



Patty Chang: *Contortion*, 2000-01, C-print, 40 by 60 inches; at Tilton/Kustera.

sive, is a full-wall projection that shows Chang in a long wig, jumping up and down on a wavering stretch of grass (in actuality a sodded waterbed), trying to keep her balance, losing it, regaining it, in a kind of Sisyphean struggle, the skies above blue, the house in the distance clapboard, jets roaring on the soundtrack; all that's solid appears to be anything but. These tricks do not really deceive, nor are they meant to, but by closely integrating narrative and medium, they do make you think about what you are seeing. In that way, they are more about video than performance, maybe representing a new direction for the intrepid and talented Chang. —Lilly Wei

Sarah Jones at Anton Kern

In her second solo exhibition in New York, London-based artist Sarah Jones marshaled the intense light of studio fixtures to electrify her mostly preadolescent subjects, artlessly posed in an ordinary, cultivated landscape for the unflinching scrutiny of Jones's camera. One by one, these young girls occupy the mise-en-scène of gathering twilight in sites of no real distinction within the boundaries of a park or garden. The light illuminates Jones's frontal assault on a cast of unaffected performers caught up in cropped cinematic moments. The girls are aware of the camera and complicit with her agenda. They function as key elements in a taut, fundamentally simple account located in the nature of

the site and the language of their bodies.

The matte, large-format color prints are mounted on aluminum panels 5 feet on a side. They are installed in a somewhat rhythmic sequence. The procession of girls-in-landscape images is twice interrupted by a dour, uninhabited frame of the same landscape; in addition, there are two interior views of solitary young women in sparsely furnished bedrooms, one near the beginning of the sequence, the other at the end, as though in punctuation.

The sequence begins with a girl wading through reeds along the bank of a pond, pausing as though listening for a sound. In the second image, *The Birch Tree/London II (Kate)*, 2002, a young girl dressed in a denim jacket, dark trousers and a white turtleneck stands on a pavement of smooth stones, leaning against the trunk of a thick, scarred tree. Her head tilts back like a martyr waiting for the machinery of deliverance. This is followed by an image of a young woman dressed in faded jeans and a black jersey reclining on a bed in a pale pink room, clutching a bit of stenciled pink and white bedspread in her hand. Her name is Sarah. She looks away with an air of reverie or sadness. These three implacably literal images, taken together, suggest the first moments of a cinematic narrative offered for the viewer's rationalization: There is a girl in a suburban landscape. Night approaches. The girl is alone. There is another girl, leaning on a tree.

The girl is gone. The tree remains, and so on.

In the penultimate moment of this sequence, the same tree rises in the unforgiving lights. Without the girl named Kate, the tree seems desolate, even dying. To the right, the last image is the other bedroom. A young woman named Rhea sits on the edge of a plain pine bed. She wears blue. Her room is pale blue. The window next to her is open, and trees are just barely visible in the growing darkness. Her head is thrown back, in determination or exultation, almost lupine.

Jones works in a manner that is serial in its rigorous consistency and in the interrelationship of structure and syntax. Each image seems to contain the others, individual narratives in an endless present. Jones thrives in the unguarded interstices of these potent and empathetic moments. —Edward Leffingwell

Seydou Keïta at Sean Kelly

Prior to 1991, when his images were included in the show "Africa Explores" at the Center for African Art in New York, Seydou Keïta (1921-2001) was unknown in the U.S. Today his work is finally achieving the recognition that it deserves.

The self-trained Keïta opened a studio in Bamako, Mali, in 1948 and quickly established himself as a master of postcard-size portraits. Until 1962, when he became the official photogra-

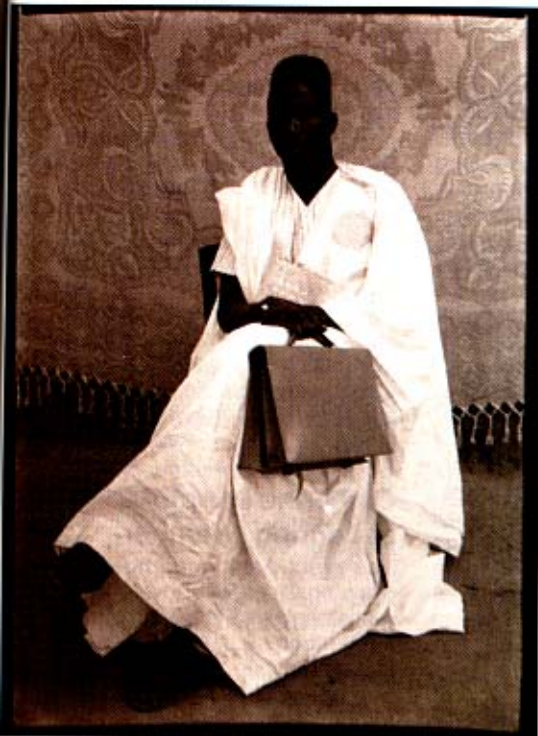
pher of Mali and closed his business, he produced thousands of negatives of the Bamakoise. This recent show consisted of 46 never-before-exhibited, untitled portraits from the '50s and '60s. The beautifully lit and composed images depict families, couples and individuals in their finest tribal costumes or the adopted attire of Western businessmen.

Sitters were photographed variously in a three-quarter or full-length frontal pose, in a shallow pictorial space (mostly out-of-doors, on a dirt ground), before boldly patterned African textile backdrops (including the artist's own bedspread), and with "modern" accoutrements (radios, wristwatches, fountain pens, telephones). Several images mix cultures, demonstrating that this West African city was dealing with the rapid infiltration of Western culture and the erosion of its ancestral one. A man with distinguishing facial scars is pictured in a suit and tie; a woman in traditional dress, resplendent with jewels and glamorous headscarf, leans against a radio.

Although not mentioned in the wall text or press release, the images on view were printed and enlarged from the original negatives that lay dormant for years in Keïta's darkroom. The new prints are an extraordinary testimony to his talent. In the enlarged versions, one notices his eye for composition and design, as well as his uncanny ability to monumentalize his sit-

Sarah Jones: *The Bedroom II (Rhea)*, 2002, C-print on aluminum, 59 inches square; at Anton Kern.





Seydou Keita: *Untitled, #52, 1950-55*, gelatin silver print, 22 by 15 1/2 inches; at Sean Kelly.

(paint) to the unconventional (bread), in what she defined as an extended investigation into the nature of mimesis and representation. Recently, however, Castillo's patient fidelity to a single subject has given way to an exuberant eclecticism. In her exhibition of new work at Robert Miller, she showed a mix of paintings, painted objects, photographs and video, with nary a self-portrait in the bunch. An almost carnivalesque sensuality pervaded the show, but the same conceptual rigor that generated the self-portraits was clearly a driving force in the new work, too.

At the heart of the show were several works that used painted flowers to set up an ambiguous zone somewhere between depiction and actuality. In the two paintings *Forty Days* and *Blancalilly*, flower petals were covered in oil paint and stuck directly to the canvas support in pretty, naive-looking arrangements that suggested the work of an amateur botanist. Here the illusion of pictorial space was abolished, and the canvas became a sort of specimen tray. The inert, thickly-coated petals protruding from the canvas seemed like a parody of overwrought impasto.

The same deadpan sensibility infused the short video *Dancer's Self-Portrait*, in which a dancer in a yellow leotard appeared against a background of mint-green plastic tarps. Oversized cuffs composed of small canisters of paint were strapped to her wrists and ankles. As the stony-faced performer executed a series of ballet movements, raising high her arms and legs, the paint spilled from the canisters and splashed dramatically across her body and the tarps, creating an Abstract-Expressionist painting in commedia dell'arte colors.

In the show's other video work, *Pictorial Effects*, three small adjacent monitors showed looping videos of an eye, a man's genitals and a nipple. In each work, a hand holding a

small, soft, wet paint brush was shown stimulating the respective body part, which then visibly responded to the touch of the brush, either by producing tears or by growing erect. This piece seemed to tread knowingly along the edges of the risible, but its ultimate affect was oddly poignant. With its playful, pointed use of flowers and flesh, Castillo's recent work keeps tongue in cheek while asking serious questions about the paradoxes of touching and looking, sensing and perceiving.

—Elizabeth Schambelan

Clay Ketter at Sonnabend

If the home improvement guru Bob Vila were an artist, he might create works similar to the 10 painted reliefs in Clay Ketter's recent show at Sonnabend. Building his works from particle-board, steel beading and other construction materials, Ketter coaxes high modernist abstractions from the vernacular of domestic architecture.

The largest work in the show, *Freeport Wall* (2001), reproduces a section of exterior wall from an ordinary suburban dwelling. A rectangle of white clapboard siding, nearly 10 feet in length, is punctured on the left by a glass window outfitted with venetian blinds. A strip of gray oil paint, liberally textured with sand, runs along the base to suggest a concrete foundation with a metal dryer vent attached. These same elements reappear in *Cooks Corner* (2001) but are confined to a smaller, square panel. The reduced scale emphasizes Ketter's formal concerns, as the squares of the window and vent clearly echo the shape of the support, while the horizontals of the pine siding rhyme with both the vent's incisions and the louvers of the drawn blinds.

Most of the works in the show, however, do not depict exterior facades, nor are they quite as finished in appearance. Ketter presented several large panels that mimicked interior walls in states of disrepair or renovation. In *Clubhouse Stair* (2000), for example, red house paint and yellow wallpaper subdivide a parlor wall into zones of contrasting color. This geometric composition is relieved by exposed patches of the masonite support, indicating

where a staircase, a railing or other architectural element has been stripped away.

The dismantled appearance of many of the reliefs lent an air of nostalgia to the entire show and linked Ketter's recent work to that of Rachel Whiteread, Doris Salcedo and other artists who have excavated the haunting pasts of domestic spaces. Two of his works forsake legible descriptions of architecture in favor of purely abstract compositions. In *Eastham 6* (2001), the artist stacked three rectangles of enamel house paint and wall-board compound on top of each other. The end result is a serene study in white and gray that resembles a late painting by Rothko. —Matthew Guy Nichols

Nathan Slate Joseph at Sundaram Tagore

Nathan Slate Joseph's work uniquely combines the large-scale exuberance of Abstract Expressionism with the laissez-faire mellowness of found-object art. He slathers pure pigment onto small square- and rectan-

Monica Castillo: Detail of *Dancer's Self-Portrait*, 2001, Duratrans print on stainless-steel lightbox with projector and DVD player, 40 by 60 inches; at Robert Miller.



ters. The brilliance of these images resides not only in the directness with which Keita approached his subjects, but in the sense of self-possession and dignity he captured.

Unlike some of his African-based contemporaries (e.g., François-Edmond Fortier and Alphonso Lisk-Carew), Keita was not catering to the desires of a predominantly colonial market. Initially, these were private commissions made by, and for, Africans, to be printed on an intimate scale and circulated among family and friends. However, before his death, Keita sanctioned the reuse of his negatives, approving their new large scale and framing. While the reissuing of these once-modest objects constitutes a dramatic recasting of their original form and function, on the white walls of a gallery they emerge as magnificent works of art that beg for a more thorough reexamination of portrait photography in West Africa.

—Maura Reilly

Monica Castillo at Robert Miller

Monica Castillo spent the better part of the 1990s exploring the nuances of a single subject—her own face. Over the course of the decade, she executed numerous self-portraits using a wide variety of materials, from the traditional