ARTFORUM

MAY 2009 INTERNATIONAL

LORRAINE O'GRADY JIM JARMUSCH ALIGHIERO BOETTI LARRY JOHNSON

Heh.
Heh, heh . . .
Ah yes . . .
HA, HA . . .
HA, HA, HA.

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plastic and metal joints. And where a work like *The Corner* would seem to present a more holistic *being* (a body at least half assembled), it evidences, nonetheless, a kind of emptiness, undercutting assumptions of just what (or who) is represented there.

A number of the paintings show the various body parts as literally strung together (or partially strung together), making overt reference to puppetry, with one picture (*Green Bar*) even including a pair of hands that seem to be manipulating an arm hanging akimbo from a slender beam. Looking at these images, which portray the human form as suspended between mechanization and materiality (showing, perhaps, the ways that certain forms *refuse* to "divide right"), I was reminded of Heinrich von Kleist's famous 1810 essay "On the Marionette Theatre." Discussing with a dancer friend the irony of the human condition—that consciousness interferes with physical grace—Kleist concludes that the puppet (with its utter lack of will) might best express human emotion simply because it has none of its own.

—*Johanna Burton*

Ben Jones
DEITCH PROJECTS

In Ben Jones's *New Painting and Drawing*, a slim book of images published last year by PictureBox, song lyrics by the noise rock band Polvo serve as an epigraph (and the volume's only text): "Show me something round and I'll analyze the form / Teaching us the code that makes us crack." It's hard to think of a more apt description of Jones's practice. In his second New York solo show, a smart, energetic installation of drawings, paintings, light boxes, sculptures, and digital videos, Jones makes form—specifically, fundamental geometric shapes—his primary medium; his aim is to reveal the elements shared by diverse constructions of meaning.

Ben Jones, ***NDA Video 1,*** **2009,** still from a color video, 5 minutes.

On the surface, Jones's art doesn't stray far from the zany fluorescent pop-surrealism of Paper Rad, of which he is a member. His new body of work is populated by symbols of the occult, including, in *NDA Video 1*, 2009, a cranky, bedridden wizard-king who must "mentally" change the channel on his television because he's lost the remote control. However, Jones's examination of his imagery is more sophisticated than Paper Rad's, as the four pentagrams displayed at the start of the exhibition illustrate: Two are hung upright, a positive symbol in pagan and Judeo-Christian belief; the other two are hung upside down, and this easy reversal endows them with an opposite and sinister meaning. Yet by exhibiting both versions together, Jones cancels out the meaning of each, producing a dissonance literalized by the stars' thin strips of vibrating neon colors. Elsewhere, the pentagram is shown partially collapsed, recognizable but thoroughly emptied of its original significance, which depends upon its five-point shape. The show's title, "The New Dark Age," likewise overlaps contradictory ideas—"new age" and "dark age"—nullifying them as separate terms.

Essential shapes are also seen in a group of prints displaying three "Ben Jones Approved Patterns": rows of rectangles, concentric irregular polygons, and three sound-wave forms. The patterns build into complex and meaningful images, and, in doing so, acquire physical dimension. The rectangles, for instance, are silk-screened onto wallpaper as flat shapes resembling ladders, and then appear as three-dimensional objects—actual ladders—hung on an adjacent wall. Once the pattern enters Jones's video work, it becomes virtual, or multidimensional, able to move through space and time. In *NDA Video 1*, the "ladders" act as a kind of rolling assembly line, shuttling unconscious humanoid figures across the screen. Here, Jones complicates form with matter, bringing together inorganic and organic constructions. The figures, composed of the sine-wave "approved pattern," are vivisected to reveal their internal workings, which resemble an intricate network of rhythmically pulsing, bulbous, sinuous intestines. *NDA Mush Robo Video*, 2009, shows three pyramids, which Jones calls "mush robos," likewise made up of the sine-wave pattern and likewise possessing elaborate and elegant inner systems, but ones that are hard-edged and exacting machines. The contrast is enforced by a difference in production: The unconscious figures and the mush robos are rendered in Flash animation, which produces flat fields of undifferentiated color; the machines, however, were created using a three-dimensional animation program, a more advanced tool allowing for a greater sense of depth through more precise line work and detailed color gradation.

Jones's rich, tightly conceived work has affinities with Peter Halley's minimalist Day-Glo geometries and Jim Nutt's blobbed, baroque figures, but his aesthetics are more closely tied to those of his contemporaries who came out of the late-'90s Providence scene, particularly the Fort Thunder group. His flat, neon palette and dense network of forms are like those of Forcefield and Brian Chippendale, and the schematic feel of his compositions (in any medium) recalls C. F.'s drawings in the graphic novel *Powr Mastrs*. In tracing the lineage further, one finds indebtedness (in all of these young artists) to Gary Panter's pop-cultural mashups and visual assemblages. But then Jones might see Panter's inventory of references—"the big flood we are all swimming in"—as one big wave.

—*Nicole Rudick*

Carolee Schneemann
P.P.O.W./CAROLINA NITSCH PROJECT ROOM

Carolee Schneemann is an original, and a nexus. Lissome banshee-progenitrix of Body Art and downtown doyenne whose influences span the New York School, the Judson Dance Theater, and contemporary performance, she can connect, say, Joseph Cornell (she met him when she was around twenty) and Matthew Barney (see *Up To And Including Her Limits*, 1971–76, her drawing-in-a-harness performance). After fifty years and counting of exhibiting, she remains "Carolee, naked and maenadian," as Lucy Lippard apostrophized her in 1979. "Painting, What It Became" at P.P.O.W., curated by Maura Reilly, surveyed the development of Schneemann's work from paintings of the late '50s to the various media she contends with today. It bespoke an eminence already anointed not as seminal—that would be wrong, of course—but, to quote Jerome Rothenberg, as "germinal."

Can we opine, then, that Schneemann is at last safely canonized? Not quite. Is it possible it's best that way? I raise this question not to romanticize historical elision, nor to underestimate forces that might wish to demote her artwork—uneven, fervent, gynocentric as it is—from phenomenon to footnote. But her key performances seem now to occupy a remarkable position as simultaneously unassimilable