

little kid. A look of concern on her face, she grasps his shoulders tentatively, while he flails hard to escape. The composition is terrific, but it's the color that makes this tableau so riveting. The woman is pale and blond, dressed in pastels, the boy wiry and dark, dressed in bright saturated colors. They stand on a base that has been painted to resemble an orange tiled floor.

The other works in the show are unpainted plaster casts of hands grouped together, mostly in gestures of solidarity and connectedness. *Pinwheel* (1998), for instance, is a ring of linked hands with the arms fanning out like the pinwheel of the title; the rear wall of the gallery was entirely covered with similar arrangements. I have to admit that I found these sculptures utterly banal. Ahearn's work needs color, facial expression and anecdote to thrive. By now nearly everyone can see the limits of life-casting, but at its best Ahearn's work remains very lively. Also, it's important to recognize that mimesis is the only strategy with enough force to put the representation and the represented back together again. Ahearn has known this all along. The people in his images have never been toys in some other game. Questions about

the validity of the mimetic effect now lie right at the heart of much of the debate in contemporary art. —Robert Taplin

### Dove Bradshaw at Sandra Gering and Linda Kirkland

A miniature geological drama took place late last spring with the presentation of *Negative Ions I-IV* (1996/98) in the main room of Sandra Gering's gallery. Four large, untrimmed blocks of rock salt sat on the floor; inches above each, Dove Bradshaw had suspended a dropping funnel which slowly released water onto the salt. Over the course of the exhibition, the water bored a hole through the rock, providing an elementary demonstration of the process of erosion. The elegance of the work—the spare installation, simple mechanism, graceful blown-glass funnel—was countered by the artist's fundamental lack of control over the event. For if Bradshaw set the process in motion, she steadfastly refused to neaten the results: as the salt dissolved, it formed a solution which in part recrystallized on the block, but elsewhere ran down onto the floor and dried out.

The beautiful natural light of Linda Kirkland's front gallery created an appropriate setting for a complementary work. Bradshaw's *Indeterminacy I-IV* (1997). Here she placed chunks of pyrite (also known as "fool's gold") atop one-foot cubes of limestone. Previously set outdoors and exposed to the elements, the chunks of pyrite had weathered, shrinking in size and leaving rusty stains on the pedestals. In both this work and *Negative Ions*, time was the engine of gradual transformation, leading to the entropic state at which we finally might consider the piece "finished."

There are obvious echoes of Robert Smithson here, particularly the shared interest in crystal formation and geochemical processes.



Sarah Lucas: Installation view of *Life's a Drag Organs*, 1998, two burnt cars, cigarettes, glue; at Barbara Gladstone.

Dove Bradshaw: *Negative Ions III*, 1996/98, untrimmed rock salt, glass funnel, water, salt, 16 by 39 by 24 inches; at Sandra Gering.



Yet where Smithson was careful always to maintain a dialectical tension between nature and culture, Bradshaw gives more weight to the former. She is perhaps as much alchemist as artist, conjuring various forces: the flask in *Negative Ions* became an instrument of containment and control which directed liquid to overcome obdurate rock.

These alchemical pursuits are even clearer in the *Contingency Pours* (1998) displayed at Linda Kirkland. Shortly before the opening of the exhibition, the artist covered four thin rectangles of silver with liver of sulfur solution and mounted them on the wall. During the run of the show, tarnish overcame the pristine surfaces. (A similar process governed *Contingency [Book]*, 1995-97, on view in Sandra Gering's project room.) The coppery-blue and white crusts were quite evocative, and begged the question of what, precisely, was the nature of this beauty. For the experience of *Contingency Pours* was akin to looking not at the result of an artist's decision-making but at a rare stone or piece of coral whose beauty seems to lie outside human determination. An adept of John Cage, Bradshaw pushed us, in a salutary fashion, beyond the conventional gallery experience.

—Tom McDonough

### Sarah Lucas at Barbara Gladstone

As one would expect from a "Britpacker" (that group of young British artists whose work is characterized by raunchy sexual and/or scatological content),

Sarah Lucas's new work is unruly, rambunctious and cocky. Despite being titled "The Old In Out," her recent show had less to do with sex than with other cherished themes, among them drinking, shitting and smoking.

Cigarettes were prevalent, serving as a clichéd penis surrogate in *You Know What* (1998), and functioning more directly as a sculptural material in the installation *Life's a Drag Organs* (1998). The latter comprises two wrecked and burned-out cars whose seats and other parts have been meticulously, almost anally, covered with thousands of Marlboros. In previous installations by Lucas, vandalized vehicles referred to the violent, working-class neighborhood of Islington where the artist grew up. Here the cars also were emblems for her lungs, or "organs," burned-out from years of smoking.

While Lucas's use of everyday materials (beer cans, old mattresses, hotdogs, eggs) is firmly established in contemporary practice, the abundance of bathroom imagery inevitably evoked the specific precedent of Duchamp's *Fountain*, the 1917 urinal-as-readymade. *Is Suicide Genetic?* (1996) incorporates a soiled ceramic toilet in which the artist has painted the work's querying title; *Nature Abhors a Vacuum* (1998) is a toilet painstakingly covered with cigarettes. In the show's title piece, *The Old In Out* (1998), nine variously colored polyurethane casts of toilets seem to pay (mocking?) homage to the bathtubs and other domestic objects cast by the artist's compatriot Rachel Whiteread.



Elsewhere in the show, Lucas launched an assault on gender stereotypes. In one photographic self-portrait, *Human Toilet Revisited* (1998), she sits atop a toilet seat, naked from the waist down, feet up, smoking a cigarette. In another, entitled *Laugh?* (1998), the artist opens a beer can, which sprays up and out toward the viewer. Lucas targets gestures and actions associated with a very specific "brand" of masculinity: the beer-swilling, leg-splaying, ass-scratching bloke. By usurping

thoughtful accumulation of effort, with a result that has none of Minimalism's sometimes shrill self-importance. Laib downplays his artistic intervention, presenting familiar components of the natural world—beeswax, marble, rice and pollen—in such density that their color, texture and smell become the focus of each piece. Nature is the star, Laib seems to be saying, and he is just the man behind the scenes.

Even the monumentality of a pair of beeswax ziggurats tall enough to graze the gallery ceiling was overwhelmed by their almost stupefying scent and dense, honey-rich color. They seemed out of place in the gallery's white glare, begging to be discovered rather than displayed. Laib's proposal to eventually site them in a cave in the Pyrenees seems entirely appropriate; in a natural setting, their man-made qualities will seem more cryptic and significant.

The ziggurats dominated Sperone's main gallery, while the second room held an installation of three much smaller works. The first was a white marble sculpture in the shape of a house, long like a chicken coop, low

to the floor and banked, as by drifts of snow, with curved mounds of white rice. The "house" is roughly hewn and the marble is unpolished, which makes it sparkly and gives it an almost edible look, like salt. Another sculpture, six beeswax steps going nowhere, like a fragment of a ziggurat, climbed the far wall. The pièce de résistance, alone in the vast middle wall, was a tiny, uneven mountain of brilliant yellow hazelnut pollen tucked into a small square niche. It was displayed like a jewel and engendered a mood of reverence—some of it for the interminable amounts of time Laib spends collecting the

fine powder. The role of pollen as an agent of new life allows us to view it as a quiet force, a little pile of potential and possibility.

Impressive as this exhibition was, it lacked the mystery of some of Laib's earliest pieces: paintinglike squares of an almost otherworldly yellow (who would guess it was pollen?) and "Milkstones"—shimmering whiter-than-white surfaces, also square, which turn out to be thin slabs of marble gently hollowed and filled with milk. Even without that compelling "what is it?" quality, however, Laib's work succeeds, and is remarkable for its asceticism and integrity.

—Carol Diehl

### Katy Schimert at David Zwirner

Katy Schimert's engrossing, densely layered multimedia installation at David Zwirner is her first new work since *Oedipus Rex: the Drowned Man* at the 1997 Whitney Biennial. This conceptually rich and mesmerizing effort encompasses glass and ceramic artifacts; a six-minute film titled *Icarus and the World Trade Center*; framed ink and pastel drawings; and wall drawings of the sun, Manhattan and the twin towers.

The wall drawings create an illusion of narrative by diagramming two intertwined stories onto three cosmic, geographical and architectural sites. Dotted lines plot trajectories and enigmatic penciled phrases suggest a sequence of events. The myth of Icarus—who fell into the sea and drowned when the sun melted his wax-and-feather wings—is intertwined with Schimert's own tale of "The Man in the Gray Suit," a bear-market suicide who jumps from the top of the World Trade Center and then (perhaps) "walks home" as "the headless man."

Projecting from the wall in the main gallery room was *The Sun*, an 8-foot circle formed of translucent yellow, rose and amber blown-glass pieces which are shaped like irregularly contoured rocks and long tubes with flared lips. A low platform in the rear gallery supported two rows of rounded terra-cotta vessels, glazed with 14-carat gold and called *Sun Spots*. The glaze and reference to the sun made the

kiln-firing process seem like a distillation of cosmic energy into the gold of human commodity exchange. The film adds an element of self-referentiality by recording the effects of sun glare on the camera lens, and by changing focus and film speed in the midst of documenting the WTC, the teeming floor of the stock exchange and the anguished face of the man in the gray suit as he walked toward the lens.

The glass and ceramic shapes comprising *The Sun* and *Sun Spots* all have been used by Schimert in earlier installations; the new work recombines that vocabulary of sculptural forms into new configurations, and then uses myth and story to build an explanatory context around them. Schimert brazenly seeks to determine all aspects of the exhibition experience—from creating the "object," to controlling the gallery installation, to using her narratives and diagrammatic maps to demarcate the ground of criticism and analysis. The work plays skillfully on a deep longing for story and meaning in the wake of 20 years of deconstruction; at the same time it is a product of that critical practice, and reveals the limitations of any single set of visual perceptions or conceptual tools.

—Daniel Rubey

### Marc Quinn at Gagosian

Along with British artists Damien Hirst, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Chris Ofili and Abigail Lane, Marc Quinn has helped to spark an international sensation, most notably in 1991 with *Self*, a refrigerated cast of the artist's head made of nine pints of his own congealed blood. In his first New York solo exhibition, he continued this exploration of mortality using a vast array of materials and casting techniques, from rubber and polyurethane to silvered glass and frozen flowers.

Raucous sexual and scatological content is typically encountered in Quinn's work; his "Shit Paintings" and *Shit Head* of 1997, as well as *Incarnate* of 1996, a boiled sausage filled with the artist's blood, are primary examples. But none of these more grotesque works was included in the recent exhibition; which is not to say that his show was



Wolfgang Laib: *Nowhere-Everywhere*, 1998, beeswax, two wooden constructions, 152 by 146 by 29 1/2 inches each; at Sperone Westwater.

this socially abject male stereotype, she seeks to undermine the conjugate myth of the weak and vulnerable woman. Her grungy, gender-ambiguous work is intended as an affront to the decorum of the gallery context in particular and the mores of patriarchal society in general.

—Maura Reilly

### Wolfgang Laib at Sperone Westwater

Wolfgang Laib uses the fruits of nature to create art works whose power is derived from their almost extreme modesty. Although Laib's forms are simple, his work depends on a