

GREENENAFTALI INC.

PRESS RELEASE

Deliberate Living

curated by Sima Familant

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Opening Reception; Friday January 12, 6-8 pm

We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor...to live deliberately.

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, 1845.

Greene Naftali Gallery will open its winter season with the group exhibition, *Deliberate Living*, with works by Bas Jan Ader, Darren Almond, Tom Burr, Andre Cadere, De Rijke/De Rooij, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Hellen van Meene and Cosima von Bonin.

The title of the exhibition, inspired by Henry David Thoreau's work, *Walden*, is a reference to the possibility that art objects occupy a unique position in contemporary culture by inviting contemplation. When the mind is still, thought is possible. As art has become increasingly entwined with technology and with economic pressures, it is moving closer to entertainment status. Cynicism, irony, and spectacle dominate. As Bas Jan Ader once wrote, "The sea, the land, the artist has with great sadness known they too will be no more." It is this quest for living in the moment, and the search in between, that is indicative of Bas Jan Ader's work and the artists included in the group show, *Deliberate Living*.

Bas Jan Ader was a Dutch artist who moved to Los Angeles in the early 60's, studied art and philosophy and taught at UC Irvine. Ader had a short but influential career, dying quite young while performing an art piece. He disappeared at sea while making a solo crossing across the Atlantic in an art work titled, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 1975. Before his death, Ader was among the conceptual artists working in LA in the early 70's who investigated such issues as the boundary between art and life. How best to feel life than falling on the ground, feeling the weight of the earth on one's body and knowing one is helpless to gravity. Ader is well known for his "falling" pieces such as the work in this exhibition, *Untitled (Swedish Fall)*, 1971.

Time and the awareness of its passage are an integral concept in the work of Darren Almond. Time in this work is set and fixed to reality. With *Border*, 1999, the work included in this exhibition, Almond has reconstructed an object that is connected to a place where time stood still, Oswiecim, Poland, also known as Auschwitz. The sculpture is a recreation of the bus stop signs, one for coming in to the city and the other, with the line crossed through the name, for leaving the city border. A place with such a poignant history of time and loss of life carries with it many metaphors of living, appreciating life and conversely death. Recently, there was an article in *Newsweek* describing a discotheque that was started in Auschwitz by one of the young local men. This caused much controversy, especially among the western Jewish community. Owner Waliczek, 30, responded, "But it is not our fault that Hitler chose this place. We want to live too." This statement is the voice of a generation in a town that in the last two years, 1500 young people have left. (Hammer, Joshua, "Dancing on Graves", *Newsweek*, October 9, 2000.)

André Cadere was a Rumanian artist who arrived on the Paris art scene and immediately became part of the elite artistic and intellectual elite influenced by Duchamp. He first became known through his body of work loosely referred to as "Beads of Wood". Cadere's legacy is roughly 180 bars of wood painted in specific colors that Cadere would take with him on excursions. The beads

are strung with intentional errors to avoid fixed numerical patterns. At first Cadere exhibited these works in parks, cafes and other nontraditional exhibition spaces. Later he began exhibiting in galleries and museums alongside contemporaries such as Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset and Niele Torroni. Like the other artists in this exhibition, Cadere was interested in making an illusory simple body of work that integrates life and reflection as part of the art work. "It is only through the error, brief contact with reality, that we perceive it. The fact of breaking one's foot makes one aware of the rhythm of walking." (Letter to Yvon Lambert, June 12, 1978.) The Beads of Wood are a reminder that art, like life, is not only a journey but a process of discovery.

The erosion of boundaries, formally and contextually, is integral to Felix Gonzalez-Torres' oeuvre. His work crosses the political, the ephemeral, the personal, the abstract and the sculptural. Between 1987 and 1992, he chose sixty-four photographs ranging from landscapes to images of his lover, his dog and his childhood to be transformed into jigsaw puzzles. The puzzle format is a commentary of the fragility of what we construct and the photograph in itself is a way to stop time and capture a moment. Gonzalez-Torres' personal selection allows the work to discuss how we construct our life and the deliberate way of what we choose to remember.

Tom Burr's sculptures expand a minimalist dialogue by heightening the viewer's experience of moving through a space layered with sexuality, power and ambiguity. Interested specifically in the social interactions which occur in public space, Burr's work reveals the codes, psychology and behavior which are often sublimated and not explicitly stated. Philip Johnson recently described the genius of the work of the famous French designer, Philip Starck on these terms. "Starck's best work is the bar stool. It's sculpture. It's hard to sit on, but extremely inviting sexually." ("Philip Johnson's Starck Choice", *The New York Times Magazine*.) Burr's work constructed for this exhibition, The Oblong Box, 2001, references an Edgar Allen Poe poem to evoke a Gothic neurotically claustrophobic zone. The work is hinged to the wall with heavy metal fasteners and has a hard black impenetrable exterior. One walks behind the empty corridor and is confronted with a single red ashtray perched on the ledge.

Cosima von Bonin is an artist who is well known on the Koln art scene (which is heavily whose influenced by Martin Kippenberger.) There is no boundary between her life, her work, her influences and process which includes sculpture, performance, music and installation. Von Bonin directly referenced the work of both Cadere and Ader, specifically in Please Don't Leave Me where she redraws the sign work in Ader's handwriting. The work included in this exhibition is a cowboy style fence post that is constructed from Laura Ashley fabric, a company heavily invested in creating an image of home and pastoral lifestyle. The fence post which usually acts as a divide, a separation between where one is and where one would like to go, fosters a design of contemplation for the viewer.

De Rijke/De Rooij are artists living in Amsterdam who collaborate to make films. They create succinct, nearly silent films of beautiful images that stem from their imagination. These films are slow unfolding scenes which ultimately examine the methods of image production. The artists choose a form deserved for its beauty and ultimately a kind of essentialness which derives from a strict visual order and confrontational frame. As in Chun Tien (Spring), 1994, the first collaborative work by the artists, the image is a young Asian couple in love surrounded by overflowing Magnolia blossoms. The film was shot in the Botanical Gardens in Amsterdam but the scene does not offer this contextual information. To the contrary, the artists appreciate that the work has a universal openness, to the point that they end the scene at the moment of intense dialogue allowing the film to drift off into nothingness. Non-linear and narratively unconstructed, one feels that they stumbled into the middle of a love story and have arrived at the pinnacle emotional moment where the two exchange words of endearment. Revealing this intensity is intentional, as the artists have remarked: "We think art deals with sublime moments, dreams, fantasies, and prophecies. The more emotions you experience while watching an art piece, the better it is. We'd love to make a work that would make everyone cry." (Nicholaus Schafhausen: Interview with De Rijke/ De Rooij, After the Hunt, 2000).

Hellen van Meene, also an artist from Amsterdam, photographs portraits of young women from her home town of Alkmaar. Van Meene's work references the formal structure found in historical

painting, specifically the Northern tradition of painting. Their use of natural light and shadow to create a psychologically charged atmosphere and timeless quality is predominant and most powerful in van Meene's images. Van Meene has staged and directed the young women in various contexts. Without camouflaging reality, van Meene obtains a glimmer of her subjects in a state of awareness of themselves. At adolescence, says author of *Reviving Ophelia*, Mary Bray Pipher, "Girls become 'female impersonators' who fit their whole selves into small, crowded spaces." Although the subjects themselves are beyond adolescence, the psychology of van Meene's work articulates with an intimate, sensitive gaze an adolescent vulnerability.

Searching and wandering through people and with things is intuitive in the art of this exhibition. Through minimal and conceptual projects, the artists' works in this exhibition are thoughtful, soul searching and purposeful, to investigate feeling life. "It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look..." (Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, 1845.)