

# frieze

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PHOTOGRAPH BY ADAM & SUPER GIMBEL

# April 2002

## Columns

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38 Books

### High anxiety

Jerome Boyd-Maunsell trips his way through the history of narcotics

### White lines (don't do it)

Alexander Barley weighs up the pros and cons of writing under the influence

40 Music

### Country life

Dan Fox gambols through the field of pastoral electronica

42 Art

### Moving pictures

Michelle Grabner is touched by James Elkins' approach to art

44 Jewellery

### Jewel in the crown

Diamonds are Tom Morton's best friends

46 Design

### Material guy

E. A. Gieben-Wulf is warmed by the simplicity of Jan von Borstel's products

### Pause for thought

Emily King reveals the cultural significance of a comma

48 Motoring

### This year's model

Martin Pesch takes a spin round the Frankfurt motor fair

50 Technology

### Census sensibility

Keith Stuart delves into the dusty recesses of Internet archives

## Features

---

### 52 Martin Heidegger's thinking cap

by Jörg Heiser

### 54 Travelling light

Jörg Heiser on Franz Ackermann

### 58 Dream machines

Edward Allington on robot art

### 64 Luxe, calme et volupté

Jennifer Higgin on Pae White

### 70 Poisoned arrow

James Trainor on Christian Jankowski

### 74 How things get done

Louise Neri in conversation with Richard Artschwager

### 80 Neighbourhood threat

Lars Bang Larsen on Jakob Kolding

### 82 Walk on by

Bennett Simpson on Janet Cardiff

### frieze

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## Reviews

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- 86 **Keith Tyson** South London Gallery **Alex Farquharson**
- 87 **Andrea Fraser** Pat Hearn Art Gallery, New York; Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York **James Trainor**
- 88 **Urgent Painting** Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris **Jemima Montagu**
- 89 **Richard Hamilton** British Museum, London **Sally O'Reilly**
- 90 **Bruce Nauman** Dia Center for the Arts, New York **Kristin M. Jones**
- 91 **Werner Feiersinger** Raum Aktueller Kunst, Vienna **Jörg Heiser**
- 92 **David Burrows** fa projects, London **Tom Morton**
- 93 **The Bart Wells Gang** Bart Wells Institute, London **Benedict Seymour**
- 94 **Art & Language** Musée d'Art Moderne Lille Métropole **Tom Morton**
- 95 **Ugo Rondinone** Schipper & Krome, Berlin **April Lamm**
- 95 **Lee Bontecou** Daniel Weinberg Gallery, Los Angeles **Zoey Mondt**
- 96 **Partnerschaften** NGBK, Berlin **Dominic Eichler**
- 97 **Christoph Büchel** Maccarone Inc., New York **Lauri Firstenberg**
- 98 **Liliana Porter** Annina Nosei Gallery, New York **Jenni Sorokin**
- 98 **L.A. Raeven** Casco Projects, Utrecht **Maxine Kopsa**
- 99 **Willie Doherty** Matt's Gallery, London **Peter Suchin**
- 100 **Matthew Ronay** Marc Foxx Gallery, Los Angeles **Zoey Mondt**
- 101 **Claudia and Julia Müller** Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich **Mai-Thu Perret**
- 102 **Nina Saunders** The Kiosk Project, London **David Gleeson**
- 103 **Daria Martin** Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York **Esther Pierini**
- 104 **Drew Heitzler** Anthology Film Archives, New York **Michael Wilson**
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## Urgent Painting

Musée d'Art Moderne  
de la Ville de Paris

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Opting for the 'biennale' brand of curatorial practice, Bossé and Obrist invited 17 international curators and artists to select the participating painters. The star-studded group of selectors (curiously described as 'protagonists') included Daniel Birnbaum, Okwui Enwezor, Charles Esche, Bernard Frize, Paulo Herkenhoff, Thelma Golden and Paul Schimmel and almost overshadowed the list of emerging and well-established artists. To aid the viewer's comprehension of 'authorship' in the show, each curator was assigned a colour, and the colour of the seat facing each work of art indicated who had chosen that particular artist. Given the celebrity factor of the participating curators, this strategy seemed to validate the artists through curatorial association more than through the quality of their work.

Despite the colour-coding, the diverse and inclusive nature of the exhibition was not checked by any sense of organizational strategy or structure. This can be a good thing. It certainly isn't helpful to look at a disparate group of artists, in this case from many different countries, under a doggedly restric-



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Dubossarsky and  
Alexander A.  
Vinogradov  
*Le Déjeuner sur  
l'herbe*  
2002  
Oil on canvas  
300 x 510 cm

Katharina Gross  
*Untitled*  
2002  
Mixed media  
Dimensions variable

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The only conclusion that can be drawn is that this kind of exhibition mirrors the supermarket eclecticism of free global economic markets. The apparent openness and non-exclusivity of 'Urgent Painting' simply exposed the reluctance of the curators to pin their colours to the mast. Given the obvious dangers of pigeon-holing inherent in any single-media exhibition, it was all the more important for the exhibition to define its position and put forward a clear set of questions. Without these, why should we start to look at painting again? What's so urgent?

Jemima Montagu

## Richard Hamilton

British Museum, London

Richard Hamilton began studying James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* (1922) during his national service in 1947 and made his first preparatory sketches the following year. With a cumulative history of 55 years so far, 'Imaging Ulysses', an exhibition of Hamilton's illustrations of the novel, is as Homeric a quest as could be hoped for. Even to contemplate translating the irascible mother of all Modernist novels into a thoroughly Postmodern *mêlée* is an act of immense courage. Not only are the scale and content of *Ulysses* daunting, but the perception of the role of such an undertaking provides little incentive. The term illustration tends to be derogatory and, although regard for mimesis and narrative waxed and waned throughout the 20th century, it was definitely scorned by painters when Hamilton embarked on the project.

The very notion of imaging *Ulysses* seems an oxymoron. Although wildly vivid, the book is strangely non-visual. There isn't one iota of description of the main character Bloom until, deep in the throes of a deranged hallucinatory sequence, he 'opens his tiny mole's eyes'. A picture of Dublin and its inhabitants on 16 June 1904 can only be gathered by the unpicking of metaphor and archetype – but then this is possibly what makes the prospect of its illustration so different and so appealing.

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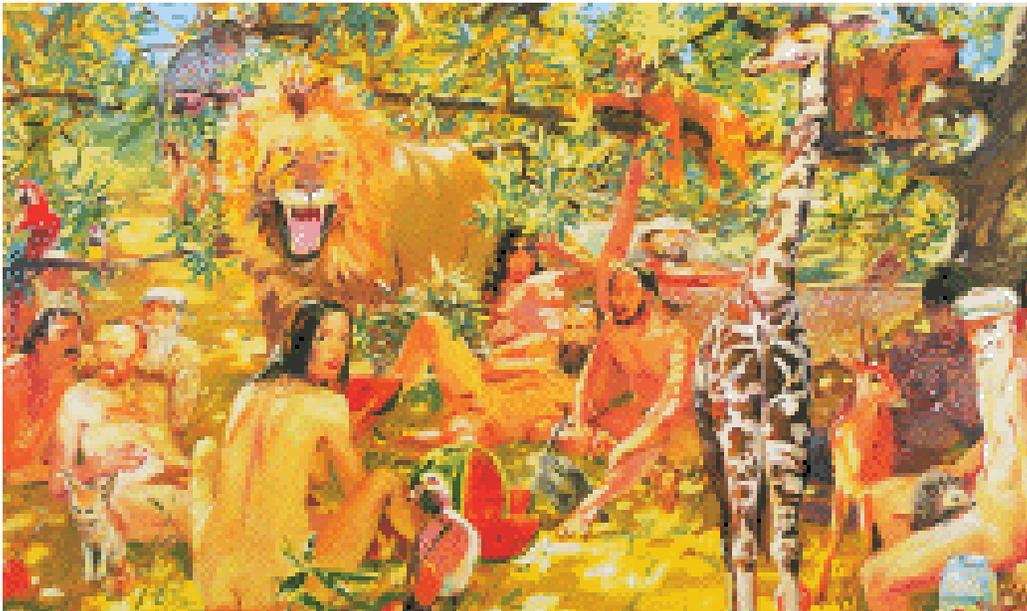
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REVIEW - 04 APR 2002

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BY JEMIMA MONTAGU

Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris, France



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Despite the colour-coding, the diverse and inclusive nature of the exhibition was not checked by any sense of organizational strategy or structure. This can be a good thing. It certainly isn't helpful to look at a disparate group of artists, in this case from many different countries, under a doggedly restrictive theme. However, it also falls into the 'biennale' trap of cultural levelling - how useful is it to throw together this heterogeneous work under the ambiguous blanket term of painting? What can be learned from placing the elegant geometry of Sarah Morris or the dreamy tracings of Laura Owens, both so covetable and decorative, alongside the multi-media overflow of work by Matthew Ritchie, Carroll Dunham and Karen Leo? What does it mean to walk from the muted faux-Modernist abstract markings of Zambian Victor Mutale towards the faux-naïf folksy fantasies of American Verne Dawson? By ignoring specific cultural contexts these juxtapositions fail to bring a greater understanding of individual practices, and the works by emerging artists tended to get lost in the fray.

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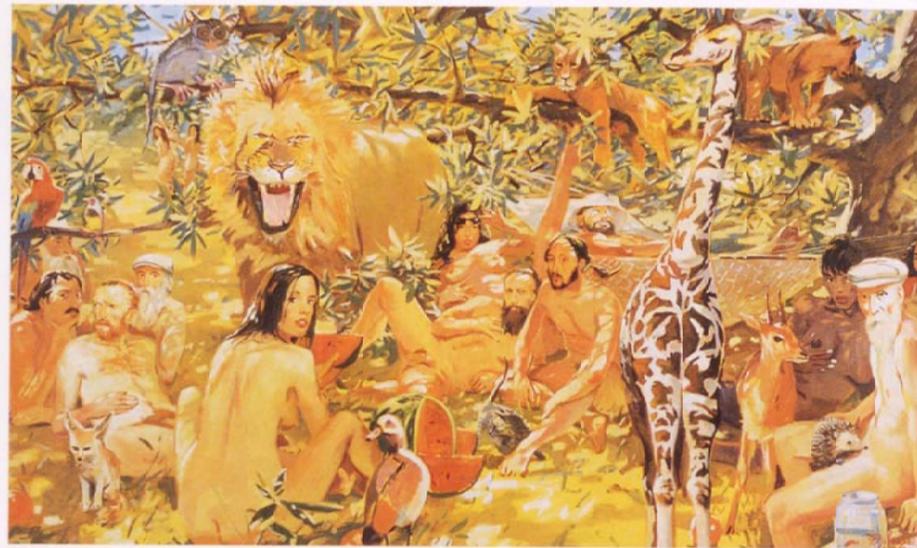
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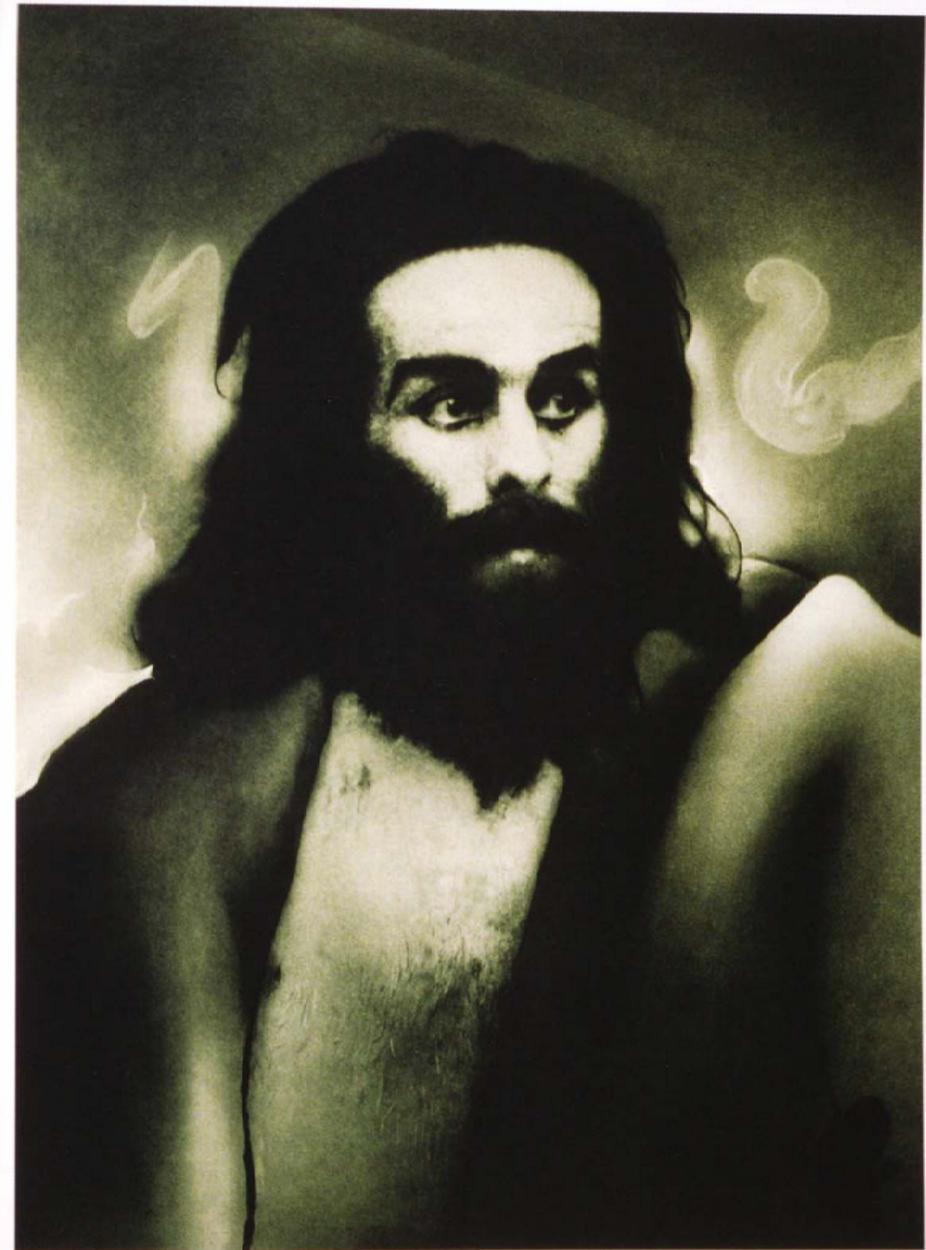
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