For your pleasure

Cai Guo-Qiang
MATRIX 204

Chiho Aoshima
MATRIX 205

Angela Bulloch
MATRIX 206

April 23 – August 3, 2003

University of California
Berkeley Art Museum
“The pleasure of life is according to the man that lives it, and not according to the work or the place.” —Ralph Waldo Emerson

MACROMATRIX: For your pleasure is an exploration of a particular phenomenon in contemporary international art: artists making works that give something back to the viewer. This spirit of generosity is an approach to conceptual art that has emerged since the turn of the millennium. While every work of art contains the possibility of providing the viewer a transcendent experience, the works by Chiho Aoshima, Angela Bulloch, and Cai Guo-Qiang on view in MATRIX foreground experience. These three installations utilize nontraditional forms and cutting-edge technology to offer values long sought and found in art: glimpses of beauty and moments of pleasure.

Beauty and pleasure, experiences that had always been synonymous with art, were suppressed when Minimalism, an anti-emotional movement, took hold in the 1970s. That beauty has reemerged in art was confirmed by the 1999–2000 Regarding Beauty exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum. And, as the visitor to For your pleasure will encounter, sensual pleasure is back as well.
Chiho Aoshima

“Pleasure is continually disappointed, reduced, deflated, in favor of strong, noble values: Truth, Death, Progress, Struggle, Joy, etc. Its victorious rival is Desire: we are always being told about Desire, never about Pleasure.”—Roland Barthes

Tokyo-based Chiho Aoshima uses a giant printer to create large-scale digital works featuring a unique world of big-eyed girls, hybridized nature, and candy-colored environments. The highly stylized female figures that populate Aoshima’s animated landscapes sometimes encounter gory circumstances and other times enjoy pure bliss.

Aoshima is associated with the “superflat” movement, a term coined by contemporary Japanese artist Takahashi Murakami to describe the simplified and emphatically two-dimensional forms that have become the staple of a hip new visual language employed by young Japanese artists. Aoshima is a member of Murakami’s Tokyo-based Hiropon Factory, where distinctions between fine art and commercial art are blurred. Making a direct reference to Andy Warhol in nomenclature, Murakami also has taken base and overexposed forms of popular culture—animated and still cartoon characters and styles—as his subject. Additionally, he has embraced otooku culture—the Japanese version of computer geeks who retreat into the fantasy realm of cartoons for entertainment and even sexual fulfillment. At this early point in Aoshima’s career, it is impossible to analyze her work without a discussion of the work of Murakami. However, while she utilizes similar sources, Aoshima’s personal style combines state-of-the-art computer-animated illustration, Japanese manga (comics) and anime (animation), and the formal conventions of premodern Japanese prints in a way that is highly individualistic and identifiable.

Using digital illustration programs, Aoshima draws exclusively with computer tools; there is no loss of clarity in the production of her giant digital prints. She has a keen eye for detail and in her images misses nothing. A slick mastery of technology camouflage and seemingly G-rates Aoshima’s tantalizing subject matter: forlorn girls, bare bottoms, and seductive couplings. This, along with her astonishing, highly fabricated palette, is a successful means by which to trick the viewer into looking.

The spaces she creates have a disorienting, fantasy feel; up and down cannot be distinguished and locations—orbital, sub-aquatic, or purely fabricated—are difficult to determine.

A Contented Skull (2003), the work commissioned by the MATRIX Program, is set against a lush night sky. An iconic blossoming cherry tree “snowing” petals sprouts from several orifices of a large white skull. The spiny limbs of an octopus emerge below the teeth. The back of the head rests on a gray-skinned, blue-eyed girl whose long black locks of hair are seductively intertwined with the branches and roots of another cherry tree. Mermaid girls with spermatozoa tails swirl around a tomb-laden graveyard while a young girl in a short dress and white boots strolls among them.

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The Red-Eyed Tribe (2000) features a group of young women in a narrative that takes them from the sea to the heavens. In this mural-scale digital print, Aoshima mixes biblical imagery, in the form of a serpent and an apple, with traditional Japanese symbols—cherry blossoms, bamboo—in a freewheeling conflation of spirituality and science fiction. The young women's big crimson eyes are aglow, but whether this is desire, destructiveness, or the result of amateur snapshots taken with a flash, we do not know. In superflat art, large round eyes have become signifiers not only of Western influence but also of innocence, childhood, and the unthreatening cuteness of kawaii that is now internationally ubiquitous through Pokémon and Hello Kitty. Aoshima's brave new world of cyber sprites turns coy giggles into ecstatic screams and soft edges into sinuous lines. Her product is seduction, but on the level of form, not content. The fantasies these works incarnate are more aesthetic than sexual.

In Mushroom Room (2001), a nude girl lies on a bed and stares at the ceiling as an abundance of polka-dotted fungus sprouts around her. Whether poisonous or hallucinatory, their upright forms are distinctly phallic. The scene is a dripping violet and purple annulus. Paradise (1999) depicts seven frolicking nymphets lolling away on a fecund island in an aqua sea. Napping under trees, petting a fawn, dipping toes in water, cuddling with each other, they appear to live lives of absolute contentment. Critic David Pagel writes of Aoshima's work, "Utterly artificial and stunningly seductive, her exquisitely rendered cartoons give vivid form to the topsy-turvy world in which we live, where repressed fantasies do a lot more damage than those that see the light of day." Writer Zoey Mondt comments further, "Aoshima's fantasies transcend oppressive earthly conventions such as perspective and gravity." Are these girls in charge of their own pleasure or are they victims of some male fantasy of masochism? The ambiguity of meaning in Aoshima's works allows voyeuristic entry into her spectacular imagery, dreamy scenes of sensuality and desire.
She selected Zabriskie Point because, as she says, for her it stands at the threshold between Minimalism and 1960s psychedelia, order, and chaos. Bulloch has long explored the places where systems of control exist. In her Rules series, begun in 1992, she asks, What effect do rules have on our lives and how do we deal with them? These works are lists of rules that pertain to a particular place, practice, or principle. She takes the rules from one system or condition and transforms them by placing them in another. For example, rules for go-go dancers taken from a club called the Baby Doll Saloon were posted at California College of Arts and Crafts in San Francisco. Ultimately her interest is in the idea that people may say "maybe" or even "no" to what is being demanded of them regardless of the specifics of what is demanded.

The interaction required by technology can be seen as yet another system of rules. Interactivity has become a late-twentieth-century buzzword that is often misused. Bulloch’s works examine how one makes an act, not necessarily a choice, almost by default, sometimes even without awareness. Thus her works reveal that most actions are interpassive rather than interactive. It is in the possibility of sparking consciousness that surprise and pleasure can come into play.

Disco Floor_Bootleg:16, Bulloch’s contribution to MATRIX, is the first work in the series. She selected Zabriskie Point because, as she says, for her it stands at the threshold between Minimalism and 1960s psychedelia, order, and chaos. Bulloch has long explored the places where systems of control exist. In her Rules series, begun in 1992, she asks, What effect do rules have on our lives and how do we deal with them? These works are lists of rules that pertain to a particular place, practice, or principle. She takes the rules from one system or condition and transforms them by placing them in another. For example, rules for go-go dancers taken from a club called the Baby Doll Saloon were posted at California College of Arts and Crafts in San Francisco. Ultimately her interest is in the idea that people may say "maybe" or even "no" to what is being demanded of them regardless of the specifics of what is demanded.

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pixel series to synchronize color with sound. A four-by-four-foot square grid of lights, its soundtrack is the popular disco band Chic’s 1970s hit “These Are Such Good Times.” Here a bootleg version thumps out its catchy beat while the animated sculpture pulsates intricate tonal patterns. The sculpture simultaneously evokes disco dance floors of the seventies and provides an ironic commentary on Minimal Art. Its success resides in Bulloch’s effectively combining these elements into a form that delights the eyes and infectiously encourages an almost involuntary, visceral response—dance. Technically, Disco Floor: Bootleg 16 exists without any contribution from the viewer, but the surprise encounter with the sculpture in the lobby of the Berkeley Art Museum is sure to encourage participation and consequent delight.

Cai Guo-Qiang

Happy Sack (with notebooks), 1995; canvas, polystyrene, elastic, notebooks; 84 in. diameter; courtesy of 1 301PE, Los Angeles and Schipper & Krome, Berlin, Germany.
Cai Guo-Qiang

"...pleasure lies in pursuit, not in the attainment. It is because of this that society is never satisfied, and, however wearied, is always on the race-track, straining every nerve to reach the goal."—Anna C. Brackett

In a variety of aesthetic manifestations, an interest in honoring, entertaining, and pleasing his audience is at the center of Chinese-born, New York-based Cai Guo-Qiang’s work. After an initial series of paintings using gunpowder, from the late 1980s on, he turned to large outdoor projects. In 1993 he “extended” the Great Wall of China by 10,000 meters through an immense explosion of fire and smoke. In a complex installation at the Queens Museum of Art in 1997, Cai offered the museum audience a Jacuzzi infused with essential oils in which to soak and titled it Cultural Melting Bath; in Shanghai he conceived an immense firework display for the world’s economic leaders at the APEC conference; and at the 2000 Whitney Biennial he offered his in-home services as a Feng Shui consultant. Other works have included indoor kite flying, tea ceremonies, and Chinese medicine. Placement of such works in a museum context adds meaning and a certain irony with current museological rethinking of the role of such institutions as providers of culture within a competitive leisure dollar marketplace.

Many of Cai’s works express a sly sense of humor. During the 2000 Sydney Biennale, he brought a horse and a nude female rider into a room of The Art Gallery of New South Wales dedicated to historical genre painting. He then worked directly from these life models to create a painting. The visitor to the museum for that opening week of the show had the opportunity to observe the process. The outrageousness of bringing a live horse into the museum was of course a large part of the appeal to the artist. As visitors to any large-scale international group exhibition have experienced, trying to see everything can result in a rather punishing schedule. Consequently, encountering Fireworks from Heaven was particularly welcome when it was originally presented at the 2001 Yokohama Triennale. Using huge mosquito nets hung from the ceiling with graceful, scalloped edges, the artist created an intimate space within the large convention hall. Inside, he suspended six immense electronic fireworks that trickle light and explode into vibrant colors. He provided nine Japanese massage chairs with hand-held controls placed in a large circle from which to watch these choreographed explosions. The effect was profound: an astoundingly beautiful work of art, coupled with peaceful relaxation for everyone who took a chair. His MATRIX installation is a reconfiguration of Fireworks from Heaven. Here strands of light cascade from BAM’s atrium skylight and become enormous illuminated orbs seemingly compressed between the gallery floor and ceiling. Visitors may sit in these high-tech chairs to be massaged. The work offers an evolved rethinking of the nineteenth-century concept of art for art’s sake.

In an as yet unpublished paper titled “Time and Beauty,” performance artist and musician Laurie Anderson synthesizes the historical evolution of the Parthenon. She notes that the art adorning the Acropolis had become too distracting and consequently “faith had won out over beauty.” The mystical cults abandoned the structure for the nearby woods, groves, and caves. Here we can see the genesis of an argument that underscores much of Modernist thought—that somehow beauty (and pleasure) is bad or must be apologized for or is just simply not enough. Later in her essay she observes, “Do you find that as soon as you pay attention to something it becomes beautiful? Is it the act of paying attention that is the beautiful thing?” In response, one could say that it is the ability of art to transform, to cause one to look at something that we never noticed before, rethink what we thought we knew—about beauty, about memory, about life, self, mind, existence, pleasure—that is the beautiful thing. Maybe the act of paying attention is not when it becomes beautiful, but when it becomes art.

As curator Amada Cruz has written, Cai’s art presents itself as having the

References:
Fireworks from Heaven, 2001, electric massage chairs, neon lights, dimensions variable; collection of the artist; installation view, Yokohama 2001, International Triennale of Contemporary Art, Yokohama, Japan; photo courtesy of Diighō Anzai.

APEC Cityscape Fireworks, 2001; fireworks, 20 minutes; installation view, Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, Shanghai, China; photo courtesy of Cai Studio.

Next:
The Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters—Project for Extraterrestrials No. 10, 1993, 500 kilograms of gunpowder, 2 fuses – 10,000 meters each, 15 minutes; installation view, Jiayuguan City, China; photo courtesy of Cai Studio.
By offering tactilely, visually, and aurally pleasing opportunities for the viewer, true freedom. Can art do that? Cai has asked, “Could art created by an artist be a special medicine for modern society and contemporary art? Purify a mind and spirit, bathe a soul, and develop life and the light of wisdom that exists as potential in all life. When a life gets closer to the truth of the universe, it approaches mind and spirit, bathe a soul, and develop life and the light of wisdom that exists as capacity for spiritual and physical renewal.”

By offering tactically, visually, and aurally pleasing opportunities for the viewer, MACROMATRIX: For your pleasure embraces new technologies in celebration of associating art with heightened awareness and fun. At a time of immense global uncertainty, the exhibition poses the question whether seeking pleasure in art becomes frivolous—or essential.

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson
Phyllis Wattis MATRIX Curator

Chiho Aoshima
Chiho Aoshima was born in Tokyo, Japan, in 1974. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics from Hosei University. She lives and works in Tokyo, Japan.

Solo Exhibitions
2003
Chiho Aoshima, Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris, France
2002
Chiho Aoshima, Blum & Poe, Santa Monica, CA

Selected Group Exhibitions
2003
For the Record: Drawing Contemporary Life, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
SAM Collects: Contemporary Art Project, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA
Chiho Aoshima, Shirin Neshat, Shazia Shikander, The Glass Curtain Gallery, Columbia College, Chicago, IL
2002
Liverpool Biennial 2002, Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, U.K.
Coloriage, Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain, Paris, France
2001
Hirshhorn Show, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan
Superflat, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, WA
2000
Superflat, Parco Gallery, Tokyo, Japan; Parco Gallery, Nagoya, Japan
1999
Tokyo Girls Bravo, Nadiff, Tokyo, Japan, George’s, Los Angeles, CA
Hirshhorn 32–80, Nadiff, Tokyo, Japan

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Angela Bulloch was born in Ontario, Canada, in 1966. In 1988, she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Fine Arts from Goldsmiths College, University of London. She lives and works in London and Berlin.

**Selected Solo Exhibitions**

2002
- Angela Bulloch, Institute of Visual Culture, Cambridge, U.K.
- Angela Bulloch, 1301PE, Los Angeles, CA

2001
- Angela Bulloch, Magnani, London, U.K.
- Angela Bulloch, Kunsthaus Glarus, Glarus, Switzerland

2000
- Prototypes, Hauser & Wirth & Presenhuber, Zurich, Switzerland
- BLOW UP TV, Schipper & Krome, Berlin, Germany
- From the Eiffel Tower to the Riesenrad, Galerie Kerstin Engholm, Vienna, Austria
- Angela Bulloch, 1301PE, Los Angeles, CA

1999
- Angela Bulloch, Sylvie Fleury, Mehdi Chouakri, Berlin, Germany

1998
- Codes, Schipper & Krome, Berlin, Germany
- Superstructure, Museum für Gegenwartskunst Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland
- Sounds Off, Robert Prime Gallery, London, U.K.

1997
- Vehicles, Le Consortium, Centre d’art contemporain, Dijon, France
- Soundbank, Kunstverein Ludwigsburg, Ludwigsburg, Germany

**Selected Group Exhibitions**

2002
- To Whom It May Concern, California College of Arts and Crafts Watts Institute, San Francisco, CA
- Frequenzen (Hz). Audiovisuelle Räume, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, Germany
- Heil, Neugemerschneider, Berlin, Germany
- Claude Monet: Eis zum digestiven Impressionismus, Fondation Beyeler, Basel, Switzerland
- Remix, Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, U.K.
- Presumed Innocent, CAPC, Bordeaux, France

2001
- L’Esprit de famille, MAMCO, Geneva, Switzerland
- Connivence, Biennale de Lyon, Lyon, France
- Arbeit Essen Angst, Kokedera Zollverein, Essen, Germany
- Timewave Zero/The Politics of Ecstasy, Grazer Kunstverein, Graz, Austria
- art>music, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia

2000
- Against Design, ICA, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA
- Sonic Boom—The Art of Sound, Hayward Gallery, London, U.K.
- Dire Aids. Arte nell’epoca dell’Aids, Palazzo della Promotrice delle Belle Arti, Turin, Italy
- M(ode)4, Büro Friedrich, Berlin, Germany
- IV/stem. Arbeiten im Museum, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany

1999
- Video Store II, Espace des Arts, Chalon-sur-Saône, Lausanne, Switzerland
- Sweetie: Female Identity in British Video, The British School at Rome, Rome, Italy
- At Home with Art, Tate Gallery, London, U.K.
- Power, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, Germany
- Here to Stay, Arts Council Collection purchases from the 1990s, The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke on Trent, U.K.
- Tendenzen der 80er und 90er Jahre, Museum für Neue Kunst ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany

Selected Bibliography

Cai Guo-Qiang was born in 1957 in Quanzhou City, Fujian Province, China. He studied stage design at the Shanghai Drama Institute from 1981 to 1985. From 1986 to 1995, he lived and worked in Japan; since 1995 he has lived and worked in New York.

Selected Solo Exhibitions and Projects

2003
Ye Gong Hao Long: Explosive Project for Tate Modern, Tate Modern, London, UK

2002
Cai Guo-Qiang: Ethereal Flowers 2002, Tate Modern, London, UK

Selected Group Exhibitions and Projects

2001
An Arbitrary History, Museé d’Art Contemporain, Lyon, France
UMeCA, Arte all’Arte, Arte Continua, Colla di Val d’Elsa, Italy
Performing Chinese Ink Painting, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada

2000
Project for Projects, Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain, Paris, France

1999
I Am the Y2K Bug, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria

1998
No Construction, No Destruction: Bombing the Taiwan Museum of Art, Taiwan Museum of Art, Taichung, Taiwan

Selected Catalogues and Books


Selected Periodicals


Works in MACROMATRIX

Chiho Aoshima
A Contented Skull, 2003
Digital print
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of Blum & Poe, Los Angeles and Chiho Aoshima/Kaikai Kiki, Tokyo.

Angela Bulloch
Disco Floor Bootleg: 16, 2002
Sixteen DMX Pixel Modules, wooden base, DMX controller with program, synchronized sound box with bootleg soundtrack, sound equipment and various cables
Overall dimensions: 79 11/16 x 79 11/16 x approx. 28 1/8 in.
Each DMX pixel module: 20 x 20 x 20 in.
Courtesy of 1301PE, Los Angeles, and Schipper & Krome, Berlin, Germany

Cai Guo-Qiang
Fireworks from Heaven, 2001
Electric massage chairs, neon lights
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

The MATRIX Program at the UC Berkeley Art Museum is made possible by the generous endowment gift of Phyllis C. Wattis.

Additional donors to the MATRIX Program include the UAM Council MATRIX Endowment, Ann M. Hatch, Eric McDougall, Glenn and April Bucksbaum, and Christopher Vroom and Illya Szilak.

Support for Cai Guo-Qiang/MATRIX 204 Fireworks from Heaven has been provided by Wanda Kownacki and John Holton.

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