



Dawn Ladd, *Window-Mandalas*, 1996, iron, copper, chain, dimensions variable.



Fiona Templeton, *Recognition*, 1996. Performance view. Photo: Paula Cort.

dent Ann Dickinson's first-hand testimony, a Christlike figure emerges from a background of red and green patterned wallpaper and appears to drift beyond the confines of the depicted room—a deadpan, kitschy representation of Dickinson's sublime spiritual encounter. The artists deliberately built paradox into their provisional team-based method: while they endorse collective, socially based models of artmaking, in *Fantastic Sh*t* they put a mildly ironic spin on the ideology driving their earlier projects, such as *We Got It*, 1993, in which they joined forces with unionized workers at a Nestlé chocolate factory in Chicago to design and produce a new chocolate bar.

If artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija and Lincoln Tobier set up frameworks in which an event or situation can unfold (setting in motion a theatricality that resembles "real life," but that actually points back to the artificiality of the framing device itself), Grennan & Sperandio peel back the framework's skin so that "outsiders" are fundamental to the project's very conception. Their methodology is contingent on a radically extended collaborative process in which authorship is displaced onto—and, to a certain degree, happily serves—a set of distinct voices. For example, José Gonzalez, one of the respondents, believes that his wooden bowl gives Yes and No responses, channeled through outer space, to his questions, and that the bowl led him to discover a hidden corpse; his account is interpreted as a humorous yet disturbing twist on the still-life genre—a pair of eyes (presumably José's) stare at a bowl emanating mysterious rays.

By acting as brokers of other people's experiences, Grennan & Sperandio open

themselves up to the accusation that they are exploiting people simply to make so-called progressive political art. But it has become evident that as they reconfigure the terms of artistic collaboration, they are also poking fun at the nature of their own cultural partnership, and by extension, at the earnestness of art as agitprop. For example, in *Cartoon Hits*, 1996, a project sponsored by London's ICA, the two worked with thirteen ICA members to recreate their "true-life" stories in comic-book form: the cover of this publication featured cartoons of Grennan & Sperandio in shackles, anchored to the bottom of the ocean, and surrounded by piranhas bearing the faces of ICA members. Similarly, in *Fantastic Sh*t*, didactic panels in the style of comics introduced the project and the artists to the audience, and also offered a revealing narrative about the business relationship between the artists and their dealer—a reflexive gesture that placed the critique of art-world institutions in the realm of comedy.

—Joshua Decker

DAWN LADD BRIDGES + BODELL

This impressive solo show of recent work by New York-based Dawn Ladd revealed an artist with a singular flair for turning industrial materials into richly suggestive forms. Ladd's metal assemblages comprise a variety of agricultural implements including blades, pipes, axles, and chains, which are illuminated from within so that rays of light emanate from cracks and joints as if these sculpted pieces were animated by their own life force.

Whether they take the form of hanging metal shields or lit wall pieces that could almost double as lamps, these works not only transform familiar objects but celebrate the intrinsic qualities of these objects' materials and their sinuous, suggestive lines. Take, for example, the subtly swelling, majestic proportions of the shields, which bring to mind both abstract reliefs and medieval armor. The lit metal encasements appear to be charged with a magical vitality; among the most provocative are those that feature swirling concave and convex curves that when filled with light form glowing, luminous passages. Drawing as much from the world of everyday objects as from the curving excesses of Art Nouveau and the sleek lines of space-age decor, Ladd's work rests somewhere between sculpture and utilitarian object, creating a bridge between art and design.

—Ronny Cohen

FIONA TEMPLETON THE KITCHEN

Fiona Templeton's most recent performance, *Recognition*, is both an elegiac tribute to her longtime collaborator, Michael Ratonski, as well as a continuation of her interest in how "real life" is both amplified and obfuscated when re-presented as theater. The oddly cryptic text began as a collaborative examination by Templeton and Ratonski (who died of AIDS in 1994) "of how to understand or represent another's experience." Of course, "another's experience" loses its casualness here, as the experience represented on stage is Ratonski's own life. (We are also given videotaped glimpses into his illness, medical

procedures, and waning days as a performer in the very piece we're watching.) With fragments of the text uttered live by Templeton and, across Ratonski's screen image, in subtitles (unbearably sad when used to explicate Ratonski's fading and faltering voice), the two performers converse across a set of folding tables and bottled water that suggest a courtroom. Throughout the piece, Templeton, clumsily spilling water and laying pieces of paper on the floor to suggest the chalk outline of a body, repeatedly shows theater's built-in inadequacies in retelling Ratonski's life.

Templeton is best known in this country for the interactive *YOU—The City*, 1988, during which audience members were ushered by actors through various urban situations, from a co-op to a barroom to a Times Square peep show. While such a piece may suggest Fluxus-lite frivolity, Templeton clearly had in mind how meaning is constructed by spectators, and the way theatrical reality is grounded in the experience of individual members of the audience. In *Recognition*, the concern remains the same but is less blithely engaged: Templeton directly confronts the possibility of re-presenting Ratonski in the theater by placing a "jury" of twelve audience members onstage with her. Toward the end, a spectator/juror reads a letter Templeton wrote to her partner, and the pace, inflection—the whole retelling of Ratonski's life—is in this individual's hand. It is a potent reminder of the power of the audience: a literal, aural, and visual synecdoche—that is, Ratonski's living on in the audience's hands—for what's at stake in Templeton's continuation of this project after Ratonski's death.

Recognition is, of course, part of a varied and plentiful Pirandellian tradition in theater in which a trope of presence/absence allows for the examination of form (though Beckett's *Rough for Theater II*, in which two characters discuss the modes and methods of narrativizing a newly deceased character's life, may provide the most apposite comparison to Templeton's piece). Yet AIDS has given a new life-and-death inflection to this canonical metatheatrical conceit, of which *Recognition* is a compelling example, part of an important subgenre of AIDS plays concerned chiefly with how we tell the stories of those felled by a microscopic retrovirus (e.g., Susan Sontag's *The Way We Live Now*, 1991, Paula Vogel's *Baltimore Waltz*, 1992, David Greenspan's *Jack*, 1990). Templeton's work is as fine as all of these, but we will all be happy to see the genre disappear into the real absence of

history, becoming a corpus of work that will exist—like its ever-increasing number of real-life characters—only in memoriam.
—Steven Drukman

TRISHA BROWN
BROOKLYN ACADEMY
OF MUSIC

Trisha Brown opened her company's twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations with the remarkable solo *Accumulation*, which she first performed in 1971. Wearing a white top above loose-fitting trousers and standing barefoot with knees very slightly bent on the apron of the stage, she extended one balled hand toward the audience (thumb turned down), rotated it, and then replayed the sequence with her other hand. She then used this movement as the opening bar to a series of repeated motions, piled one upon the other. A seminal and iconic work, *Accumulation* became a blueprint for qualities that would be seen throughout this retrospective: a relaxed body framed by precise structure; repetitious movement interspersed with improvisation; and a rigorous analysis of the body in space coupled with a sense of the absurd. Evidenced also was Brown's early fascination for the double helix of mind and body that has been the starting point for her most visceral explorations into dance movement.

Set and Reset, 1983, a pivotal work among the ten that comprised three separate programs, elegantly layered Brown's ideas and sensibilities. A collaboration of sorts—Laurie Anderson supplied the music after seeing a video of Brown's early choreography, while Robert Rauschenberg designed the costumes and a stage with transparent wings, forcing Brown to play into them—*Set and Reset* is a kaleidoscope of movement designs that fade in and out of focus like the film images projected on the geometric scrim above the dancers' heads. The piece nods to both the past and the future; a dancer walking along the back wall held aloft by several performers is a reference to Brown's earlier "equipment pieces," while complex partnering patterns hint at combinations that would be elaborated in such later works as *Newark*, 1987.

Each work illustrated how Brown pushes the boundaries of her own vocabulary and style. Even her guest artists, Steve Paxton, Stephen Petronio, and Mikhail Baryshnikov, were intended as catalysts in Brown's ongoing conversation with herself about how movement can be made to mean more, yet still surprise and delight.



Trisha Brown, *You Can See Us*, 1996.
Performance view. Photo: Dan Rest.



Boris Mikhailov, from "Luriki," 1971-85.
hand-colored black and white photograph, 23 x 17".

Paxton—master dancer from the Judson Church and Grand Union days of the '60s and '70s—appeared in a duet with Brown, their bodies as loose as can be without actually falling down, while Petronio's brilliantly executed solo, completed in less than a minute, represented a successful transposition of the "softer" forms associated with Brown's movement studies to a muscular style. Baryshnikov, on the other hand, added a dash of classical eloquence to Brown's iconoclasm.

M.O., 1995, and *Twelve Ton Rose*, 1996, achieved a classicism and monumentality all their own. Not only were the stark sets with their black velvet curtains as imposing as the colonnades of a Beaux Arts building; the music (by Bach and Webern, respectively) was of a grandeur that at first seemed antithetical to the choreographer's radical composition methods. Yet Brown located what was radical about these composers and responded in kind, with movements so refined and complicated as to take her vocabulary into unexpected realms. Such a subtle and unexpected treatment of form is no doubt a sign of the choreographer's experience. Indeed, watching her company work its way through twenty-five years of dance history left one eagerly anticipating Brown's next move.

—RoseLee Goldberg

ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON

BORIS MIKHAILOV
BARD COLLEGE

Already canonized as the "patriarch of Soviet photography," at fifty-eight Boris Mikhailov is one of the most important

contemporary Russian photographers to have explored the post-Soviet psyche. This gripping show drew from three recent series—"U Zemli," 1991-92, "Sumerki," 1993, and "If I Were a German," 1995—and an earlier series "Luriki," 1971-85. Beyond the daring vision these photographs presented of Russian life, they are striking in their refusal to privilege the technical virtuosity so dear to a growing number of artists from the former Soviet Union.

Mikhailov shot "U Zemli" (which means "to the ground, on the ground, or from the ground") from the waist, using a 120-degree panoramic lens. The photographs were hung at a similarly low height in the gallery, in a kind of uninterrupted frieze. Recalling Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov's notion of an expanded "camera eye," Mikhailov's technical manipulations and hidden camera serve to increase the photographs' legitimacy as documents, though these images arise as much from childhood memories (hence the child's-eye-view) as from the scenes unfolding before the camera. Taking his native Kharkov (today part of the Ukraine) as his subject, Mikhailov captures its urban landscape—deteriorating buildings and streets lined with people queuing for bargains—in a way that recalls the explosive period in the city directly preceding the 1917 October Revolution. Never didactic in its references to political history, Mikhailov's reportage focuses on the stark beauty of silent human drama.

Russian daily life is the subject of "Sumerki" (At dusk), a series of works that immediately followed the sepia-toned "U Zemli"; this time, however, the photographs are more satirical. These images of the quotidian—old women

bundled in layers of clothes, drunk men, and the disabled, previously invisible on Russian streets—bear witness to the economic hardship that followed the dismantling of the Soviet Union. Applying what Mikhailov dubs his "method of parallel historical associations," the photographer attempts to transcend the temporal specificity of these images, evoking memories of World War II. It is difficult, in fact, to assess how much the present situation of hopelessness and pain results from recent political and economic changes and how much it is a product of the old system. But even if these photographs expose the ugliness and paranoia of Russian life, past and present, Mikhailov forgoes blunt criticism in favor of sharp observations sympathetic to the "Russian condition" or *byt*.

In "Luriki," Mikhailov presents intimate portraits of anonymous Russians that recall a period in his life (the '60s and '70s) when, working as an independent commercial photographer, restorer, and retoucher, he assembled a collection of prints depicting Russians dressed in their finest, which he rephotographed and then hand-colored. (The title of the series is a word coined by the artist, derived from another Russian word *zbluriki*; which literally means those who wink or blink, and metaphorically often refers to the dead.) At once sentimental and unsettling in the staged poses the subjects often assumed, these photographs establish a relationship between masquerade and politics, alluding as they do to official Russian holidays and their blurring of private and public life. Going beyond the Russian context and drawing a parallel between the body and society, they explore the psychological state that leads to a disruption of group