

low-hanging, orange sky; handsome men mix with stylized toughs and the token grande dame, Jeanne Moreau. By holding sultry looks and dynamic poses, the actors overdo it with attitude and underwhelm the viewer—just as in the film.

—John Beeson

Brian O'Doherty

GALERIE THOMAS FISCHER

So they still exist, these miraculous little shows in Berlin's galleries, when, for a little while, commercial spaces shake off the unbearable lightness of the mercantile world to become little kunstvereins or museums. Thomas Fischer has succeeded in just such a maneuver with his presentation (cocurated with art historian and filmmaker Boris Hars-Tschachotin) of "Brian O'Doherty: From Electrocardiogram to Rope Drawing." The show is simultaneously a concentrated retrospective and a display of changing perspectives. While O'Doherty—an artist of many facets and at least two names—is famous for his 1976 triptych of essays on the white cube gallery, he is less recognized as an artist, at least in Berlin. That's a shame, since O'Doherty, aka Patrick Ireland, excels at practical as well as theoretical work; he studied medicine and is as good a dissector as he is a reanimator. His sixteen-part series "Portrait of Marcel Duchamp," 1966–67, for example, peers into the heart of his artist colleague. Using an electrocardiogram, he recorded Duchamp's heartbeat, turning the systole/diastole into a pattern of pulsing light in a delightfully crude fake oscilloscope. The Frenchman's ECG was traced onto a piece of green-tinted glass; a rotating light source takes care of the rest. (A subsequent work put a graph of the data into a box: *Duchamp Boxed*, 1968.) O'Doherty resuscitates the portrait as a genre, liberating it from the mustiness of the salon's secretive vanity and turning it into an artifact that was, in its conceptuality, nothing if not contemporary art.

No less wonderful is the astonishing little box *The Body and Its Discontents*, 1964, a cross between a miniature pharmacy cabinet and a shelf for words. The tiny compartments are filled with cubes with medical terms written on four sides. These color-coded objects list a vocabulary of body parts, illnesses, cell types, and functions necessary for perception. In delicate pastels, a scientifically cool analysis of the human being in terms of capabilities and physical limits emerges. This work functions, if you will, as the generalized counterpart to Duchamp's individual portrait, while simultaneously engaging in lively dialogue with the text and word art that was emerging at the time.

The most recent work on display is *Bird (for Charlie Parker)*, 2012, which was created on-site for the show. Here, as in two smaller mirror objects that accompany it, space and the observer (as well as the abilities of perception touched on in the work described above) are powerfully integrated into the work's construction. It is the 117th in O'Doherty's ongoing series of "Rope Drawings," begun in 1973. Each consists of painted wall surfaces and ropes that are stretched before them in such a way that they coalesce into a whole when viewed from a particular angle, the ropes appearing as white borderlines between color fields.

But if you look at the work from a different perspective, the impression of two-dimensionality fades and the ostensible painting dissolves once more into its separate components.

There probably aren't many artists who find themselves standing to such an extent—and wrongly—in the shadow of their own theoretical alter egos. As an artist, O'Doherty is a perfectly self-contained manifestation of himself and far from a mere illustrator of the ideas presented in his writings. He tries out curatorial, conceptual, kinetic, and minimal approaches to art, but his handmade, empirically produced works never fall prey to the coldness endemic to such approaches. At the same time, he never really quite stops being a doctor. He keeps listening to and tapping at these various artistic movements, checking them for vitality and arriving at intelligent findings and scientific conclusions. And then, whenever necessary, he trots out some healing apparatus of his own design and manufacture.

—Astrid Mania

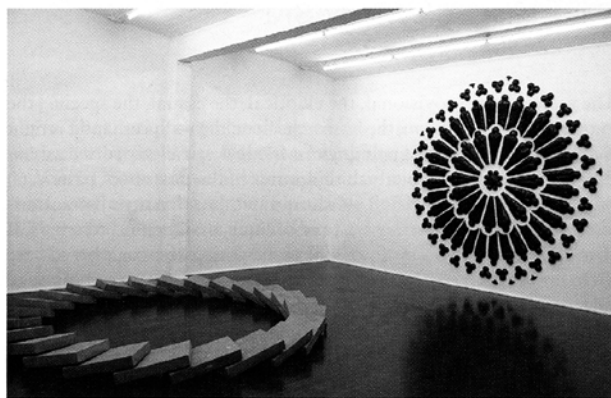
Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.

DÜSSELDORF

Vera Lossau

GALERIE RUPERT PFAB

Vera Lossau pulls off an unusual balancing act with her sculptures. They are self-consciously Conceptual but nevertheless display traces of the artist's hand, and like works in the tradition of Minimalism, they often point to their own spatial contexts, though they also take on a metaphorical dimension—a few are even narrative. Can these things go together? Haven't Conceptual and Minimalist approaches to art always stood in vehement opposition to expressive and metaphorical, let alone narrative, entanglements? As we see in the latest show by this young Düsseldorf-based artist, the combination can work if the contrasts produce an engaging tension.



And this is just what Lossau is after: this tension between Conceptual and Minimalist approaches to sculpture and the metaphorical reach that has been a major part of what sculpture is about. Lossau's references to medieval Madonnas and her fascination with the art of the early Renaissance, on the one hand, and with Marcel Duchamp on the other, are therefore not merely irreconcilable whims but help define her conceptually grounded *modus operandi*. But at the same time, she knows that this tension between modernist reductiveness and metaphorical complexities can never be fully resolved. Lossau's sculptures can come off as absurd—and this is what she wants: "This absurdity gives a tiny sense of freedom, since it exists behind the known structures

Brian O'Doherty, *Duchamp Boxed*, 1968. electrocardiographic tracing, cardboard box, 1 1/2 x 4 x 2 1/2".

