

for years—he makes wholly abstract images that look somehow representational, a practice which younger painters have enthusiastically adopted as they search for ways to refresh the medium. His ambition and authority unabated, Held crafts a pictorial domain in which he is architect, set designer, utopian visionary and, ultimately, magician—a sort of techno Prospero. The five paintings in this show, from 1998 to 2000 and of various sizes, though mostly monumental, transformed the gallery's generous spaces into a universe of checkered game boards.

The standout was *Aperture IV*, which was also the biggest at 15 by 20 feet, larger than some artists' studios. It dominated the south wall, framed by two columns and visible from the glass doors at the opposite end of the long entrance axis. Wall-to-wall and floor-to-ceiling, the painting zoomed in scale from life-size to infinite. Its illusionism is of the mathematical, hard-edged kind, a classicism gone bonkers as it blasts open the wall and invites you to enter. Angled purple, pink and blue checkerboard panels are surrounded by pink and blue or yellow diamond patterned spheres. Like Baroque *repoussoir* figures, dark and light green circles rush you into the painting to the distant, radiant heart of the matter, where you find modernism's twin grails, the circle and square.

To some, the images might recall enlarged screen savers; a frequently asked question was whether the compositions had been worked out on a computer. The answer is no—these paintings have too much substance. The small geometric components are as tangible as tesserae. The palette is more than gratifying, a rainbow of glamorous, euphoric, artificial colors—what a digitized heaven might look like.

Eagle Rock—a geometrically rendered cosmic cave surrounded by the splendid, serene blue you see only at cruising altitude—and *Blue Wave II* both have numerous undulant forms, as if architecture had morphed into rivers and begun to flow.

You might call this the geometric surreal, Candy Land for grown-ups (children permitted). This is retinal art to the max, curiously uplifting and enormously fun to look at, a trip without drugs. Beam us up, All! —Lilly Wei

Eberhard Bosslet at John Gibson

In 1983, '84 and '87, the German artist Eberhard Bosslet visited several abandoned sites in the modern built environment of the Spanish Canary Islands and also along the Costa Brava near Barcelona. These contemporary ruins, like the excavated chambers and shards common to

remains of its execution (excepting textual descriptions of the walkabout nature of his activity). The show at John Gibson, where Bosslet has exhibited regularly since 1988, consisted of handsome, large-format black-and-white photographs mounted on metal panels, produced in editions of three.

Bosslet draws attention to the planar abstraction of an erect structure's reductive surfaces or to the exoskeletal tracing of the planes of intersecting surfaces within. In the photographs of the series titled "Begleiterscheinung II" (Side Effect II, 1984), he evokes a constructivist painting placed within a barren landscape. He isolates

Tenerife, show cones of industrial plastic sheeting flying like wind socks or pennants from light poles regularly placed along a barren walkway. Bosslet not only pairs these foreign elements and records the conditions of the match, but in the process seems to make them sing.

—Edward Leffingwell

Victor Burgin at Christine Burgin

Nietzsche's Paris is a new video work by Victor Burgin that draws on the correspondence among Friedrich Nietzsche, Lou Salomé and Paul Rée from the eight months in 1882 when they collectively envisioned forming an idyllic, intellectual ménage à trois in Paris. The three had spent the late summer of 1882 discussing philosophy in the forest of Tautenberg before briefly meeting again in the fall in Leipzig. Salomé and Rée abruptly abandoned Nietzsche, who assumed (incorrectly) that they had left without him for Paris. Projected on a wall within a small chamber at Christine Burgin, and accompanied by instrumental music, a voice-over in German and a wall text, the video is an elegiac evocation of the philosopher's never-realized dream.

Shot at the site of Dominique Perrault's new Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the mostly black-and-white video ranges over the library's open spaces and sunken garden (where foliage is contained within geometrically precise steel-link cages), glass skyscrapers, cranes, rail tracks, the Seine and a view of the distant city. The video is briefly punctuated by a color film of a woman who represents Salomé sitting, perhaps waiting, on a bench placed before dense woods. Text dissolves in and out, describing Nietzsche's vision ("I saw a pleasant workroom filled with books and flowers . . .") of their ideal intellectual communion.

Although the camera fluidly rotates as if in a seamless circumferential arc, the video image is composed of a series of passages linked to form a survey of



Al Held: *Aperture IV*, 2000, acrylic on canvas, 180 by 240 inches; at Robert Miller.

archeological digs, spoke to the artist of unrecovered memories. As though to reify or even honor that impression, Bosslet traced thick white lines and rectilinear black blocks of paint on barren surfaces and photographed the results.

Bosslet called the works "interventions." They were visited upon a collection of emptied maritime foundations, the flat and unornamented exteriors of abandoned concrete and stucco-surfaced buildings and the wreckage of burned-out cars along a highway. Bosslet's forensic photographic images, fixed in the literal light of the Atlantic and Mediterranean skies, are both the project—a variant of installation—and all that

the principal forms as he found them: horizontal "slabs" of space where windows once were and vertical incisions where doors had been set into a poured concrete wall. He duplicates their size and shape with blocks of dark paint, producing a momentary trick of perception, conflating the flat painted area with the rectilinear void. As though to draw attention to the artifice of his procedure, he allows the paint to drip along the lower edges of each block.

Bosslet's work has long included found materials, which he combines at any meaningful point of fit or contact as sculptural assemblies. For example, the images of the "Sonnenwind" series (Solar Wind, 1984), from

Victor Burgin: *Nietzsche's Paris*, 2000, DVD projection; at Christine Burgin.

more than 360 degrees. Nearly empty of human subjects, the desolate urban space appears to have been recorded in a state of intermission, the flux of experience arrested as if an image in the mind. Indeed, the smoke that leaves the factories is frozen in space, establishing that the video was shot from a series of panoramic stills and thus stands at more than one remove from the urban setting it records as well as from the scholar's Arcadia it evokes.

Understood as a reverie or dream, present to a disembodied eye but not alive to be experienced, the work offers an allusive meditation on the vision of pastoral innocence and retreat in Nietzsche's fantasy (and on the version of that existence the trio experienced in the woods of Tautenberg). Perrault's enclosed garden (which refers both to free natural growth and to the tradition of the austere landscaped French formal garden) stands as a kind of lyrical or Edenic space in itself, visually available to researchers and the public while physically closed to them as well.

—Jonathan Gilmore

Peter Brandes at DCA

The 78 silver prints (all 9½ by 12 inches and produced between 1986 and 2000) in "Past III," Peter Brandes's recent exhibition, presented the Danish artist's meditations on culture,

power, time and memory. All four themes are implicit in the ancient Egyptian and Greek ruins and sculptures which Brandes photographs, and are underscored by the way in which he handles the medium.

Brandes emphasizes the photographer's individual vision by creating unique prints. He uses prolonged exposures—from one to 10 seconds—and unusually slow films, shooting with a handheld camera. The occasional movements of his body are communicated to the images, which are consequently blurred. Atmospheric qualities are augmented in the darkroom by brushing alternatively weaker or stronger developer onto the images. The resulting painterly effects evoke old-master canvases as well as introductory chapters in the history of photography. Significantly, some early photographers considered the visual preservation of antiquity to be among the new medium's more elevated tasks.

In one of several photos titled *Kouros, 6th Century B.C.* (1995), the Archaic Greek statue of a standing nude youth at the Metropolitan Museum of Art is viewed slightly from the left and framed so that the head and torso fill the right half of the vertical composition. The splendidly schematized figure is shown from a vantage point that allows the contour of his right arm to reinforce the silhouette of the tall Attic stele behind. Streaks of dark brown along the vertical margins of the photograph create an atmosphere from which the kouros dramatically emerges.

Vitality is likewise conveyed by the phallic morphology and upright surge of the fragmentary kouros at Olympia (2000), shot in profile and appearing dark brown against a radiant background. However, many of Brandes's photographs speak

of death, loss and isolation. Witness, for example, the doubled images of a statue of Akhenaten in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin (2000), each pair showing slightly different views of the damaged head. The coupled images are separated by a black bar and surrounded by darkness, as if they belonged to sacrificial victims and had been squeezed into boxes.

These relics of the past are emotionally moving, visually grati-

East Village, he became known for his strong photographs of the performances of such artists as Zhang Huan. In the urban environment, where so much architectural change has occurred, Rong Rong commenced a ruins series in which he documented the dilapidated buildings and their traces of human occupation.

Rong Rong's lyrical images of rubble and solitary walls are



Eberhard Bosslet: *Sonnenwind*, 1984, black-and-white photo, 47½ by 49 inches; at John Gibson. (Review on p. 97.)

fying and intellectually challenging for all who are concerned with the roots of the Western tradition. Brandes's photographic re-presentations of the fragments reward the viewer on as many levels.

—Michaël Amy

Rong Rong at Chambers Fine Art

Beijing-based photographer Rong Rong belongs to an influential generation of contemporary Chinese artists. Born in Fujian province in 1968, he began his studies in painting but changed to photography. Poverty was an obstacle—it took the artist three years of work in his father's grocery to save enough money to buy a camera—but he prevailed. He moved to Beijing and became part of a mostly underground art world. Living on the outskirts of Beijing in what was called the

poignant examples of a lost world, and something more, as well. In *1996 No. 1 (1) Beijing* (1996), he focuses on a bare wall with a crossed steel support; placed along a vertical element are snapshots of glamorous women, including Marilyn Monroe. In this and other pictures in the series, the artist documents the physical transformation of Beijing; that the beautiful women caught by modern depictive means are Western as well as Asian also intimates a social transition.

While the exhibition included three images from the ruins series, the main focus was on new work, a wedding gown series in which Rong Rong poses with a female companion in romantic scenes that also question gender roles in a patriarchal culture. These large black-and-white photos (approx-

Peter Brandes: *Akhenaten, 18th Dynasty, Egyptian Museum, Berlin, 2000*, silver print, 9½ by 12 inches; at DCA.

