

EN, GERMANY

Icy Graves

LUDWIG FORUM FÜR INTERNATIONALE KUNST

Graves is probably best remembered for her life-size, ostensibly camel sculptures. When, in the late 1960s, über-collector Peter G. Schirmer discovered his passion for contemporary art—at the time, the center for US Pop art—he acquired Graves's *Kenya Dromedary* and *Iranian Bactrian*, both 1969, for his newly established Aachen Museum, Neue Galerie Sammlung Ludwig. The camels were a hit. And it didn't change when they later moved into the Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, where the furry creatures stood stoically next to Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Duane Hanson, and Günther Rambow—Graves's colleagues and companions, but bad company, as it were, for the *Dromedary* and the *Bactrian*, which were then repeatedly and erroneously placed in the context of Pop and hyperrealism.



In any case, Graves—who died of cancer in 1995, at the age of fifty—had a much greater range in her art. Her interest in the handmade is in the orbit of those in the Pattern and Decoration movement, and her fascination with the past is akin to that of “relic hunters” like Nancy Spero and Patrick Poirier—all likewise in the Ludwig Collection, but more prominently displayed. A great deal of her inspiration came from sciences, including paleontology, geology, astronomy, and anthropology. *Paleolithic Cave Painting, Southwestern United States, Depicting Mammal Migration*, 1970, a drawing for a large-scale, faux-cave painting blending skeletal and living, extinct and modern camels, sits comfortably in any contemporary exhibition that examines the construction and the fallibility of (scientific) knowledge. Her work as a feminist twist. With the camels, it is evidenced in their eye-like orifices and perhaps through the use of handicrafts traditionally considered women's work—for instance, the patchwork facings of the animals' skin.

It is today's renewed interest in research-based work that allows us to fully appreciate Graves's oeuvre. “Nancy Graves Project & Guests,” the first major exhibition of her work in Europe since 2007, gave vivid testimony to the artist's many fields of interest. Organized by the Ludwig Forum's Brigitte Franzen and Annette Lagler, it featured a survey of Graves's career, placing particular emphasis on her early work from circa 1968–75. Paper works such as *Crab and Sea Anemone on Ocean Floor*, 1971, with their radiant pointillist surfaces, exercise in perception as much as depictions of the camouflage of various flora and fauna. Similarly, the vibrant canvases from “Camouflage Series” of 1971 appear as abstractions when seen up close; their hidden plants and animals can be perceived only from a distance. Graves applied the same antithetical optical principle to her

paintings of lunar, Martian, and oceanic surfaces. *Mars*, 1973, comes across as a patchwork rug made out of a variety of patterns, yet the painting is a giant map of the Red Planet's surface, relying on early orbiter images, while works such as *Apollo 14*, 1973, translate the optical noise of their source photographs into a Richter-esque blur. A highlight of the show was *Shaman*, 1970, Graves's contribution to Documenta 5 in 1972: a group of hanging, life-size assemblages that evoke shamanic costumes and headdresses to form an installation that is part ethnographic display, part ghostly ritual, in which the “authentic” is a fabrication, maybe a confabulation, relying on “inauthentic” materials such as latex, wax, steel, and copper. Later works, including the multicolored, skeleton-like sculpture *Spun*, 1983, seem to mark a departure from Graves's often messy, earthy work of the 1970s. Yet given the precarious contrast between their fragile, bony legs and solid, robust-looking parts, these sculptures explore the same kinds of improbable balance that Graves's camels do.

This smart and thorough exhibition (and catalogue) was long overdue, and it's a shame that it will not travel to the United States. After all, in 1969, Graves was the youngest (female) artist to have a solo show at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art, yet she is still little more than a footnote in the canon of American art history. Her broad and well-informed play with science—including its modes of representation and narrative construction—as well as her fascination with perception and the acquisition of knowledge all feel strikingly contemporary. It's the right moment for her rediscovery.

—Astrid Mania

COLOGNE

Christian Falsnaes

DREI

The performances of Christian Falsnaes, a Danish artist who lives in Berlin, often seem pretty mean-spirited—even cynical. And yet by balancing his art on the brink of the intolerable, he has given it a unique power. His performances draw viewers in with deft manipulation and involve them in the action. Since the 1960s, this sort of art has generally been described as emancipatory, even though it sometimes has a distinctly authoritarian edge to it; think of Joseph Beuys's actions, in which the problem of authority was notoriously unresolved.

Falsnaes's actions address the issue of authority head-on. The performance that constituted the opening of his exhibition “One” at DREI in Cologne, organized by Oriane Durand, a curator at Kunstverein Nürnberg in Nuremberg, was no exception. It took place in an all-white



Christian Falsnaes, *One*, 2013. Performance view, November 7, 2013. Center: Christian Falsnaes. Photo: Alwin Lay.

room whose walls were hung with white canvases; Falsnaes himself was there, engaging the steadily growing crowd in light banter. Then, suddenly, he picked up tubes of paint and brushes from the floor, thrust them into the hands of several people, and instructed them to paint on the canvases. Initially hesitant, but goaded on by Falsnaes and, soon enough, by the onlookers, they complied with his request. The mood grew spirited, then boisterous, and the pictures started filling up; what remained after the action were painted canvases, a dirty floor, and splotches of paint on the walls. Coming into the room later on during the course of the exhibition, visitors encountered Abstract Expressionist-style canvases and the wreckage left behind by a painting frenzy; a sound recording of the action was playing.

Falsnaes is interested in the relationship between the individual and the group—a fundamental issue in art, given that, at least since modernism, the work of art has usually been regarded as the self-expression of a single individual who stands apart from the collective and often even comes into conflict with it. Falsnaes, turning this model on its head, arranges for the creation of a communal work. But then, things aren't quite so simple. It's he who initiates and manipulates the action with the thorough professionalism of a talk-show host. He sees the audience as the raw material for his art and tries to shape it. His interest is in exploring his sway over the participants. His themes are power, authority, seduction, and control on the one hand, the merging of the individual in an expertly manipulated collective on the other. The documentary video of an earlier performance with the telling title *Masculine demeanor as a consequence of social power relations between artist and audience*, held at the Bonner Kunstverein, in Bonn, in 2013, reveals the amazing things that people who are perfectly conversant with contemporary art—curators and collectors among them—can be inveigled into doing through the potent pull of group dynamics. The absurdity of their actions raises questions not only about power and seduction but also about what audiences expect from a contemporary artist and how far they are willing to follow him.

In a second room in the exhibition in Cologne, Falsnaes offered three drawings for sale. But once again, he gave the relationship between public and artist a twist: Purchasers of a drawing were given five, ten, or fifteen minutes to draw a copy of it and burn the original. A photograph and certificate were produced to document the process by which the collector had become the creator of the work he had acquired.

—Noemi Smolik

Translated from German by Gerrit Jackson.

BRUSSELS AND BOUSSU, BELGIUM

Tony Oursler

GALERIE ALBERT BARONIAN/MAC'S GRAND-HORNU

Tony Oursler has taken Belgium by storm. “Glare Schematics,” at Galerie Albert Baronian, one of two impressive exhibitions recently on view in that country, was a crowded and outrageous mixture of works on paper and mixed-media sculpture, depicting happy people, devils, talking masks, and more. Among the sculptures were four wall-mounted, branching metal structures that evoke family trees—send-ups, maybe, of the seriousness of those who try to go back in time and rediscover their forefathers. In Oursler's world, this is a perfect starting point for putting together sometimes absurd combinations of all kinds of found objects with archetypal yet fake family portraits. What to say of a combination of an eye-to-the-telescope photographic view of the cosmos, a remote control, a talking ethnic mask, and a seemingly mismatched “family,” such as we encounter in *Cosmiconsanguinal* (all works at this venue 2013)? And how should we make sense of *Distant Relatives*, in



which a man (a father?) dressed up as a woman (a mother?) pretends to be his two children, a toddler and a baby? In some of the family sculptures, we recognize the same characters Oursler depicts in his works on paper, all created via the same technique of mixed media, paint, and collage. Here, the titles refer to an associative web of notions of family and ancestry—for instance, *Related*, *Black Skin Nature Nurture*, and *Spitting Image* (in which we encounter the father from *Cosmiconsanguinal*). According to Oursler, the atypically dysfunctional family is the norm instead of the exception.

Diverse and totally different aspects of Oursler's work were on display in “Phantasmagoria,” at MAC's Grand-Hornu (Musée des Contemporains de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles—Grand-Hornu), a museum on a former coal-mining site near the French border. The show presented two new installations along with a sampling of earlier works, among them his collaboration with the late Mike Kelley, *Trash / Phobic (featuring Mike Kelley and Tony Oursler)*, 1992, and *Fuck you*, 1994, with its image of a trapped head under a mattress cut out and declaiming in an abysmal tone such profanities as “Hey fuck shithead ya fucking scumbag go to hell,” remains as poignant as troubling in its evocation of the nightmare of obsessive fear and longing. The recent large-scale installation *Phantasmagoria*, 2013, which Oursler produced for the show at MAC's Grand-Hornu and in which the visitor walked through giant talking masks and huge projections which looked almost like an amusement park of obsessions, embodied today the same disturbing power that *Fuck you* delivered two decades ago. Oursler remains one of the sharpest anatomists of our contemporary paranoia, whether on the intimate level of the family or as a public spectacle.

—Jos Van den B

ROME

Ian Tweedy

MONITOR

Ian Tweedy's most recent solo show was called “My Neighbors The Stauffenbergs.” The title is not as fanciful as it may sound; the works of the show, all dated 2013, were inspired by the American artist's childhood, when he lived for a period in Berlin with his family in a building also inhabited by descendants of Colonel Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg, one of the authors of the failed attempt on Adolf Hitler's life in 1944. Tweedy had only rare and fleeting interactions with his neighbors, but apparently these were sufficient to leave an indelible mark on his memory. These recollections have surfaced in the form of visions