

ARTFORUM

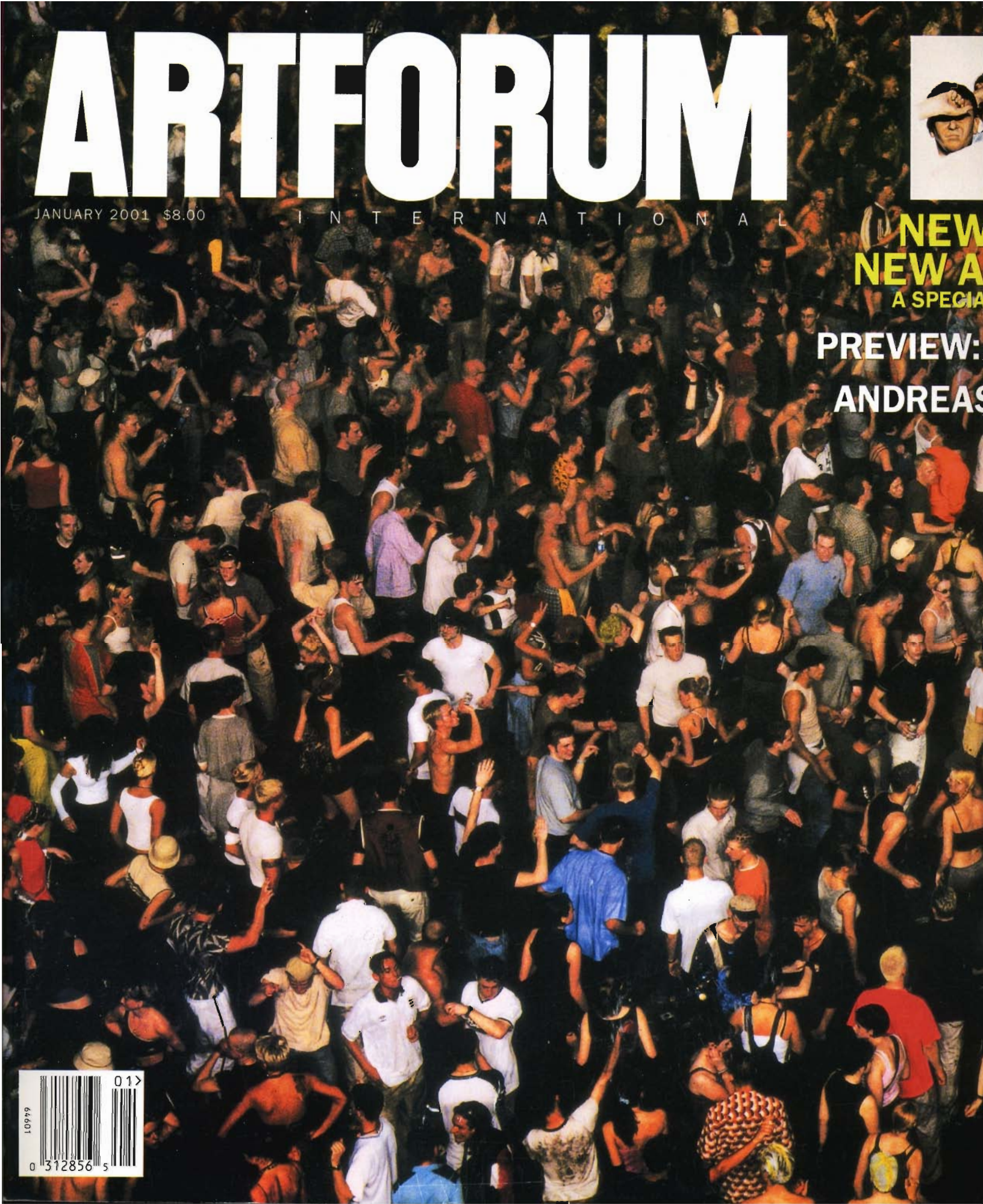
JANUARY 2001 \$8.00

I N T E R N A T I O N A L



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**PREVIEW:
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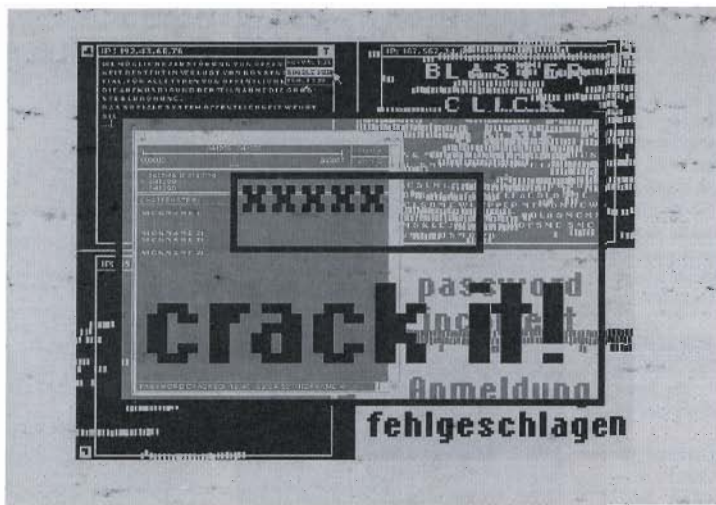
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Phantasmen (The plague of phantasms)
pencil on wall, dimensions variable.



Knowbotic Research, xxxxx connective force attack—open way to public, 2000,
Internet project, <http://www.h-h.de/hh/images/logo.jpg>. From "Aussendienst."

POMMERER
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and floods into the gallery space—or a whole exhibition hall, as in the German Open at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg in 1999. The more fragmented and deformed the depiction, the more emphatic the libidinal energies it conceals.

Pommerer's titles, though, reflect an almost fairy-tale, supernatural approach to reality. A wall titled *Die Pest der Phantasmen* (The plague of phantasms) was dedicated to the moment when drawings of dream sequences suddenly turn threatening. On the other hand, titles like *Montauk* or *Paradiesgarten—Im Januar* (Garden of paradise—in January) function as frames for pictorial motifs that are perpetually in dis-solution. The narrative threads Pommerer spins out are continually picked up and dropped again. One could also say Pommerer veils his content in endless variation, in ornamental chains of signifiers. For it does, in fact, have to do with strategies of survival and power, as the Schiller quotation suggests at any rate: One must beware of tigers and lions, Schiller tells us, but the worst beast is man himself. For Pommerer in turn, this monster no longer takes any distinct form. Though the artist shows every elephant and every predator by its familiar shape, the beast "man" is alone reduced to mere caricature. In general, man seemed to disappear in the allover pattern of creatures with which Pommerer covered the rooms. Sometimes a face still peeked from the corner of the wallpaper hung on the gallery walls as a background for the drawings. But that was hardly more than a ghost from a strange, other reality.

—Harald Fricke

Translated from German by Sara Ogger.

HAMBURG

"AUSSENDIENST"

In the last two decades, "art in public spaces" has increasingly served as an opportunity for large-scale exhibitions in the center city. Tourism has been introduced to contemporary art, and art has in turn taken its place in the calendar of events. Now another large-scale project has been realized in the public sphere—one with a running time of more than a year (divided into three phases), an international roster of artists, and accompanying symposia. By the third and last phase, which begins in May 2001, around thirty artists will have completed their "Aussendienst" (off-site assignment).

What separates "Aussendienst" from comparable projects is, first of all, that it does not take the form of a single event. The presentation of eight works in July was followed in September by another seven, exhibited for the most part in public and semipublic interior spaces. Only Phase 1 had the task of situating visible objects in exterior space. An artificial meteorite by Thomas Stricker placed alongside a lake promenade is doubtless an eye-catcher. Just as striking, if in a somewhat hidden location, is Roman Signer's *Engpass* (Bottleneck; all works 2000): Signer had a car slam in between two converging, wedge-shaped walls of concrete, its arrested energy now petrified as sculpture. Quieter and more contemplative is Ronald Jones's *Cosmic Garden*, which took as its model a similar medieval garden that had been planted by a Catholic woman in the

concentration camp at Auschwitz. Near the main train station, Jones's garden evokes the memory of those deported from Hamburg during the Nazi era.

With a few exceptions like these, though, "Aussendienst" on the whole eschews a spectacular image. Its theoretical substructure is nourished by the thesis that the public, once thought of as an inclusive social body, has been splintered into partial publics. Accordingly, art takes on a new role, acting as an agent moving between the separate partial social groupings and defusing potential conflicts. Add to this the fact that public space is conceived more as a discourse or activity than as a tangible urban terrain and there arises, for the organizers of "Aussendienst," a new standard for art in the public sphere: as a mediator among potentially conflicting "lifestyle communities."

Phase 2 of "Aussendienst" is oriented even more strongly to partial publics in enclosed spaces. Katya Sander's *Cine-mapping* is a "video arena" installed in a department store, where scenes of market research may be viewed. Real shopping behavior within the department store is confronted with what triggers it, i.e., the researching, tracking, and evaluation of consumer interests. Ideally, the customer should experience his or her personal freedom of choice in matters of taste and personal image as a product of directed market strategy. More typical, perhaps, is *xxxxx connective force attack—open way to public*, an Internet project by Knowbotic Research: a game of breaking into encoded domains, whose public is specifically the worldwide community of hackers.

By focusing on the idea of promoting communication between partial publics, the organizers and artists of "Aussendienst" have entered into an experiment whose outcome is unknown. A decisive factor will be whether viewers used to traditional art-in-public-spaces agree to play by the new rules and whether, in any case, they are prepared to direct their attention to its sites of interest. The word on "Aussendienst" so far suggests that many continue to perceive only the more spectacular or monumental objects, while the offerings peculiar to this exhibition remain at a remove. In this respect the expectations of those responsible for "Aussendienst" seem doubly high: "The reaction to art in public spaces must enter into the form of the works themselves." Here, a nonreaction could have a form-annihilating effect.

—Wolf Jahn

Translated from German by Sara Ogger.