

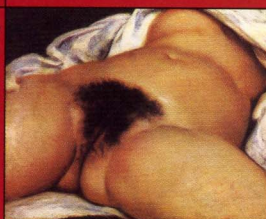
Tracey Emin

Noritoshi Hirakawa

Pierre Joseph

June 4 - 20, 1998

Gustave Courbet, *The  
Origin of the World*,  
1866, Musée d'Orsay,  
Paris



# Live and let die

Curated by Udo Kittelmann

APEX ART C.P.  
291 Church Street  
New York, New York 10013  
212 431-5270 tel  
212 431-4447 fax  
apexartcp@aol.com

Thank you to Götz von Bleichert, Christian Boros,  
Barbara Clausen, Brigitte Kalthoff, Kathrin Luz,  
Ingo Maak, Steven Rand, Gregory Williams and  
Kölnischer Kunstverein Cologne.

Apex Art Curatorial Program is a 501c3  
not-for-profit tax deductible organization





## Live and let die

*Oh enrapturing beauty of the living body that was neither made artificially with oil paint nor with stone, but was created from ever changing, ever living matter and is pulsating with the feverishly blazing secret of life and decay.* [Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*]

In the middle of the exhibition room lies "it." It is just one of the most natural three-dimensional creations of man: a small heap, an excrement. The young woman, who sits in the exhibition room every day, gets up from time to time in order to present her work at this place. Next to her: a photograph, in which the beauty of the anal is compared to that of the floral.

Something else is lying on the floor not far from this: a witch, streaming blood, who obviously dove and crashed against the blue wall. With a broom between her legs like a phallus, and with her neck broken like a bird after colliding with a window pane, she has lost her life.

At the same time, a video is presented. A young woman tells of her "best mistake up to now," an abortion. She relates it as her personal fate in an honest yet not bitter or moralizing way, but as an existential experience that changed her life, because she had to make a decision on life and death.

The symbiosis of life and art is known to have been a topos of the art discourse for a long time. However, the notion of life is often used as an abstract concept, as just the opposite of art. Yet, what is life (however banal the question)? And what about the really essential, the eternal circle of birth, life and death?

From its very beginnings, art has been concerned with these subjects, designing great mythological constructs and involving religious inventions. With the beginning of modernism, these subjects were approached once more with utmost radicality. Yet since art has entered the stage of heightened self-reflexivity, the traces become blurred.

Rembrandt,  
*Urinating Woman*,  
1631, Rijksmuseum,  
Amsterdam



Noritoshi Hirakawa,  
*Spring of Mum*,  
Photograph, 1998

The exhibition condenses three artworks into a comprehensive image, which deals with the existential subjects of being human in a very up-to-date way. It unites the definitive events between which our existence takes place and projects them into the exhibition space. Actually, the exhibition itself is a kind of live-show, the only artistic medium in all three contributions being real people. Thus it tells the story of life and death and simultaneously illustrates the fact that especially these subjects are often taboo – both in art and in life.

The positions gathered in this exhibition approach these questions about human existence in a way that is radical enough to break up these taboos. Physical as well as spiritual life in its concrete biological-anatomical determinedness of becoming and passing, the power and the powerlessness of the flesh, are the focus. The exhibition as a whole makes the visitors aware of the determined nature of their existence, an existence that is established between beginning and end, between birth and death and only knows these as definite parameters.

In his work, Japanese artist **Noritoshi Hirakawa** (born in 1960) often shows everyday behavior which is highly taboo in our modern society, both western and eastern. Among his best-known works are large-scale photo-portraits of young squatting Japanese women. They do not wear underwear and might start urinating any moment. This direct and seemingly almost normal way of presenting their de-tabooed behavior is disarming and touches on shame as well as on desire. Hirakawa knows about the secret laws of taboos which – at the border of sense and nonsense – force stimulation. In his work "The Home-Coming of Navel String," realized in this exhibition

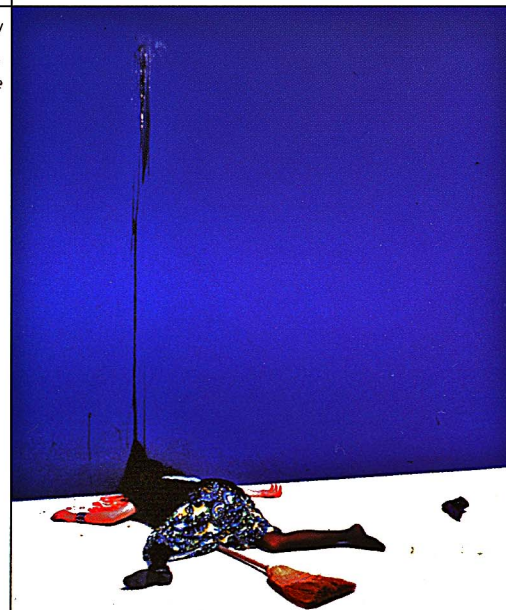
Edouard Manet,  
*The Dead Torero*,  
1864-65, National  
Gallery of Art,  
Washington



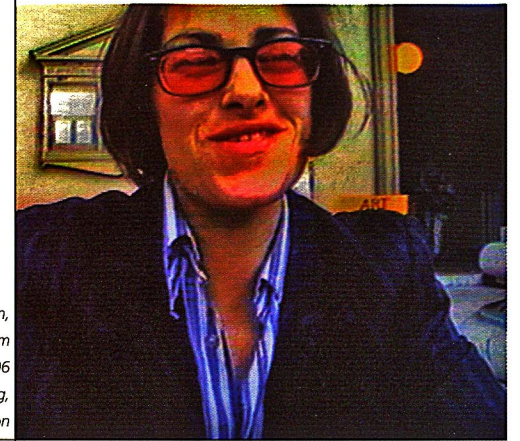
for the first time, he confronts us with the biological circle of becoming and decaying, illustrated by the process of digestion as an indicator of life, thus touching on another highly tabooed part of human life. And yet, this is one of the most natural things: man is determined by his physical rhythm of ingestion and excretion, from mouth to anus. With every evacuation, he deliberately gives away a piece of his lifetime. Thus, Hirakawa also proposes a new appreciation of life in all its universal phenomena.

Similar to the historical *tableaux vivants*, French artist **Pierre Joseph** (born in 1965) enacts little narrative scenarios with living persons, especially the death of well-known mythological figures and popular literary characters. Fairy tale figures and Easy Rider heroes, toreros and cowboys – they all belong to the inventory of our collective consciousness, and in Joseph's tableaux, they all die a most human or even pitiful death. The era of media innocence has just passed away and its heroes and heroines have disappeared. Their former, mythically transfigured existence was frozen in the moment of its end, when human existence is mercilessly confronted with all its banality. Pierre Joseph's characters perish tragically, though certainly not heroically.

Pierre Joseph, *La Sorcière*!  
*The Witch*, 1993,  
F.R.A.K. PACA, France



Tracey Emin,  
video still from  
*How It Feels*, 1996  
Courtesy Jay Jopling,  
London



This is also true for "The Witch," presented in this exhibition. The witch as a monstrous invention of human paranoia at the beginning of modern times is one of the dark phenomena that accompanied the triumph of reason. Later on, she became a regular – and also downplayed – figure in our fairy tales, from which Pierre Joseph now violently tears her away. For an infinitely short second, she is brought to life – just in order to die, thus suffering the same fate as all of us. With this work, Joseph has created a very impressive and unequivocal image of death.

In the work of British artist **Tracey Emin** (born in 1963), the seemingly documentary video "How It Feels" also focusses on a woman, i.e. the artist herself. In a moving manner, she tells about her experience as a woman who had an abortion and hence took on the decision regarding the life or death of another human, the decision of rejecting or admitting it. While reporting, she returns to the stages of this decision. The places that were decisive for this period of her life become a mirror of her psychological state.

Tracey Emin's artistic subject is her personal life with all its ups and downs. Yet she always retains her dignity and her self-confidence. Her work becomes the indicator of a time in which only the reference to the personal, to the subjective, is permanent in the end. And that is one's own life with all one's big and small problems, one's fears of losses, one's lonelines and despairs, but also one's passions and pleasures. Emin's way of returning to the origins of being and becoming human is both irritating and touching. On her bargain table of the products of fate, there is something for everyone to identify with.