

zingmagazine

a curatorial crossing



JACKIE ROBINSON

October 24, 1947

Mrs. Paul
P.O. Box 101
Center, Colorado

Dear Mrs. Paul:

I have no special recipes, but my
favorite menu is:

Fillet Mignon

Baked Potato

Lettuce & Tomato

Apple Pie & Milk

The apple pie as my wife makes it only.

flaky crust	{	3 cups flour--sifted	{	mix well
		1 tsp. salt		
		1 cup shortening		
contents of pie	{	8 baking apples peeled and sliced	{	mix well
		1 tsp. cinnamon		
		1 tsp. nutmeg		
		1 cup sugar		
		1 tbsp. flour		
Place drops of butter and lemon juice on pie before Bake 45 minutes. placing top crust on.				

I trust this will be of some help to you.

Sincerely,

Jackie Robinson

JRK:ss



CONTENTS

The Discipline, The Title

"If it wasn't for the mist we could see your home across bay..."

The Ruined Map

Ad on Exchange

The Bermuda Triangle Project

Howard the Duck

The NEA Papers

Girls and Horses

Architectur

Fur

Dissociationism

The Curator

Judith Findlay

Matthew Ritchie

Jade Dellinger

Uscha Pohl

Jonathan Horowitz

Eidia, Paul La Marre & Melissa Wolf

Janet Biggs

407

Gregor Muir

Mike Ballou and Adam Simon

The Reflection, The Review, The Reaction

Hall of Mirrors (148)

Michael Joseph (151)

Lynn Tondrick (153)

Slowness (155)

The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing (155)

Mo Picasso at MoMA (157)

The Art Exchange (160)

Rainer Ganahl (161)

Michael Ashkin (163)

Timothy Nolan (164)

Spring Collection (166)

Nothing Matters (168)

Lucas Reiner (170)

William Pope.L (171)

Gert Rappenecker (173)

"Between the Acts" (175)

Lee Stoetzel (177)

Jeremy Deller (179)

Les Ayre (181)

corps étranger (182)

Rachel Whiteread (185)

Midway (186)

Rachel Whiteread (189)

Filiale (191)

Devon Dikeou, Robert Heckes, Christian Schumann (192)

Olaf Nicolai (194)

Traffic (196)

Eve Andrée Laramée, Jim Hodges (197)

Charles Long (200)

Salome (201)

Dennis Hollingsworth (203)

Peter Zimmerman (205)

Stephen Berens (206)

Axel Hütte (210)

Rachel Harrison (212)

Robert Adams (214)

William Radawec (217)

Haralampi G. Oroschakoff (219)

Rainer Ganahl (220)

Paul Ramirez -Jonas, Ricci Albenda (222)

Momoyo Torimitsu (224)

Manifesta I (226)

Robert Frank (229)

Laker Thoughts (230)

The Contributor

M. Begleiter

Lisa Jaye Young

Aron Namenwirth

Tom Rayfiel

Mathilde Heyns

Spencer Finch

Germaine Keller

Tom F. McDonough

Max Henry

Mario Ontiveros

Katerina Gregos

Kevin Radley

Steve Mumford

Stuart Horodner

William Fox

Katerina Gregos

Angela Brisnovali

Judith Findlay

Bryan Burkey

Sabine Russ

Max Henry

Stuart Horodner

Janet Goleas

Rainer Ganahl

Terri Friedman

Thomas Fechner-Smarsly

Emily Tsingou

Jane Hart

Leonard Bravo

Shelley E. Marlow

Kerry Kugelman

Katerina Gregos

Jan Tunlir

Katerina Gregos

Geraldine Postel

Jay Mandel

Ann Carter

Iwan Kovak

Maria Wutz

Gregory Volk

Rainer Ganahl

Sana Papa

Simon Niedenthal

Milan Babic

Stephen Berens: Who's Afraid of Reification?; Richard Heller Gallery • Santa Monica, California

For Several years now, Stephen Berens's artistic gaze has been turned in on itself. As in the myth of Narcissus, what appears in the reflecting pool is an image of youth, but a youth devoid of innocence or innate beauty, and accordingly, one which may be tampered with. Since 1991, in fact, Berens has been busy constructing a new culture from the ruins of the old; former art school projects, slide-files and statements of purpose long ago abandoned to dusty obsolescence, the abject accumulation of useless work that weighs like a monstrous albatross upon all but a chosen few art-stars, as they schlep from one garage, studio or (in mounting degrees of prestige) gallery to the next. Here all that dreck, basically, is recycled and repackaged as a secondary yield of what? More or less legitimate art? More or less viable product? Or still more dreck? Confronting the insanity of artistic ambition head-on, such questions inevitably loom large.

Berens's basic method could easily sustain an entire career, and shows every indication of doing so. Putting aside the particular works for a moment, it is, in itself, almost excessively resonant, proposing no end of hermeneutic openings and avenues, an intimidating wealth of theoretical incentives ranging from jokey to dead-serious. On the whole, we might approach this project as a kind of excavation of early creative impulses, intentionally thwarted from the get go. The aim is not to revisit a long-lost, magical terrain, but to confirm that it does not, in fact, exist, and never did.

As for the myths which stand in its place, the first to fall by the wayside concerns the intrinsic worth of "untrained" expression. The output in question betrays a generic photo-shop anality; high-minded, work-intensive and way beyond clumsy, it is no doubt also much more ponderous and over-intellectualized than anything which could possibly come after. Yet Berens does not dote upon this fledgling product, nor does he plumb it specifically for sociological insight. As an archival project, this is substantially lacking in the requisite appearance (at least) of objectivity. The mock-scientific rigor and "hands-off" preciousness typically associated with Conceptualism, while not relinquished outright, are undermined at every turn.

That Berens does not appear to be pursuing any one particular objective with regard to content, grants leeway to a sensibility which tends, rather, toward a baroque and over-determined theatricality. Above all, he is much too eager to get on with the business of production, and thereby treats his various artifacts as though they were, more or less, a raw material. In 1992, for instance, he carved a series of photographic works into a variety of eccentric shapes, and then rehung them facing the wall. Another installation mounted at the former Federal Reserve building in downtown Los Angeles involved the bronzing of a stack of slides to resemble a gold brick. Former objects d'art and their informational supplements are subject to every sort of abuse and elevation; only a small portion of their original significance survives amidst Berens's forceful manipulations, and even that is largely recontextualized in the process. Yet it is just these push and pull dynamics of concealment and revelation which grant the work its coy and somewhat forbidding allure. We can see no more than is shown, which holds true for all art, I suppose, only here the perceptual limits are emphatically proscribed, and the eye is continually drawn to the borders.

Often enough, occlusion is directly contingent upon the archival process itself, as with the semi-opaque protective sleeves within which Berens likes to present his photographs. The sleeves promote a generalized blurring of the image, a pseudo-pictorialism of concealed rather than eradicated detail. The resulting effect, just like his overall aesthetic, is at once elegant, instructive and slightly irritating. Articles of storage are misapplied to purposes of display and vice versa; these erroneous conflations and happy accidents are the operative principle of a kind of surrealism brought to bear upon the art-institutional apparatus. An initial "mistake" supplies the alibi, the motor, and everything else follows suit. Art and error become consequently indistinguishable. This, I believe, is one of the central conceits of Stephen Berens's work, and his current show at the Richard Heller gallery in Los Angeles provides its most concise and effective elaboration to date.

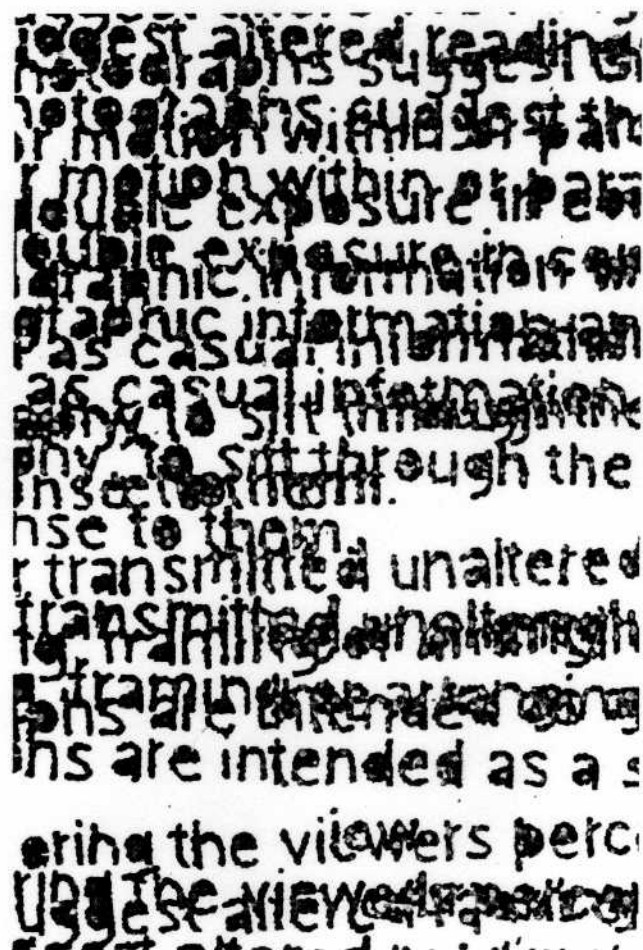
Here, an eight page M.F.A. thesis, three smallish photographs from 1977 and their attendant statement of purpose comprise the basic elements of an extensive and often hilarious meditation on the impossible rift which separates the theory and practice of art. Characteristically, their absolute difference is figured through a failed reconciliation—an ostensibly naive attempt to actually make the words "look like" the pictures. This program of overcompensation suggests its own logistical problems, all of which Berens resolves quite deftly. Generating a stylish suite of objects in the process—objects so aesthetically "sound," we cannot help but occasionally overlook their shaky premise. At the same time, we are reminded that such sleights of hand, precisely, are a stock in trade of art. What else should we expect of this absurd and openly nonfunctional endeavor, after all, than to be dazzled by structure and complexity, the rules of the game over and above its point? Berens seems at first to adopt this imperative outright, he seems to be just playing along, up until the last moment, that is, up until the punch-line, which as everybody knows, in art typically goes missing. It is a fact he never seeks to deny or in any way diminish.

The theme of failure which runs through so much of the writing on Conceptualism is here crystallized as subject of the work itself. It is as though Berens were purposefully misreading the cautionary texts of Joseph Kosuth, Charles Harrison, Terry Atkinson, et al., as a gung-ho prescription for objecthood. The distinctions are outwardly slight, the basic discursive elements remain in place. It is, in fact, the same theoretical construct, but put to an entirely different function. The idea of art as a highly precarious and susceptible practice besieged on every side by the forces of reification has, at any rate, already been standardized in art course curricula across the country, as has the idea of production as a dialectical struggle between art and its context, its housing and history. For Conceptualism, a "movement" (if we can call it that)

which thrived on covert strategizing and secrecy, the worst of all possible fates was, precisely, recognition, success and annexation to the grand canons of art-history. Berens hardly disputes such assessments of avant-gardist defeat, and, in fact, adopts them as a kind of given, a starting point. He occupies the Conceptual as something finished, a tradition already dead.

Berens's work reactivates the oppositional structures of Conceptual Art in the absence of any kind of utopian agenda. Instead, it unfolds as a kind of theater, a parodic dramatization of art's continual defeat and capitulation to language. In the writings of Kosuth, among others, this perceived enmity between art and institution is nowhere more present than in the process of academic naming. The name is an agent of ideological recuperation, the ectoplasmic extension of an institutional amoeba that consumes every object in its path, and then displays their spat-out shells. For all its vehemence, this critique nevertheless maintains a glimmer of idealism, a stubborn faith in the capacity of art to resist these linguistic encroachments, which, by the time we come to Stephen Berens, is altogether extinguished. Here, academic labels and categories, in fact, precede art—they are its *raison d'être*. By the same token, however, the fearsome power with which Kosuth and others imbue these institutional dynamics is considerably depleted. A tentative intellectual scaffolding, at best, it necessarily partakes in the flimsiness of its core structure.

On a purely technical level, it all makes a great deal of sense. Berens classifies one group of his "word-pictures" as paint-



Stephen Berens • MY STATEMENT FROM 1977 PAINTED IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT APPROXIMATES, AS CLOSELY AS POSSIBLE, ONE OF MY PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THAT PERIOD AND THE ORIGINAL SCENE AS I REMEMBER IT, OR, I WANT TO BE PAID BY THE HOUR, 1995, oil on canvas.

ing for the simple reason that they are made of paint and canvas (just in case you aren't convinced, one even resembles a Barnett Newman). A related group of works, due no less simply to the presence of the pencil, falls instead into the drawing category. Here, we find Berens operating in rather more of an editorial mode. Scanning the old thesis statement for the signs of an incipient sensibility—on the one hand modern, on the other hand postmodern—in a sarcastically literal and flat-footed fashion, he seizes upon each word, one at a time, weighing them equally for signs of ideological coding. Those that pass the muster—"autonomous" is one example, "relative," another—remain in place, and everything else is dutifully eliminated. Two separate, and even opposed, texts emerge from this process, each of which is then subjected to various treatments or formats designed to further break down their potential readings in relation to a given array of stylistic compartments and categories. Yet, whether the resulting information is deployed sequentially across the eight page paper or condensed unto a single page, whether it is labeled color-field or conceptual, modern or postmodern, painting or drawing, we cannot forget that all of it derives from the same source. And, however forcefully articulated are these various differences, in the end it serves mainly to reinforce an underlying sense of arbitrariness.

Art school emerges as the show's ubiquitous subtext, and for good reason, as that is where this arty blathering typically reaches its zenith. And that is also where Berens finds his best material: the fragmentary remains of a consciousness under occupation, coaxed for the first time from out of the mute enclosures of "pure" form and into a bewildering expanse of theoretical invective. The shock of having to justify in practical terms something which, up until then, had been organic, unspoken (or so we like to think), compels all kinds of doubt and defensive posturing. Compounding the shaky state of the young student's psyche is the constant demand for fresh product-objects, papers, ideas—all of which are supposed to manifest some small degree of autonomy, at least. Predictably, the outcome is often desperate, ill-conceived and cursory and yet, for this reason exactly, it is also sometimes extremely revealing. From these puffed-up and preposterous documents, Berens wrests a troubled eloquence, surprising only because so rarely consulted. Indeed, they have much to tell us, most of all about desire-subjective, institutional, and whatever it is that results from their collision.

"Certain words, certain gestures, certain actions seem to come from an 'alien being' in the general, human sense of the term: it is not 'me,' a man, who has spoken, but 'him,' the artificial being, presumptuous, angel or devil, superman or criminal, created within me to stop me from being myself and from following the lines of force whereby action achieves more reality..." While this passage from Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* pertains specifically to the concept of alienation, it could be just as easily applied to the previously discussed category of the institutional. In fact, the terms are very nearly interchangeable. Alienation, as he defines it, is a self-perpetuating condition; it seeks to replace reality as such, and accedes to this end by first seizing control of the word—its primary base of operations. None of this is lost on Stephen Berens, who, likewise, has chosen to engage an alienated and hyper-institutionalized language. Yet, through a parodic and theatrical auto-critique, he attempts to turn it against itself, and thereby open it up to thought. An "authentically" alienated language automatically prohibits the formulation of anything other than alienated ideas, which is the opposite of what happens here, since what emerges in the end is neither (to quote Lefebvre) "inhuman" or "unreal," but, in fact, a kind of truth. Nor, on the other hand, is it innocent, natural or even remotely uncoded. It is the truth of a yearning—to be a real artist; an explorer; a discoverer; a genius; to be obsessed; serious and important; a contributor at least. It is the truth of a desire groveling before its object, and it is nowhere more evident than in its early destitution, the pain of which we learn in time to conceal, or reveal, as here, in between bursts of bitter laughter, attacking art with all the fury we believe that we deserve ourselves.

At some point in every artistic career (and probably much more than once), there occurs a mistake, a monumental error of judgment, which, were it revealed, might cast a pall over the oeuvre as a whole. Then there are those smaller gaffes; decisions which are merely lame, mediocre, and for this reason, perhaps even more appalling. I have long suspected that success comes to those, precisely, who've refined the art of cover-up, nipping all such potential embarrassments in the bud, purging any and all signs of weakness from their work—perhaps just what Andy Warhol meant by becoming a machine. In the work of Stephen Berens, the machine-like veneer of an over-institutionalized art serves conversely to house a flawed and thereby still human (all too human) interior.

Jan Tumlrir
Los Angeles, California
1996