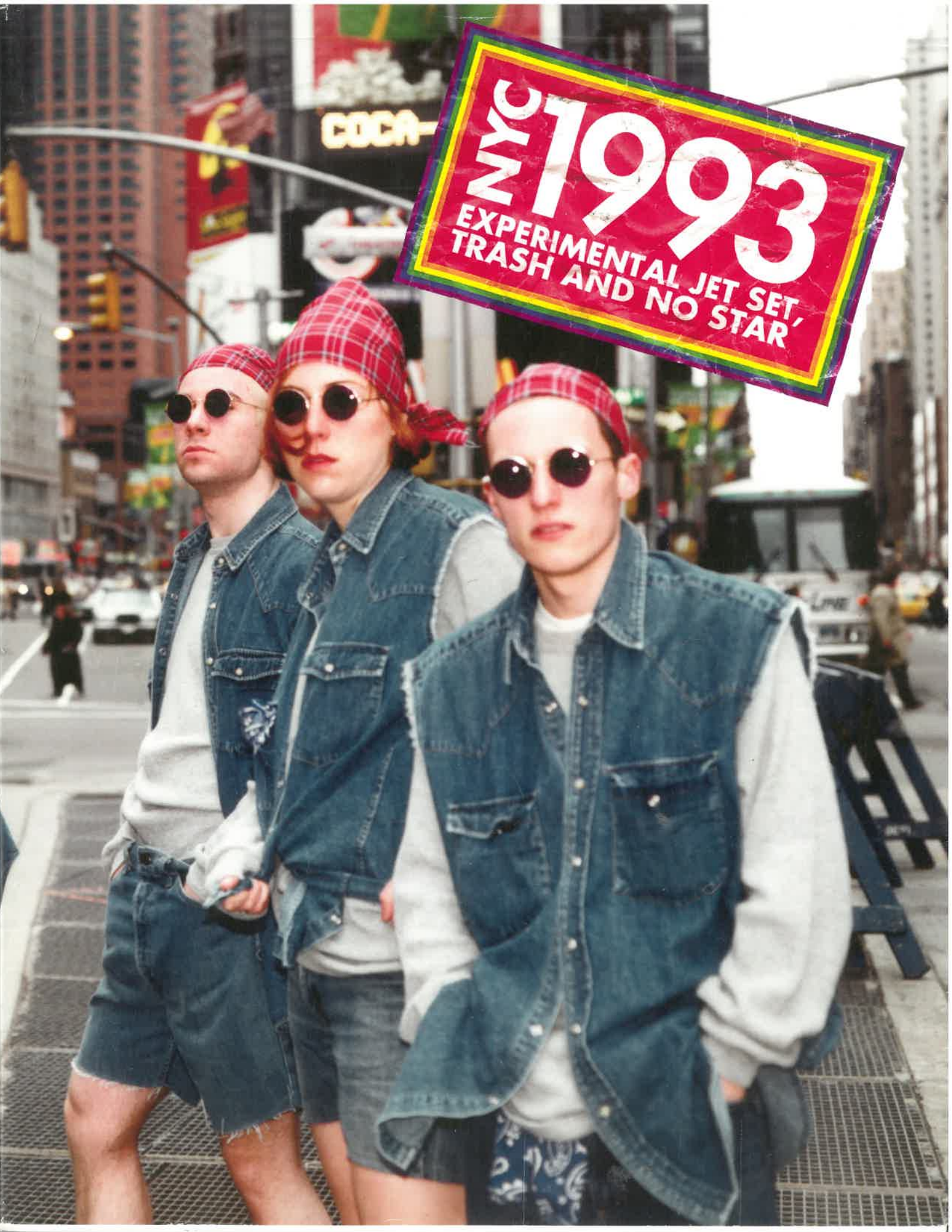


NYC
1993
EXPERIMENTAL JET SET,
TRASH AND NO STAR



THE MERE INTERCHANGE

Francesco Bonami

A lot can happen in three years. So much can happen, in fact, that we might do well to take the whole period, three years, *en bloque*, and let it be enveloped by a history which, for some time now, has proved incapable of using its own unit of measure: years. It had to be pointed out that contemporary art constitutes part of this time and this is precisely what we are pointing out. The drawing up of a project capable of tackling the state of emergency we have imposed upon ourselves at the same time means sharing the errors we have committed, exchanged, and, even if only rarely, learned from. In years past, many identities involved the inversion of positions and roles.

Such an exchange has, however, been exponentially complicated, secularizing once and for all the contemporary Western artist's role in society. No longer the teacher, ideologist, philologist, or producer of symbolic goods, the artist has progressively lost sight of the therapeutic function of his operations and has sacrificed the quality of his endeavors by concentrating on the unrefined structure of the various issues at hand. This qualitative regression, on the artist's part, in a bid to elude savage reification, has led art to appear illuminated by the substance of its contents while remaining apparently incapable of synchronizing the passion of gestures with the rhythm of words. However, if we scrutinize the image of which we too are a part, and to which we are temporarily defiladed, the need to once again simplify and synchronize the voice with the gesture seems obvious. "The Mere Interchange."

Once reappropriated with the "reificated" reality that surrounds him, the artist has come to realize that he has also assimilated an existence which is socially, politically, and economically run-down, and on which his expression inevitably depends. Rather than produce some sort of reaction, what contemporary art has done is to abandon itself to the depression of the social setting, as it appeared, mirage-like, on the horizon during the last decade. Political psychopathies have gotten the upper hand so that where the environment has failed to provide refuge, it has been up to the body to provide shelter. This body of ours has been talked about at great length over recent years as the only sign capable of producing identity, which, once again, neglects to take into account the fact that the quality of our gestures is manifested only in its balance with

AUGUST 6

President Clinton's budget plan to reduce the deficit by \$496 billion is passed without a single Republican vote when Vice President Gore breaks a tie in the Senate.

AUGUST 7

As fighting between Afghanistan and Tajikistan intensifies, Russian President Yeltsin encourages other Central Asian countries to help defend the porous border.

our sounds, voices, and words. "You are the message." A "You" who seems to represent everything we are capable of communicating and exchanging, not only through our imagination but also via our physicalness and, above all, by the narrative structure gained through the voice, be it a vibration, a whisper, or a cry.

The voice is where the "mere interchange" terminates and the point from which it resumes its journey, a circular project that is developed around reality like a cortex.

Kristin Oppenheim's chants and poetry fill the space, the void we pass through, transforming the inert moment of passage into a volume where sound takes on the material form of any other material, because only by means of physical and spiritual feeling can reality complete its journey around things. Art picks up on the lost vocality of an entire society whose time seemed to be up. Once the sound disappears, at that very time when silence can once again seize upon the abandoned space, civilization is consumed until it once again encounters the primordial gesture that defines it. Thus, Matthew Barney recapitulates the problems of blocked evolution, regression, self-mutilation, life on the sidelines, and the catastrophe of a civilization. In his mute accounts, which are carried out in altered spaces, the artist reconsiders the breakdown of the subject in what appears to be a sort of social meltdown. Thus, the specter of man's blocked evolution ends up lighting the way from behind civilization and the human being's return to primordial fear, the fear of a species that has proved incapable of dictating the right laws of biological evolution and the direction to be taken by human history. From this point of view, artistic activity represents a continuous flashback to the heroic and mythical significance concealed by the paralysis and immobility of day-to-day existence.

The task undertaken by Gabriel Orozco consists of pitting the social and historical human being against the backdrop of the urban landscape of a society perceived in backlight. The approach becomes the sign that connects natural places with artificial places.

The exchange assumes a circular form that sees the objects and human actions deposited on the landscape absorbed and remodeled by a nature that defends itself from them by accepting them as nothing more than diverse and, however unjustly, alien elements of the same

reality—a reality which is all the more partial because it is separated from the plenitude of the senses and the journey through time which is impoverished in the present.

To resolve this partiality of our existence and prolong the senses, transforming them into sentiments, is what Charles Ray endeavors to do in a bid to fill in those voids that fragment life.

Enlargements, reductions, slo-mos, each piece is the recovery and rebalance of disproportionate, out-of-synch realities: the adult desires of adolescents, group fantasies developed in solitude, visions, affects, expanses, or compressions carried out in the distorted perimeters of the mind. The weight of existence is only relieved by the lightness of our visions.

Reality stays open twenty-four hours a day because there is no one actually inside or outside of it. A supermarket on the outskirts of town. The anonymous space that substitutes the inside/outside of our minds and where language has lost track of sound, only to be transformed into social or economic orality, a means of communication or consumption. The solitude of the body and the anguish of the mind, a dream that gradually becomes a nightmare. Love forever.

Jessica Diamond, harbinger of disastrous news of our inferiority. Paul McCarthy, exhuming fetishes from the garden on the outskirts of town where the obscure rites of a familiar proletariat order have been consumed. The very structures of our psychopathies are disassociated from the social structures they originate from and, in the rebellion that follows, relish the exchange between a society of ingrates and one of outcasts.

In the run-down sitting room where the television represents the perennial twilight of our hopes, the prospects for our discovery begin to take form. The family environment we have passively assailed is transformed into a setting of self-regenerating therapy. The outcast fails to be reintegrated because there is no longer the need. In the tenement kitchen, the metamorphosis of social impoverishment is underway. Anonymity is defeated as soon as it comes face-to-face with its own positive identity.

It is from this psychosocial metabolism that Carter Kustera distills his artistic language, which also serves to diagnose a recovery that is already underway along with

AUGUST 10

The US publicly discusses sending commandos to Mogadishu, Somalia, to hunt down General Aidid, the warlord responsible for the deaths of four Americans.

President Clinton signs the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act; under the new law, Americans will pay an additional 4.3 cents per gallon for gasoline.

AUGUST 11

The US Marines announce publicly that they will phase out married servicemen and women, and are quickly overruled by Secretary of Defense Les Aspin in an embarrassing public relations gaffe.

the detoxification of words. The phrase does not merely ask but informs, creating an open line with the contingent. In the atmospheres of an artistic imagination, Rainald Schumacher detects the awareness of a marginality, which does not set out to change the world or carve out its own space within the "uselessness of art" of the present or, for that matter, of all times.

His "journal" is the dramatic account of the worn-out, discontented artist who, via the language of opinion, rediscovers the direction of his own spirit. We are one step away from recovery. The violent terror of exclusion is not only under control but in remission. The making and remaking of art lies in constantly excluding the other "objects" of art. Art can recover through the exchange of these "objects," by excluding them as options and assimilating them. Maurizio Cattelan is the convalescent of art. The world, human and social relations, prescription, violence, the injustice and barbarity that, however paradoxically, coexist alongside religion and structures of productive use and order are nothing more than a metaphor of the demotivated, randomized, and indifferent structure we live in. The structure is created within the illusion of a separation that exists between the just and the unjust, between value and non-value, and, therefore, between full meanings and the lack of meaning. However, through such creation, perhaps we and a world that is lying in pieces can recover. This is how the process of unification/disassociation is carried out and reconstituted in the illusory totality of the "pictorial moment," as a reassuring, utopian vision.

Rudolf Stingel's output is neither a perversion of nor a regression into the infancy of art, but the recovery of the dominion of intellectual choices of an impossible, negative utopia of irrelevance and fortuitousness. The gesture is lightning-like, instantaneous, but the thought that lies behind the creation of his art is gaping and diluted in time.

Behavior is the matrix that oversees the movement and functions that take place within the reality of a global discourse on art as an important event in the world. Artistic product becomes a pylon along which run the wires and the waves of a finally healed existence.

This healing, however, is nothing more than the capacity to awaken oneself within a sick context and perceive it as such. Only then will art come to represent the experience

of a society that is reopening its eyes, safe but racked in pain. To awaken but not re-emerge after having suffered the passion of history. Each individual and each artist is aware of the pack that surrounds him and of which he is a member. He senses the directions and hurls himself in the face of destiny. In this pack, salvation means losing one's own identity through an undertaking of exchange with other identities. The things we did not know are precisely those things that bring wealth once our centrality has flaked away. Contemporary art is a pack that is often annihilated in the obscure attempt to safeguard the individual identities of its members. When the exchange comes to an end, the pack is scattered and the end is near. What remains of the group, however, is the instinct, which recomposes the significance of being together by means of a social fabric that protects the undeniable individualities on all fronts.

To bring together a group of eight or ten people, in this case artists, is tantamount to isolating a fragment of the pack, to discover where and when each identity is disposed to lose itself and be regenerated with the others, to reconfirm and enrich the unique quality of its own particular language. In the quest for one's own maker each one of us, whether alone or in a group, never abandons the hope that the mere exchange of our own doubts with those of other people will make the mirage of uncertainty concrete.

This is what we offer and what we desire. The desire for power rarely leads to the gift of justice. This is why the effectiveness of our actions thrives on the generosity of our own offers, and art is an offer that has to find its own power and its own meaning.

This is how we knew and still know that our life is not and never will be fully and satisfactorily meaningful until we abandon accountability to our own thoughts, actions, and sentiments.

Unfortunately, however, we live under the dominion of economic reason and with the nightmare of brutality both at home and on our own doorstep. It would therefore be dishonest to insist that art have an autonomous utility. But if we manage to keep alive our hope for an exchange capable of transforming creative gestures into voices, and voices into actions capable of creating objects, and if we place some of our hope in these objects, we might still be

AUGUST 14

In Oklahoma, the nation's governors announce that they will take up the issue of the proposed federal health care plan during their annual meeting, noting their concerns that it will disturb health initiatives in individual states.

AUGUST 15

As discomfort with attitudes expressed in rap music mounts, the feminist scholar bell hooks is quoted in the *New York Times* saying, "I think a lot of misogynous rap is similar to crack. It gives people a sense that they have power over their lives when they don't."

able to expect art to liquefy the rigidity of violence and become a prototype for a new world to love. For all these reasons, it remains impossible to comprehend a solution within the sterile act of looking. To resolve and resolve ourselves, it is necessary to go back to sympathizing with life right down to its solution; exchange and continue to exchange sounds with silence, the gesture with immobility, and simplify everything in order to retrieve the complexity, the generosity, and the eroticism of the world.

AUGUST 18

The White House proposes combining the FBI with the Drug Enforcement Agency in an effort to coordinate the government's war on drugs, eliciting a fierce debate.

AUGUST 19

In a reversal of a long-held policy, the Metropolitan Opera announces that it will use "supertitles" to display translations of foreign-language opera texts.



Kristin Oppenheim, *Sail on Sailor*, 1993.
Installation view: 303 Gallery, New York

AUGUST 24

Two Iraqi ambassadors defect, seeking haven in Britain and condemning Saddam Hussein's "reign of terror."

AUGUST 25

The US indicts Egyptian cleric Sheikh Abdel-Rahman for orchestrating the World Trade Center bombing, a planned attack on New York City's tunnels and buildings, and the killing of Rabbi Meir Kahane.