by manipulating her outer reality. Her body is a found object which, "assisted" by a few props—a talismanic economy of means, suggestive of sexual curiosity and penetration—becomes a theatrical statement of the emotional truth about her. Similarly, Condo shows what Michael Eigen calls the "original face" masked by our everyday composure—the hysterical, freakish face, our very own distorted Dorian Gray self-portrait, usually kept hidden in the attic—or is it catacombs?—of our psyche. Where Hartman punctures the myth of the passive ideality of the female body with his tacks and crutches and dominatrices and Amazons, Condo's loony tune grotesque fantasy of a face—a crazy composite of comic strip fragments that seems uncannily alive—punctures the myth of the expressive nobility of the human face. Woman indulges in transcendence, to refer to a Hartman title, but she is far from transcendental, just as Condo's creatures are far from superior, however weirdly sovereign and monumental. Both artists may seem to be anti-humanistic—and Hartman anti-feminist—but they disclose the unwitting humanity of their subjects. They show us the obscene human truth behind obviously scenic beauty and pretension. In letting down appearances rather than keeping them up, they achieve a perversely all too human perspective.

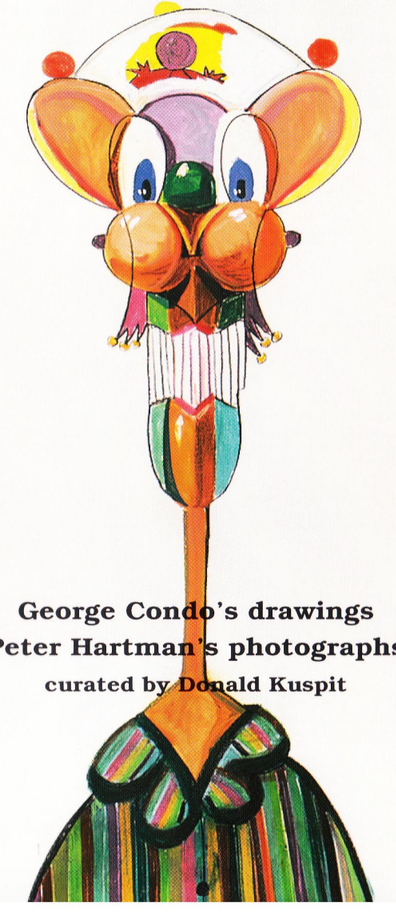
Their images are freshly unexpected at a time the unexpected has become a postmodern cliché, a leftover piece of modernist expectation. They are genuinely subversive, at a time when subversion has become a cynical culture industry. They reach to the core of abnormality at a time when abnormality has

Apex Art
291 Church Street
New York, New York 10013

cover:
George Condo Particle Pete 1996 80" x 80"

Screaming Heads, Grating Bodies

April 11- May 11, 1996

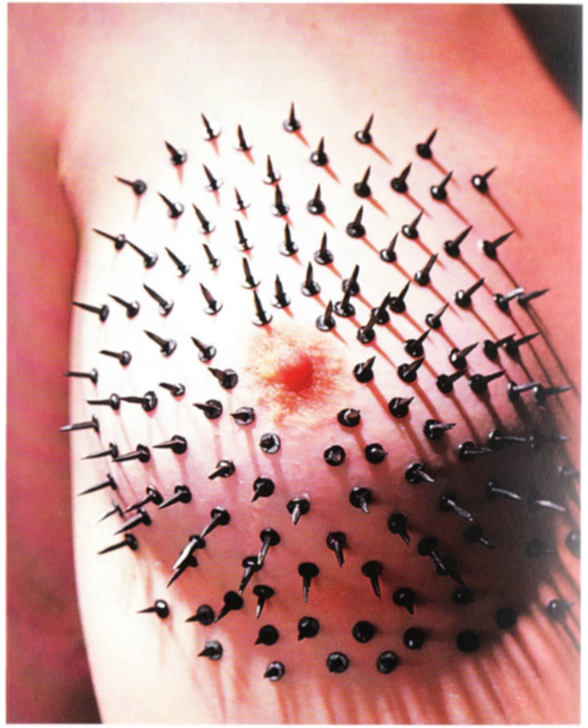


George Condo's drawings
Peter Hartman's photographs
curated by Donald Kuspit

Screaming Heads, Grating Bodies

George Condo's Drawings
Peter Hartman's Photographs

George Condo's "screaming heads" and Peter Hartman's "grating bodies" make a wonderful loving couple: on the one hand, the human face is reduced to tragicomic monstrousness, exposing the sick absurdity of the psyche hidden behind it; on the other hand, the female body is turned into a piece of gamy, sometimes macabre art, suggesting that the person within the body is as perverse as the body is perfect. Condo and Hartman are anti-idealists—pathologists of the ideal, divulging the bitter emotional truth—the abnormality—it masks. Hartman shows the "psychological body" behind the physical body, to refer to the phrase in the quotation that veils the female body in Desire and Capital. That is, he shows the inner reality of woman



Peter Hartman In Defense of Feminism 1993 30" x 40"

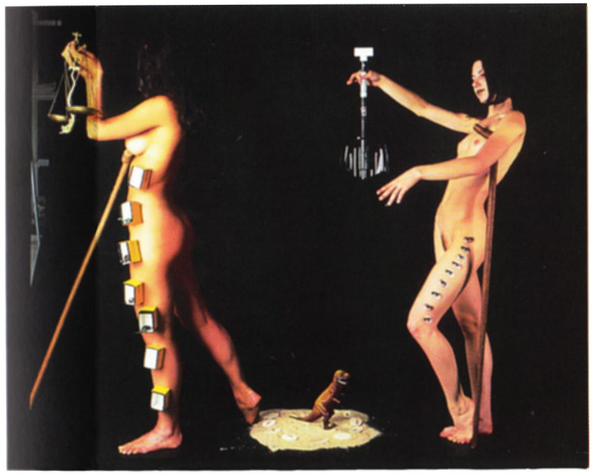
become talk show chic. Their works are informed by a rage increasingly rare in art—a measured, visionary rage far from the shrill, self-blinding rage of would-be activist art. Condo's crazy clowns and Hartman's bitch goddesses are masterpieces of demystification-desublimations of what has always been regarded as sublime. Their violent wit disinvests in the object of their ironical devotion, destroying its power—Condo's faces and Hartman's bodies are, in their different ways, repulsive. They may have a residual power of menace, but they have lost their authoritarian presence- female beauty has lost its persuasiveness in Hartman's images, and Condo demonstrates that ugliness is always more fascinating than beauty.

The bizarre, unnerving character of Condo and Hartman's images has, technically, to do with the fact

George Condo Raging Schizo at the Gate 1996 80" x 80"

that they are perverse art historical constructions. Condo's "artificial realism," as he calls it, is at once surreal and cubist, with prominent vestiges of popular culture representation, especially the goggle eyes. Hartman, as his numerous reprises of official masterpieces suggests, is determined to show Bodies imprinted by History, that is, that woman's body as become a historical text, antiquated if still relevant for its subjective import. (Many of his images verge on parody—of both art and woman—as the replacement

George Condo Stepmonk's Diary 1996 80" x 80"



Peter Hartman The Cult of Copying 1994 30" x 40"

of the hard iron in Man Ray's Gift (1921) by a soft breast in In Defense of Feminism and buttocks in The Rear Guard Confronts The Avant Garde, indicate.) Thus their works have an analytic edge—cut to the quick of preconceptions, dismembering them in the very act of rendering them, reducing them to "mock ups" in the very act of making them self-evident. In this, they are as subversive as they are "conservative." As such, they have achieved that unusual thing, a postmodern balance of power.

Donald Kuspit