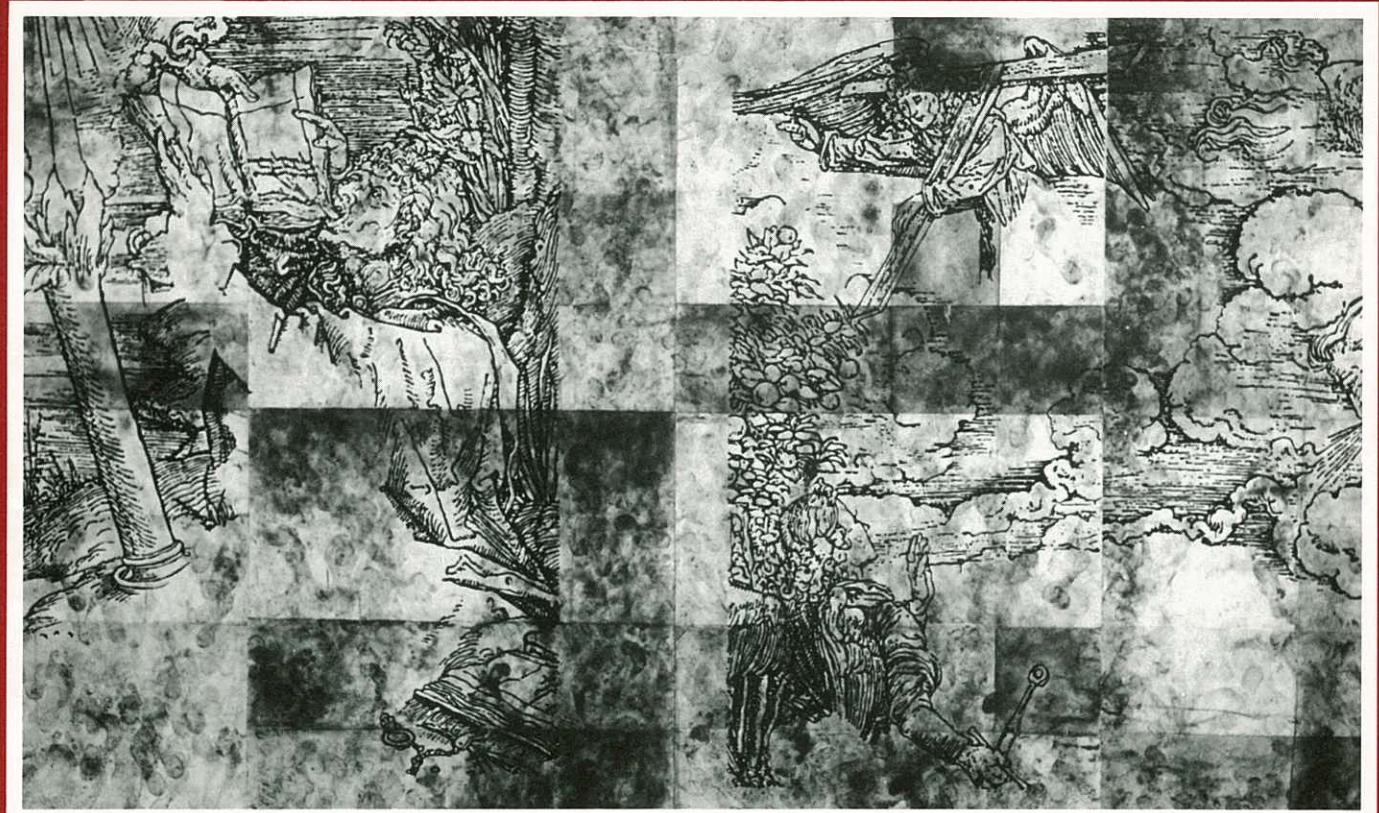


Australian Centre for Contemporary Art

ANTICHAMBER



SAKARIS / THEMANN

18 MARCH - 12 APRIL
1992

Genesis Apocalypse VELVET

Antichamber explores, amongst other things, the internal architecture of the historical process as understood by the Modern West in a post Cold War world. Believing it to be the only legitimate movement in history, the capitalist West has tended to judge all that is outside its economic and technological progress, as beyond its *salvation*. From the premodern theological model of history, capitalism borrows its pivotal centre of history (incarnation/human kind) from which all events, from beginning to end, are interpreted. The Modern West's absolved/vindicated consumer society logic places the (consumer) human self at the centre of existence. Once the incarnation of deity, now the deification of the human self, affects the interpretation of all that is believed to have happened and will happen. In the narrativization of happenings, the present runs like a seam between and before past and future; a hallway in *between*, joining and separating; an

ante-chamber *before* beginning and end; a waiting room as draft-room in which the narrative architecture of history is designed. (In the waiting room, the afflicted self reflects on existence asserting



presence by fearing its loss. In such spaces we write our stories under the sway of Eros and Thanatos, beginning and end).

It is between the covers of a (the) book that beginning, middle and end run their plotted course. In examining the Western view of history as narrative, *Antichamber* incorporates three visual narratives, two of which highlight the West as a culture of the book and the book as the sign of Western culture. Depictions of beginning (Genesis) and end (Apocalypse) are laid over the pagan Gigantomachy (the battle between new and old Gods) which was the basis of the *Alter Altar* installation project. The narrative drawings of *Antichamber* taken from book illuminations/illustrations by the post Byzantine Greek artist, Klontzas, and the proto-Reformation German artist, Dürer, evoke a typological reading of history — what Greece began (the Great Chain of Being), Germany completed (The Holocaust).

Evangelos Sakaris 1992

Above: Albrecht Dürer, St John Swallows the Book, 1497/98
Left: Klontzas, Illustration for The Book of Genesis, 16th Century

IN THE WAITING ROOM...

In the introduction to the *Antichamber* installation, Evangelos Sakaris writes:

In the waiting room, the afflicted self reflects on existence asserting presence by fearing its loss. In such spaces we write our stories under the sway of Eros and Thanatos, beginning and end.

Such a statement locates itself in the main corpus, as a strand in the continuation of contemporary conceptual deductism, pinpointing philosophical despair and spiritual sorrow against revisions of western universalist allegories and their textual histories.

Evangelos Sakaris and Mark Themann's collaborative installation at A.C.C.A. is their sixth together since commencing in 1989 with *Towards a Migration of Object* at Benalla Art Gallery. *Alter Altar*, first shown at Verity Street in 1991, appeared in four different regional venues, the installation

varied significantly, adapting and responding to the architecture of each gallery.

With this current exhibition they continue a textually based debate focusing on key archival monuments from art history. Pictorially and spatially reconstructing archetypal images and details, their collaborations isolate the mythic power of particular western narratives with a deconstructive practice that re-builds a unifying critique on homologies it seeks to isolate.

Using moral, perhaps fundamentalist paradigms, invisible mortal fissures and contradictions which incorporate sin, injustice, loss, murder, power by conquest, provide, through inference, the sub-narratives or antagonies to the dead books of idealized modern intellectual narrative.

No doubt western culture's hieratic deeds and heroic pieties come from the mess and gore of flesh



meeting power, but they also present as forms separated from human experience as they take their place for us within logos as archetype.

From the privileged position of a textually assessive or revisionist perspective, such commentary on the mind history of the recent west re-incarnates a new theology, which is why the key to Sakaris and Themann's installation is in fact The Book, and in The Narrative.

Moving stories, both millenarian (Klontzas' Genesis 16th Century manuscript) and eschatological (Dürer's *Apocalypse* 15th Century woodcut) physically around from space to space and from suggested gaps of moral defeats to gaps of moral absences, the *Antichamber* functions not for resistance or opposition and certainly not for skepticism or cynicism, but for passage into and out of the gallery's spaces. In the telling of any story, it is critically implied that the acts of history are somehow unconsciously absolved by simply being kept on the move as word and image, and, as word and image keep being reproduced.

Each reproduction, each tracing, leaves a vestigial mark, a shadow, a smudge, but the distance from the true moral condition of all beginnings, all endings, in fact all histories, is lost. This *Antichamber* of origins provides two moral instructions: the discarded suitcases are symbols of passage, exit and holocaust; the pile of soap is functional, as is the iconography of primary narratives in the way that these are used to remove the facts and even the make up new ones which cannot conceal the truth.

Narrative in this world view becomes historically secular and dubious, providing absolutions, consolations and substitutions for the absence and therefore for the pursuit of absolute truth.

The beginnings and endings provided by western narrative archetypes are for these artists clearly not unified enough, either historically, or morally. The Book for Sakaris and Themann obviously cannot contain the truth, but their deconstruction

presupposes another repository, and in such a theological pursuit there only remains presence, the truth incarnate, the deity in revelation.

In this sense then, Sakaris/Themann's collaborative installation indeed places them in the antichamber, not so much between their postulated Greek beginnings and German endings but between an antithetical invocation of an all-knowing, all-seeing God and his untrustworthy and dishonest western translators (the narrators).

Perhaps we see here an old interpretive theological dispute between the mysticism of the Eastern church and a perceived history of western spirituality as a series of textual juridical battles initially fought out around the edicts and schisms of Kings, Popes and antichrists.

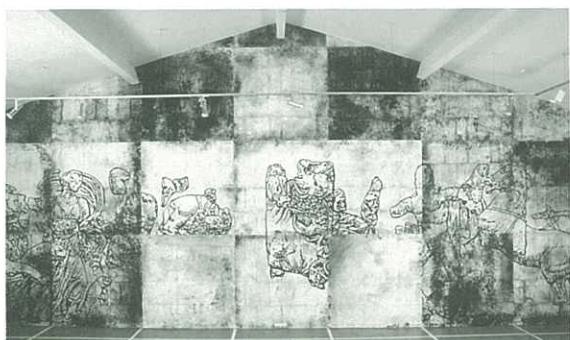
In this antichamber/waiting room, the concepts of Time and History as the events that mark Time, are in fact traversed and transcended. Its ephemerality as a transitional place is not contemptible, nor is it an absurd interruption to our real Time. The waiting room is in fact the place to be, for it embodies sacred Time as opposed to the profane Time of the western narrative tradition.

If there are acceptable liturgical beginnings and endings rather than historical ones, then these collaborations cross between critical iconoclasm, exposing on the one hand a seductive and deluding use of the didactic mythological aesthetic object and on the other invoking fundamentalist mysteries of orthodox spirituality as an alternative, both positions placing the work squarely within Christian religious practice and its struggles.

In this context Evangelos Sakaris and Mark Themann's cultural origins in Greece and Germany, respectively, are self-consciously based in culture and tradition. The work is, in the strictest sense, conservative; it does not propound the deconstructive end of cultural meaning presupposed by proof of cumulative textual and historical lesions within The Stories. Deconstruction of myth is here an inductive method for contemporary confirmation into the Christological *illud tempus*, the sacred Time at the end of History.

In this sense, profane history and dubious mythical narratives are no different to transcended concepts of liturgical, mystical Time or presence, for both depend on a historiographical consciousness about Europe which has internalized a view of culture as the supreme moment which precedes and announces death. At the end of history the incarnation reveals itself and there will occur the periodical recovery of the Great Time, of the beginnings. The Greek/German relationship is but two sides of being between messianic mythologies waiting for

Sakaris/Themann, *Alter Altar Verity Street*, 1991, paper, charcoal, plates, industrial type, nails. Installation view.





Sakaris/Themann, *Antichamber*, 1992. Work in progress. Photographs The artists.

the great Death (The Apocalypse). In *Antichamber* deconstruction functions as a tool of Apocalyptic hope.

Nordic paganism in its denouncement of Christian values acknowledged the prophesied eschaton, the *ragnarok*, the catastrophic end of the world, a Race memory of the gigantic combat between the gods and the demons, ending in the death of all the gods and all the heroes and a final regression of the world into chaos. Even though the *ragnarok* did not preclude the rebirth of the world, its myth of recurrent creations and destructions of the world challenged a Christian eschatology rich in promises and consolations for a fatally pessimistic end of all gods, and a vision of the world in which all would all perish.¹

The main epistemological challenge presented by such a fusion of abstract eastern Christian mysticism with deconstructive discourse theory is that it marries two seemingly contradictory systems. Anti-mythology (in this instance *Antichamber*'s rhetorical premise) was not only a cliche of the Enlightenment, it was the platform of Christian polemics against the pagan world. The Positivism that is located at the origins of our contemporary critical intellectual knowledge is also Christian. So we then arrive at a schizmatic position, which sets up denials in the face of overwhelming cultural contradictions of which Edward Said can write quite easily:

Contemporary discourse is fundamentally anti-dynastic in its attitudes, to the work, to the critic, to knowledge, to reality. Orphaned by the radical Freudian, Sassurean, Nietzschean critique of origins, traditions and knowledge itself, contemporary criticism has achieved its methodological independence by forfeiting an active situation in the world. It has no faith in traditional continuities (nation, family, biography, period), rather it improvises... making order out of extreme discontinuities. Its culture is a negative one of absence, anti-representation and ignorance... It is a praxis of (only) textual functions.²

Sakaris/Themann are breakaway revisionists, theological advocates of a narrative which dispenses with itself while seeking dispensation.

Elizabeth Gertsakis February 1992

NOTES

1. Eliade, Mircea, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities*, The Myths of the Modern World, Harper New York, 1960, pp. 23-38
2. Said, Edward, *The World, The Text and The Critic Roads Taken and Not Taken in Contemporary Criticism*, Faber and Faber, London, 1984, pp. 140-157

SAKARIS / THEMANN

EVANGELOS SAKARIS

1959 Born Greece
Arrived in Melbourne 1966
1982-84 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Phillip Institute, Melbourne

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1992 *True Cross/love in two dimensions*, 13 Verity Street Gallery, Richmond, Melbourne
1990 *X-ED ENDINGS*, 13 Verity Street Gallery, Richmond, Melbourne
1989 *Migration of Meaning*, Rodiaki Epavli, Rhodes, Greece

COLLABORATIVE EXHIBITION

1992 *Eggopagus (traversing water)* (with Ann Wulff and Constantine Koukias), Chameleon Contemporary Art Space, Hobart

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1991 *Second language*, Curator: Nick Tsoutas, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
1987 *Kentro Tehnis*, George Street, Fitzroy

CURATORIAL PROJECT

1991 *Departures, II*, Linden Gallery, St Kilda, Melbourne

GRANT

1991-2 Australia Council, Visual Arts/Crafts Board Project Grant

MARK THEMANN

1958 Born Melbourne, Australia
1965-1972 Lived in Germany
1981 Bachelor of Education, Melbourne State College, Victoria
1982 Master of Fine Arts, California State University, Long Beach, USA

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1990 *Objects For A Cavity*, Christine Abrahams Gallery, Melbourne
Thresholds, George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne, Melbourne
1984 *Security*, Gallery C, The University Art Museum, California State University, Long Beach, USA
Art Space Gallery, Los Angeles, California, USA (with Roy Herwick)

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1989 Irving Sculpture Gallery, Sydney, New South Wales
Roberts Art Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
1988 Faculty of Art Gallery, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne
1987 Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

1986 Northern Territory Museum of Arts & Science, Darwin
The Lewer Bequests and Penrith Regional Art Gallery
1984 Source Gallery, San Francisco, USA
Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, USA
University Library Gallery, California State Polytechnic University, USA
1983 The Pennsylvania State College, USA
University Art Museum, Gallery C, California State University, Long Beach, USA
1982 Gryphon Gallery, Melbourne

GRANTS

1988 Project Grant, Visual Art/Crafts Board, Australia Council
1986 Studio Establishment Grant, Crafts Board, Australia Council
1984 Phi Beta Kappa Scholarship — International Scholar, Phi Beta Kappa, USA
1983 Professional Development Grant, Crafts Board, Australia Council

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Sakaris, E., *Thresholds*, George Paton Gallery, Melbourne, August 1990
Rooney, R., *Traditions of the New — and New Traditions*, *The Weekend Australian*, October 6-7, 1990
Jackson, B., *Second Language, Art & Text*, No. 41, January 1992
Sakaris, E., *Alter Altar Chameleon*, Chameleon Contemporary Art Space, Melbourne, 1991
Sakaris, E., *Lost Tongue Pleasures and the Host-Isle Language*, Chameleon Contemporary Art Space, Melbourne, 1991
Tsoutas, N., *Second Language*, Institute of Modern Art Projects, Brisbane, 1991
Hoffie, P., forthcoming *Eyeline*, Brisbane, 1992

SAKARIS / THEMANN

COLLABORATIVE EXHIBITIONS

1992 *Antichamber*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art
Alter Altar, CC.AS, Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Canberra
1991 *Alter Altar*, Verity Street, 13 Verity Street Gallery, Melbourne
Alter Altar, IMA, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane (Second Language Show)
Alter Altar, Chameleon, Chaemeleon Contemporary Art Space, Hobart
Host-Isle, Chameleon Contemporary Art Space, Hobart
1989 *Towards a Migration of Objects*, Benalla Art Gallery, Benalla, Victoria

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