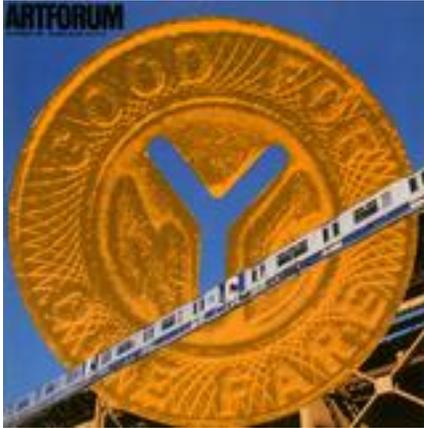


Edinburgh / London



PRINT December 1981

Bill Woodrow

New 57 Gallery

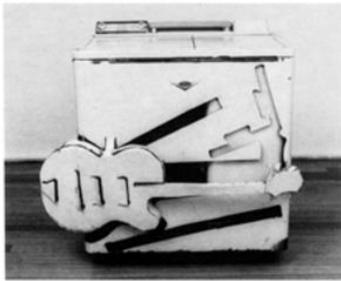
Everywhere you look these days there seems to be vigorous interest in painting, and it is in relation to painting that the most lively debate rages. Everywhere, that is, except Britain, where a small group of sculptors has been able to make a claim for the continuing preeminence of their practice at the cutting edge of esthetic activity. This is remarkable enough, perhaps, but what is even more unexpected is that these artists have been able to do this by staging a surprising reversal of Richard Long's procedures.

The newer sculptors eschew process for product. Turning Long's fascination with natural materials on its head, they choose to work with objects with social implications—the castaway detritus of consumer culture. These found objects, already overloaded with possible significance, are rearranged or reworked in such a way as to further complicate that significance. Tony Cragg's name is inevitably put forward as some kind of talisman, the necessary identification tag, in discussions of this work, and this is perhaps justified simply on the grounds that his work can be understood most directly in relation to Long's. However, it is others, like Bill Woodrow, who seem to take things even a step further.

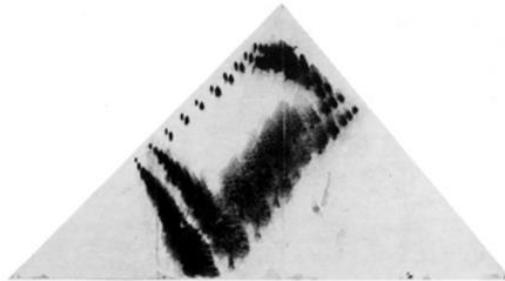
Woodrow's basic materials are the discarded appliances and furniture he picks up in the streets of his South London neighborhood. Originally content to rearrange these poignant souvenirs of walking tours in areas as humdrum as Long's favored sites are romantic, he now refashions them, taking, for example, an old two-tub washing machine and converting part of its siding into a life-size replica of a chain saw. Other combinations include another large washing machine with a guitar slung low in front of it, and a smaller one with a machine gun propped against it. The resulting evocation of various kinds of urban, working-class myth—everything from mum

doing the washing, to the rock band the Sex Pistols, to the IRA—is as inconclusive, and as resonant, as any of Long’s more poetic, genteel mythologizing. Woodrow’s work is puzzling, and stubborn enough to be provocative.

A newer piece, *Electric Fire, Car Seat and Incident*, is a good deal less ambiguous. Looking almost like a stage set, the piece is more artful, less awkward. The back of the heater has been cut out to make a handgun, which rests on the red seat, the back of which in turn has been cut to make a pool of blood on the floor—the internal punning heavily underscored by the interlocking arrangement of objects and images with their trailing umbilical cords. It is an effective single take, but ultimately not as rewarding as the washing-machine pieces.



Bill Woodrow, *Twin Tub with Guitar*, 1981, washing machine, about 39 x 51 x 29"



Simon Read, *The Chase I*, 1980, photographic print on bromide paper mounted on linen, 9 x 16"

esque for the rest of his life. Or he could take a few chances. Of course, there is a critical problem. What is the place of formalism in a post-modern inclusive world view? Pluralists have dogmas, too, we conclude. There is also a national problem. Few of Caro’s large works are ever seen in London. Sadly, despite all this, the indications are that the best sculptor in Britain is padding around the house in his carpet slippers like some dotty pensioner. His latest pieces are accomplished, interesting even, but a little eccentric and overwhelmingly safe, the playthings of a Grand Old Man. Dear Mr. Caro, put your shoes on. Sell your foundry. Go out there and be great. Grow old disgracefully. What have you got to lose? Signed: An Admirer.
—STUART MORGAN

Edinburgh

BILL WOODROW, New 57 Gallery:

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—THOMAS LAWSON

Bristol

SIMON READ, “The Chase,” Arnolfini:

If as many entities exist as there are points of view—Ortega’s theory of *perspectivismo*—then there is a camera for every subject. Working on this assumption Simon Read, as much inventor as artist, perfected (among other things) a pinhole device the height and width of a gallery, and a rotating apparatus to create anamorphic portraits. Basing his art on principles of Renaissance perspective, he took his cues from Jan Dibbets and John Hilliard, elaborating the metaphor of eye as camera to remind viewers of lacunae inherent in coherent but arbitrary systems. Having done so, he regarded them as admirations of other, more complex, orders, imaginable only by extrapolation.

A studio fire in 1979 forced Read to begin again, in a 10-by-12-foot bedroom. One entire corner became an angled, inverted triangular pinhole camera, opposite which stood an eight-foot-high drawing of a tree in white on

black. When the photograph was taken, some of the three-dimensionality of the mechanism was transferred to the re-creation of the object. An initial task consisted of arranging 500 apertures to produce the perspectival prints in this show. Calculations were complex. Read told me: “The angle between the front of the camera and the wall had to be determined. The relationship between these was taken as if between two rectangles where one plane (wall) would see the other (front of camera) in perspective. Having arrived at a perspective of front plane as seen from back plane, the form the camera would take as a triangle had to be superimposed on this. Then the back as corner rather than a flat plane had to be taken into consideration. . . .”

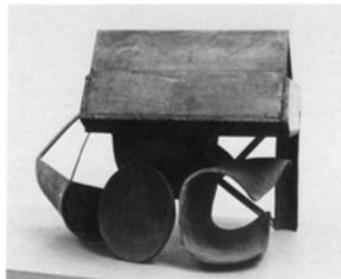
Rather than settling for mathematical solutions, Read operated by what he calls “whimsy,” a play between necessary projection and willful distortion. Drawings recalling Naum Gabo constructions were made to illustrate experiments with five vanishing points, or vanishing points shifting downwards and inwards as the eye moved. Certain features of the drawings—the superimposition of square grids, for instance—were inherited from previous series. Gradually, problem solving gave way to an acceptance of rules based on former decisions. Finally, reliance on those rules was crystallized to form a game structure existing in and for itself, generating more plans from within boundaries that threatened to exclude the artist completely. Developing took place on the wall; then the pictures were laid on the floor. When images had been completely bleached out, relevant por-



Marc Camille Chaimowicz, *Partial Eclipse*
1981, performance



Marc Camille Chaimowicz, *Partial Eclipse*
1981, performance



Anthony Caro, *Half Leap*, 1980, brass sheet and
cast and welded bronze, 22½ × 28 × 30½"

and the image they project to the viewer is that they aren't afraid to use it.
—HAL FISCHER

London

MARC CAMILLE CHAIMOWICZ, Tate Gallery:

In the most general way it could be said that Marc Chaimowicz' art is about the melancholy repetition of the recollection of past desires. It is a careful, highly structured art that seems at once tender and yet rather cynical. Working with a deliberately limited set of images—images of an eroticized domesticity—Chaimowicz has, over the past few years, been investigating the boundary between the private and the public worlds, an area in which the voyeuristic impulses of both the artist and the spectator are brought into question.

Chaimowicz' work is consciously artificial, it has a stagy feel to it; yet its subject matter is private and resolutely untheatrical. Installations, performances, videotapes, and photographs are all rigorously structured, but the atmosphere they generate is at first vaguely romantic, an uncertain disease. One becomes aware that one is seeing the same highly stylized furniture, the same patterns on wallpaper and curtains, the same room. The figures inhabiting this room grow familiar, too, looking out the window, sitting, drinking, talking on the telephone; rarely talking to one another, they appear introspective, an effect heightened by the pale greens and grays that predominate.

In this installation at the Tate—a brave new venture into contemporary art for that venerable institution—Chaimowicz pursues the metaphoric use of screens as a distancing device. The photographs, now with a frankly erotic content, are arranged, as though at random, over large sheets of glass. These are tilted against the wall so that a pattern of shadows is cast by the blank slides that throw diffuse magentas and blue-greens against the piece. The work is pregnant with meanings, but none are allowed to surface definitively. The work remains darkly anxious.

In *Partial Eclipse*, a performance piece that accompanied the installation, the artist steadily circles a straight-backed chair and a blank screen placed in the corner of a darkened room. Slides are projected against the screen, coming and going with a regular, rather slow rhythm. Making this rhythm hypnotic is a sound track composed of eerily vacant music by Brian Eno, and a woman's voice reading a meditative text of repetitions and ellipses. The projected pictures seem to record the passing of a love affair. The text perhaps alludes to this also.

Again one is held in thrall by the slow, insistent repetitions, kept at a distance by the shadowy interplay between the theatrical, real-time representation—the artist walking in circles around his work, around his life—and the photographic representations on the screen. The predominantly gray tones of these slides on slow dissolve, in combination with Eno's music, indicate a mood, but this is punctured from time to time by incidents of sharp humor—the insertion of a lushly colored close-up of a flower,

a snake in the grass—which reduce the pervasive melancholy to a very un sentimental acknowledgment of both self-pity and fear.
—THOMAS LAWSON

ANTHONY CARO, Kenwood House:

Anthony Caro's recent small-scale works are sculptural aphorisms. Open and closed, balanced and falling, abstract and recognizable, part and whole interpenetrate rhythmically, and while some pieces permit immediate visual access, others conceal their complex organization, demanding close attention. Play of opposites is evident, too, in their making. Often they resemble improvisations urged suddenly into permanence by bronze casting. Domestic utensils, trays, drapery, and pipes defy gravity. Accident turns into high drama, as when jugglers let plates drop nearly to the floor before catching them.

Casting may seem unnecessarily heavy-handed, depriving constructions of color, variety, or sheer seediness. Though Caro's technique of arty retrieval could be regarded as a belated response to Robert Rauschenberg, a more plausible argument might be that, in shifting his terms from a space "between art and life" to a realm reminiscent of René Magritte or Giorgio Morandi, Caro is becoming a latter-day metaphysical sculptor, increasingly preoccupied with variations on the Many and the One. As a rule these are rehearsed in accordance with his Cubist tenets. Standing works tend to connect entire units paratactically, if illogically. The very act of showing them off as if once and for all to demonstrate their emptiness distracts attention from

their elementary arrangement. Conversely, works on bases slice and recombine parts of units, attempting metaphors. While the vertical structures seem innocent of structural pretension, the horizontal, based ones reveal an almost machine-like economy. Though movement is not implied in any traditional sense, they give the impression that by rotation (*Hot Case*), retraction (*Half Dollar*), or a miracle of folding (*Centre Back*) they will pack away for easy carrying, like antiquated portman-teaus. This artificiality is deliberate; at least half of the best works—*Second Half* (its title a possible pun on the strong resemblance to a maquette for a stage design) and *Black Raspberry Marble*, by far the simplest and most surreal of all.

Artifice is flaunted, too, in constant witticisms about weight. The "bases" for *Half Dollar*, semicircular bell shapes emerging from what looks like a cardboard box, are two half-hidden papier-mâché egg boxes so slight that, in real life, they would be squashed to a pulp. But so many reversals have taken place since they were part of the real world that any joke is lost without trace. The trickier his structures, the less control Caro seems to have over his tone of voice. That air of the "master at play," condescending to feign intimacy with household paraphernalia, is irksome after a while. And casting egg boxes in bronze is weird however you look at it.

Caro is at a dangerous age. Unfashionable, with no perceptible relation to a British avant-garde, he can choose to put on carpet slippers and be Caro-

Marc Camille Chaimowicz

Tate Gallery

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