

Jenny Holzer takes on the CIA
Tracey Emin embroiders the truth
I. M. Pei builds an island in Qatar
Peter Coffin launches a UFO
Brian Dettmer destroys The Book

MODERN PAINTERS

NOVEMBER 2008 | ARTINFO.COM

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b6-3,4
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He did hear planes flying overhead.

He did not see any Americans.

Modern Painters

November 2008



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Frances Stark on why Dorothy Parker is the “perfect metaphor” for her work

For last spring’s Whitney Biennial in New York, LA artist Frances Stark presented a digital slide show composed of literary quotations, the artist’s confessions of self-doubt, and images of surprising beauty from the artist’s home, such as piles of paper or a tangle of objects on a desk. Stark has long worked between the spheres of visual art and writing to examine the labor of artmaking and the poignancy (and humor) of a “human, all too human” worldview, creating quiet yet graphically seductive text-based collages and sculptures that use found or written language as material. We talked to her on the eve of her solo exhibition at Portikus. —LK



Banal household tasks and high-minded ruminations are twinned in your work. To this end, what did you do today? And also, what are you reading?
 Today I avoided the studio, the excuse being that some long-overdue personal paperwork that is overflowing out of my handbag needed attention. I have recently dipped into *In Praise of Folly* by Erasmus; an old Richard Hamilton catalogue; also *On Being Ill*, by Virginia Woolf; and an interview with Malcolm McLaren. And I’ve been voraciously reading about all things related to the upcoming US presidential election. It’s an ugly addiction at this point. But I’m eagerly awaiting the arrival of a recent eBay purchase, *A Happy Death*, by Albert Camus. I am hoping this book that I loved 25 years ago (*gasp*) will be just the thing to wean me off the politics.

You once wrote about someone who, when he asked Dorothy Parker if he could see her manuscript, was presented with a box containing a pile of unanswered letters and unpaid bills. In the collages that present the detritus of your daily life, how do you decide what goes in and what stays out?
 I’ve used mostly studio and art-related promotional printed matter that I receive in the mail. My use



of printed matter that comes through my mailbox isn’t interesting because it’s *mine*, but because there are a lot of other people who receive that same stuff. It ends up being just material, like paint.

You show your work in galleries as well as publish books. Can you talk about how preparing for each is different?

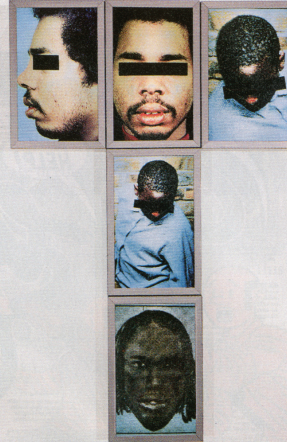
I haven’t published that many books, but I am often shocked at how increasingly intuitive the process is for making work for exhibitions, and that seems to also be the case for the books. Only writing is just very, very different in the sense that I can’t hire an assistant to help me move or glue down some unwieldy scrap.

You’ve quoted Thomas Bernhard’s novel *Old Masters*, in which the main character, Reger, is chastised for being neither a philosopher nor an author but accused of having “sneaked”

into both. What do you think one gains by straddling two disciplines, as you do with art and writing?

Because I am a complete pessimist, it’s hard for me to admit I do gain anything besides anxiety and perpetual self-doubt. At the same time, I am not so naive to acknowledge that without my writing, my artwork might not have an audience, and vice versa. I see my own straddling as very specific to the support structures of the artworld and not nearly as impressive or significant as the kind of cross-discipline straddling (and waffling) that occurs in Bernhard’s characters. But I identify with the process of deferral at play in these characters who are never able to complete that pure text on music, or philosophy, or whatever, and this is not about a kind of interdisciplinary utopia, but psychological despair and human failure. In fact, that Dorothy Parker reference above is a perfect metaphor for my own straddling technique.

“FRANCES STARK,” NOV. 22–JAN. 4, PORTIKUS, FRANKFURT, PORTIKUS.DE



DONALD RODNEY RIVINGTON PLACE

For British artist Donald Rodney, who died in 1998 at age 37 after a lifelong struggle with sickle-cell anemia, physical pain inspired poignant work that linked his tribulations to larger social ills, specifically racism and the marginalization of black artists. This exhibition examines the last 10 years of his life, when his “black” disease resulted in increasing hospitalization and agony. Rodney, who was active in 1980s black-artist coalitions, such as the Pan-Afrikan Connection (later the Blk Art Group), oscillated between intensely personal works (sometimes using his own X-rays or skin grafts) to political indictments. His *Self-Portrait as Clinton McCurbin*, for example, was named for a black man who died in police custody in 1987. Debuting at this exhibition is John Akomfrah’s film *The Genome Chronicles*, a three-part “poem” that Akomfrah says “captures the private drama of a man who, faced with death, turned to a camera for solace, for assurance, for respite, for redemption.”

THROUGH NOV. 29, RIVINGTONPLACE.ORG