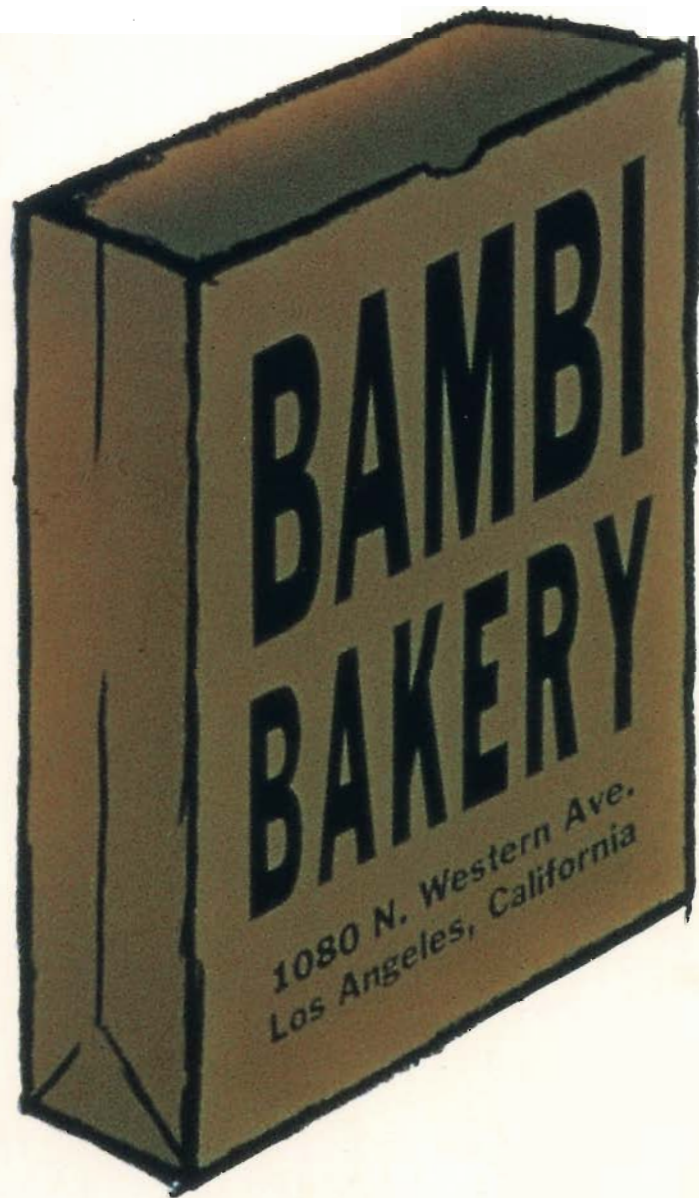


art/text



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its two years, we will have to wait and see if it in fact breaks or mutates the mold. At the present, it seems most prudent to be skeptical, if only because "Berlin/Berlin" seemed most interested in too much of the too-recent art world past, and this surely (hopefully) isn't the only way left for these exhibitions to operate.

In other words, too often in "Berlin/Berlin" I found myself flashing back not only to 1997's Documenta X, but to earlier exhibitions like the 1996 "NowHere" show at the Louisiana Museum in Denmark: is anyone going to ask what it means when it all begins to look the same? Given the curatorial parameters of "Berlin/Berlin"—all the work is from artists who spend or have spent significant time in Berlin, and is more or less current—one would think that there would be ways to find other (more specific? less programmatic?) things to see, even in the stuff we now see all the time, in particular all of those installational sprawls ultimately rendered institutionally correct. Don't misunderstand, I'm not so much railing against work I

haven't even mentioned yet as I am wanting it to contribute to far less cohesively institutionalized (whether "anti-" or not) patterns by being placed in direct contact with as many other contradictory moments as possible.

I'm even conservative enough to suggest that once again in Berlin (like Kassel, for example), this problem has been framed symbolically by infectious curatorial paranoia about painting: it's been banished from this show, where the audience has been sent off to Franz Ackermann's studio if they want to see some (call first), Ackermann being an artist whose peripatetic way of working calls for not only his participation here, but also *fully* that of the work itself in the space, on the walls (good move on the part of Neugerriemschneider to have a fantastic show of his paintings up in the gallery). This complaint, however, is too easy: painting needs no protection; *presence* remains a problem.

To that end, the sprawling yet self-contained installations have the largest presence in the show, three in particular—John Bock's *Liquiditätsaura-aromaportfolio*; Honey-Suckle Company's *HSC3D*; and Jonathan Meese's *AHOI DE ANGST*. All take off from the artist (or artist group) as obsessive *Merz* collector, whether Bock's underground world of knitting, toys and electric guitars (some of it captured on video) which he lived in for awhile underneath a false floor in his two rooms (an arrangement which put viewers up against the ceiling while they stuck their heads in various holes to get a closer look); Honey-Suckle Company's collective living space, each member with his or her own corner (they're hoping to form a sort of ashram); or Meese's "Marquis de Sade" archive, in which personal fixations and delusions of grandeur force our attention. Other examples took a more directly social approach: Christoph Schlingensiefel's roped-off *CHANCE 2000*, which replicates (and unfortunately museumifies) a sort of campaign headquarters for the political party he founded ("Failure as opportunity!" is one slogan); and Thomas Hirschhorn's poignantly witty on-the-street *Otto Freundlich-Altar*, dedicated to a Jewish artist who, according to Hirschhorn, "might have died at this particular spot," even though it's pretty certain he was killed in a concentration camp. Not without interest individually, these works have been collectively put in a position of canceling each other out, which, given the context, has the effect of once

KATYA SANDER.
INSTALLATION DETAIL.
"SAFETY GUARANTEE." 1998.
PHOTO KATYA SANDER.
COURTESY GALLERI
TOMMY LUND.



again rendering the present absent. Therefore, I do remain somewhat wary of the much greater solace I've taken in many of the more singular moments to be found here: Thomas Demand's simple yet breathtaking film, *Tunnel*; Monica Bonvicini's *BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR* (a fan that assaults you from above when you walk into one of the buildings, power-full enough to move daily a volume of air equal to that in the building); Armand Günrtuch and Almut Grünrtuch-Ernst's *Center Peep* (a peephole-cum-periscope which brings Berlin's TV tower upside-down into the gallery); Mathieu Mercier's *Structure for a Plant Made from White Mosaic* (an elaborate construction that supports each leaf of a plant with smaller and smaller pedestals); Gabriel Orozco's mesmerizing video projection, *Still Waterfall*; Manfred Pernice's *Tatlin Tower 3* (a large particle-board model of a modern apartment building, installed in the dilapidated Akademie der Künste, in the very room where Albert Speer presented his model of the Great Hall to Hitler). Solace as a form of refuge is necessary at times when raking on a city like Berlin. However, I don't believe it is to be trusted when it happens to you in an exhibition.

Terry R. Myers

Katya Sander

mfkkm, Copenhagen
October 9 - November 1, 1998

As the invocation of a response to a catastrophic scenario that is the welfare state's other, Sander's shelter is paradoxically effective—this because it actually doesn't feel safe. A superficial viewing of its structure and the items offered for sustenance suggests that these are most likely insufficient for purposes of survival. In this, the official contingency plan assumes a dimension of symbolic redemption of the threat to the welfare state; actually, the measures seem somewhat futile. Another interesting fact the artist brings to light is the argument for maintaining the national emergency plan to be found in the Interior Ministry's annual *Note on Uncertain Factors in the Security Policy of Denmark*. In the 1996 version presented in the exhibition (the '97 and '98 versions are still strictly confidential), the threat of Eastern military aggression is toned down in relation to the dangers of wholesale emigration from regions experiencing unrest, the refugee torrent which it is "morally difficult for Western Europe to reject and handle" [sic]. Of course, it is exactly these "sorts" of people who would be able to recognize the shelter as something other than de-subjectified architecture.



JACK PIERSON, *GOLDEN SCREEN*, 1998, EKTACOLOR PRINT, ED. OF 10, 40 x 30 IN.

Although an unexpected and distinctly black-humored inflection of the current interest among artists in city planning, "Safety Guarantee" doesn't avoid a relatively pedagogical presentation. But the fact that the exhibition also triggered responses of the more fantastical kind betrays a welcome lack of calculation. During the exhibition Sander received absurd calls from asteroid freaks and other groups with eschatological leanings; and even the Civil Defense Forces invited her to participate in a think tank on the subject of possible catastrophes. In this light, "Safety Guarantee" persists as an interesting catalyst for discussing more or less congruous, official as well as unofficial preparations for the disastrous.

Lars Bang Larsen

Jack Pierson

Regen Projects, Los Angeles
October 17 - November 28, 1998

Nine modestly proportioned Ektacolor prints comprise Jack Pierson's latest exhibition at Regen Projects. The hue of each is saturated, skewed to

extremes of vermillion, magenta, gold or cyan. They are formal, largely abstract and devoid of pictorial reference, save a bridge, a neon "25¢" and a solitary male figure, viewed from some distance. The images that do exist are all edges and byways, through traffic only, transits to or from places, over bridges, behind screens. And even these attachments to the real are flimsy, each fugitive and interrupted by the mechanics of flash, focus, and the fact of the ends of the film—those things a good photograph is meant to render invisible.

Pierson's work is blander than that (no good intentions here), and resistant to the critical dimension so eagerly applied to artists and personalities of his generation. Thus the current work has none of the intimate immediacy of a Nan Goldin, nor the slacker histrionics of a Wolfgang Tillmans, nor even the by-now familiar signifiers of homosexuality to be gleaned from his earlier work. So, too, when out of focus, they have none of the redemptive elegance of an Uta Barth, nor does their glaring flash satisfy a documentary verity.

The staged ineptitude of these photographs resists recuperation. It comes as no surprise then that a picture of the side of a dumpster, taken too close, is called *Dumbster* (all works 1998). This piece highlights the unctuous and too-painterly runs of the many-times repainted object, caught in the heat of the flash, streams of white light dripping over the hot orange surface. In *Red Strip*, the photographer—stupid as a painter—prints the end of the roll and gets a plenitudinous surface of red edged with yellow, like some atavism of Barnett Newman. *Golden Screen* and *Sunlight on the Changing Room* read as photographic Rothkos, the sweep of modulated color splitting the image in two, or running around the edges with neo-Greenbergian flourish.

There is a play between the dumbness—the muteness—of these perversely formal compositions, and a residue of sex: red strip, white drip, golden screen, a changing room or a back alley (where you'd find a dumpster). They produce abstraction as a kind of pink formalism in which the blankness of the forms and the haphazard methods of the amateur leak sex in spite of themselves. In an interview from 1994, Pierson remarked: "Take a Rothko. I guess they were hoping to banish all kinds of content and specificity, so that you could get to a spiritual state. But ultimately it's their thing