

FIFTH BIENNALE OF SYDNEY

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Former Director of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, currently Editor of *Australian Art Review*, Co-Curator of the Power Gallery of Contemporary Art, University of Sydney, and a Director on the Board of the Biennale of Sydney.

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Compilation: Paula Latos-Valier and Elizabeth Westwater
Printing: Gardner Printing Co. (Vic) Pty Ltd
Typesetting: Rochester Photosetting Service
Colour and halftone reproduction: FMF Colour Creations Pty Ltd
Editing: Leon Paroissien
Proofing: Nancy Sibtain

Poster and catalogue cover design: John Lethbridge
Poster printing: Bloxham & Chambers

Compilers' note:

Artists participating in the Biennale of Sydney appear in alphabetical order in this catalogue, both in the visual and the biographical sections.

The biographies and other information in this catalogue have been compiled from information received from each artist or artist's representative at the time of publication.

Biographies are selected only and have been edited for the purposes of this publication. In many cases, specific information regarding biographies and works included in the exhibition was not available at the time of publication.

Critical and/or artists' statements preceding biographical material were received from each artist or artist's representative. Wherever possible the Biennale of Sydney has ensured that copyright clearance has been obtained.

All dimensions are for unframed works except in instances where no other dimensions have been available. All dimensions are in centimetres unless otherwise indicated. Dimensions are shown in this sequence: height x width x depth.

Credits for photography, loans and collections, where provided, appear on each artist's biographical page.

Biennale of Sydney (Fifth, 1984)
Private Symbol : Social Metaphor

Bibliography.
Includes index.
ISBN 0 9596619 3 X.

1. Arts — New South Wales — Sydney — Exhibitions.
I. Title

700.74'099441

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Published by the Biennale of Sydney Limited,
100 George Street, Sydney, New South Wales,
Australia.

THE FIFTH BIENNALE OF SYDNEY PRIVATE SYMBOL : SOCIAL METAPHOR

11 April — 17 June 1984

Art Gallery of New South Wales
Art Gallery Road, Sydney

Ivan Dougherty Gallery
City Art Institute
Cnr Albion Ave & Selwyn Street
Paddington

**Aspects of Australian Figurative Painting
1942-1962**
S H Ervin Gallery
National Trust
Observatory Hill

Colin McCahon
Power Gallery of Contemporary Art
University of Sydney

Biennale Forums
13-15 April
Merewether Building, University of Sydney
Organised by the Power Institute of Fine Arts

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DEACCESSIONED

LATIN AMERICA: CULTURES OF REPETITION OR CULTURES OF DIFFERENCE?

Nelly Richard

I FORMS OF REPRODUCTION

1. For works that come from peripheral regions to appear in an international setting means giving up a part of their own motivation as works: to show these works in another continent involves risking renunciation of the past because the new context ignores and denies all that precedes them; it means risking mutilation of their present by suppressing every linkage to what defined their *milieu*. By cutting themselves off from the social whole of which they are part (and which is also a part of them), and by severing the web of their relationships — interproductive relationships — to other activities, the works even run the risk of appearing incomprehensible. In any case, they must sacrifice a part of their historical and cultural meaning.

The wall — gallery wall, museum wall, international exhibition wall — that displays the fate of these works as cut off from their whole, becomes the support of transference. It erases any reference that is not museological; inevitably it neutralises the living impulses that gave the work a social potency.

Coming from peripheral regions to appear in international events therefore involves bearing the cost of this transference; but it also gives the work an opportunity of confronting other circumstances, to new cross-roads of experience, thus reactivating their original meaning while putting it to the test of such a contradiction. For these works to be presented elsewhere comes to mean the certainty that they are not foreclosed, and this is all the more important as those works are frequently deprived of breathing space.

2. For those of us in Latin American countries, appearing in an international context means a challenge; it signifies for us fighting for our own legitimacy within a framework that tends to subordinate any secondary (marginal, peripheral) activity to the forms promoted as models by the international power centres. Fatally, the products of our cultures are condemned to the role of duplications; any one of our forms then appears as dependent on other forms, internationalised by metropolitan cultures — as plain repetition or copy, imitation, replica or image similar to one belonging to an international stock. The dictatorial international perspective tends to look for the whole. It encompasses within that whole all relevant works (even if they come from contradictory or different historical processes) and places them with a uniform historical sequence. It does not take into account the different processes that specify each history as the history of a minority — as a form of dissidence in respect to the international dogma of modernism.

Our forms, then, are deprived of the spaces in which they are validated by national histories. The circumstances in which they have appeared are forgotten. The specific social and cultural conditions determining their manifestation are obliterated.

3. Peripheral cultures find it very hard to reverse the process that mutilates their ability to engage in dialogue and condemns them to being merely the recipients of messages of others.

These cultures of ours, deprived of the capacity of exchange, are seen as purely passive, acquiescing or ratifying what has already been expressed; the one-sidedness of international communication imposes upon them the condition of subscribers to forms perceived as dominant.

In our cultures, our lack is not only the product of quantitatively limited information, but also of a relationship to information that is qualitatively limited. The dominant cultures force us to relate to information as to a monopoly.

4. Our cultures have formed themselves within a historical and geographical lag, and are thus identified not by the production of forms but by their reproduction. Historically it has always been their fate to have belated contact with international models through copies. A work is then, for us, nothing but the trace of itself: a delayed signal of something that has already happened, and whose value as an event has been cancelled through repetition.

This art situation that excludes us as actors and even as witnesses, shows itself to us always after the fact (in a moment that is no longer there) and through some form of translation, and thus turns our cultures into the cultures of dubbing.

Our cultures are also those of pruning: the works we see are fragmented by photographic selection of the image and thus severed from their situation.

5. A country in the process of being colonised, or one that has been colonised, shows itself by its patchwork, by the remnant character of its tradition. Its memory of the past is made up of remainders of other histories, a memory formed by hybrid traces in different layers and by the residues of petrified forms of language.

The international mechanism of imposing signs does not take into account the national specificity of productive complexes into which those signs will be inserted. Therefore, our production appears as irregular, our references heterogeneous. Our histories feign a certain succession, a certain continuity. Our histories are fakes; they are travesties of social correlation. As the doubles of something else, they are alienated and relate to culture through substitution.

II PRODUCTION OF FORMS

1. However, it is possible to consider the validity of works which, even if they have been built on a foreign stock of pre-existing images, are able to re-elaborate those images critically, in relation to previous conditions of existence and functioning. It is possible to force those pre-existing images (through the pressures of a different context) to signify in Latin America what they had never the chance to signify before. Those forms detach themselves, here, from the security of their own past and have to venture into a present unknown to them; they disengage here from a tradition whose weight neutralised their strength and served as a buffer for their impact,

depriving them of their vehemence and their aggression. Here, unprotected, those forms expose themselves at last to the strength of a conflict, in the enormity of the act of stumbling upon our facts, our reality appears extreme in relation to theirs.

International forms, in moving both geographically and historically into a context of deprivation such as ours, have to reset the perspective in which they initially appeared. The urgency with which they are confronted strengthens their signification, no longer in relation to a past (as in the case of a history continuous in relation to itself or to its memory) but in relation, now, to a future exceeding, for us, the notion of history itself.

International forms, in each case, turn back on themselves and thus modify their own origin; even if they come from another tradition, no forms can save themselves from the shock of their transit through our history — a history constructed of abject poverty or repression.

We are, in consequence, prepared to consider as valid the activity of "building our own phrases through a vocabulary and a syntax received from others"(1), and to see in it a very important strategy of criticism, as it subverts an order in which we appear as secondary, as it modifies the meaning attributed to us from outside: we are prepared to consider as valid the creative handling of international techniques, seen as a way of using (misusing, reusing, recycling, harming) them for the purpose of building our own historical signification.

2. Even though we have to fight against what, in an international sphere, forces upon us alien forms of conscience, and even though we have to fight against hegemonic pressures from Europe or the United States, we do not have to give up the chance of profiting from the information coming from those countries, information that we might process for our own ends.

Colonisation is alienating. Equally alienating (in the sense of myth-making) is the wish to see "authentic" Latin America only in the remains of its pre-colonial past.

The mythologising of the Latin American identity (based on the primitive), in forms of art aspiring to be aboriginal, caricatures that identity. The exotic (the myth of the savage as a return to nature, the myth of native culture as a legendary spring, as folkloric memory) and the picturesque lead Latin American culture into a regression of identity. The origins (the pre-cultural) may be the only legitimate way of deciphering a history abbreviated to the memory of its past, a history unable to participate in the real dynamics of the present.

Even though myth, in our continent, is a sub-stratum feeding its own forms of culture, to yearn for the virginal, pure indigenous forms of culture, free from all foreign participation, means to subtract Latin American culture from the dialectics of history. In erasing the traces of conflict amongst different cultural pressures that have clashed during the diverse processes of colonisation, the possibility of a Latin American form of conscience open to a process of self criticism regarding its own contradictory

condition (that of several histories interacting, contradicting one another) is denied.

3. The non-coincidence of international and Latin American forms, the non-synchrony of relation to international standards of contemporaneity; the difficulty, for example, in seeing the point of aesthetics such as that of the "trans avant-garde" in regions as marginal as ours denotes but separates the traumatic consciousness that we have of our history (failed, incomplete) and the satisfied consciousness of Europe that leads Europeans to relate to the past in terms of over-abundance of art historical references. This leads European art to smother itself in its own references. In the case of Europe, any innovation appears in the form of a quote, since each form has necessarily been anticipated by a predecessor, absorbing the new form into continuity. The accumulation of references and proliferation of quotations leads European cultures to constitute themselves in a web of presuppositions and reminiscences.

In the case of Latin American practices, born of deprivation (from non-belonging and from residues, the leftovers from satiated cultures), tradition can hardly be considered as a heritage, since it is based on a series of acts of dispossession; the game of quoting, here, would only be a parody of history, disinherited by the numerous ways of expropriating life.

4. Refusing annexation, in the form of becoming the cultural territory of someone else, does not mean shutting ourselves off from foreign contributions in the name of so-called authentic local consciousness. It means working on forms of critical consciousness that will make us capable of evaluating such contributions in accordance with our own historical convenience, and of discriminating amongst such contributions in accordance with our own standards. It means designing a fighting strategy through which we might profit from what is imposed on us, by distorting its original frame of reference.

The same heterogeneity of references that formed our own pruned identity, this historical fragmentation and disparity of our productive web, this discontinuity of our processes of cultural reference, demand that our practices have to be such as to render (and make productive) their own peripheralisation, to produce their own shift in processes.

For instance, our practices try to render, through their own processes, the technological inequality between imposing signs and the local structures receiving those signs. Our practices present the social stratification that results from the incompatibility of different modes of working that are anachronistic in their processes.

The more recent Latin American practices take as their theme (and even dramatise) their conditions of production, generating a dynamic of signification capable of rendering the destiny of a work in so far as it is divided among cultural processes antagonistic to each other.

5. The Latin American signs that are in revolt (rebellious against their origin) emerge in the interior of our language. The language moves signs from one

zone to another, bringing by means of their underlying conflictual charges a clash between the different levels of culturisation to which our histories have been submitted. In the interior of sign the different levels of social historicity enter into conflict.

Within each one of our histories, two opposing forces face each other: the one from outside imposes signification in conformity with standard international norms; the one from inside assumes the defence of what is our own (not that which is native), rising up against that external frame of imposition.

The regime of censorship that reigns in many Latin American countries and affects our cultures takes a double form. It proceeds from the imperialism of international cultural forces that peripheralise our production with respect to the metropolitan webs of artistic signification. It proceeds also from the authoritarianism of the political regimes that subject the countries to the officialism of their models of repression. A double silencing, a double law of censorship that we have the responsibility to fight in all modes of language — the only field of action and the only place where we can imprint the gesture of our disobedience.

The language with which we work in our practices is in itself this battlefield, a zone of emergence of signification that intends to subvert the regimes of dominance imposed upon it.

The underlying tactics of resistance and of combat against what is proscribed is being developed as a subculture occupying the hidden face of the codes. This activity works with clandestine references, disguising itself through processes of travesty of signification, parodying the order and metaphorising the law.

Only an archaeology of our languages can reveal the stratification of the obverse of dominance and exhume that which lies buried under so many graves.

(1) Michel De Certeau: *L'Invention du Quotidien*

Santiago, Chile
August 1983
Translation: Adriana Valdes

THE GERMAN SITUATION, OR THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WILDEN COIN.

Annelie Pohlen

The future won't be found in the immediate past or on the rubbish heap.

Time contains its own magic. Contrary to any reading of history one measures its passing in decades and centuries as if reality, actual or imagined, ever bothered about such distinctions. Man needs to impose order on confusion and so he puts everything away into the simplest compartments.

In Germany, or anywhere else for that matter, the art scene is no exception. The latest trend is the "duel" between the art of the 1970s and that of the 1980s. While one group tends to emphasise the enormous differences between what was produced during the two decades, the other will painstakingly seek out the similarities. With the passage of time it is natural, of course, that there should be changes and developments in the material as well as spiritual conditions of human societies. These are neither linear, as the staunch believers in progress would have it, nor as easily measured as by those who neatly divide time into decades and centuries to obtain a clearer overview. From all these revolutionary, reactionary and contradictory directions, clarity of thought has to be somehow distilled. In the current German socio-political situation (more accurately in the West German one) this leads to the *Wende* (reaction — new political order) and from an international cultural viewpoint to a declaration of the victory of post-modernism over modernism.

Even if cultural and political ideals have never had much in common, *Wendepolitiker* (reactionary politicians) and post-modernists do share one preoccupation: their need to reform the immediate past — a shameful retreat into the arsenal of historical values. These are restored to life, uncritically and unashamedly by politicians while post-modernists, showing little concern for their previously held position and current context in time, adapt it to a socially irresponsible, idealistically anarchic scenario. The progressive positivists of the immediate post-war era, as well as the critical revolutionaries and those advocates of humanist Utopias from the late 1960s, are in their attempts to visualise the future all accused of delusion. They talk as if the artists of 1968 had not already, in their revolution against internationalist *rigor mortis*, fought for the ideal of a humanity rooted in the historical process as a basis for future vision. The creative products of a whole decade are reduced to a formalist and intellectualised spectacular of innovation while the worthlessness of the Utopias is measured by the failure of political and social reform.

The more the reactionary politicians try to denigrate the last social Romantics of modernism (well supported as they are by *petit-bourgeois* desires to retain material possessions), the more certain young cultural militants indulge in proclaiming the end of

social responsibility in the arts. Overnight the *Neuen Wilden* (new wild ones) as they were hastily tagged, at least by their promoters and probably also by themselves, emerged from that post 1960s movement which so carefully nurtured the responsibility of art to create a humanistic future. From here on a total subjectivism reigns and anything from the grab-bag of history is available for use in the production of art works: an anarchic outpouring of the subconscious without any communicable social relevance. From the supermarket of culture only the technical media were eliminated as these were regarded as the impotent tools of a beleaguered technocratic age. "No future" became the logical catch-cry. "All Quiet on the Western Front" was the somewhat more refined version¹.

Two cities in West Germany became centres for the new attitude: Berlin, fixated for a long time in an inbred critical realism, hurled itself back into the centre of cultural world awareness with the help of the young *heftigen* (tough) painters. The *Wilden* (wild ones) of the *Mühlheimer Freiheit* originated in Cologne from where they went on to conquer the entire Western art scene. It was only fair that their predecessors, the painters Baselitz, Lüpertz, Immendorff, Kiefer and Penck, left out in the cold all through the 1970s, were thus thrust into the long awaited international limelight. If one were to take the reactions in foreign publications to these international triumphs seriously, then it would be impossible not to come to the following conclusion: despite the world wide profusion of the "new painting", it is the expressive stance of a few German artists, nurtured by a trivialised mythic mood, that continues to call forth an effusion of amazed comment on the continuation of an unbroken Nordic tradition. The quite obvious differences between individual artists go unnoticed and they only see German pathos, surging dark mythology, wild excitability, raw monumentality and a world stage with Wagner and Nietzsche calling the tune. The mythological chaos of the German soul conquers the world.

Now, slowly perhaps, the trench warriors of the 1970s and 1980s are getting tired. We are becoming curious to see if there are not other creative attitudes to be discovered among the supposedly socially disinterested young painters and sculptors of today. Even the indiscriminate appraisal of the so called *Wilden* or German expressive painters and their closely aligned sculptor compatriots is coming ever more under review.

In order to simply kill off modernism its critics have conveniently turned on the creative potential of their fathers from the at least German Bauhaus and concentrated their attack on the terrorist, technocratic and inhuman functionalism instigated by the inheritors of the Bauhaus ideal. But the "Modernists" in the development of German art are in no way all unimaginative rationalists, any more than the Post-Modernist, Neo-Expressionists of the 1970s and 1980s are all obsessively emotional anarcho-subjectivists. The relationship between the generations in their use of media and means of expression, as well as in their attitude towards the function of art in a social context, is considerably more complex and also more involved than the



A WHOLE DAY OF MY LIFE, 1983, photo silkscreen and painting on acrylic, cotton and masonite, each panel 240 x 77,6



PIETA, 1983, work in progress, Vinilplus and photo silkscreen on P.V.C., 160 x 170

EUGENIO DITTBORN

Born Santiago, Chile, in 1943
Lives and works in Santiago

Close looking

About looking

To find photographs, the photographs of long since forgotten figures, long since forgotten criminals (whose faces were printed for purposes of detection), long since forgotten prostitutes, long since forgotten victims of crimes: to find those photographs printed in the media, the Chilean media of many years ago — perhaps this would be the starting point for the work of Eugenio Dittborn, and perhaps this work might be described simply as an activity of close looking; and of trying to make explicit, by visual means, this act of close looking.

About working on those photographs

Visual means of making explicit this act of close looking: among them, giving those photographs a wholly different context and a wholly different physical dimension, thus forcing on them a way of looking to which they were alien; thus creating a space in which the gaze of the spectator is thrown back upon itself; in which the faces send none of the signs with which the spectator is familiar, but rather the signs of their own remoteness, their belonging to another order, previsual or nonvisual, prephotographic or nonphotographic, these forgotten people mostly pictured against their will for purposes of identification or detection, for the purposes of being fixed in their own sorry place within a society with no place for them; among these visual means, also, the act of superimposing on them the text of verbal clichés, sayings, lyrics of popular songs, whatever can be recognised as collective, "used" speech, and of doing so in the penmanship of someone who never quite learned to write, who still writes as if drawing, each letter a laborious design in pursuit of some ill-conceived perfection; among these visual means, the use of different techniques and materials for the printing of the photographs, thus bringing simultaneously into play the memory of the different occasions and times in which each of those techniques or materials is or was commonly used — establishing in the one place occupied by each work the coexistence of different historical times, of different social spaces, the discontinuity hidden behind each

idea of a society taken as a continuum in space or in time.

About visual means, society, history

The work of Eugenio Dittborn seen from the viewpoint of its production within Chilean society, during these last years, a time in which the social tensions existing in an underdeveloped society have reached paroxysm, have seemingly left behind any possibility of expression or explanation based on previous ideological discourse; a baffled, incoherent time, whose lessons have not yet been learned, and have not yet even been expressed; a time in which history as it is written, ideas on society as they have been expressed, are evidently in tatters, and any possible understanding is based on an awareness of the *débris* in which thinking is at the moment immersed — this work rescues the evidence — the photographic trace, the physical imprint of what official history has left behind, the tangible evidence of bodies erased by written history, the visible proof of the gap, the lack that both invalidates official history and makes its writing possible; it exposes our notions of society and of history, and creates visible awareness of the discontinuity underlying them — and, from Chile, projects the notion of repressive society, of enforced unison, and exposes it, bringing into play the different strata forced into a pose — a gesture — that masks the open wound of their incompatibility, their forced and contradictory existence.

Adriana Valdés
Santiago, Chile
1983

Studied

- 1962-65 Escuela de Bellas Artes de la Universidad de Chile, Painting, engraving and drawing
1965 Escuela de Fotomecánica de Madrid, photoengraving
1966-69 Hochschule für Bildende Kunst, West Berlin, silkscreen and lithography
1968 Ecole des Beaux Arts de Paris, painting
1972 Atelier Estudios Norte, Santiago, photosilkscreen

Selected individual exhibitions

- 1964 Galeria Marta Faz, Santiago, Chile
1965 Colegio Hispanoamericano, Madrid
1969 Galerie Eva Rosiner, West Berlin
1974 *Acontecimientos para Goya, pintor*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago
1975 *Premios 1975*, Galeria Matta, Santiago

- 1976 *Delachilenapintura, Historia*, Galeria Epoca, Santiago
1977 *Final de Pista*, Galeria Epoca, Santiago
1978 Galeria San Diego, Bogota
1979 Galeria la Trinchera, Caracas
1980 Galeria Sur, Santiago
1983 Galeria Sur, Santiago

Selected group exhibitions

- 1968 Galerie des Beaux Arts, Paris
Galerie de France, Paris
1979 Iglesia de San Francisco, Santiago
1980 *Visual works for a poet*, Galeria Cal, Santiago
Fifth Norwegian International Print Biennale, Oslo
1981 *First French-Chilean Video Festival*, Instituto chileno frances de cultura, Santiago
Bienal de Medellín
1982 *Writing and Reading*, Galeria Sur, Santiago
Artists' books, Metronom, Barcelona
Registro, Medellín
1983 *in-out*, WPA, Washington
Artists' Books, Franklin Furnace, New York
El Cayman Gallery, New York
Textos infernos, The Festival of International Poetry: Latinoamerica, Galeria Venezuela, New York
1984 Intergraphyk, East Berlin

Selected bibliography

- Nelly Richard, Ronald Kay, "v.i.s.u.a.l.", *Delachilenapintura, Historia*, Santiago 1976
Nelly Richard, *Una mirada sobre el arte en Chile*, 1981
Gonzalo Muñoz, "Tres notas sobre la obra de Eugenio Dittborn", text in catalogue of *in-out*, Washington Projects for the Arts, Washington 1983
By the artist
Estrategia y proyecciones de la plástica nacional sobre la década del 80, 1979
With Ronald Kay, *Definitivamente transitorio*, 1979
Final de Pista, 1977, 1981
Fallo Fotografico, 1981

A WHOLE DAY OF MY LIFE, 1983
Photo silkscreen and painting on acrylic and masonite
Wall panel 240 × 400
Floor panel 77 × 400

Courtesy of the artist
Under the auspices of the Instituto Superior de Comunicación y Diseño
Santiago

Photography Jaime O'Ryan, Santiago

FELIX DROESE

Born in Singen/Htw, Düsseldorf, 1950

"Self redemption". "Condemned, to redeem ourselves . . ." Can one actually be more exact in deciding one's own horizon of faith? Who eliminates the curse, banishes divine pity; whatever they do, they do as condemned ones. They usually don't enquire further as to who condemned them; it suffices to know that this trial of condemnation is unjust and that it belongs to the emancipation of the new man, to declare this trial null and void, and this by the act of self-redemption.

Redemption from what? From economic misery? Today they know as well as their opponents that the forms of work organisation, which have developed through historic necessity in countries under Marxist administration, do not eradicate misery but generalise it. They do not supplant the world's curse, instead they consecrate work. Work is the single valid thing, even the ritual which outlasts this "death of God" (not to mention the various smaller twilights of the lesser deities), which facilitates the communication of people with the world (by now curseless), as they imagine, in religious forms. By this rite the redemption of the world is celebrated with a seriousness, a ferocious fervour, which creates the suspicion that, at that time in the rebellion against the bourgeois *Weltschmerz*, the pain itself was not really conquered but its bourgeois forms, and by the destruction of these forms — which like old fashioned phials had bound the poison in the vessel — the pain now is distributed with even less restraint into the air we breathe.

Walter Warnach
Extract from
"Die Welt des Schmerzes"
(The World of Pain), 1952
Statement for *dort 1981-83*
(there 1981-83)
Tape by the artist
Neske Verlag, Pfullingen, 1984

Studied

- 1970-72 Academy of Art, Düsseldorf, arts and crafts
1972-76 Academy of Art, Düsseldorf, social sculpture

Selected individual exhibitions

- 1980 *Schwarz auf Weiss*, Kunstsammlung, Museum Bochum
1983 *infelix lignum*, Kunstraum Muenchen, Munich

dort 1981-83, Orangerie Schloss Augustusburg zu Bruehl; Kunstverein, Bruehl
1984 *Mangelmutanten ueberleben Kapitalismus*, Museum Hans Lange, Krefeld

Selected group exhibitions

- 1974 *Vietnam — Solidaritaetsausstellung*, Mensa of the University of Frankfurt
1977 *Gegen politische Unterdrueckung in der BRD und DDR*, Old Mensa of the University of Cologne
1981 *Westkunst*, Cologne
1982 *documenta 7*, Kassel

ELF — "WIR SIND KEINE AMERIKANISCHEN LAMPENSCHIRME", 1976-84
(We are not American lampshades)
11 processed cowskins

LENINISTISCHE FRIEDHOEFE, 1980
Drawings on paper

Courtesy of Galerie R. Zwirner, Cologne

Photography Oleski Galerie R. Zwirner