

non-fiction #00018

fig. 1

Cassandra Jeane creates “deactivated situations” in her practice. These involve projects sited within the public domain, projects that question the habits, behavior, and opinions of individuals and society in general. Her projects cause a disruption in the everyday flow of events, thus forcing us to reassess our understanding of accepted codes of behavior, value systems, and social conditioning. Jeane’s projects often center around a form of transaction or exchange. For example, a recent project (made for the exhibition *Value* at the Kulturhaus Osterfeld) looked at the symbolic significance of money as a means of exchange, value, and control. *What the Figure Says* involved the artist counting one hundred euro bills throughout the 42 days of the exhibition. This action could be observed by visitors to the gallery on a monitor, while it was also possible to follow the count on a website. The artist stopped counting at 10,287,411. However, it was unclear as to whether Jeane had been counting the same bundle of bills over and over again, or if she had actually amassed that amount of money during the project. Through the suggestion of a sleight of hand, the project questioned our belief that economics is an exact science or natural law. Jeane demonstrated that the trust that we put in numbers, counting and accountancy is absurd, as figures reveal nothing about the value of people, objects, and events. For *The Workstation*, Jeane will present *ReTale*, a project that examines how our individual freedoms alter on a daily basis as we move between public and commercial spaces. On entering the retail environment, we are no longer seen as political subjects; what counts is the money we spend and where. Stores compete for our custom by providing a “positive” shopping experience; attractive stores, motivated staff, etc. Jeane will perform a series of actions sited in central Osterfeld that will test this system by investigating the ability of major high street

chains to react when something out of the ordinary occurs and the customer retaliates against the restrictions of the imposed structure.

fig. 2

Is it the nature of man to look for meaning no matter where? Does any mere trifle become interesting as long as it is part of an interesting context? These questions and many more are posed by the artist Anne Ringelblum in the exhibition *The Museum of Thought*, which is constructed as a sculptural installation divided into three tableaux in the Upper Gallery 3. *The Museum of Thought* is a sort of visual philosophy. Anne Ringelblum addresses one of humanity’s oldest speculations about how meaning comes into being. But she chooses an unusual angle. Rather than the heavy and dry theoretical explanations of old men, you will be faced with a sensuous and interactive experiment. When you visit the exhibition, you become yourself a part of the experiment. Anne Ringelblum explores how different statements and expressions in the exhibition space acquire sense in relation to each other and to you. But what is this thing meaning really—and what is meaninglessness? Anne Ringelblum poses the question, but gives no clear answers. Her intention is not to instruct you, but to open up a new view of the universe of thought. Anne Ringelblum is trained as a sculptor. She works with the medium of sculpture in a new way, which involves the space surrounding the exhibited objects and the space you are situated in. Anne Ringelblum does not make clearly demarcated sculptures representing objects or figures as in the classical sculptural tradition. Her works interconnect even though they are spread across the exhibition space. They are separated physically but they cannot do without each other. They extend themselves thematically one into the other across the room and partake in defining each other. When you look at one work, you have to relate to the others at the same time. All the works in the exhibition are the

result of a particular curiosity toward the world. A curiosity regarding paradoxes. “I like things that look like something they’re not,” says Anne Ringelblum in an interview with the director of Upper Gallery 3, Benn Overkamp. In a characteristically unpretentious wording she indicates paradox as an artistic method. To Ringelblum, paradox contains a special quality—a kind of truth and reality that has preoccupied artists, philosophers and scientists at all times. Anne Ringelblum circles around those places in which opposites meet and collide—where something is simultaneously meaningful and meaningless. Anne Ringelblum makes you consider the relation between sense and nonsense, between language and reality and between chance and control. In Anne Ringelblum’s laboratory, the world is turned inside out and examined for a hidden life that forms new patterns and traces. As points of departure, the three tableaux all have material which physically is located outside the exhibition. That is, a phenomenon, an object, and a text that Anne Ringelblum has wondered at, because they, precisely, are balancing on a paradoxical boundary. Overall, the tableaux address the themes of peace, communism, and brain research. But these themes are also just occasions for investigating more general structures of consciousness and the sensory apparatus. By way of associations, sudden transitions, and off-beat questions, Anne Ringelblum analyses various circumstances around some of the focal points of history. Circumstances to which we traditionally ascribe historical and scientific weight. Anne Ringelblum translates and interprets her material freely as open statements and expressions. There is nothing noble or dignified about the elements of the exhibition. On the contrary, they consist of cheap and simple materials that challenge the historical role of the work of art as a sublime object. However, Anne Ringelblum wants us to consider how the staging of artworks has an effect on our opinion of them. Accordingly, she mimes the traditional museum’s aura of authority, cult, and science through a solemn arrangement of pillars, signs, and partitions. An arrangement that forms an ironic comment on the humble content. In this way, Anne Ringelblum creates an exhibition whose composition mirrors the very theme of the structures of wonder. We wander around among objects and spaces in now logical, now

random landscapes, and become ourselves the center of the exhibition—while we search for a meaning. The tableau *Stalin’s Brain on the Faroe Islands* takes off from the phenomenon that certain anatomical institutes collect the brains of famous men. The brains of Stalin, Tchaikovsky, and Gorki are preserved in glass jars at an institute in Moscow. This has made Anne Ringelblum wonder about the questions and answers that lie hidden in such a mania. The sentence *Stalin’s Brain on the Faroe Islands* is a statement that substitutes the real brain in its jar. Anne Ringelblum is interested in conceptions of what it would mean if the brain was actually here. She contents herself with the linguistic statement, which becomes the title of the tableau. In a sound piece which consists of a number of questions presented to brain researchers in Tórshavn, Moscow, and New York, as well as their answers, Anne Ringelblum explores various suggestions regarding the meaning of brain research. We listen to a medical, a psychological, and a biological background for brain research, which all offer very different answers to the same questions. We are not told who is who, so you have to elaborate on the conception of a cultural and a professional identity yourself. However, if you listen to the answers of the researchers on the headphones, you will note quickly that brain research, philosophy, and religion are not always easy to distinguish. A serigraphic print representing a sky with clouds and the title of the tableau in red letters indicate the airy and divine sphere as a possible counter image to the more robust scientific experience. All visitors to the exhibition can participate in a drawing of five of the ‘heavenly’ serigraphies. In that way, those who win will bring the message of *Stalin’s Brain on the Faroe Islands* further out into reality. In the work *Thoughts Without Interpretation*, Anne Ringelblum shows a series of drawings which are physical parallels to the questions she asks the three researchers. Is a picture the same with and without a frame, and does it mean anything whether it is the original or a photographed copy we are looking at? Also, a work with four identical images of the brain behind glass of different thicknesses raises doubts whether the way of looking changes what we are looking at. The optics itself and the attitude toward, for example, a brain can apparently change completely identical images—or can they? Anne

Ringelblum gives you the benefit of a doubt.

fig. 3

Unitive Nationalist Minibar is the title of a large-scale exhibition which Eduards Vadim (born Siauliai, 1956) will be presenting at the CAC Skopje from October 19. In it, the Lithuanian artist conveys the viewer to a battle field to reveal the horrors and barbarity that result from war. In a totally committed spirit, Vadim denounces inequalities and injustice while at the same time inviting us to reflect on the reality of current politics. *Unitive Nationalist Minibar* represents a devastated, chaotic space, reflecting the full dimension of the tragedy through the appropriate, even inevitable, use of waste materials. Through the use of everyday elements and recycled materials, Eduards Vadim denounces the excessive consumerism of contemporary society. In the same way, his work is characterized by an abundance of images and text, sometimes resulting in an overloading of data which imitates the process of confrontation of the artist with the excess of information in our daily lives.

fig. 4

Many artists end their relationship with their artwork when the work is completed. To Louisa Hanoun it is the other way around. Her personal relation to her artwork is a driving force in her art production. Her works descend from every day objects which are linked to technology, industry and virtual reality. Her engagement with ideas is best demonstrated in her presentation, or rather, penetration of the sociological truth. The penetration process takes place through value exchange and explores relationships between aesthetics, arts practice and social process. Her work is interdisciplinary and participatory, and her thought, speech and discussion are core materials. Hanoun transforms visual art into a transmission apparatus—an apparatus for sending and receiving—a medium for social communication. She questions the production and reception of artworks, how they are mediated, and how they themselves function as mediators. Hanoun's work is an extraordinary example of the way our lives have become as result of living in a digitalized world. Our need for contact with the outside world can be reached by pressing a button, but when we attempt to

look into our own selves we are facing a mission impossible. The more our private world becomes publicly violated, the more public we want to be in our privacy. We live inside and outside at the very same time. We are watching and being watched at the same moment. Hanoun's contribution in this connection is to reflect our reality, for example by showing us the friend and the stranger inside ourselves. Hanoun will not permit time to bypass her without vigorously engaging and participating in the progression of change. She is a visual artist who sees different objects as tools that can be used in an artistic process to serve a purpose—to achieve aesthetical progress—in order to reach a communicative goal. By using contemporary and diverse working strategies and technologies her work demonstrates what's on her mind, and how she views the world surrounding us. Hanoun has an ability to draw the viewer into close visual and psychological proximity with her work, but complicates such attempts with frequent quotations from Minimalist and Conceptualist practices of the 1960s, as well as with the use of industrial processes and materials. Her implication of industrial processes and materials result in a tension between the perceptual experiences and metaphors for cultural relations within a broader social framework. In her work *Intrusions violentes* at Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Louisa Hanoun presents what I will call the electronization of traditional kitchen metal elements. The elements belong to the age of manual-ism and can only be operated by the use of manpower. Through this work she attempts to establish an authentic visual dialog with the spectators. She attempts to electrify these elements, not only in order to electronize them, but also to mystify them. She places low voltage lamps under some of them and connects them in a way so that the lamps operate at different times. When the lamps are activated, an electronic vibrating noise starts to shake the exhibition space. The shift of light and the audio effect cause a special atmosphere in the space, and the work's strongest side reaches its climax. Hanoun's work is characteristic for a concerned and committed living artist. Her work transmits experiences of new cultural intersections that link identities with the physical and perceptual world surrounding us. Hanoun's artwork wishes to tell about itself in the shortest time possible but has a

desire to stay in our memory the longest time possible after we leave it. Even if the images of her art choose to leave us, due to the failure of our human memory, one more important element will remain. The most important is your personal impression of her work and that will never leave.

fig. 5

In vast installations constructed from throwaway materials, Polish-born, Paris-based Konrad Mazowiecki critiques modern globalism and the consumerist excesses that accompany it. His dense, sprawling installations confront the viewer with difficult ethical issues related to political injustice and various moral dilemmas. These themes Mazowiecki scripts in extravagant, large-scale environments, chaotic universes that interweave vernacular materials, recycled images and disparate social phenomena. Equally challenging is Mazowiecki's in-your-face, art-school esthetic, or rather antiesthetic, with its preference for the purposefully crude. Aggregating ready-mades and makeshift sculptural forms fabricated from lowly scraps of cardboard, packing tape, plywood, cellophane and aluminum foil, he undermines art's visual seduction and aura. Conceptually and materially embedded within Mazowiecki's politically charged spaces is a critique of capitalism, in particular the way its systems govern and mediate reality. His individual targets are many, as he made abundantly clear in two recent installations, one at the Contemporary Art Institute of Detroit, the other at the Anti-Cruelty Society. Consumption, consumerism and the universalization of commodity culture were the subjects of *Jumbo Cake and Sexy Snacks*, created site-specifically for the Art Institute. At the work's center was a giant pink cake crafted from cardboard, its surface lavishly embellished with shards of mirror, photographs, books, electric candles and video monitors—all attached by means of tape or chains and bits of rope. Statistical charts on poverty and the distribution of world income abutted magazine and newspaper images of famine, war and obesity, while video images of gourmet cooking shows and toiling agrarian workers flickered on the monitors' blue screens. Books such as *Who Owes Whom? and 49 Other Questions About World Debt* and *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change* (Comedia) were included to but-

ress this commentary on globalization and economic disparity, as were a series of plastic buckets and ladles that dangled from the base of this gross object. Twelve colossal spoons, made from cardboard wrapped in aluminum foil, were placed at regular intervals around the periphery of the museum's classical white space. Each spoon was a memorial to what the artist has termed "a failed utopian ideal," as embodied in a broad range of individuals and cultural artifacts. Depicted in effigy were Friedrich Nietzsche, Rosa Luxemburg, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Kasimir Malevich, whose various modes of moral and political idealism collectively confronted the political extremism of Communist China and Hitler's "Degenerate Art" show, also commemorated. Additionally included were monuments to the Chicago Bulls, Rolex watches, guns and fashion—all presented as forms of idol and commodity worship—as well as eulogies to Venice and the Apollo space program, signifying tourism and galactic imperialism respectively. A didactic brochure stated that the spoons objectified Bertolt Brecht's well-known statement "First comes fodder, then comes morality," although their original inspiration came from 16th-century religious souvenirs commemorating the 12 apostles. The artist's Oldenburgian translation of the miniature to the gigantic, coupled with the secularization of the sacred, located the spoons and the icons associated with them within the arenas of public spectacle and consumer culture. Some of these lost ideals received more emphasis than others, particularly those that serve Mazowiecki's own artistic and political agenda. For example, the proto-existentialist ideas of Nietzsche, who denied universal morality, were echoed throughout the installation, as were the socialist exhortations of Luxemburg. Mazowiecki similarly aligns himself with the social utopianism of Mies van der Rohe and Malevich, but rejects belief in the transformative power of abstraction and pure form through his baroque use of banal materials and images coopted from mass culture. Spilling from the spoons onto the floor were pools of red paint, presumably representing blood, next to which were placed clusters of tools, a reference to labor. A network of aluminum-foil tentacles and metal chains physically connected these objects to the spoons and to the central cake, signifying capitalism's pervasive hold on the global, etc.