciousness ramblings, surreal and inane as the following excerpts show: "Look Sophie! (excitedly) A whale...

"Rocks and crevices that the squirrels called home...

"...young blond surfers in their wet suits... Ahead was the turn off (long pause) to the beach.

"Frederick! (frightened) I have the feeling something awful is going to happen...Relax! Everything's fine, Sophie. Look! We're coming into the dunes: into the Sahara. See that ridge on the right. My eyes traveled over the ridge on the right.

"...waves of pain...washing over the houses. Just like the pains when little Sophie was born.

"...my husband, the cigarette hanging out of his lower lip. A modern Humphrey Bogart...Love made me blind...Any minute now he could just shoot me down. His being French and barely speaking English helped a lot...What a bore to know you're loved...True eroticism is the eroticism of doubt.

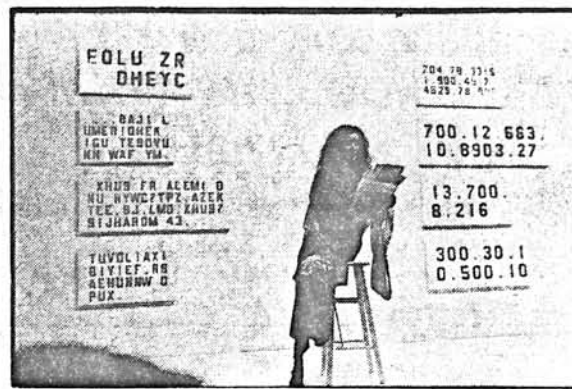
"The electric blue light was spreading and receding like an orgasm...Relax, Frederick said. It's your first mirage, Sophie.

"My reverie was interrupted by the real thing. There it was. The sea. No doubt about it. Those were real waves. Or were they? I asked my husband. He said yes...How did I ever think I could make a move without a MAN to guide me!

"...probably a virgin if that was possible for a 19 year old hitchiker," etc. etc.

Guy de Cointet is into more than making paintings and planning incomprehensible performances. Also available at Cirrus are: prints resembling the paintings but signed with the pseudonym "Huzalumst"; a book authored by "Mysxdod" written in indecipherable code, each page being different (a librarian's nightmare); and a newspaper with more coded imagery which is a visual delight.

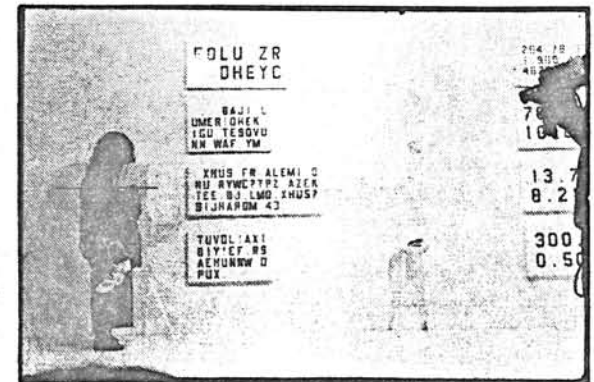
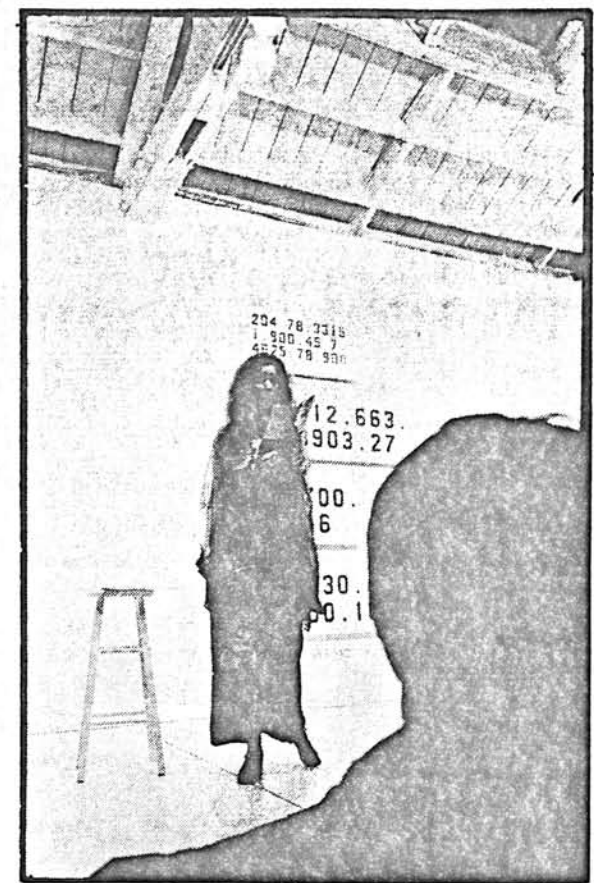
Whether de Cointet actually knows the meaning of each painting, print, page, etc. no one will ever know, unless, of course, he conducts an actual decoding performance, which would be anticlimatic, at least. Actually, who cares. De Cointet is making a clever statement. I see his work as a comment on the psychological



GUY de COINETET: Performance, April, 1974.

reassurance that art having "meaning," "content" or whatever you want to call it is more valid than imagery devoid of obvious intellectual intent. The compulsive hang-up of viewers to "understand" art — all that nonsense about "what is the Mona Lisa really smiling about?" and "what is the artist saying in this painting?" — seems to be what de Cointet alludes to. He acknowledges that need for reassurance by giving his paintings meanings and at the same time makes fun of us by telling us that they are secrets!

To me, he is directly aligning himself with other artists who also comment on the unnecessary confinement of extraneous meaning in art and are purposely working with images that have a minimal amount of message. Some people are making visually rich products that are consistently and intellectually empty. Such artists as Chuck Close, A.C. Westermann, Ralph Goings, etc. are making powerful statements by seeming to be blatantly direct, while they are, in fact, ambiguous as hell. I must admit that I have great respect for artists, Guy de Cointet included, who understand that the most valuable gift they can impart to their audience is an unending question mark. I have no reason to return to art that has been totally digested and "understood."



GUY de COINETET: Performance, April 1974.