

of the slow evolution of the art world's mechanisms of exclusion, and it reminded us, once again, that the categories of "outsider" and "avant-garde" at times overlap in a way that exposes the hollowness of the implicit value judgments of each.

—Alexander Scrimgeour

Hermann Nitsch

MIKE WEISS GALLERY

Over the course of two consecutive evenings this past February, Hermann Nitsch executed the first American "Painting Action," officially the sixtieth such performance since 1960, when he debuted this mode at the Technisches Museum in Vienna. The Painting Actions—the most recent one included—are not as scandalous as his better-known Actions from the early 1960s, for which he once skinned, mutilated, and crucified a lamb, displaying its body on a wall of white fabric and its entrails on a white table, covered with blood and hot water. *Hermann Nitsch 60. Painting Action // 60. Malaktion*, 2011, while lacking a lamb—presumably the sacrificial lamb of God—did refer to the Crucifixion, incorporating a number of cross-shaped canvases on which the artist and his assistants had splashed paint, some of it bloodred. White robes and several large-scale canvases were also included, splattered with bold greens, yellows, and browns. The effect of the performance—and the resultant canvases—was suggestively sensational, as all action painting is.

Nitsch regards himself as a "person gifted for religion," and, as such, "gifted for grasping being . . . in its manifold forms." Presumably, his Painting Actions are orgiastic celebrations of Christ's sacrifice. But it isn't just killing that Nitsch is interested in, however sanctified, but sex, too—also a sacred act. "Sexual love need not compete with a love of god or loving life," he has written. "On the contrary, god has created all that leads to sexual consummation of love"—through sexual orgasm "we enter into his most inward substance." Shades of Saint Teresa! She also seemed to have confused/fused sexual rapture and religious ecstasy.

So are the Abstract Expressionist paintings that we see in the gallery the traces of sexual acting out, or the residue of a sacred ritual meant to inspire our worshipful awe? Likely they are both. There are four in total, each large-scale and unfolding horizontally, mural-like, along the wall. Two feature several colors splashed around a thick band running horizontally through the center. A truncated cross is positioned amid a luminously yellow work; another painting features bold splashes of blood red, with a bit of blue, and the "heavenly" white of the canvas



Hermann Nitsch, *Hermann Nitsch 60. Painting Action // 60. Malaktion*, 2011. Performance view, February 16, 2011. From left: Loretta Mae, Giuseppe Zevola, Hermann Nitsch, Monica Lorraine Bernal.

coming through. In the center of the room is an altarlike white table with white lilies and roses, as one will often find in a Catholic church. Such a reference to ecclesiastical space is Nitsch's standard vocabulary, and, in lieu of the lamb, he no doubt sacrificed himself during the two days of the performance, painting with fervor and using a multiplicity of colors, as the paint cans and bags of pigment on display imply.

Harold Rosenberg, who coined the term *action painting*, spoke of its tendency to turn into "apocalyptic wallpaper," raising the questions of whether Nitsch's painting actions merely recycle Abstract Expressionism, and whether the artist's religious fervor serves to impart an extra edge of meaning and expressive frisson to the splatters and drops. Indeed, Nitsch's work seems oddly quaint, despite its grandness, its welcome celebration of painting for painting's sake, and its implied profundity. At the least, Nitsch's works are saturated with spontaneous gesture and personalized idea, and, as such, meet psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott's test of the true self.

—Donald Kuspit

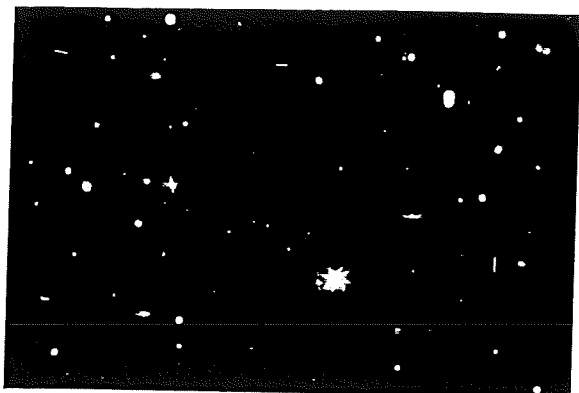
Dario Robleto

D'AMELIO TERRAS

For an "abstract" medium composed of invisible sound waves traveling through air, music generates a considerable number of fetish objects. The idea of performing can itself become a substitute for direct experience: Even the shyest individual may harbor secret fantasies of rock-star success, of driving countless fans to a near frenzy of adulation and identification. But as Houston-based artist Dario Robleto's recent show, using records, audio tapes, posters, show flyers, and handwritten lyrics demonstrates, it doesn't take a psychotherapist (or a semiologist) to explain that any projective aspirations on the part of the fan say more about fantasy and possibly fanaticism than about the tangible satisfaction of desires. For *Candles Un-burn, Suns Un-shine, Death Un-dies*, 2010, Robleto digitally removed the bodies of now-deceased performers from their live-concert album covers, and created a composite from the residual constellation of stage lights and tiny pinpricks of lighters held aloft by fans. The piece is an eerie portrait of absence: Once the gravitational pull of a star is removed, the light flares appear like so much brilliant but evanescent intergalactic dandruff. Robleto attempts to capture the ineffability of stardom, the way in which the reflected light of the star inevitably comes to us as a parallax of some distant and mysterious event.

Indeed, even as we try to possess a little piece of the star through the consumer objects the music industry sells us, a central fetish object of twentieth-century music—the LP—has receded into obsolescence and is now an antiquarian artifact. Much of Robleto's work has used the materiality of this and other music-related ephemera to test the way in which the idea of collecting is always charged with a kind of temporal delay, imbued with an elegaic sense of the outmoded. His diminutive sculpture *How to Resist Nothingness? (I Don't Wanna Let You Go)*, 2010, incorporates another technological relic from pop music's past—magnetic audiotape, which he unspools and re-forms into tiny leaves wrapped around willow twigs. Suspended in clusters inside of a mason jar surrounded by mirrors, the handcrafted leaves are precious, vulnerable, and anthropomorphized, though endlessly duplicated in reflection. The audiotape from which they are fashioned contains transfers from 45 rpm singles whose titles feature women's names—Dion's "Run-around Sue," Ritchie Valens's "Donna," Roy Orbison's "Leah," for example—which makes the leaves a strangely recursive *mise en abyme*: Their spindly veins are formed by yards of tightly wound magnetic tape that we cannot hear, and contain fifty-year-old proclamations of love for

Dario Robleto,
*Candles Un-burn,
 Suns Un-shine, Death
 Un-dies*, 2010,
 digital composite on
 photographic paper
 mounted on Sintra,
 46 x 65½ x 2".



unseen women who were just girls when the recordings were made, if the women ever existed at all. It is particularly poignant that the source records for this piece belonged to Robleto's mother, she who most likely saw herself interpellated by these pop stars' love songs. Fandom's obsession with presence is revealed as the ambition to suture time and space in an impossible dream of immediacy, always tempered, however, by the passing of time, by the aging of the star, by the aging of the fan.

Robleto's meticulous labor parallels a fundamental asymmetry of pop music—the way audiences spend far more time and energy parsing details of the star's life than the star will ever return to them in kind. A pair of text pieces proclaim the one-name monikers of soloists "Dusty" and "Muddy" (as in Springfield and Waters)—spelled out in cursive script with thousands of minuscule pale pink clamshells. But *ceci n'est pas une pipe*: These adjectival nicknames do not describe what they depict—the nacreous seashells are neither dusty nor muddy (though the singers' last names both refer to water). The intricate collectivity of the shells hints at the complex affective bonds of the crowd; though the members of the group are joined laterally to one another, they ultimately exist in a hierarchy, fused together beneath the larger-than-life, highly cathected star.

—Eva Díaz

Paul Gabrielli

INVISIBLE-EXPORTS

For the major part of Paul Gabrielli's sophomore solo exhibition, "Generally," half a dozen everyday institutional features—a railing, a fire alarm, a soap dispenser, etc.—installed around the gallery's front room at points appropriate to the functions they reference, were afflicted with awkward protrusions. Each artifact hosted a parasite that glommed onto its surface, evoking a tumor or a tick before any form of assemblage blessed with an art-historical pedigree. Here Gabrielli blended the found, the manipulated, and the constructed to loosen the hold of use value over even the most workaday stuff.

First in the space, and typical of the series, was *Untitled*, 2011. Perched atop a surveillance camera's metal-and-plastic housing, mounted on the entrance wall above head height, was a simple black flashlight. At first glance, the combination almost seemed to make practical sense—both objects are used to enhance vision—but a second look clarified the arrangement's absurdity. It was as if the oddly matched components, in gently but insistently pushing against one another, cast doubt on the whole idea of "purpose." And in playing with objects without altering them too much, Gabrielli reestablishes their inherent strangeness in a

real-world arena. Think of the improvised and accidental mash-ups in Richard Wentworth's photographic series "Making Do and Getting By," or the way that materials in Peter Fischli and David Weiss's video *Der Lauf der Dinge* (The Way Things Go), 1987, seem to act without regard for what they were originally "supposed" to be "for."

More evocative still were works based on an alarm bell and a soap dispenser. In the former, a plastic smoke detector the approximate size and shape of a hockey puck is affixed, barnacle-like, to a cherry-red fire alarm. In the latter, an air freshener has settled on a liquid soap dispenser. Both works are also shaped by the artist's own manipulations and additions; in the fire alarm, for example, the text on the bell's central label has been blurred by digital processing, rendering it not quite legible. It's a tiny change, but one that arguably undermines our expectations more profoundly than any more obvious or exaggerated intervention. Again, we find ourselves nudged—not shoved—toward an interzone of ambiguity and uncertainty.

In the show's second set of works, Gabrielli employed a different format but again juxtaposed pairs of independently familiar elements to produce a radically unfamiliar third. Par for the course is a battered piece of aluminum preserved behind clear plastic and attached to a cardboard backing printed with a photographic image of sunset-tinted clouds. The reference to standardized commercial packaging is immediate, but what exactly is the product on display here? Is the encapsulated fragment a piece of evidence, a religious relic, a fetish object, or some private souvenir? It appears at once unique and mass-produced, utterly ephemeral but linked by association to the natural sublime. As with its companion series, we are left with endless questions around function and value, nature versus nurture, played out through products and their physical makeup. We might compare Gabrielli to the protagonist of Tom McCarthy's novel *Remainder*, whose search for authenticity requires him to make and remake the real until its very substance is undermined.

—Michael Wilson

Victoria Sambunaris

YANCEY RICHARDSON GALLERY

The border between the United States and Mexico has been contested since 1848, when the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended war between the countries. It took survey teams six years just to draw the line, then marked with small obelisks and stone mounds. Disputes arising from population growth and other forms of development necessitated that this survey work be redone in the 1890s, when more than two hundred additional monuments were erected. During the twentieth century, as towns and cities along the border grew, five hundred more markers were dedicated; in recent decades, they have been connected by fences, owing to fears of illegal border crossings. Throughout this history, images have played an important role in the recognition and policing of this boundary, from Arthur Schott's ink drawings, created

Paul Gabrielli,
Untitled, 2010,
 Ultracal, plastic
 smoke detector,
 ink-jet-printed sticker,
 steel bolt, wood,
 acrylic, enamel,
 12 x 12 x 4¼".

