



Elizabeth Schambelan

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1 **"Dada"** (Museum of Modern Art, New York) "It often happens that the real tragedies of life occur in such an inartistic manner that they hurt us by their crude violence, their absolute incoherence, their absurd want of meaning, their entire lack of style." Oscar Wilde's aphorism, which came to mind as I wended my way through MOMA's rendition of this sprawling bazaar of a traveling show (co-organized by the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and the Centre Pompidou, Paris), seems weirdly germane to the Dadaists. In their efforts to come to grips with "real tragedy"—World War I, modernity in general—they met reality on its own ground, pioneering the use of "inartistic" manners, ludic absurdities, and a pointed lack of style in the practice of art. Duchamp and Schwitters, of course, aren't the whole story. With revelatory works by Hannah Höch and other lesser-knowns, this show, curated by the National Gallery's Leah Dickerman with the Pompidou's Laurent Le Bon (and coordinated at MOMA by Anne Umland), offered the inverse of a "great man" theory of Dada.

2 and 3 **"Lee Lozano: Win First Don't Last Win Last Don't Care"** (Kunsthalle Basel) and **Dorothy Iannone** (Whitney Biennial, New York) This year America got Dada, and Europe got Lozano—an even trade, maybe. Her combination of badass Conceptualism, painterly prowess, and mordantly erotic figuration, as glossed by curator and Kunsthalle Basel director Adam Szymczyk, looked particularly nonpareil in the Kunsthalle's gracious chambers. Iannone's psychedelic orgasmatron *I Was Thinking of You III*, 1975/2006, meanwhile, was one of the most truly transgressive works at Chrissie Iles and Philippe Vergne's

biennial. While I didn't see "Seek the Extremes . . . Dorothy Iannone. Lee Lozano" at the Kunsthalle Wien this past fall, Sabine Folie's show seems an inspired pairing of two oeuvres whose increasing visibility is a happy development for contemporary art.

4 **"Make Your Own Life: Artists In & Out of Cologne"** (Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia) Curator Bennett Simpson's exploration of the connections between the Cologne scene of the '80s and '90s and an international network of younger artists was a bit unresolved, thematically speaking. But the low-resolution premise was appropriate to the issues—of the artist as "self-performer," of the "nonproductive attitude"—that the show provocatively and importantly engaged. The art looked great too.

5 **Productive failure** When I learned that curators Anton Vidokle and Tirdad Zolghadr had responded to the implosion of Manifesta 6 by putting together a conference called "Histories of Productive Failures," I thought that here, maybe, was an organizing principle for what feels like a time of retrenchment. Certainly the notion of "productive failure" resonates with a lot of work on view in New York this year, from the pairing of Josh Smith's literally nominal paintings (on toile, no less) and Gedi Sibony's swaths of gray carpet at Harris Lieberman last spring, to Amy Granat's deconstructed structuralist film at P.S. 1 in November (*Circle Jerk*, 2006). Group shows as diverse as Matthew Higgs's "Dereconstruction" at Gladstone Gallery, Drew Heitzler's "Bring the War Home" at Elizabeth Dee, and Katie Holten's "Cluster" at Participant, Inc., were in some sense odes to the shambolic, while Rebecca

Warren's neon-lit vitrine of studio detritus at the Frieze Art Fair in London suggested transatlantic affinities. Staging the global weltschmerz but not making a fetish of it, these curators and artists wrest compelling propositions from the vexations of their respective forms.

6 **Artists in dark times** In a letter published in this magazine last month, curator Chris Gilbert argued that we should be engaging in a "struggle that holds constantly in view the taking of power and is ready to apply violent force" to get it. When curators sound like latter-day Nechaevs, things are grave indeed. But, in addition to terminal vanguardism, the year offered other old-school models of engagement, namely Rosa Luxemburg, whose Hans Haacke-designed memorial was unveiled in Berlin, and Hannah Arendt, who was feted on the centenary of her birth. In *Men in Dark Times*, a collection of her essays published in 1968, Arendt cites Luxemburg as one of those figures whose work illuminates dark periods when "the public realm has been obscured and . . . people have ceased to ask any more of politics than that it show due consideration for their vital interests." Among the living, two artists who persist in asking more of politics are Nancy Spero and Krzysztof Wodiczko. Both signed the "Drive Out the Bush Regime" petition circulated this year, joining a menagerie of notables that also included members of Congress, and, of course, Gore Vidal. Their practices (and Haacke's, and others') illuminate the public sphere.

7 **Seth Price, *Untitled Film, Right*** (Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York) Price's 16-mm film of a roiling ocean had a dire, mesmerizing presence. The footage, it turned out, was a "multiuse

video background" of the type used in news broadcasts. As melodramatic in its way as Max Beckmann's 1912 *Sinking of the Titanic*—also a response, of a kind, to the pressures of mass media on art—it suggested a future for history painting, but without history or painting.

8 **Kalup Linzy, *Conversations wit de Churen V: As da Art World Might Turn*** (Taxter & Spengemann, New York) Like a belated sequel to Alex Bag's scabrous art-school confidential *Fall 95*, this video charts the travails of a would-be art star, Katonya (played by the artist in his customary desultory drag), who must contend with deep insecurities and a bitchy gallerist. Linzy's tweaked *telenovela* style seems exactly right for a critique of that ever-ascendant phenomenon, the emerging artist.

9 **Political burlesque *verité*** During the French Revolution, Parisians could buy obscene caricatures of aristocrats in the gardens of the Palais Royal. These days, thanks to video sharing, we don't have to leave our cubicles to see regime loyalists looking vulgar and ridiculous. With omnipresent camcorders fixed on pals like George Allen and Katherine Harris, who needs Jacques-Louis David? Liberty, equality, YouTube!

10 **Jeff Koons's *Black Monday*** On October 17, Koons, flanked by cultural-policy wonks, rang NASDAQ's closing bell. Ostensibly, this was just an unintentionally hilarious commemoration of National Arts and Humanities Month. But consider this: The Black Monday stock market crash of 1987, which ushered in an art-market collapse, fell on October 19. Clearly, Koons's ingenious performance was intended as a kind of occult anniversary celebration. 2007: The bell tolls for thee. □

1. Heinrich Hoerle, cover of the *Journal Stupid*, November 1920 (Stupid Verlag, Cologne). 2. Lee Lozano, *Untitled*, 1964, diptych, oil on canvas, 5' 6" x 16". 3. Dorothy Iannone, *I Was Thinking of You III*, 1975/2006, archival video and painted box. Installation view, "Day for Night," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2006. 4. View of "Make Your Own Life: Artists In & Out of Cologne," 2006. Photo: Aaron Iglor. 5. Josh Smith, *Untitled* (4), 2006, acrylic on fabric, 60 x 48". 6. Hannah Arendt in her home, New York, April 21, 1972. Photo: Tyrone Dukes/New York Times Co./Getty Images. 7. Seth Price, *Untitled Film, Right*, 2006, still from a color film in 16 mm, 14 minutes. 8. Kalup Linzy, *Conversations wit de Churen V: As da Art World Might Turn*, 2006, still from a color video, 11 minutes 16 seconds. 9. Katherine Harris during a gun safety course at the Hallelujah Land Ranch in Pasco County, Florida, May 13, 2006. 10. Jeff Koons ringing the NASDAQ closing bell, New York, October 17, 2006.

