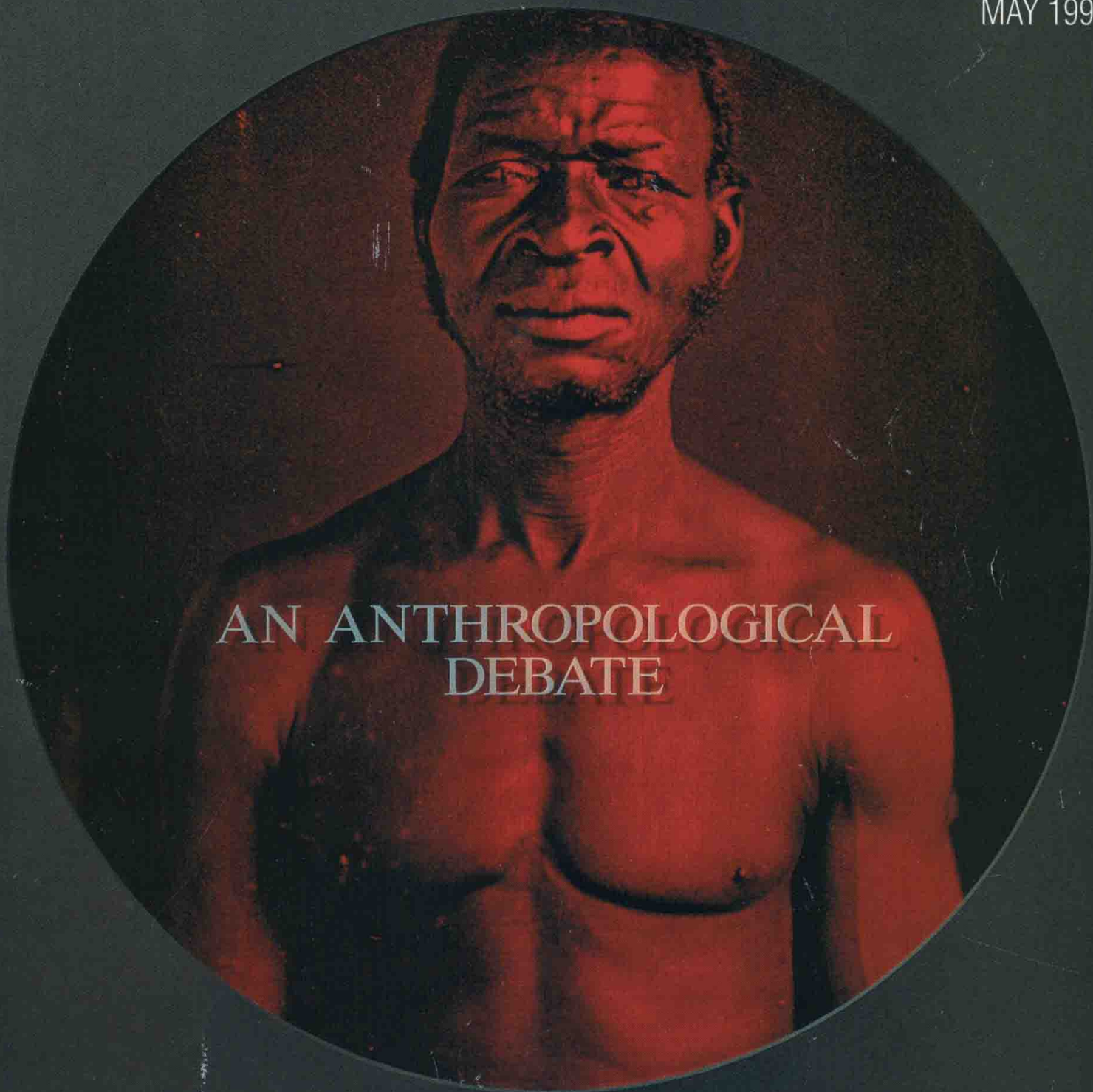


Art in America

MAY 1999



AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL
DEBATE

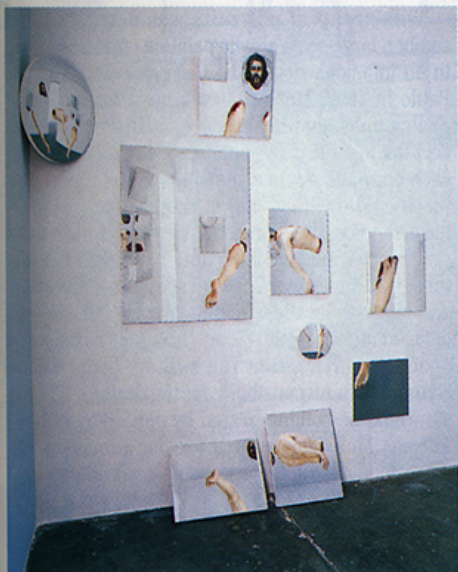
Carrie Mae Weems Dosso Dossi Jackson Pollock
São Paulo Biennial Miami Museums

\$5.00 USA

\$6.50 CAN £3.50 UK

*Left, view of Michael Asher's Rio Bravo, 1998, showing one of 14 photographs of South Texas colonias presented in collaboration with Andrew Freeman; in "Routes."
Right, partial view of Cildo Meireles's installation Detour into Red, 1967/98, red-painted furniture and objects; in the historical section.*





Adriana Varejão: *Reflection of Dreams on a Dream of Another Mirror (detail)*, 1998, a 30-painting installation. Galeria Camargo Vilça, São Paulo. Photo Vicente de Mello.



Miguel Rio Branco: *The Fire and the Lioness*, 1993, from the artist's installation of slide projections; in "Routes."

borrowing as curatorial and artistic activity, the Bienal secured several van Goghs from the collection of the MASP (São Paulo Museum of Art), the preeminent encyclopedic museum of art in Latin America. The Bienal included an installation of Levine's photographs of van Gogh's self-portraits, which devour the cults of authorship and originality in one fell swoop.

The Bienal got further mileage out of the van Gogh vehicle in a large newspaper ad sporting a black-and-white self-portrait vignettied in a mask shape. It illustrated the esthetic question "Anthropophagite or cannibal? Come see for yourself." Several other artists equally deserving of above-the-title billing, such as Bacon and Nauman, were also listed. A billboard near the Ibirapuera Park exhibition hall affirmed "Cannibalism unites us"—the opening line of the Andrade manifesto. Participating Brazilian artist Regina Silveira splattered the facade of the landmark building closest to the freeway with a vast parade of painted animal tracks recalling the logo of *Jurassic Park*, a

welcome to a broader audience. (Just inside the pavilion, Silveira installed a wall piece in the form of a jigsaw puzzle featuring the faces of Che Guevara, Eva Peron and other "devoured" legends of Latin America.)

A children's educational supplement to the *Estado de S. Paulo* newspaper featured extended captions discussing the works of a number of artists, including Judy Pfaff, Bacon, Magritte and Cildo Meireles. The Meireles sidebar illustrated his installation *Desvio para o vermelho* (Detour into Red, 1967/98), which appeared in the Bienal's historic section. The supplement unflinchingly noted that the work referred in part to the artist's childhood memory of seeing the body of a journalist who had been murdered for political reasons and whose colleagues had used his blood to write words of protest on a white wall. Meireles's father had taken the boy to witness the protest, where a bloody inscription read, "A journalist died here in defense of freedom of speech."

It was the third time Meireles had installed this monochromatic mise-en-scène and the first time the work was seen independent of the context of military dictatorship in Brazil. But aside from political ramifications, the work cast a broader net, drawing the viewer into its arrangement of red objects and raising a passing thought of Matisse's *Red Studio*. The inventory of Meireles's room includes such common objects as tables, coat racks, paintings, a bookcase, vase, telephone, refrigerator, typewriter and sofa, all set in more or less conventional places. Accumulation is part of Meireles's vocabulary, and the objects he gathers here are without exception connected by some close variation on the color red, as though to express the notion that one is "seeing red." Meireles diminishes or consumes the identity of the object by foregrounding its color, thus locating order in the way that obsessives and children do. This work, on repetition, is never quite the same piece, and contrary to its notion of accumulation it bears a new sense of depletion because, as its elements have been stored in various places over the years, some have disappeared through neglect or accident. (Among the objects in *Desvio* were works by some of Meireles's peers, including Tunga⁴ as well as Antonio Dias, whose more or less monochromatic black painting was featured in the monochrome painting "detour" of the historic section.)

As part of the curatorial scheme of "contaminations" or intrusions that broke up the weighty presence of the great ones, the curators inserted a piece of a metric measuring stick by Meireles—perhaps "measuring up" to an installation of yellow-painted ones he created for Documenta—into a low niche cut into a wall in the historical section. This was in some

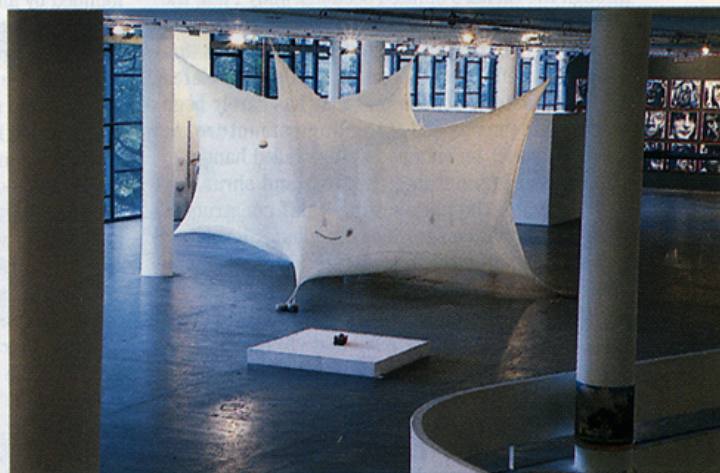
For the Bienal's "Roteiros" (Routes) section, Kim Soo-Ja brought a bundle-laden truck from Korea to Brazil, documenting in photos the movement of this literal vehicle-for-art as it stitched together far places.

ways a reference to Meireles's earlier subversive insertions into commercial systems: counterfeit currency and texts printed on Coca-Cola bottles that could be read only when the bottles were filled and distributed.

Contemporary art in Brazil celebrates a long tradition of such playful interludes in the making of art. Artists like Meireles, Wesley Duke Lee, José Resende, Oiticica, Waltercio Caldas, Jac Leirner and Tunga have occasionally played fast and loose with contemporary art history, not sparing their own work and its place in that history. Among the more hilarious is Ernesto Neto, whose funny, formally elegant works



Kim Soo-Ja (Korea): *Cities on the Move—2727 Kilometers*, Bottari Truck, 1997, Hyundai truck, used clothes, bedcovers; in the national section.



Installation view showing a Michael Asher/Andrew Freeman photograph, 1998 (on column, in foreground), Edgard de Souza's untitled wooden baby, 1997 (on platform, center), and Ernesto Neto's Lycra tulle Goddess Ship, 1998; in the Brazilian contemporary art section's "One and Other" exhibition.



Left, Judy Pfaff (U.S.): partial view of the installation *Crown of Thorns*, 1998; in the national section. Inset, visitors on Pfaff's catwalk. Photos © Rob van Erve.



of them with experience and residency abroad, focused variously on social issues, identity, the urban milieu, popular culture and the environment.

Representing Puerto Rico, Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla were the youngest artists in the section. They constructed a plywood dance floor in parts and populated it with dancers as seen from above, rendered (in charcoal) from projected photographs. They invited a willing public to erase the drawing by dancing on it. Allora and Calzadilla are alumni of P.S. 1's international studios, as well as Skowhegan, the Whitney and a studio program in Florence. Panama's Sandra Eleta produced intimate documentary portraits that foreground the identity of the indigenous Chocoes, with whom she lived for a time. Albert Chong's portraits deal with his African-Chinese identity as a Jamaican living and working in Denver. His iconography includes the historic currency of cowrie shells, ceremonial fetishes and travel documents. The section's 14 artists provided fresh insight into the globalization of contemporary art practice; the show was a breakthrough for the countries of the region as Bienal participants.

The "Roteiros" section, carefully grouped and selected, offered a geography-based reading of contemporary artistic production and an opportunity to review the work of a number of well-known artists in a global context. Guest curator Rina Carvajal included Gabriel Orozco's *LA DS* (1993), the famous Citroën sectioned and recombined in an act of bodyshop cannibalism. Meyer Vaisman, now resident in Caracas, presented a new work, *Meyer Vaisman* (1998), a portrait of the artist as divined through his body parts, which were cast in plastic and resins. The elements of the portrait, excerpted from the entire body, included delicate, amberlike copies of his skull, hands and feet. Colombian Doris Salcedo offered an installation called *The Widow House* (1993-94). In this compound work, Salcedo brings together a door and various fragments of furniture to be installed in relation to the architecture of a given site, but with the intention of thwarting an easy reading of its elements, which serve as fragmentary cenotaphs

marking the ominous absence of the occupants/users. Here she placed the elements at the entrance to and within a discrete gallery in such a way that the spectator's view was obstructed and physical entry frustrated. Brazilian photographer Miguel Rio Branco (see *A.i.A.*, Apr. '98) was represented by an installation of photographs of street, market and jungle, saturated with color and bleeding with life.

In another "Roteiros" project, Michael Asher deployed a series of color photographic prints so that they could be viewed one at a time close at hand, as a suite from a distance and, in addition, as an architectural insertion ornamenting the spatial puzzle of the Bienal building. The horizontal prints show vernacular landscapes in and around the *colonias* (ad hoc collections of shacks) of South Texas photographed by Andrew Freeman, and by Asher, who considers himself an amateur as photographers go. They were mounted on 14 of the pillars that support the building, at heights keyed to the curving concrete handrails along the open spaces above the ramps in the building's heart.

Asher glued each print around a column, like a lone poster on a telephone pole. He included labels describing where the pictures were taken, the names of the *colonias* and their populations. The intense blue of the Texas sky repeated from image to image, column to column. The photographs allude to all like places, including the favelas of Brazil and the bidonvilles of North Africa, the homes of the poor and disenfranchised wherever they are built. In an exhibition particularly rich in photography, Asher, given the specificity of his reference and the situation

of the Bienal, quietly brought the outside and global within.

One of the artists in the "Roteiros" of Asia, Korean Choi Jeong Hwa, was allotted the prime atrium space historically occupied by works of major artists selected for clout, eye appeal, appropriate scale and emblematic resonance. Choi's contribution, *Encore, encore, encore* (1997), consisted of an inflated phallic column of bright gold synthetic fabric, three floors high, with a huge, flabby angel perched on its glans, her arms raised in triumph, quilted wings beating through the efforts of the ventilator and motor that kept the piece aloft. Open to a number of readings, the work at least parodied ideal beauty and the excess of luxury. As though to remove the historic burden from this specific location, Herkenhoff awarded the space to Choi not because of lobbying or international caché, but because she was the first to ask for it. It was certainly the only place the work could have been accommodated at its full inflated height.

At another extreme, Kim Soo-Ja's bundle-laden Hyundai truck connected with the "routes" of this exhibition's title, but was almost dwarfed by the immensity of the site. Although Kim officially represented Korea, photographs of the truck en route appeared as "contaminations" in the beginning of the "Roteiros" catalogue. The truck literally was the vehicle for the artist's work in cloth and in the "performance" of the fabric through sewing, wrapping, inserting, wearing, filming, publishing. The movement of the truck through the world to São Paulo, by road and by boat, was a process much like sewing, stitched together from beginning to end.

In a Bienal light on installations, Carlos Aguirre of Mexico offered an untitled project with an aura of danger and imminent collapse that recalled Pfaff's engagement with line and space. Aguirre's construction consisted of a somehow delicate structure of steel rods and wood planks, grimly ornamented with bones, saw blades, machetes, catheters and surgical clamps. The ensemble was a metaphor for the systems of the human body and the perils to which the body is subject. As if to demonstrate the uses of such equipment, Adriana Varejão produced a deconstructed homage to the academic painter Pedro América's gruesome 19th-century canvas of the slaying of Joaquim José da Silva



José Damasceno's wood-and-concrete *Soliloquy*, 1995 (foreground, left), Lia Menna Barreto's *Sloppy Flowers*, 1998 (on wall at right), and Rosângela Rennó's "Penitentiary/Scar" photo series, 1997-98 (on wall in background); at Galeria Camargo Vilça's warehouse site. Photo Vicente de Mello.