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by Sasha Frere-Jones

# THE NEW YORKER

DEC. 24 & 31, 2007

## WINTER FICTION ISSUE

### RAYMOND CARVER UNCUT

THE ORIGINAL VERSION OF A CLASSIC STORY

### THE CALCUTTA STEPMOTHER

*Jhumpa Lahiri*

### ALL ABOUT ALMA

*Junot Díaz*

### COETZEE'S BAD YEAR

*James Wood*

### PINTER COMES HOME

*John Lahr*

### TEEN-AGERS IN LOVE

*Anne Enright*

PLUS: *Lore Segal, John Updike,  
Paul Rudnick & more*

## GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

### DEVON DIKEOU

Conceptual art meets self-disclosure. Rather than hide a potentially embarrassing devotion to a childhood security blanket, nicknamed Niney, Dikeou makes it the subject of her work. "The Niney Chronicles" unfolds in a series of photographs and hilarious text paintings. As the nar-

rative twists and turns (Niney is nearly lost on a shuttle bus from LaGuardia to J.F.K.), Dikeou's homage to her sacred scrap of wool points, with absurdist levity, to the mysteries of our attachment to objects—and that includes art. Through Feb. 10. (Art Moving Projects, 165 N. 12th St. 917-301-6680.)

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## Bodyguard

Katharina Hegewisch

Five Ways of Seeing

The possibility to reinvent oneself is what Jeffrey Deitch in his introductory essay for the Posthuman catalog calls the most significant aspect of our times. Surgically corrected, cosmetically styled and pressed into a corset of fashionable dictates the individual is presented as test tube product. What is hidden behind the artificially aligned bodies and faces is now presented by a small but carefully selected exhibition at gallery Hohenthal und Bergen. Bodyguard is the title of the show, which is made up by single works of Charles Le Dray, Taro Chiezo, Cheryl Donegan, Janine Antoni, and Devon Dikeou. Five ways of seeing society which represses pain, glorifies beauty and doesn't forgive weakness. Without a soul, empty and narcissistic, egocentric and dialog hostile this produces extreme emotional deficits. The need for human proximity, for tenderness and safety within a functioning social net is more and more unsatisfied.

The already thirty years old Devon Dikeou for example hasn't yet been able to sleep without her security ninety. The help of her childhood becomes a symbol for security which she lacks in her adult life. The ritual of finding herself in a trusted object is repeated evening after evening. The fabric disappears under her pillow, ready to be taken out in moments of doubt, fear, and loss of oneself. The pillow is replaceable and therefore present at the show, but the fabric is only represented in a photograph. A poor looking cloth in which the entire disillusionment of a life is put that somehow went wrong.

Also Le Dray's "bear" proofs of broken childhood dreams, the early blessings and the helpless attempt to hide old wounds. The approximately 25cm high bear, made of leather, cotton, wood, buttons, and other stuff seems to be old and worn out. The eyes are loosely hanging, the head falls off to the side, the cotton pours out of his destroyed body. With difficulty Le Dray attempts to imitate what is usually a result of childhood love over the years. But his bear doesn't narrate consolation and tears, hugs, kisses, and whispered secrets. Fragile and abused it is standing for violence, which is done by the big ones to the smaller ones and those to the ones that are even smaller.

Completely deprived of any soul are finally the headless bodiless children clothes, which Taro Chiezo made mechanically move and circle around. Wires and battery powered toy engines are animating these clothes and show the individual reduced to its wrapping, vain, speechless, and without contacts. Turned into a

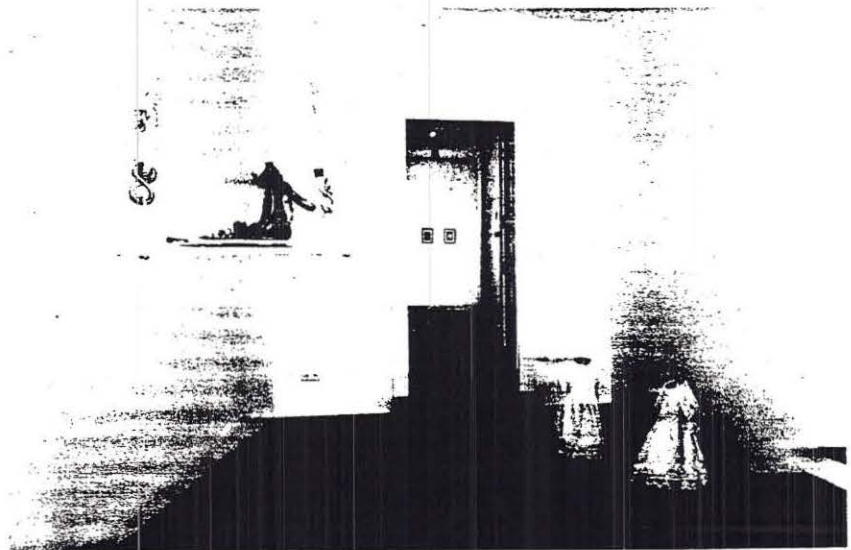


pink dress the child turns into a puppet. Everything of his own is driven out of him. Cute, bloodless, and adapted it represents the ideal bourgeois behaviorism, a trained being which is only loved as long as it is obeying.

Also Cheryl Donegan's video "head" deals with this kind of adaptedness. Her unbelievably direct, pornographic work shows a young girl (the artist), which catches with her mouth the stream of milk which emanates out of a green container. Her movements signal sexual excitement. She moves herself. Giving, unhibitedly and self forgotten she glides her body along the container up and down, a perfect show, which is in the end only showing, that even the most intimate, private show, which is in the end only showing, that even the most intimate private gestures have turned into randomly quotable standards(patterns).

Janine Antoni also makes use of her body. She uses it as a painting and sculpting tool. With hair she paints with color, with her teeth she gnaws fate, with her tongue, she licks chocolate, and with her body she forms soap. The outcome of these physical processes are works that strangely quote conventional styles. The child like direct approach to the material produces

Ausstellungsphoto  
"Bodyguard"  
Charles Le Dray, Taro Chiezo,  
Devon Dikeou  
Courtesy Hohenthal und Bergen



Bodyguard. Hohenthal und Bergen

forms, which are deprived of the spontaneity and originality of their treatment. 629 times Antoni blinked her eyes in order to layer Mascara over two small pieces of paper. The result of these immense attempts reminds us of Henry Michaux, fragile abstract, and tastefully informal.

Oscillating between cynicism and deep melancholy these works presented at Hohenthal und Bergen are describing the mourning over loss of one's own body and the nostalgia for original feelings, smells, and experiences. The path towards this aim is blocked. For pain and ecstasy, for love and hate, there is already such a broad repertoire of gestures and formulas that even the most honest utterance appears as a quotation.



PIA STADTBÄUMER  
JOHNEN AND SCHÖTTLE

Anyone used to looking naked people in the eye, looking at their arms, legs, chest, and hands, will see in this show a man with his double standing some way away, and a woman with her double standing close behind her. There is one small difference; it's between their legs, so to speak. The male body has female genitals and the female body has male ones. Or, if you prefer, the female genitals have a male body, and the male genitals a female one. When David Bowie and Grace Jones were fashionable, we would probably have talked about androgyny.

The casts have a loop on their heads, attached to a rope suspended from the ceiling. So they are mass produced in some way, another reference to this topical theme. But where do we go from there? I find it hard to see anything in these works that I haven't been told better and more clearly by other media. So they have the same artistic quality as a monument to the unknown soldier? A monument to the identically reproduced, cloned, and undefinable no. x and no. x1, or no. y and no. y1 of the age of genetic technology? Do they not speculate specifically on the idea that they have to become reality in order to receive meaning as an artwork, rather than rebelling against it? Or are they simply an attempt to make sculptures representing the human body? Something that is certainly very difficult after classical Greece, after Rodin and others. Is that why they need these topical, fashionable disguises and confusions? Or does Pia Stadtbäumer think the situation so serious that we must cease to make certain claims on the quality of the work, to allow others to come to the fore? Is the alienation of these sculptures merely a skillful attempt at camouflage, leading our thoughts off into the chains of association of other media, and persuading our eyes that no. X1431 will be just as beautiful, intelligent, and productive as the others?

Rainald Schumacher

(Translated from German by Shaun Whiteside)

STEFAN HÖLLER  
LUIS CAMPANA

By profession, Stefan Höller is a courtroom artist for television, capturing scenes from trials in watercolor whenever photography or filming is forbidden. This strategy would not be worthy of discussion if Höller did not succeed in combining his undisputed technical abilities with the principles of conceptual art, which alone keep his painting from being mere virtuoso stuff. As a courtroom artist, Höller first of all finds an answer to the question of why there are still good reasons for painting today: painting provides the only possibility of documenting a situation if other media are prohibited. Secondly, the watercolors on show are saturated with political reality, they show the trial against Markus Wolf, the head of the secret police in the former GDR, who is

currently on trial in the Federal Republic. Questions arise about the moral legitimacy of a process wherein the position of the victor is foregrounded all too clearly. Thirdly, Höller also takes a stand as regards the re-kindled debate about the political relevance of art: it would be difficult for an artist to be closer to the events of the day, closer to the focus of current affairs, than by documenting the Wolf trial. Fourthly, and finally, Höller's art is also conceptual, as art about art: years ago, the trial about the destruction of Beuys's *Fat Corner* was held in the courtroom where Höller was working; along with his own watercolors, Höller is showing meticulously worked paintings of works by Beuys. He thus pits his trade against that of the propagandist-in-chief of an art beyond technical ability by providing a photographically precise depiction of his work.

The involvement of context, in the courtroom setting, the reflection on the political effectiveness of art, in the documentation of an exemplary problem concerning the two Germanys, and the concern for his own artistic language in his treatment of Beuys, all combine to produce conceptual quality in Höller's work. Unlike most conceptual artists, Höller also has a trade.

Rainer Metzger

(Translated from German by Shaun Whiteside)

BODYGUARD  
HOENTHAL UND BERGEN

As a group show, "Bodyguard" provides us with a run-down of certain interrelations that exist between the various pieces, and when it comes to evaluating the works, the temptation is to group the artist's individual discourses not in terms of any particular style they might share but in the specific emotional state they betray.

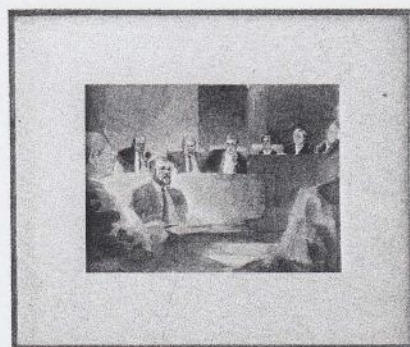
Well-ordered and fortuitously selected, the line-up includes small-scale, headless robots, deformed teddy bears, drawings made with eyelashes, and simple videos touting the erotic joys of tirelessly suctioning milk. This all goes to reflect a distinctly unhealthy pulsing and a heightened sense of dispassion on the part of a set of artists who, while they never cease to be, have certainly turned their backs on the other-subject when it comes to showing their works to outsiders.

"Bodyguard" transmits an overwhelming sense of sadness and childishness. Janine Antoni, Taro Chiezo, Devon Dikeou, Cheryl Donegan, and Charles LeDray all reflect, through their discrete and fragile images, the youthful and disillusioned face of a country and an artistic culture: the passing New Yorker and her little Japanese sister might well lapse into a process of regressive withdrawal on being faced with what this show has to offer. It is as if the more the bodyguards protecting mundane little myth figures such as Michael Jackson grow in size — often reaching mastodontic proportions — the more pressing the urge to get back to the warmth of the absent body among other artists of his same generation. In this respect, the show reveals a certain insight into pathology and the desire to stave off the pain caused by culture when it represses anything abnormal.

In their efforts to hold the sickness in check, protract the metaphor, and acknowledge themselves within it, these artists have proven capable of endowing the proceedings with what



CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS, GRANDE DIXENCE, VAL DES DIX, SWITZERLAND, 1993. GELATIN SILVER PRINT.



STEFAN HÖLLER, WOLF TRIAL, 1993. WATERCOLOR, 51 X 61 CM.



Foucault once referred to as "a sense of accidental and organic process." I would not, however, go so far as to call this "posthuman" art since what comes after humanity is death and, therefore, the death of art. Against the odds and despite the apparently scant resources left to them by their predecessors, the artists showing here manage to transform the traces of disaster into a finely-tuned if brief harmony with a contemporary feel.

José Lebrero Stals

(Translated from Spanish by Christopher Martin)

## MUNICH

CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS

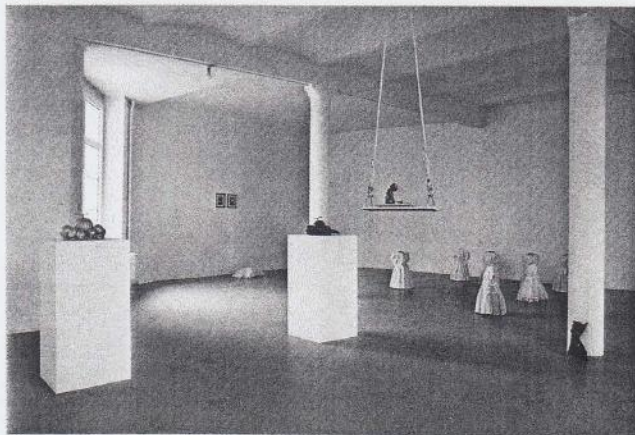
KUNSTVEREIN

"For Example: *Die Welt ist schön* (First Draft)": this mélange of two languages is the title of the exhibition installed by Los Angeles-based artist Christopher Williams. *Die Welt ist schön* (The world is beautiful) was also the title of a book that brought fame to Albert Renger-Patzsch, with the work of August Sander, the major German photographer of the 1920s. Williams refers to him by displaying certain subjects central to classical modernist photography with a view — the artist turns director, so to speak — to making aesthetics secondary to the age of Renger-Patzsch. This produces an art about photography, about the various genres, varieties, and motifs of the photographic image. At the same time, however, Williams's work is also art about modernism: an art about the cold manner in which objects are staged — in this case, ornamental door mountings shot by a photographer at the Munich Ethnological Museum — to satisfy the photographic obsession with objectivity. It is also an art that refers to one of the vanquishers of modernism, Jean-Luc Godard, to whom Williams renders homage by making a landscape photograph of the dam at La Dixence, the building of which was filmed by Godard. And finally, art about that particular area of portrait photography which contributed greatly to the victory of modernist detachment early in its history: fashion photography.

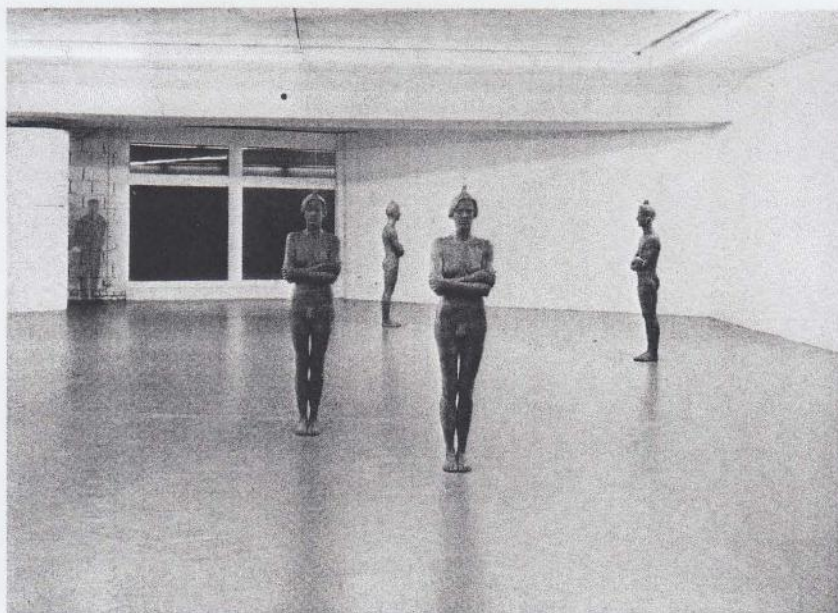
These subjects are presented in a strictly rigorous manner, like a museum display, each photograph individually and expensively framed. Here again, Williams is trying his hand at following the tradition of classical modernism, and the unexamined way in which it implicates the space as a "white cell." Williams's staging is thoroughly conceptual; it takes a strongly historicizing approach in an attempt to reconstruct a stage in the development of art. None of the objects on show is actually a product of the era to which Williams refers. An atmosphere of fakery and simulation, of theatrical contrivance, is thus produced, allowing in through the back door the very thing that Williams had set out to analyze with his desire for historicization: the modernist aesthetic and its parading institution, the museum.

Rainer Metzger

(Translated from German by Shaun Whiteside)



BODYGUARD, 1993. INSTALLATION VIEW.



PIA STADTBÄUMER, HERMAPHRODITES, 1993. WAX, H. 185 CM.



# KUNSTFORUM

Bd. 126 März - Juni 1994

INTERNATIONAL

Beate Eickhoff

## »Bodyguard«

Galerie Hohenthal und Bergen, Köln, 12.11.1993 - 26.2.1994

Five New York male and female artists, all in their early 30s share one theme: all question the human dimension in modern society, through the structure of the psyche and through the trope of their bodies. For art this theme is IN for the moment—and though a timeless one, it is treaded by various contemporary artists living in various locales. This is a sufficient reason for the gallery Hohenthal und Bergen to present them in a group show under the programmatic title "bodyguard". Indeed, there were obvious points of coherence. Because

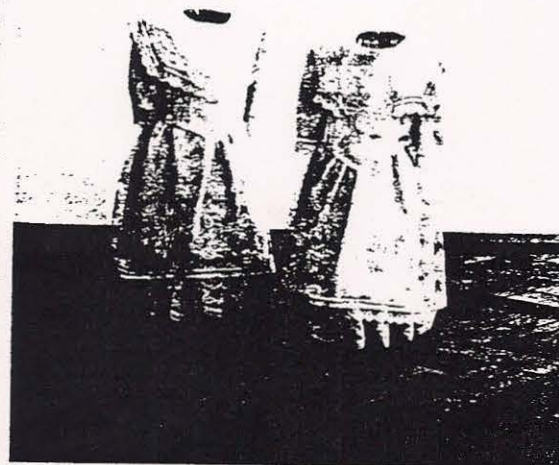
the selection of the works was cohesive, the question whether the artists or the theme came first is gratuitous. The work of Janine Antoni, Cheryl Donegan, Charles LeDray, Devon Dikeou and the Japanese artist Taro Chiezo recall their childhood using material and actions reminiscent of it: security blanket, painting with fingers and eyelashes, teddy bears, and dolls. But the idea of the lost childhood is contradicted by the clear loss of naivety that informs all works. As a sub current, one can feel the regret confronted with the superficiality and

the brutality of modern society, in which it is better not to show ones feelings.

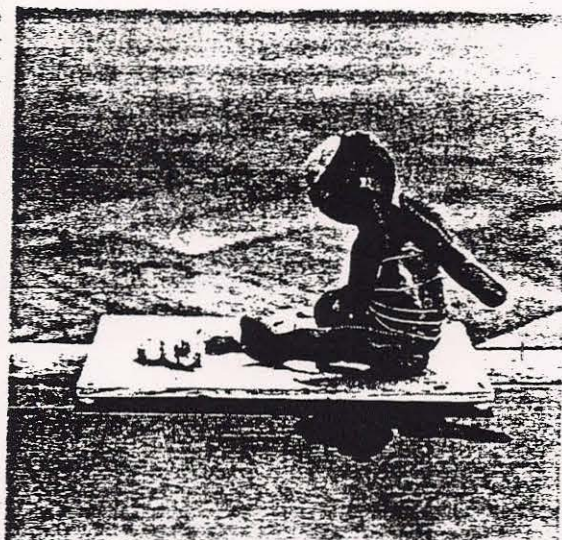
Devon Dikeou as a grown up person still sleeps with her a security blanket. As she isn't supposed to have such a thing she hides it during the day underneath her pillow. In the gallery there is only the pillow and 2 photographs—as a reminder of her "security blanket" and the forbidden gesture of hiding the blanket. Also, in a related piece, during the opening the artist had wet warm towellettes distributed by a professional waiter. The visitors dumped their towellettes after they lost their pleasant temperature. The left overs from this action were white, unpleasant detritus laying in all corners of the gallery. Charles LeDray treats his childhood object the Teddy bear in a rather brutal way. Both bears look cute, but the beholder gets uneasily scared encountering how unnaturally twisted one is sitting on the floor, and another one on a swing. The two are rudely fixed together as the swinging one aloftly stares at the sitting one. Also alienating, are the motorized dolls by Taro Chiezo. From the outside they are little ladies in pink dresses, but without head and with nothing underneath or inside. These dolls rush like robots through the space without a destination or any orientation. Janine Antoni maintained for herself a childlike body language. For the two Mascara-drawings she moved her right eye 629 times for the right drawing and the same amount of times with the left eye for the left drawing. Her eyelashes left their traces. The poetry lies in its simplicity, but also in its sensitiveness. Cheryl Donegan's two short and clear videos also treat original human behavior. The first video in relationship to "painting," shows her making painting with her hands which she erases subsequently; the second video's relationship to "eroticism," shows her trying to capture with and in her mouth white liquid emanating from a large milk carton. The artists of this exhibition are making their points clear, formally direct and are easily understood. They express things, that in the end, are nothing new yet touch upon everybody's most personal experience. The playfulness of most of the works presented made the exhibition "bodyguard" amusing and full of experiences, which therefore, makes a difference—compared to many other group shows.



DEVON DIKEOU. Security/Niney. 1963-93. Mixed media. Alle Fotos in diesem Artikel: Courtesy Galerie Hohenthal und Bergen, Köln



TARO CHIEZO. T-534 P. 1993. zwei Teile. Stoff, Metall, Roboter-Mechanismus 63 und 60 cm hoch



CHARLES LEDRAY. Untitled (bear). 1992. Leder, Baumwolle, Holz, Knöpfe, Garn. Kordel. Drant, Nadein, ca. 13 x 23 x 15 cm