



Anne-Lise Coste,
There #7, 2010, oil
pastel on paper,
19% x 25 3/4".
From the series
"There," 2010.

really at stake in this series is something much more ambitious: the direct agency of lived experience on art. Whether the artist has managed to rework a memory through these drawings until it is rendered harmless isn't overly important. What matters, rather, is that we accept everything that goes through our minds, regardless of where it is locked away.

—Martí Peran

Translated from Spanish by Jane Brodie.

Bracha L. Ettinger and Ria Verhaeghe

FUNDACIÓ ANTONI TÀPIES

This demanding exhibition was not for anyone who might be in a hurry. It required patience, concentration, and above all, a great deal of time. Curator Catherine de Zegher, the former director of the Drawing Center, in New York, has long been looking at convergences in the work of Bracha L. Ettinger, an artist and psychoanalyst based in Israel and France, and Ria Verhaeghe, a Flemish artist who has worked as a nurse. On a broad scale, de Zegher's major 1996 traveling exhibition, "Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine" (which featured more than thirty women artists from a wide range of countries), laid out some of the notions fundamental to this show—mainly, the idea of building a conception of art in opposition to phallogocentric discourses and the set identity structures that they impose. The works on view in this exhibition, titled "Alma Matrix," entail a search for the "matrixial" sphere. Born of Ettinger's own psychoanalytic practice, this influential concept refers to the intrauterine environment in which two bodies, the subjectivities of mother and child, coexist in the final stages of pregnancy: an unconscious space where self and nonself share a vaguely defined terrain in which, seeking psychic affinities, they are constantly reorganized.

This idea translates in the work of Ettinger and Verhaeghe into the creation, manipulation, and photocopying of paintings, drawings, documents, and photographs from newspapers, so that the images are not clear but washed out, giving shape to indeterminate spaces. Ettinger often makes use of family photographs and documents related to the Holocaust—most of her relatives were killed in the Lodz ghetto and at Auschwitz—which she repeatedly photocopies to create blurry images upon which she then draws. The copying ink that appears throughout her work—as in *Mamalangué*, 2001, whose title

to its corrective severity and dramatic because of its supposed curative silence. Rather than ensuring a return to calm, the asepsis and hygienic asceticism of this hospital architecture houses only fear and loneliness.

The therapeutic potential of art has been widely discussed in the long tradition of writing on the field, and its importance to Coste's project and its reading cannot be dismissed. Yet what's

refers to the notion of a maternal language—gives the images a purplish hue. Similarly, Verhaeghe sets out to salvage what seems about to vanish: images of anonymous people doing an array of ordinary things, or in the midst of disasters or violent conflicts. She calls this archive of journalistic images *Provisoria* (Provisional), 1996–2008, and it is, in fact, a provisional collection of photographs gathered according to subjective criteria. Verhaeghe does not set out to create an orthodox and rigorous classification system that yields statistics; rather, she keeps those images that she finds striking, and juxtaposes or intersperses them in works like the collage *Glenden*, 2002. In other pieces that allude to Verhaeghe's previous career as a nurse, such as *Knuffels*, 1997–2009, she uses latex and cotton to suggest the theme of healing. Organic latex, which is often used to make doctors' gloves, is directly related to the body and to convalescence, but (as de Zegher reports in a text accompanying the show) the smell of latex also reminds the artist of her childhood and her mother.

By means of these subtle references to the maternal, to the patient and therapeutic task of collecting forgotten images, these artists insist on the primacy of shared experiences and sentiments: an approach that challenges the viewer to avoid easy answers, and one that the society of the spectacle is hardly equipped to accept.

—Juan Vicente Aliaga

Translated from Spanish by Jane Brodie.



Bracha L. Ettinger,
*Drawing from Matrixial
Borderline, 1990–91*,
mixed media on paper,
63 x 13 3/4".

ISTANBUL

Cengiz Çekil

RAMPA

Born in 1945, Cengiz Çekil is widely regarded as a founding father of Turkish contemporary art. Perhaps because he has spent most of his life outside Istanbul, however, the art establishment in the country's most cosmopolitan city has mostly overlooked or ignored him. René Block and the curatorial collective WHW skillfully inserted a few of Çekil's more incontestably brilliant works into the fourth and eleventh Istanbul biennials, respectively. But according to the curator and critic Necmi Sönmez, who wrote the text for the artist's only existing monograph, "Cengiz Çekil remains the least known, least documented and [most] *concealed* artist (of Contemporary Turkish Art)" in the recent history of art in Turkey.

This rare solo show of Çekil's work included paintings, sculptures, installations, and prints, but—as its curator, Vasif Kortun, noted in an interview—it merely scratched the surface of the artist's practice. In wildly disparate media but with remarkable consistency, Çekil draws on the sensual, tactile effects of piled-up accumulations of cheap, low-tech stuff, in order to coax seemingly incongruous meanings from commonplace materials: transforming construction supplies, fluorescent lights, electrical cables, and fabric into somber funerary slabs in the sculpture *Clandestine Light*, 1987, for example, or manipulating nothing but melted candle wax and charred wick into a soulful expression of pain in the "painting" on cardboard *Waxing, Etching*, 1976.

The installation *Towards Childhood, Since Childhood*, 1974, consists of a dozen glass Coca-Cola bottles, each turned on its side, tied to a bed of twigs, and rigged to a battery-powered light. The bottles were arranged on the floor in four neat rows of three. The name of the piece immediately keys in a nostalgic reading of the work, and indeed, these objects are related to the kinds of contraptions that Çekil made as a boy. They resemble bricolage-style boats, or message carriers made with a bit more mechanical ingenuity than the usual glass container stuffed with a missive, corked, and flung out to sea. But the cables, lights, batteries, and electrical tape that crown the objects give them a sinister cast, evocative of the moment when rudimentary gasoline bombs or Molotov cocktails adopt the technological sophistication to become more damage-inducing improvised explosive devices.

Çekil made the piece in 1974 for his first exhibition, “*Réorganisation pour une Exposition*,” which was staged in the basement of a Paris café a year after the artist graduated from L’École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. Taken in that context, *Towards Childhood, Since Childhood* suggests a deep sense of foreboding about a stark rise in political violence at the time, notably in Turkey itself, which for much of the 1970s was convulsing through one traumatic military coup after another, each replete with deadly street protests, assassinations, and terror campaigns from Right and Left.



Cengiz Çekil, *Towards Childhood, Since Childhood*, 1974, bottles, batteries, string, tree branches, bulbs, cables, electrical tape, 13½ x 4 x 4”.

Several of the works on view here multiplied their meaning in the process of being revisited, and many were restaged or even radically altered: *Smashed into Pieces*, for instance, was originally executed in 1998 as a site-specific performance for which Çekil enlisted live models, cast their limbs and torsos, and arranged the resulting molds on squares of white fabric stretched out across the floor; but here, the artist wrapped 288 fragments of the gold-leafed molds in aging pages of newsprint and crammed them into utilitarian metal shelves. As a result, Çekil’s show didn’t come off as a by-the-book retrospective, nor did it seem like an overly dutiful tribute. Instead, it came across as a sustained and engaging conversation among and between the works themselves, with much to be gleaned from them still.

—Kaelen Wilson-Goldie

AMSTERDAM

“I’m Not Here. An Exhibition Without Francis Alÿs”

DE APPEL ARTS CENTRE

With solo shows in three major European institutions this year (London’s Tate Modern, Brussels’s Wiels Contemporary Art Center, and the

Bonnefantenmuseum, in Maastricht, the Netherlands), Francis Alÿs seems to be everywhere you look. So this group show, curated by the six participants in this year’s de Appel Curatorial Programme, was timely indeed. Presenting a thoughtful selection of work by fourteen artists (none of them Alÿs), the curators conjured the atmosphere of Alÿs’s multifaceted, sometimes elusive oeuvre, without actually showing any of it. Their Barthes-inspired aim was to critically deconstruct the traditional exhibition model of the retrospective. But the storytelling component of Alÿs’s work also formed a point of departure. To this end, Alÿs himself was quoted in the exhibition materials as once remarking, “Maybe you don’t even need to see the work, you just need to hear about it.”

A mere reminder, though, usually suffices, as this show amply demonstrated. Ariel Schlesinger’s ongoing photographic series “Minor Urban Disasters,” 2007–, for example, evoked Alÿs’s city strolls, just as André Guedes’s inconspicuously installed suitcases, *Untitled (Amsterdam)*, 2007, suggested Alÿs’s incessant traveling. A second piece by Guedes, a twice-weekly performance titled *a Fruit Turns into a Stone, Then into a Knife and Then into a Fruit Again*, 2010, in this context even vaguely recalled a specific work by Alÿs: *The Trade Swamp*, 1999, which documented the random exchange of objects in the Mexico City subway. In more indirect ways, Luisa Cunha’s electric heater, uselessly warming up the open courtyard (*Straight to the Point*, 1993), shared the Alÿs motif of ineffectiveness, of failure. And *One*, 2008, by Wilfredo Prieto, ostensibly a glittering pile of twenty-eight million fake diamonds and a single real one, echoed Alÿs’s play with authenticity and truth.

More than simply illustrating aspects of Alÿs’s practice, however, together these works actually elucidated it—better, perhaps, than a traditional retrospective would have. The key issue of absence was a frequent reference, as was Alÿs’s signature artistic strategy of storytelling, of generating hearsay or rumors. The latter was effectively addressed in Prieto’s *One*, as proved by surreptitious footprints leading into (and damaging) the pile of diamonds. Vaast Colson’s plaque commemorating an implausible walk (*Waar men ga langs Vlaamse Wegen* [Wherever One Goes on Flemish Roads], 2003–10) and Tatiana Mesa’s simple note announcing an action to take place months after the show closed (*Roce de manos* [Gentle Touch of Hands], 2010) also blurred the distinction between myth and truth, leaving the viewer in doubt about these minimal documents’ trustworthiness. How to verify the circumstances of these actions? And does veracity matter after all?

Alÿs himself would surely be the last to answer these questions. The curators had initially asked him to contribute to their research by helping them gather accounts of witnesses to his performances. Alÿs responded by sending a small poster, stating that it had just appeared in an area of Mexico City. It shows his characteristic All Star sneakers,



Wilfredo Prieto, *One*, 2008, twenty-eight million fake diamonds, one real diamond. From “I’m Not Here. An Exhibition Without Francis Alÿs.”