

REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS

NEW YORK

Richard Serra at Gagosian

On a damp weekday in late fall, the enormous Gagosian gallery in Chelsea was hushed, almost ecclesiastic, and Richard Serra's newest steel-walled spirals and curving corridors presented themselves with imperious authority. The physical experience of Serra's work grows increasingly complex, and a handful of viewers took their time, testing the work's distinctive kinesthetics, and optics, and even, quietly, its resonant acoustics. On a bright Saturday a few weeks later, the place was crammed with visitors and crawling with baby strollers, and single-file crowds circulated endlessly, chattering, pointing, exclaiming. It was like market day at the village square.

An interesting cultural history of the last 25 years could be written in terms of the reception of Serra's work. The public lynching of *Tilted Arc* would have to be part of it, but his current apotheosis is more interesting. Apparently, the enjoyment of space as such is not as arcane a pleasure as it used to be—and, perhaps, Serra can take some credit for the change. It helps that the space-time continuum of cosmic physics has acquired such wide metaphoric use, and that the warped ranges of hyperspace introduced by

digital technology (especially as visualized by Hollywood) are such popular destinations. Important, too, are computer-facilitated changes to the architectural design process, such that elaborately curved buildings—of the kind that Frank Gehry, a peer of Serra's, has become best known for—are fast becoming commonplace. All these factors help, at the least, to contextualize Serra's work; in the case of the designed environment, they may also reflect reciprocal influences.

Serra's own points of reference, though, tend toward the industrial age and earlier. In this show's catalogue, Baroque architecture and 20th-century shipbuilding are again invoked (with the artist's support) as influences. Of course, references—acknowledged and otherwise—constitute only a fractional account of Serra's resources, which involve above all a Pygmalion-like gift for animating the most unpromising raw material: empty space, solid steel.

In *Betwixt the Torus and the Sphere*, six doubly curved walls—they are, alternately, fragments of spherical and doughnut-shaped wholes—send viewers through passages that expand and contract with literally breathtaking rhythmic power. A pair of walls is joined end to end in *Union of the Torus and the Sphere*, forming a hollow but entryless pointed ellipse that is as sleek, massive and improba-



Richard Serra: *Betwixt the Torus and the Sphere*, 2001, weatherproof steel, three spherical sections, three torus sections, 11 1/2 by 37 1/2 by 26 1/2 feet; at Gagosian.

Ann Hamilton: Installation view of *at hand*, 2001, six compressed air mechanisms, paper with tinted edges, sound; at Sean Kelly.



bly buoyant as a breaching whale. The unnerving constriction and exhilarating release of the torqued spirals *Bellamy* and *Sylvester* (in memory of the dealer and the critic, respectively) recall the earlier *Torqued Ellipses*, though here the drama is stepped up a notch. No less theatrical, in its way, is *Ali-Frazier*, in which two heavy-weight blocks of solid steel square off in separate rooms, the wall between them only enhancing the combativeness, and gravity, of their opposition. Solid steel blocks have appeared in Serra's sculpture before; indeed, the basic vocabulary of the artist's work has long been fairly stable. But its meaning is no more static than its paradoxically massive and mobile forms.

—Nancy Princenthal

Ann Hamilton at Sean Kelly

In the cavernous space of Ann Hamilton's installation *at hand* (2001), each of six vacuum contraptions affixed to the ceiling periodically hovered over a stack of paper, lifted a single sheet and then let it drop to the floor. Accompanying the rhythmic whoosh, whirr and suction sounds of the machines and the gentle rustling of paper was

a woman's voice intoning a series of actions: "a hand remembers, a hand betrays, a voice offers, a hand slackens, a mouth lies, a voice brightens." The translucent paper dipped and rolled in otherwise imperceptible air currents before coming to rest in ever-growing piles of what looked like insubstantial, oversized ivory-colored soap flakes. Walking among these accumulations, one could see that the edges of each sheet had been painted red. Viewed from above through several layers of paper, the crisscrossing edges seemed like fields of facets drawn in light pencil.

Although more restrained in its construction and impact than Hamilton's other recent installations, this work continues her investigations into the corporeal, aural and visual relationships one has with architecture, and the disjunction between immediate experience and its verbal articulation. The falling paper and the installation's spectacle of its own automated production suggest a kind of communication that is public and preserved, where what is said and done becomes sedimented as part of the historical record, present—if obscured—by the volume of what has

been archived. The ambient invocation of the actions performed by the hand and voice imply another kind of communication: intimate and lost in the instant of its occurrence.

Elsewhere, Hamilton showed 39 small black-and-white photographs from the ongoing series "Face to Face," all taken with a pinhole camera held in her mouth, which she opens to expose the film. (Hamilton explored a similar process in a theatrical collaboration with Meredith Monk. A miniature live-feed video camera secured to Monk's teeth showed an audience what her singing mouth "saw.") Hamilton's parted lips serve as the photographs' borders, which have a parabolic contour. This generates the sense that one is seeing, as if in reverse voyeurism, through someone else's eyes. In counterpoint, monitors alongside the photographs played two videos, both called *the picture is still* (2001), created using a tiny finger-mounted camera that traces the faces in news photographs to suggest a form of visual caress.

The photos largely show people's faces as they watch Hamilton—with suspicion, curiosity or irritation—during the lengthy exposure time the odd device requires. It is as if the eye's vision had been given to the mouth, each organ's form of desire conjoined with the other's, and the consuming function of the mouth given a greater, perceptual reach. This resonated meaningfully with Hamilton's film of a shadow play (shown in another room

and created with a zoetrope from an earlier installation), in which a figure using a mechanical arm awkwardly clutches at a hanging ring in an effort to extend her natural grasp.

[These works are currently featured in the solo exhibition "at hand" at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Mar. 26-July 14.] —Jonathan Gilmore

Tony Feher at D'Amelio Terras

Tony Feher has the most supple sculptural intelligence of his generation. He is both tender and caustic, a critical postformalist and a cosmos builder. He's also light on his feet. Rather than spending money on traditional art supplies or at the fabricator, Feher assembles much of his work from consumer detritus or the hardware store and only borrows from the most poetic aspects (presentation, sequence, light quality) of Minimalism and installation art.

Last summer, Feher's show at Bard's Center for Curatorial Studies in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., occupied a series of rooms installed with partially filled water bottles strung from the light fixtures near the high ceilings. The bottles were arranged in rows and suspended at different levels: a few inches above the floor, chest-height or overhead. There were sequential variations in the colors of the bottle caps from one dimmed room to the next that marked off the space abstractly. The glass entrance walls had been covered by Feher in a geometric pattern

of blue plastic bags. The museum felt quietly subterranean, like a kind of pantheistic cloister. I thought of the liquid levels in the bottles as metaphors for the underground water table and the strings as the extended roots of plants finding water.

In his new show, this aspect of natural growth also seemed present, but unlike at Bard, where the entire gestalt of the space was transformed, in New York Feher treated the viewing space with casual disregard, shoe-horning two ungainly sculptures into the gallery's front room. *Maybe* (2001), which has a variable overall size depending on site, took up half the gallery space and a little more, leaking toward the doorway and the front half of the gallery. Positioned at intervals in a loosely regimented pattern were wooden fruit crates and their lids, painted silver, and short two-by-fours, also painted silver, in units of two (one standing and one lying). Within this layout were other components: recycled plastic bottles lying on their sides with labels removed, containing water. The bottles had caps of black, white or green and were accompanied on the floor by red, orange and blue plastic caps from plumbing pipe.

The accumulation of water droplets on the insides of Feher's bottles educed an interiority that bonded with the other elements in an overall organic wholeness. The ensemble collected like a galaxy or an amoeba. Here, it ended near the walls, but one was left with the feeling that it could have gone on and on. The other large sculpture on view, *Enjoy* (2001), was made up of 350 red plastic soda cases forming a roughly 6½-foot cube that seemed to be pressing uncomfortably against the confines of the gallery. Rather than being problematic, the apparent mismatch between the art and the exhibition space was exhilarating. In spite of the insubstantiality of the materials that Feher uses, his work reveals an underlying muscularity; it's getting pumped up and starting to shoulder itself around.

—Joe Fyfe



Howard Ben Tré: *Aligned Sections*, 1987-89, cast glass, copper, brass, patina, 126½ by 24 by 15½ inches; at Charles Cowles.

Howard Ben Tré at Charles Cowles

Howard Ben Tré has been making alluring sculptures in cast glass for 25 years. His elegant, extremely vertical forms are often accentuated by granite or by encircling bands of lead. His work is very process oriented: he begins with precise drawings that are then rendered three-dimensionally in Styrofoam, which becomes the basis for metal molds. Ben Tré casts sculptures once each year at a glass factory; the molds, which contain between 300 and 2,000 pounds of molten glass, must cool for 2½ months before they can be opened. Minor faults in the glass surface—pocks and fissures—are embraced by the artist, who sees the imperfections as allowing light to penetrate the form. Ben Tré finishes the work by hand, often coating the concavities with color or gold leaf.

The artist, who remained in Providence after studying at the Rhode Island School of Design in the late 1970s, is also known for his public art. This show did not include his innovative designs for public use, but in the larger pieces—versions of a work titled

Tony Feher: Installation view of exhibition, showing *Maybe* (foreground) and *Enjoy* (rear), both 2001; at D'Amelio Terras.

