

Athens, 5th February 2001

NEW ACQUISITIONS FROM THE DAKIS JOANNOU COLLECTION

9 February – 24 May 2001

AMY ADLER
MONICA BAER
VANESSA BEECROFT
MICHAEL BEVILACQUA
RICHARD BILLINGHAM
RINEKE DIJKSTRA
OLAFUR ELIASSON
INKA ESSENHIGH
ANNA GASKELL
ZHANG HUAN
KURT KAUPER
KAWS
GABRIEL OROZCO
SPENCER TUNICK

The Deste Foundation is pleased to present an exhibition of important new acquisitions from the Dakis Joannou Collection. It features an international roster of acclaimed artists, many of whom have not shown in Greece before. Other artists who have been presented at the Foundation before will be showing entirely new work. On view will be installations, video, photographs as well as painting. Although the show has no specific conceptual framework, one can pinpoint certain general areas of interest such as the exploration of the vocabulary of painting and its changing aesthetic values; a preoccupation with the human body and how it is represented by photographic means with a view to investigating personal or collective identity, whether through staged or documentary photography. Finally, many of these works reveal an interest in man's relation with nature and his perception of it.

Olafur Eliasson has earned a significant international reputation through his atmospheric installations that recreate natural phenomena such as mist or rainbows using the help of technology. His work often relies on ephemeral, elemental materials such as water, mist, light, wind, fire, and heat but also employs the use of machinery to question man's perception of the environment, the relationship between nature and culture. In most of his works, the artist is concerned with creating a space, an environment, a feeling or effect rather than an object. *Your Strange Certainty Still*

Kept (1996), one of Eliasson's most important and impressive works, consists of a basic piping system that sprinkles water from above onto a bath-like container placed on the ground. The work is installed in an entirely darkened space which is lit only by a constantly flashing strobe light which makes the droplets of water appear like glittering diamonds forever frozen in motion.

Vanessa Beecroft stages performances and then documents them through the use of photography to comment on the fetishisation of beauty in the world of fashion and the media. Beecroft is interested in the aesthetics of people's appearances but her work also examines how the principles of painting and performance extend into the photographic realm. Her photographs are complex, highly stylised figurative compositions that recall the grand tradition of history painting with its emphasis on spectacle, ceremony and display. *VBGBW*, is the artist's wedding photograph and as such it is a more personal work, though it is as highly staged and perfectly choreographed as her previous photographs. Although the work is rooted in reality, it also seems completely divorced from it. It is as if the image is perpetually suspended between real life and fairytale fiction. Those within it inhabit their own hermetic silent world. Individuality and any sense of 'expression' have been suppressed creating an impenetrable surface. In this work, Beecroft manages to completely negate any ideas of photographic immediacy, shying away from the snap shot aesthetic to create a memorable image that possesses a transcendent, timeless quality.

Zhang Huan is one of China's foremost performance artists. Huan uses the body as a vehicle through which to experience the world and communicate these experiences to others. His performances deal with the conflict between the body and its surrounding conditions but are also about the recollections of suffering in his home country, China. Huan's work often talks about futility and hardship thus providing profound insights into the human condition. Through his performances, the artist is interested in testing the limits of endurance of the physical body under external pressure as a means through which to arrive at catharsis and self-knowledge. *My America* is a photograph based on a performance entitled *Hard To Acclimatise* done at the Seattle Art Museum. Here the artist used a group of ordinary Americans of various ages and backgrounds and guided them through a series of rituals such as Tai Chi exercises, lying motionless on the floor or behaving like animals. At the end of the performance, in one violent eruption, the performers were instructed to throw bread at the artist as he sat passively in front of the group. Self-awareness, vulnerability, pain, repulsion and the reduction of the self to "nothingness" are all issues, which are examined. The work is about tension as well as conflict, and, as the title suggests, is a metaphorical statement about exile, adaptation and the effects of a new culture.

Gabriel Orozco's work is concerned with testing the limits of art and our notions of what constitutes an artwork. The artist works in a variety of media, from sculpture, drawing and installation, to photography and video, reshaping and intervening on that which is familiar to deal with questions of space and time, nature and artifice. Many of his works consist of simple objects (often mundane, ephemeral or recycled), situations or scenes that one could encounter anywhere, whose context has been altered, resulting in unexpected and sometimes uncanny objects or images. *Still Waterfall* is a mesmerizing projection of a still image of a decorative waterfall taken from a Chinese restaurant. It is very difficult to discern whether the image is real or artificial, whether it has been simulated or whether it is a modified representation of a real scene. The overall effect of the work is very bizarre, as it seems to hover between a state of stillness and motion. Does the real look fake or the fake look real? No answers are provided but it would seem that Orozco suggests that both are an illusion.

Rineke Dijkstra has become known for her simple yet insightful and sensitive portraits of young people in a variety of locations worldwide, such as her beach portraits (exhibited at the Deste Foundation in 1999) and her photographs of mothers with their newborn babies. Dijkstra works in the domain of traditional, unmanipulated photography and her pictures have more in common with the formal painted portrait than with the snap shot figurative photography. Her classically posed portraits are an examination of transitional stages in life such as the awkwardness of adolescence and the search for identity as one grows up. *Tiergarten, Berlin, July 4th* is a portrait from a body of work that Dijkstra made during her residency at the DAAD in Berlin last year. It depicts children and adolescents in Berlin's Tiergarten Park. As with her previous work here Dijkstra is less concerned with outward appearance and more with gaining insight into individuals. This particular photograph is an eloquent intimation of unsuspecting vulnerability and innocence.

Richard Billingham became known for his dispassionate yet highly revealing series of photographs of his dysfunctional family and their life on a Birmingham housing project in England. The artist's work is mostly autobiographical and a fitting reminder of how the boundaries between art and life have, in some cases, been utterly dissolved. *Untitled, Wallpiece* is a photographic patchwork of images of Billingham's father, Ray, taken from the artist's first film for British television (BBC2). The work offers a variety of close up or cropped views of Ray's emaciated body, a body ravaged by poverty, self-abuse, alcoholism and neglect. Billingham treats the body as a site of observation upon which are imprinted a myriad personal stories and experiences. His straightforward, matter-of-fact approach, his focus on veracity rather than artful staging does not subtract from his images any of their emotional resonance.

Spencer Tunick has become known for his group photographs of naked people in public places in the city or the countryside. Tunick has held shootings in places as densely populated as Times Square in New York or as remote as the Nevada desert. The artist orchestrates performances that involve dozens, hundreds or even thousands of volunteers, which the artist calls "living sculptures". Tunick's work can be described as a hybrid mixture of performance, photography, land art, and temporary public art with an interactive streak. Though the work involves documentation of the nude body, it is not about sexuality or even voyeurism. Rather, Tunick uses the body as a formal tool with which to intervene in the landscape. Rather than being concerned with individuality he is concerned with forming shapes and creating landscapes. Hence, his is an abstracted, de-sexualised view of the human body. Tunick's pictures are neither about individuality nor about identity politics. On the contrary, they are about losing one's ego and inhibitions, about getting rid of any sense of self-consciousness. His work challenges the stereotypes with which we are accustomed to looking at the human body and nudity, tests the limits of public indecency, and raises the complex issue of presenting art in public spaces.

Amy Adler's photographs question notions of authorship and authenticity. The artist selects photographs (often of herself) from her personal collection or from magazines and makes a life-size pastel drawing of the figures in them. She then takes a unique photograph of the drawing and after that proceeds to destroy it. The final image – a unique photograph - inhabits the ambiguous hybrid territory between drawing and photograph, between the real and the simulated. Her approach is typical of much post-modern photography where the border between the original artwork and its reproduction becomes blurred and often indistinguishable. This kind of photography is concerned not with capturing a moment from reality but rather creating a reality of

an altogether different kind. *Where is Love?* is a series of portraits of a young boy whose form and identity become surrogates for Adler's own. Like all of Adler's other works it also belongs to the hybridized genre of the photodrawing and possess the same eerie, impenetrable, detached quality.

Loosely based on Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland", **Anna Gaskell's** photographs explore the mysteries, latent violence as well as the seductive power of childhood and growing up. References to the world of cinema abound; the artist uses artificial lighting, actors, and filmic cropping or framing to enhance the drama in her images. The resulting mysterious rituals and ambiguous narrative are suggestive and defy easy interpretation though suppressed eroticism and latent violence always inform the work's subtext.

Inka Essenhigh creates complex, highly polished enamel paintings in which a variety of mutated, mostly faceless, grotesque figures violently engage in incomprehensible but intriguing scenes bursting with energy and motion. These unusual creatures which have been described as "humanoid deformations" or "cyborg mutations" seem to inhabit a hermetic entropic world ruled mostly by alien, violent forces. In her paintings Essenhigh creates a highly original fantastical cyber-world, which is more-often-than-not characterised by a frenzy of activity and ambiguous dramatic action; there is always an intimation of disaster or unspecified conflict - though there is no specific narrative. Her paintings reference a variety of sources like Chinese lacquerware, Japanimation, cartoons, the sinister, linear forms of Aubrey Beardsley, the sinuous lines of Art Nouveau and the fluidity of Surrealism, but are completely her own. In *Large Fire* her characteristic wretched half-human creatures drift in flat, enamel colour fields, as if trapped in a world not of their doing. Essenhigh has created a futuristic, alien microcosm that defies easy interpretation, and remains elusive. Despite the lack of narrative and specific 'meaning', the unfamiliar element and ungraspable element in her paintings can be seen as a reflection or symptomatic of today's techno-futurist angst and millennial malaise.

Michael Bevilacqua creates brightly coloured, eye-catching paintings that incorporate commercial logos, symbols and images drawn from the world of fashion, music, cinema, TV, and advertising. His painterly style synthesizes the language of abstraction and hard-edged figuration, while his combination of a wide range of visual references can be likened to the sampling found in electronic music and hip-hop. Bevilacqua's work is as much about media saturation, consumer culture and the proliferation of seductive imagery in our culture, as it is about exercising this kind of visual seduction and allure on the viewer. Characterised by the use of vibrant, kaleidoscopic colours and a linear, sharply defined approach to paint that is reminiscent of graphic design, Bevilacqua's canvases are openly flashy, unashamedly hedonistic, and sexy: a dazzling optical assault on the viewer which is also a comment on excessive consumerism, label consciousness, the insatiable quest for instant gratification, and the pervasiveness of advertising and packaging in our culture, without being judgmental.

Kurt Kauper paints highly formal, traditional portraits reminiscent of old masters such as Ingres. The artist uses the language of painterly realism and ceremonial portraiture to create entirely fictional personae whose existence seem utterly real and believable. He became known for his series of opera divas entitled *Diva Fictions*. In these works, he paints elegant, finely executed portraits of people who have never existed but who seem to have a personal history as real as our own. These figures appear to be as larger-than-life as famous opera singers who have existed. Kauper's portraits are constructed from a variety of sources from altered photographs of real people as well as drawings made from memory or imagination. His work occupies the

ambiguous territory between realism and artificiality, and ultimately exploits but also undermines realism's capacity 'truth', through the use of an amazingly realistic technique to create completely fictional characters. Above all, Kauper reminds us that appearances can, indeed, be deceptive.

Kaws appropriates and intervenes in found material from the world of advertising and fashion, such as billboards and ads found on bus stops. He paints on top of archetypal images and uses his hallmark, cartoon-like head to conceal celebrity faces and to completely alter familiar advertising and the traits that make these immediately recognizable.

Monica Baer makes peculiar, dreamy pictures where body or animal parts – eyes and mouths, the head of a pig - float on a white ground in an almost-empty picture space. These are highly subjective paintings that are closely tied to the world of dreams and the subconscious. The fragmented body parts can be read as symbols from a variety of perspectives. Each person may interpret them as he or she wishes, as they do not refer to something specific.

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