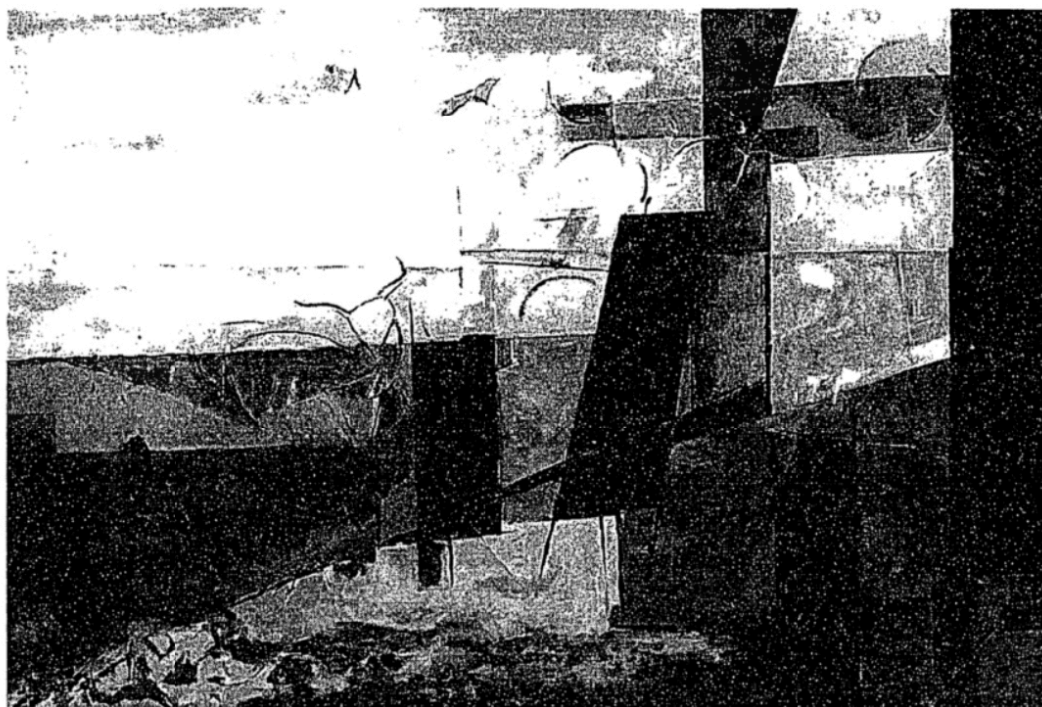


## ART IN REVIEW



The Judith Rothschild Foundation

In works like "Antelopes" (1955), Judith Rothschild allowed figurative intrusions into abstract compositions.

sical myth. Finally, Moyra Davey's installation of 30 snapshot-size pictures of empty liquor bottles suggests both Giorgio Morandi still lifes and lunacy of a chemically induced kind. Ms. Davey, like the other artists in the show, avoids landing hard on any particular target, and her piece makes an apt addition to a suggestive mix.

HOLLAND COTTER

### 'Spectacular Optical'

Thread Waxing Space  
475 Broadway, near Broome Street  
SoHo  
Through July 18

The Thread Waxing Space's latest multimedia extravaganza surveys the territory shared by contemporary art and the movies of David Cronenberg and finds the soil rich with hybridness, both organic and technological: mutating bodies, physical violence, psychological disintegration, weird sex and extravagant hallucination. The exhibition's title is taken from his 1983 movie "Videodrome"; it was the name of an optician's store that served as a front for an underground sect whose snuff videos caused brain tumors. (Mr. Cronenberg can be quite literal when it comes to spelling out society's ills.)

The show here begins with "Stereo" and "Crimes of the Future," two of Mr. Cronenberg's earliest and most intellectual films, where violence often takes place in the voice-overs or a character's mind. More concrete examples follow: the horrific gynecological tools for supposedly deformed women from "Dead Ringers," maquettes of the Brundle Fly, as the genetic accident central to "The Fly" calls himself, and the intricately inlaid, hallucination-inducing helmet from "Videodrome."

The art on hand suggests the body; the organic has become the current site of the abstract, if not of formalism itself. This idea forms with equal conviction in front of Bonnie Collura's monochromatic body fragments, which receive some helpful juice in this company; Fabián Marcaccio's oozing abstractions and Charles Long's festering Eames chair, which is becoming something of a classic of modernism run amok. Jane and Louise Wilson contribute "Crawl Space," a 1995 video notable for its teasing horror and wobbling spatial effects. Artists with a longtime interest in various intimations of horror or organic strangeness include Alexis Rockman, Gregory Crewdson, Tony Oursler, Jason Fox and Jana Sterbak. Among the photographs, Shellburne Thurber's motel rooms, Luisa Lambri's institutional hallway and Miranda Lichtenstein's wood-bound houses evoke scenes of past or future crimes a trifle too predictably. Among the lesser known artists, José Antonio Hernández Díez's giant false fingernails speak for themselves. So does Randall Peacock's "Snowman," an impeccably made fragment of a house or prison containing a radio broadcasting news of violence and mayhem.

ROBERTA SMITH

### 'The Academy of the Sword' Illustrated Fencing Books, 1500 to 1800'

Metropolitan Museum of Art  
Fifth Avenue at 82d Street  
Through the summer of 1999

There was a time when to be a well-dressed and well-educated gentleman you had to wear a sword and know how to use it. Fencing masters held prestigious positions at major universities, and elaborate illustrated textbooks explaining the

art and science of swordsmanship were published, with titles like "The Academy of the Sword by Girard Thibault of Antwerp, wherein Are Set Forth by Mathematical Rules, on the Basis of a Mysterious Circle, the True and Until Now Unknown Secrets of the Use of Weapons on Foot and on Horseback."

This little survey of such manuals is something of a tease. If you're expecting anything like the illuminated Bibles of medieval times, you'll be disappointed. Excepting "The Academy of the Sword" (1628), a massive tome opened to a spectacular and dreamlike double-page engraving of 10 swordsmen on a checkerboard floor in an ornate courtyard, the illustrations in these books are comparatively rudimentary, though not without their vernacular charms. There are examples of different types of swords and daggers on display, too, but better ones can be found in the neighboring arms and armor galleries.

The main intrigue, however, is less visual than sociological. You want to know more about this arcane world of the sword, but mostly the explanatory labels only briefly summarize the pedagogical and technical philosophy of each book. A lot of museum shows need editing; this one wants expansion.

KEN JOHNSON

### Charles Long

Bonakder-Jancou Gallery  
521 West 21st Street  
Chelsea  
Through July 24

Several years ago, Charles Long exhibited comic biomorphic sculptures equipped with headphones through which viewers could listen to the soothing, Muzak-like sounds of the experimental pop group Stereolab. The effect was ironic, yet

transporting. Long's recent work similarly mixes pop, surrealism and modernist abstraction but in a more simplistic, less heady way.

Mr. Long's new wall-mounted sculptures revolve around the motif of a simple shelf, a plank and two brackets, cast in rubber so that it has a cartoony, inflated look. The several shelves of each composition grow arm-thick tubular extensions with bulbous ends. The vinelike tubes snake this way and that, and the turgid ends dangle suggestively or repose on neighboring shelves. "Robert's Shelflessness" consists of six shelves and maybe a dozen tubular extensions, with all parts colored shiny orange or purple. It looks like a collaboration by Magritte, Donald Judd and an anonymous home handyman.

These works have an appealing, goofy presence and they wryly spoof modular Minimalism, but the limited vocabulary makes them seem overly formulaic when seen in quantity. More engagingly complex

is a set of computer-generated prints in which Mr. Long puts penciled biomorphic forms and the blue-lined pattern of yellow legal paper through all sorts of magical spatial permutations.

KEN JOHNSON

### Richard Prince

Barbara Gladstone  
515 West 24th Street  
Chelsea  
Through July 31

Richard Prince's work has always tended to a stylish, Warholian opacity. His puzzling new figurative drawings have that feeling of inner blankness but aren't so stylish; they look like the cliché-ridden efforts of an undergraduate art student.

Each large drawing (several are eight feet high) features the image of a vaguely Asian-looking man whose body is crudely outlined but whose head is drawn with a graphic facility that makes you wonder whether an assistant trained in illustration made it. Surrounding the figure is layered, brushy white space punctuated by spirals, a grocery list that appears over and over, and short jokes repeated until they're not funny anymore.

Maybe the central figure, with its large, staring eyes (crossed in several cases), is a portrait of the artist's soul. But given the kitschy look of the heads, the repetition of the stupid jokes and the stale, pseudo-expressionistic mark making, it makes more sense to see these drawings as anti-self-portraits or images of the post-modern self as a Frankenstein monster stitched together from dead parts. That might explain the sour, depressive mood.

By comparison, there's more feeling of self and life in a piece that here seems an afterthought: four pairs of old flip-flop sandals cast in colored plastics. Each pair retains the impress of its owner's (the artist's?) foot and is displayed on its own pedestal under plexiglass, which gives it a sacramental aura.

KEN JOHNSON