WIM DELVOYE

New & Improved







Alain Robbe

Grillet

newmuseum
NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York
In Association with Rectapublishers

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Published in 2001 on the occasion of the exhibition *Wim Delvoye: Cloaca*, organized by Dan Cameron and presented at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, January 24 – April 14, 2002.

Designed by *Kim Beirnaert with Wim Delvoye*
Typesetting by *Kim Beirnaert*
Copy-editing by *Gianni Degryse*
Texts pp. 49–57, 109–119 translated by *Dirk Verbiest*
Printed by *Cassochrome, Waregem (Belgium)*
Bound by *N.V. Scheerders van Kerchove's, Sint-Niklaas (Belgium)*

Photography:
Franziska Bodmer: pages 26, 40, 42, 43, 46
Bart Cloet: page 71
Cameraphoto, Venice: page 54
Michiel Hendryckx: page 78
Bart Leijnen: pages 63–68, 87, 88, 90–94
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Margherita Spiluttini: page 36 (Courtesy Kunsthalle Wien)
Wim van Egmond: pages 27, 28, 38, 39, 41, 44–46, 52, 53, 57

Text Credits:
— Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*
Faber and Faber, London, 1984, pp. 241–242
Originally published as *Nesmesitna lehkost byti*, Prague, 1984.
— Dominique Laporte, *History of Shit*
MIT Press – Documents Magazine, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 59–61, pp. 80–83
Originally published as *Histoire de la merde (Prologue)*, Bourgeois Editeur, 1978.
— Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess. Selected Writings 1927–1939*
University of Minnesota Press, Mineapolis, 1985, pp. 5–9
Originally published in *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, 1970.
— Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*
University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis-London, 1987, pp. 147–51
Originally published as *Kritik der zynishen Vernunft*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1983.
— Peter Bexte, *Blind Opticians*
Originally published as *Blinde Optiker* in *Mehr Licht*,
Merve Verlag, Berlin, 1999, pp. 33–49.
— Salvador Dali, *Aerodynamic appearances of "beings-objects"*
In: *Oui*, nr. 2, collection Meditations, Denoël-Gauthier, 1979
Originally published in *Minotaure*, nr. 6, pp. 33–34, Paris, 1934.

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ISBN 90-9015387-x

FRONTCOVER: 2001, CLOACA – NEW & IMPROVED
BACKCOVER: 1995, FUCK YOU

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The Unbearable Lightness of Being

MILAN KUNDERA

The dispute between those who believe that the world was created by God and those who think it came into being of its own accord deals with phenomena that go beyond our reason and experience. Much more real is the line separating those who doubt being as it is granted to man (no matter how or by whom) from those who accept it without reservation.

Behind all the European faiths, religious and political, we find the first chapter of Genesis, which tells us that the world was created properly, that human existence is good, and that we are therefore entitled to multiply. Let us call this basic faith *a categorical agreement with being*.

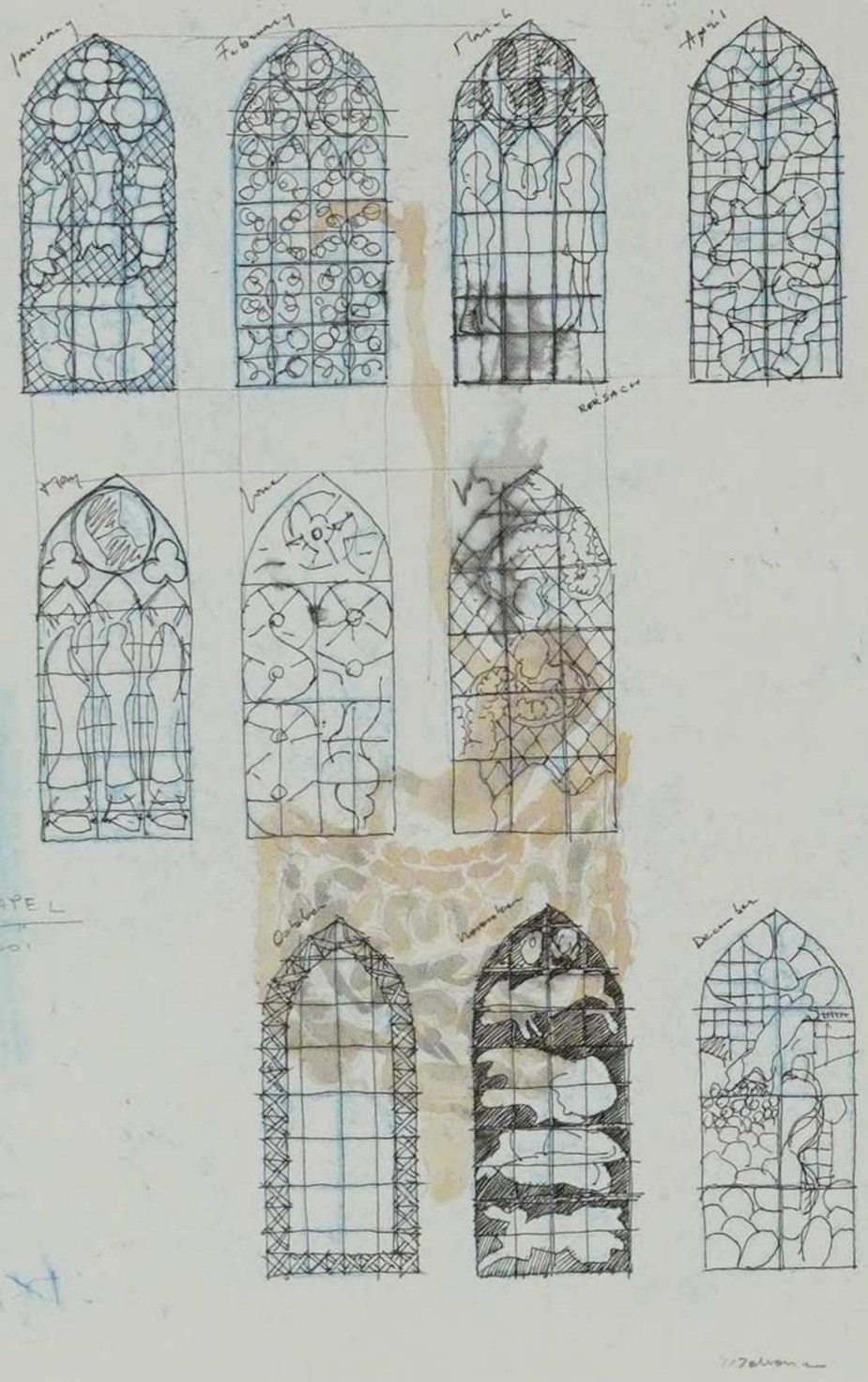
The fact that until recently the word "shit" appeared in print as s— has nothing to do with moral considerations. You can't claim that shit is immoral, after all! The objection to shit is a metaphysical one. The daily defecation session is daily proof of the unacceptability of Creation. Either/or: either shit is acceptable (in which case don't lock yourself in the bathroom!) or we are created in an unacceptable manner.

It follows, then, that the aesthetic ideal of the categorical agreement with being is a world in which shit is denied and everyone acts as though it did not exist. This aesthetic ideal is called *kitsch*.

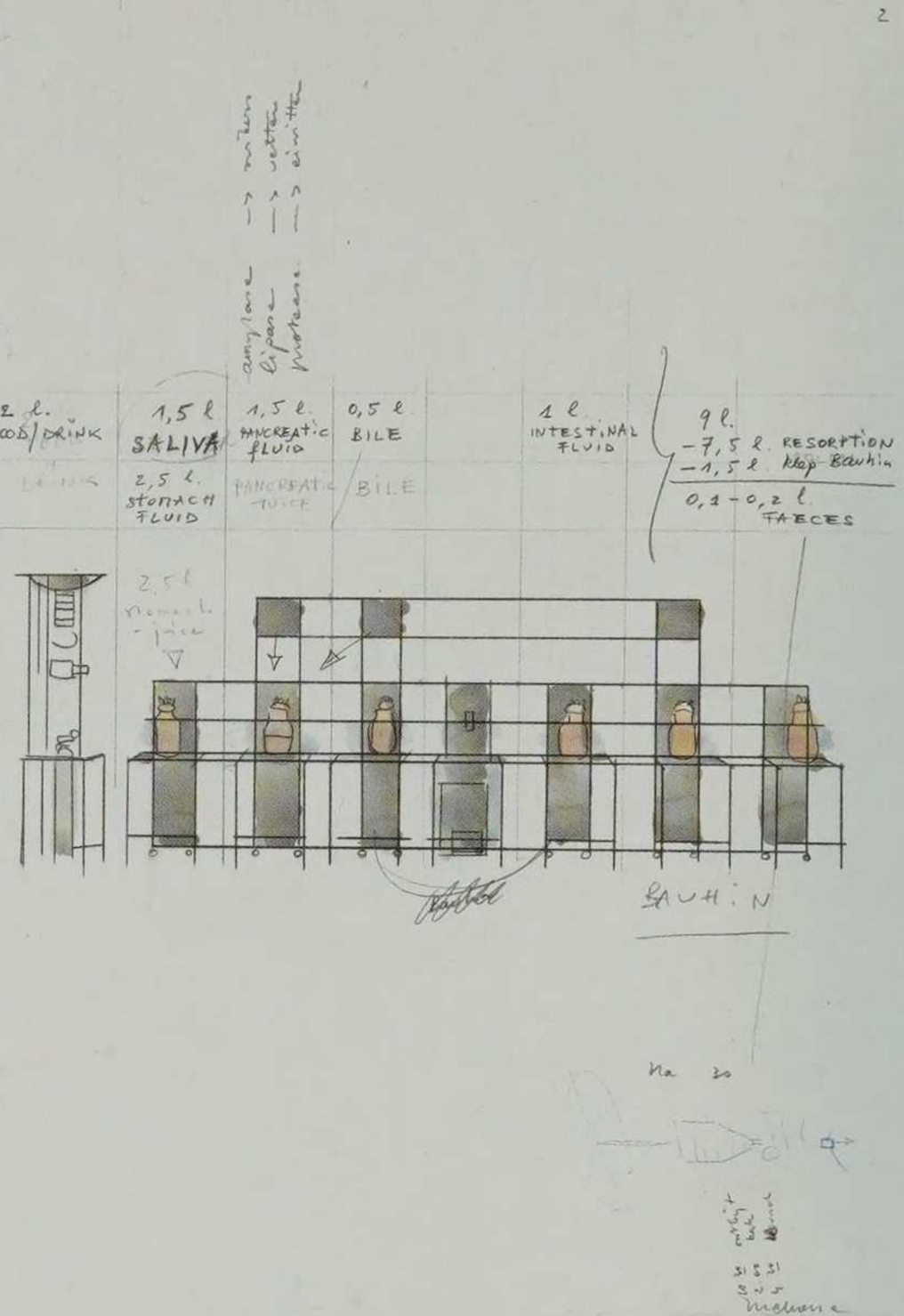
"Kitsch" is a German word born in the middle of the sentimental nineteenth century, and from German it entered all Western languages. Repeated use, however, has obliterated its original metaphysical meaning: kitsch is the absolute denial of shit, in both the literal and the figurative senses of the word; kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence.

DRAWINGS 1997–2001

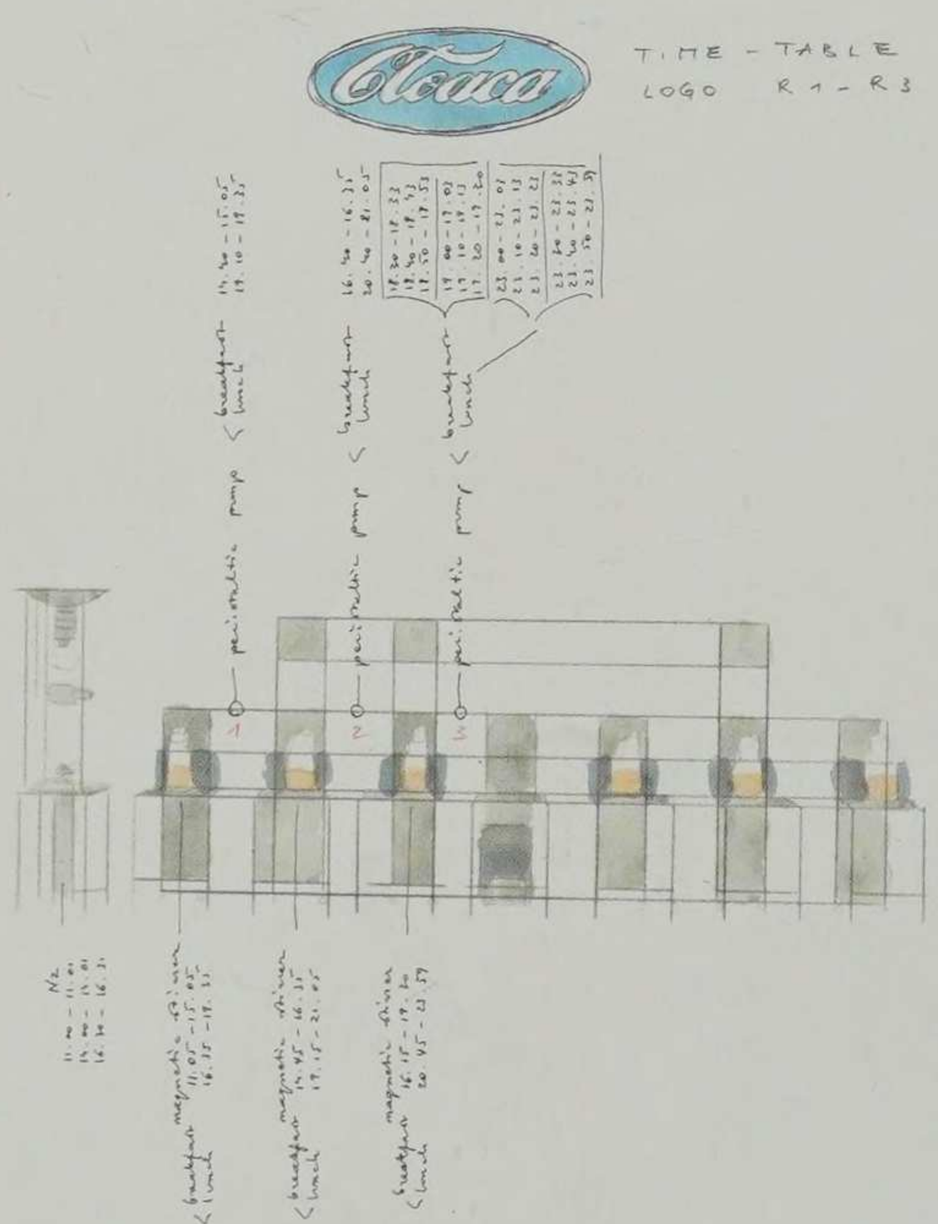
PENCIL, INK AND WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER



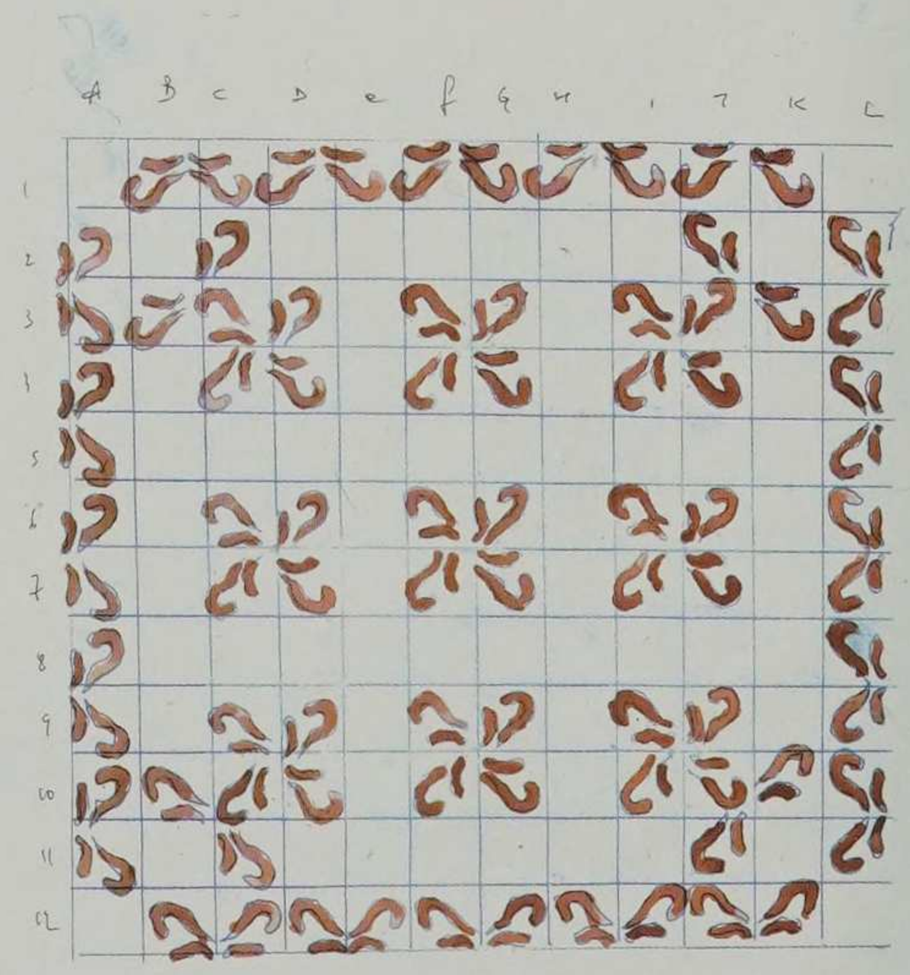
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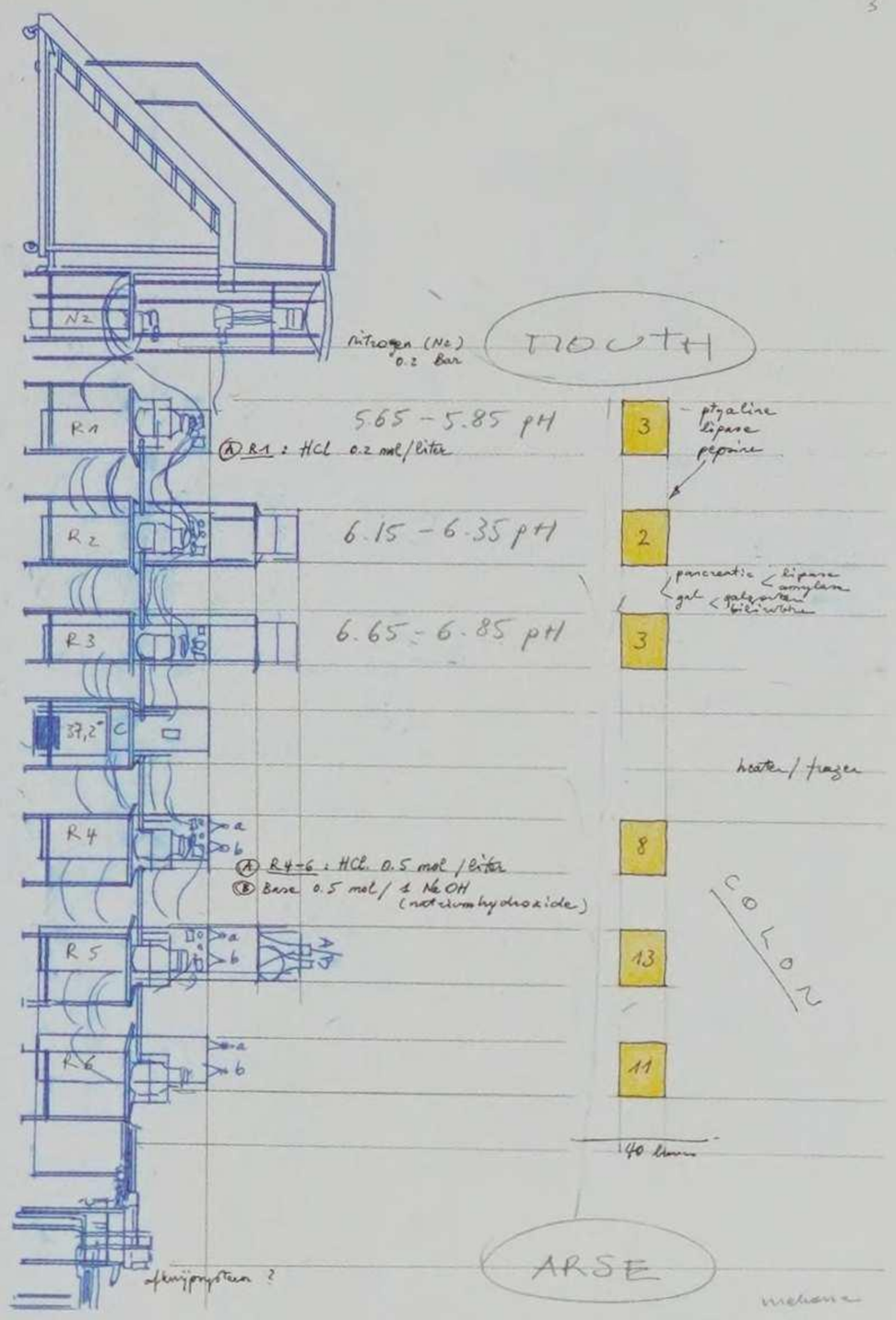
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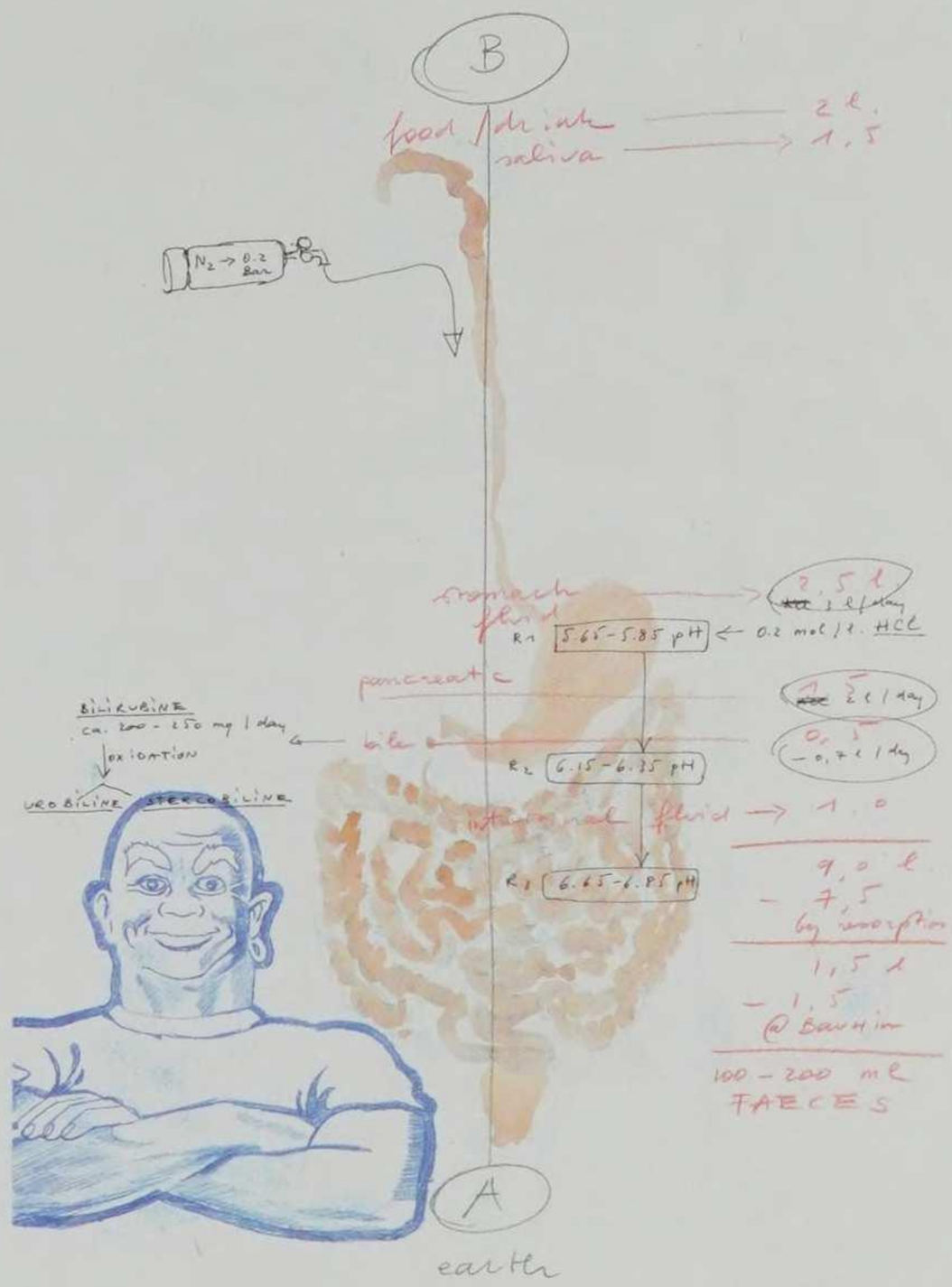
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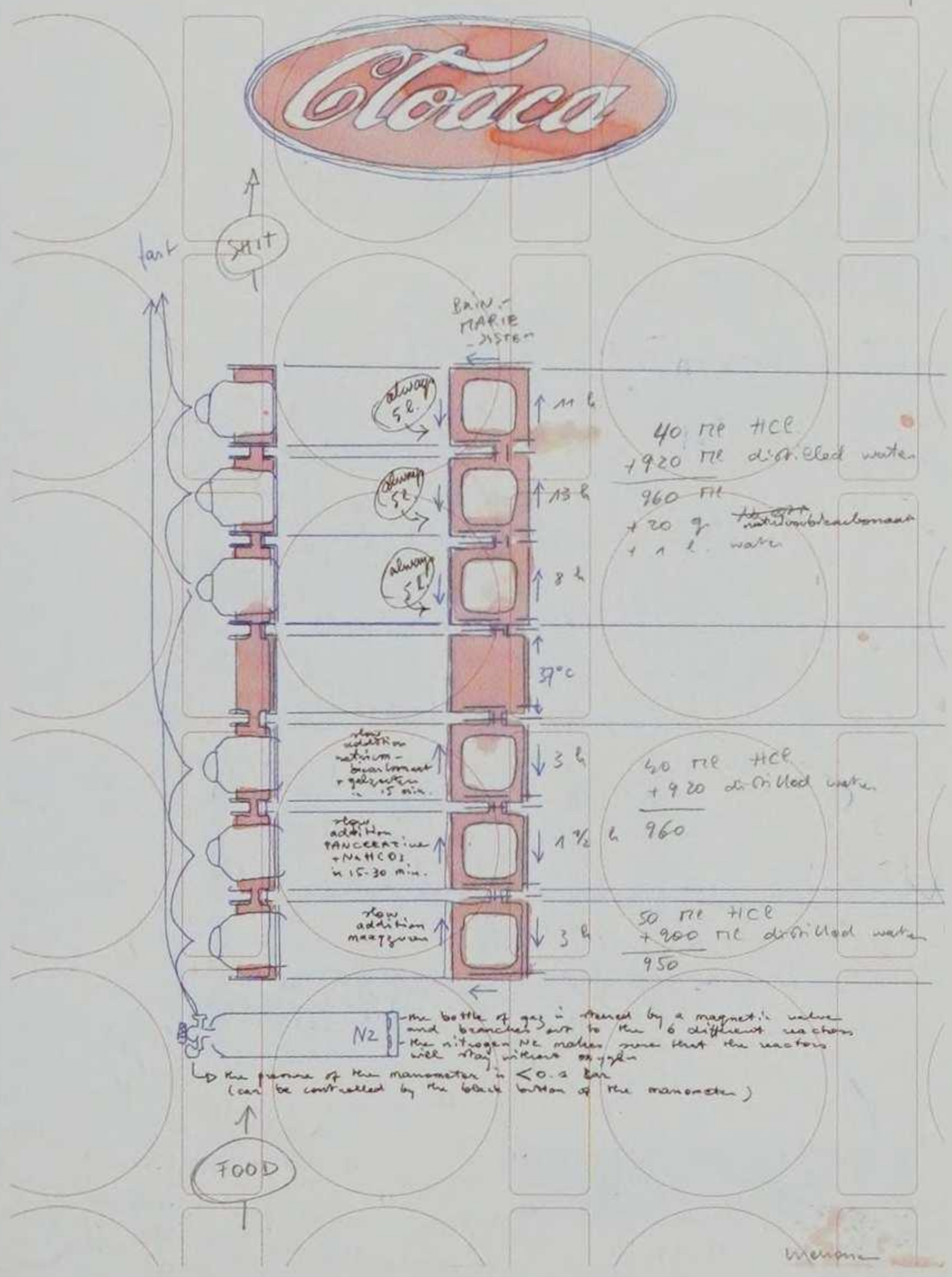
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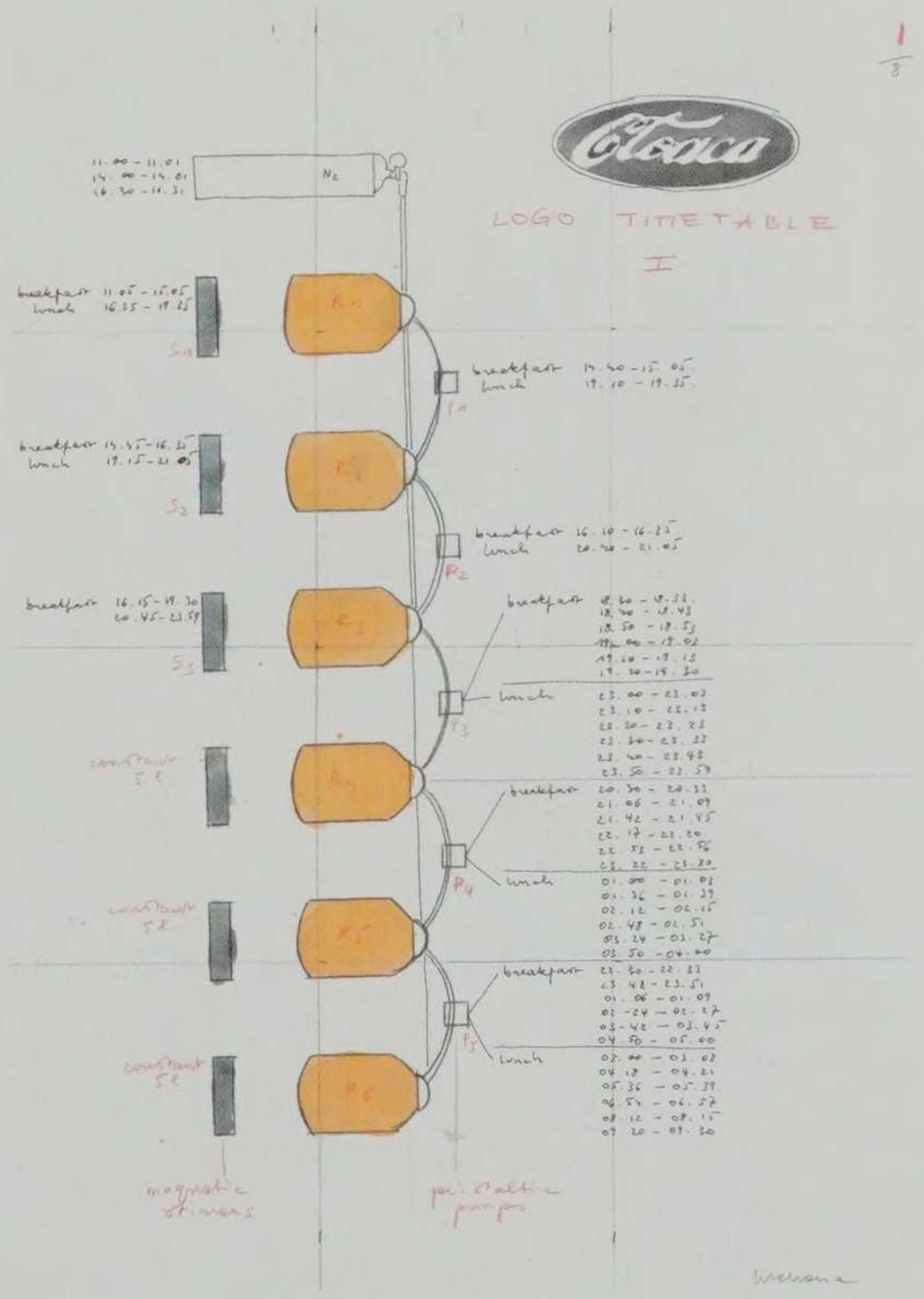
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24 1/2 x 17 INCHES (62 x 43 CM)



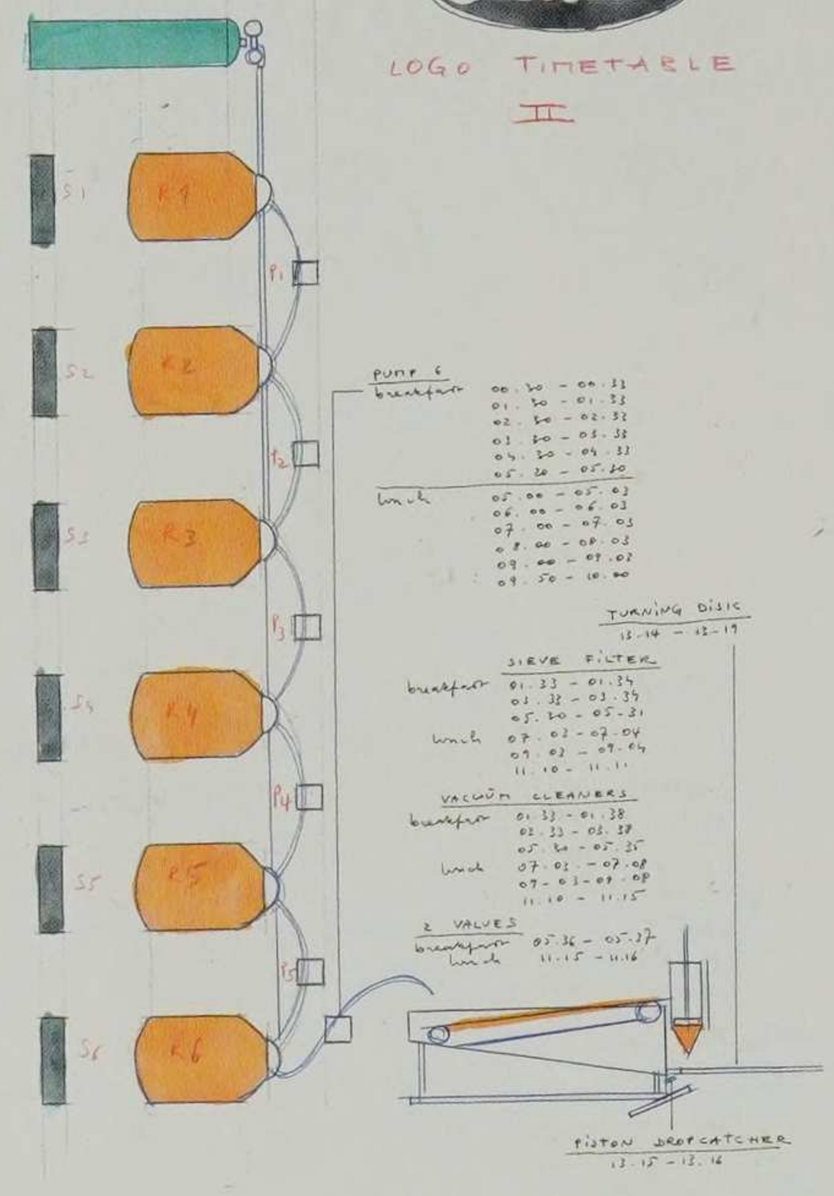
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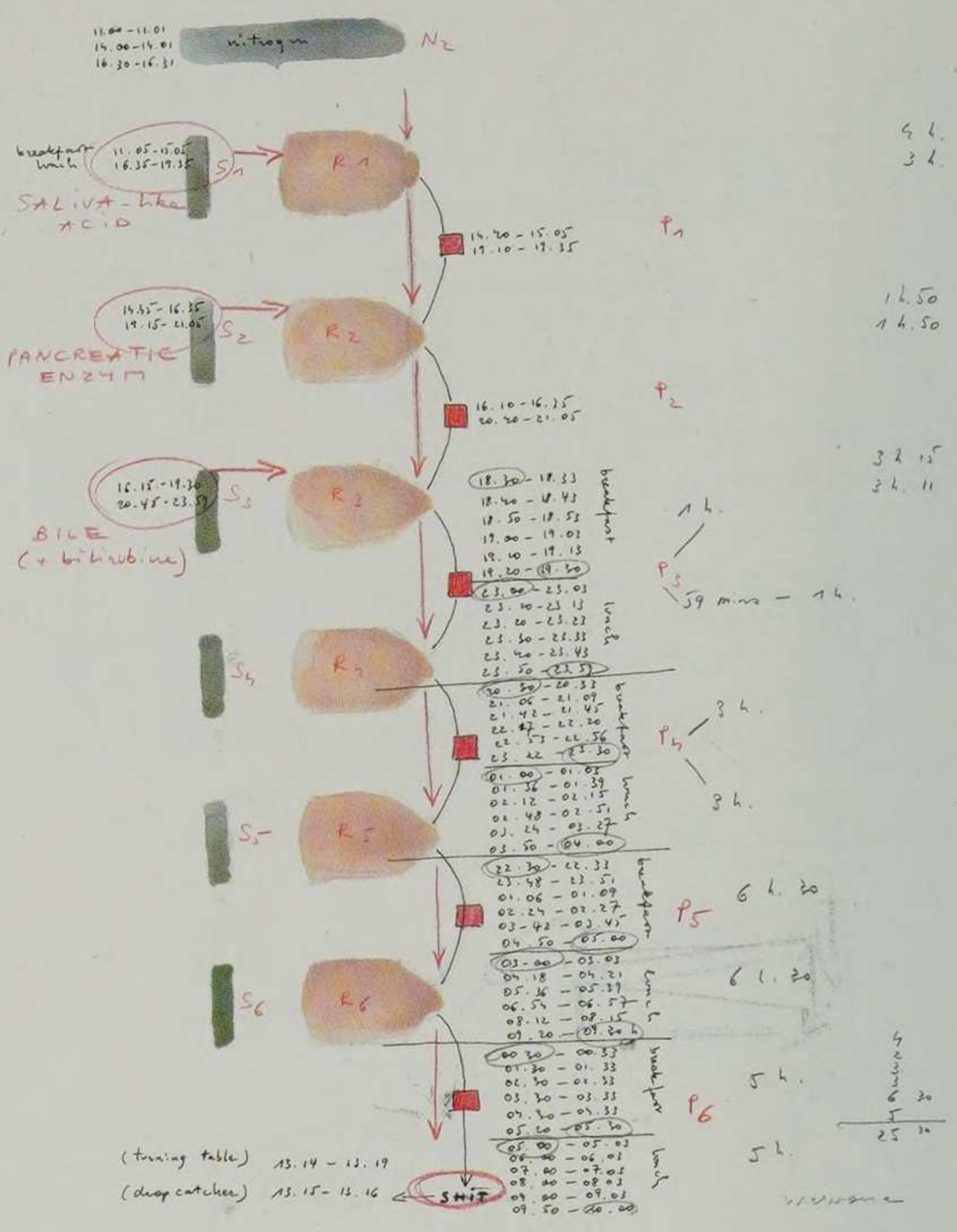
Cloaca

LOGO TIMETABLE
II

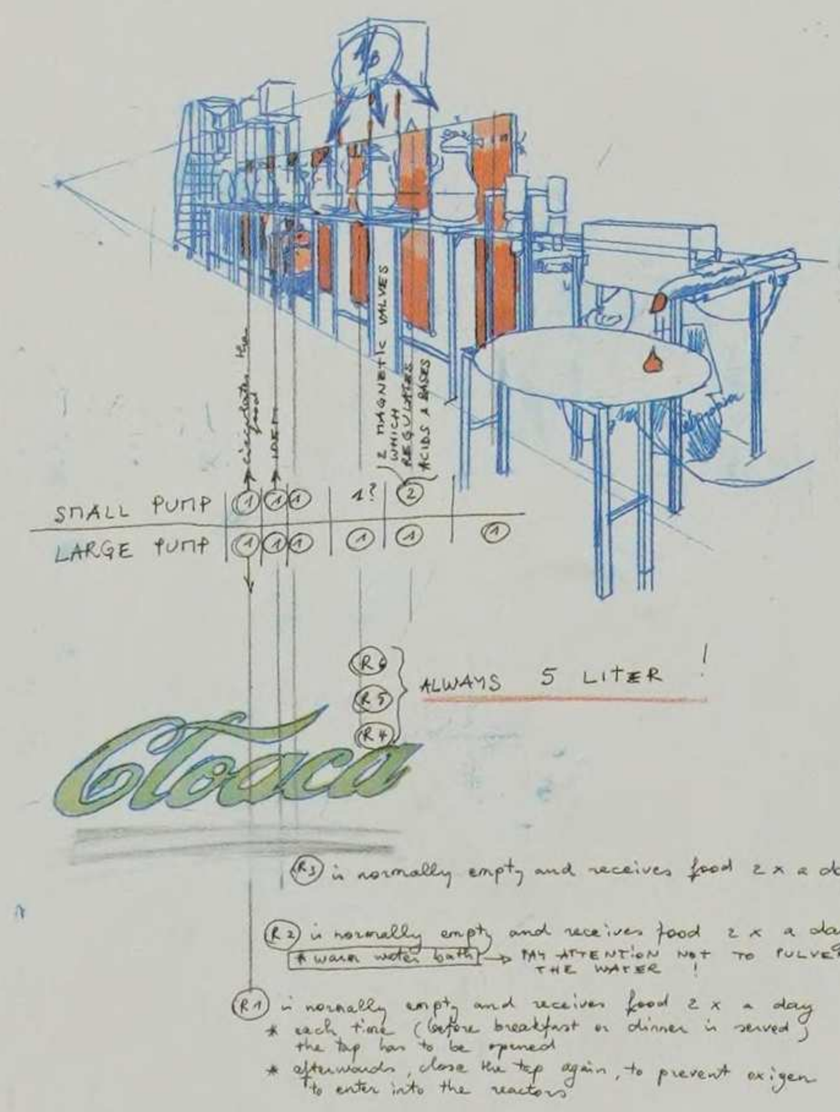


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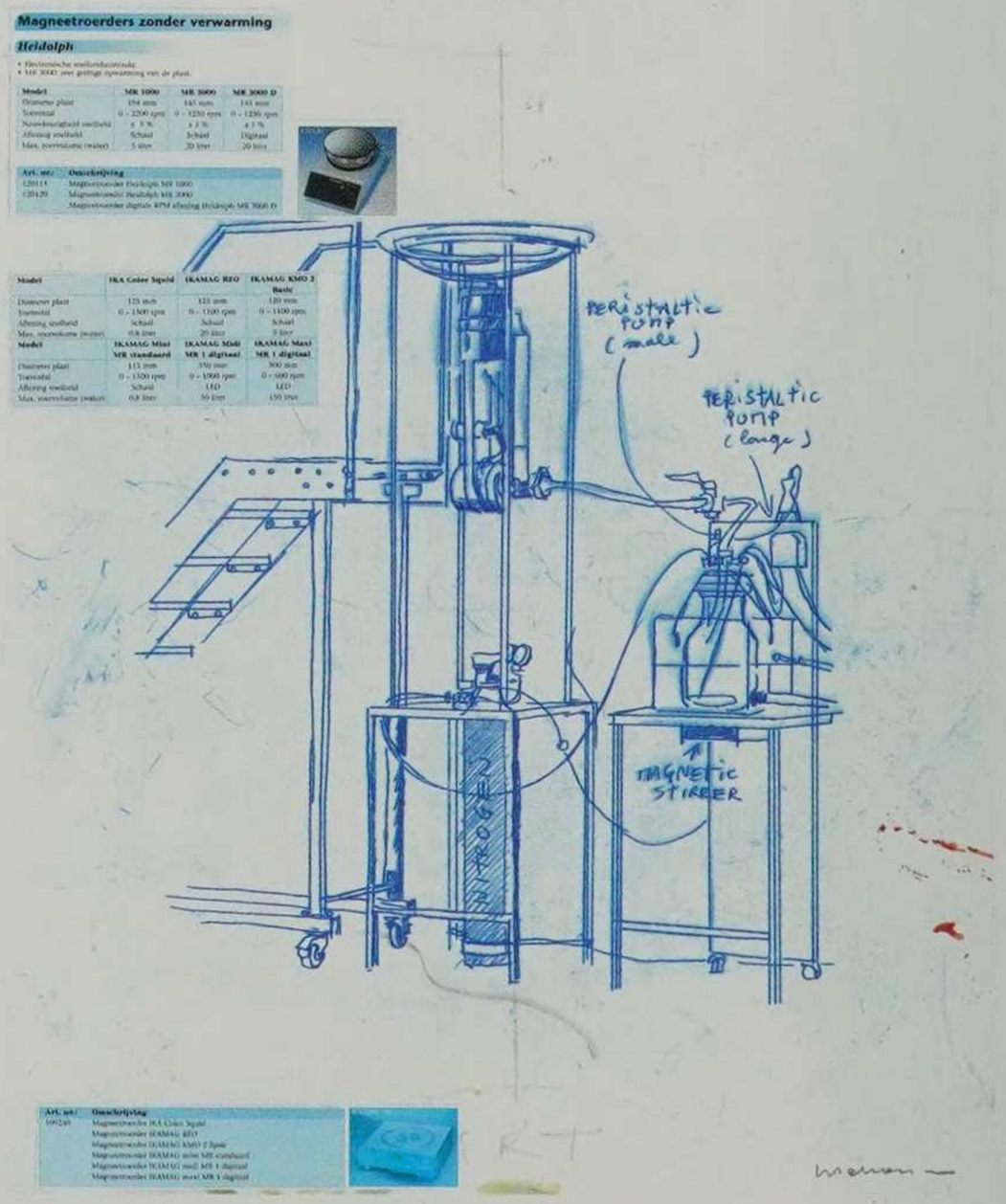
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breakfast + lunch



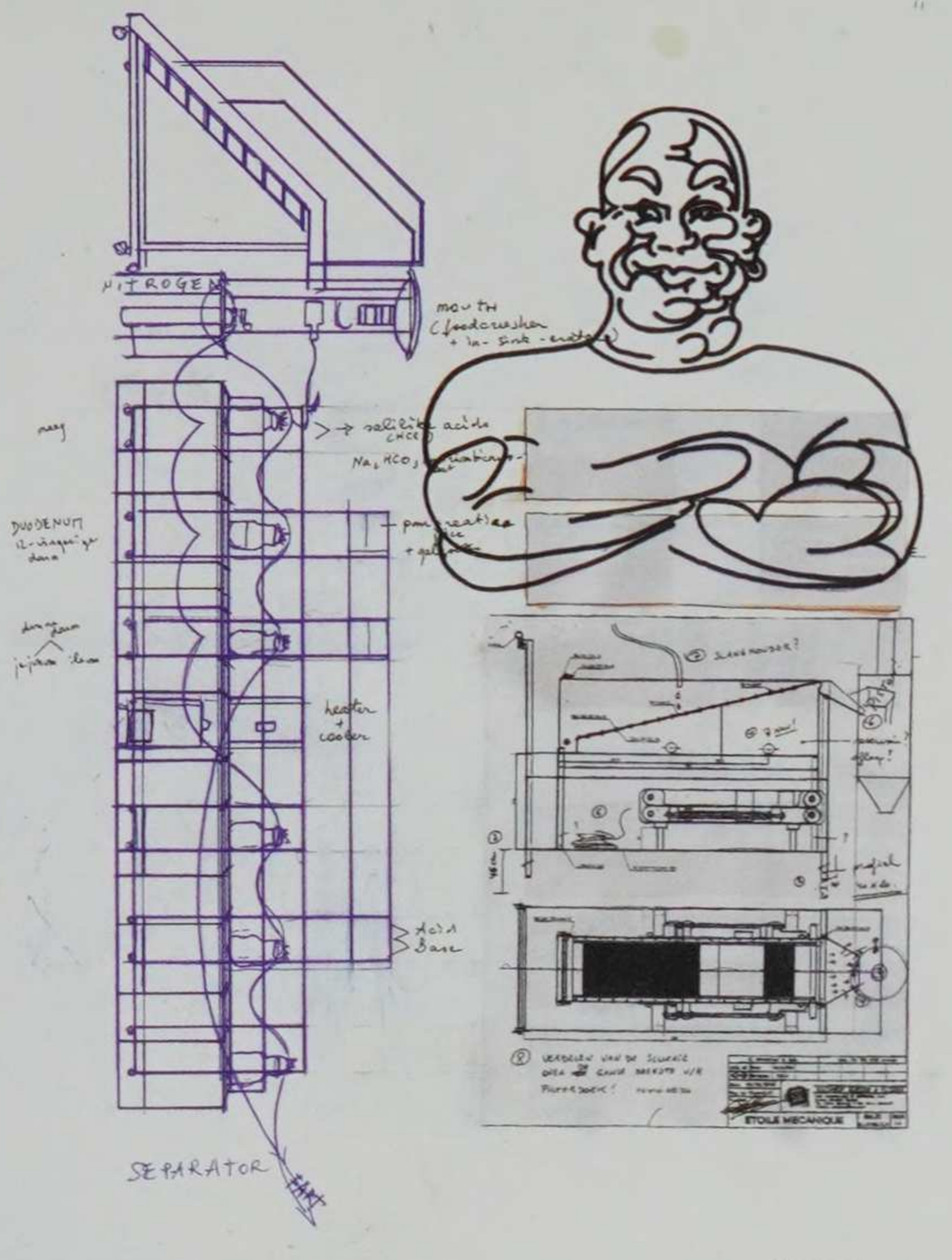
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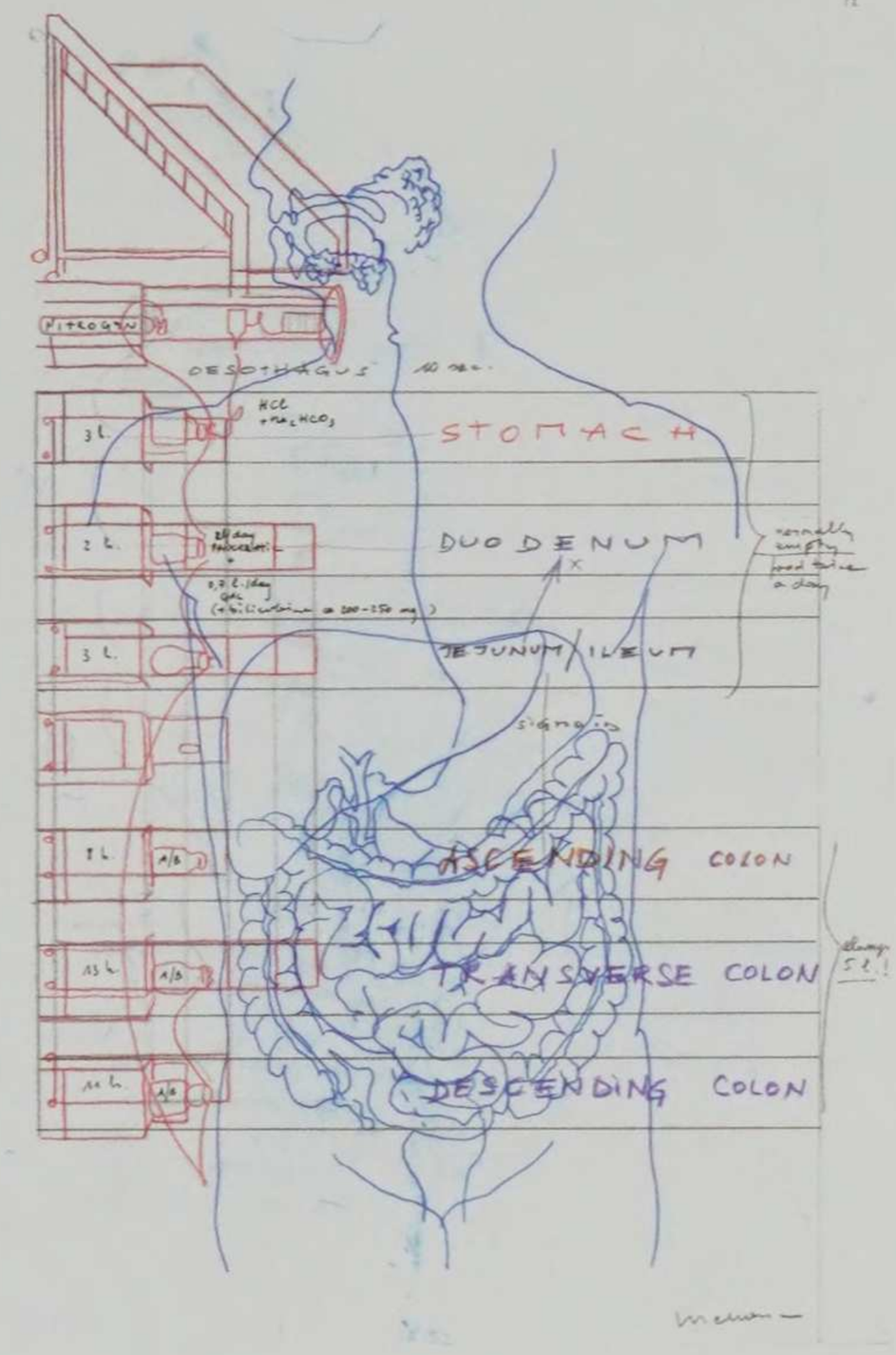
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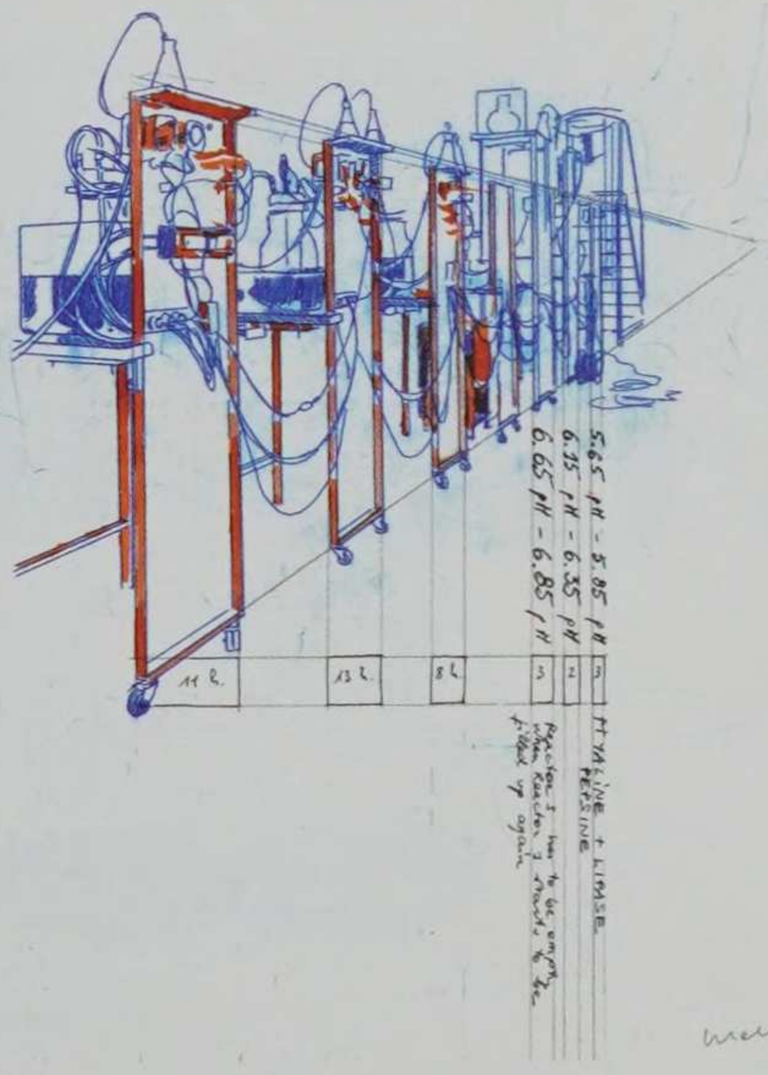
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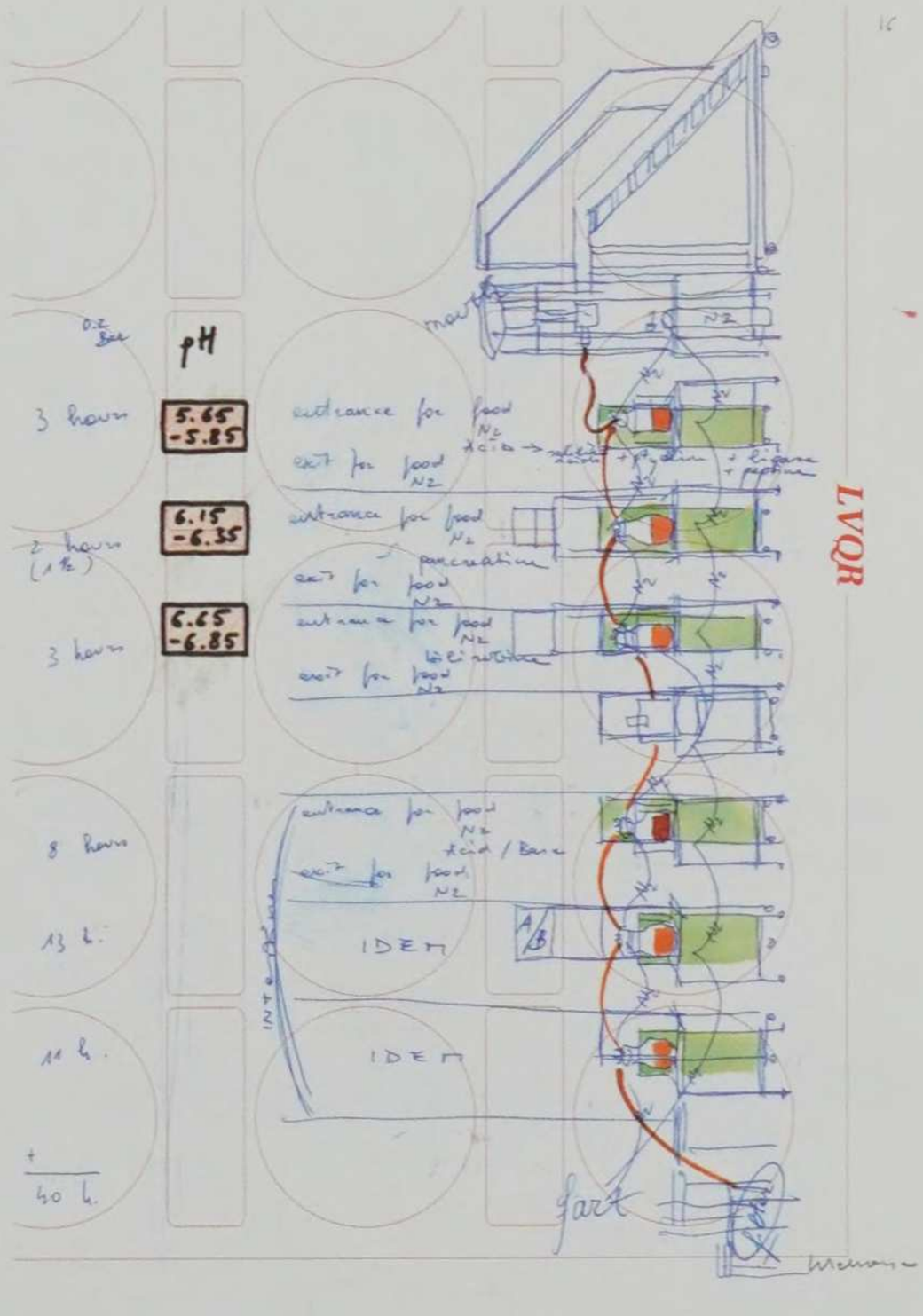
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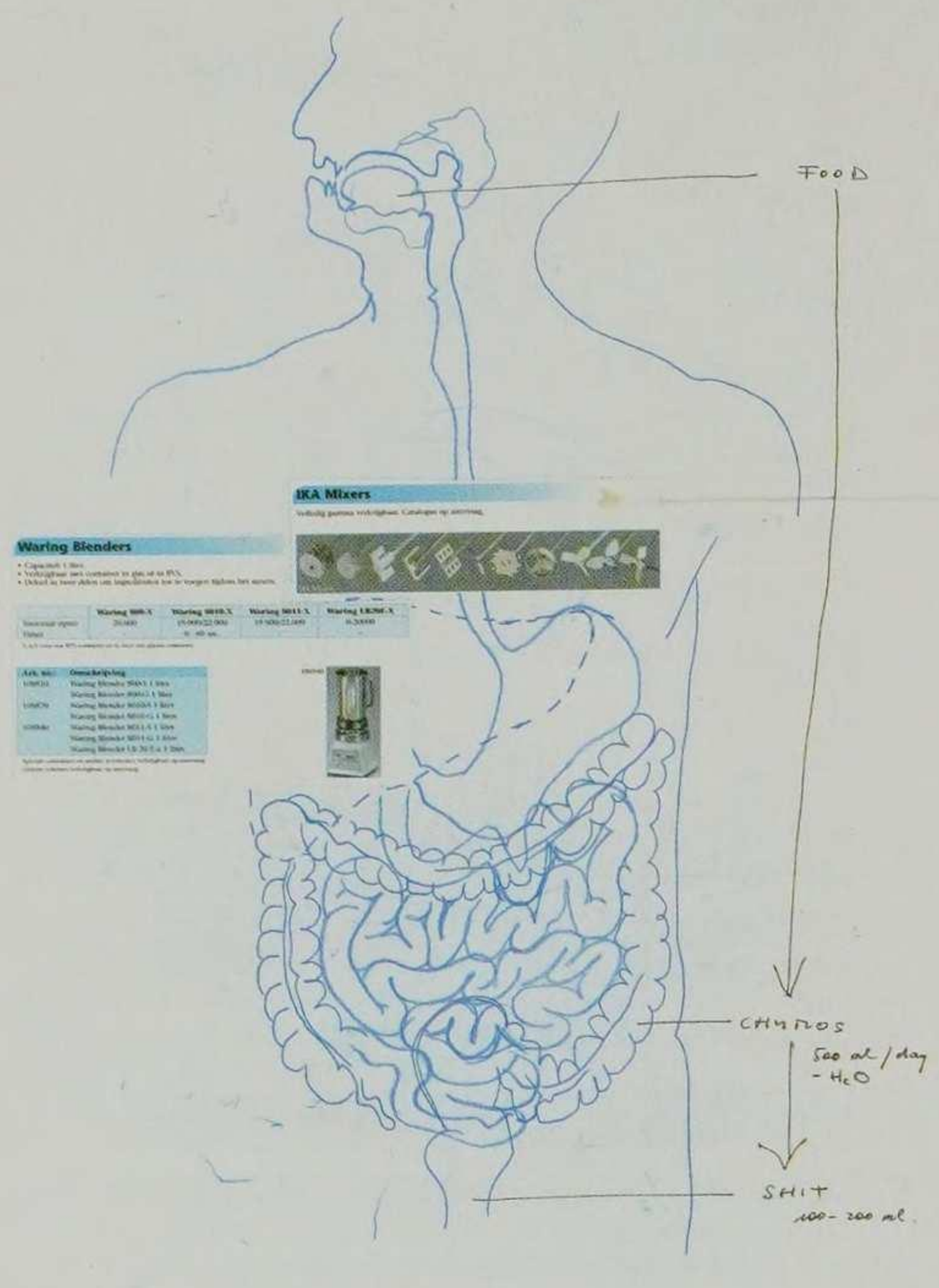
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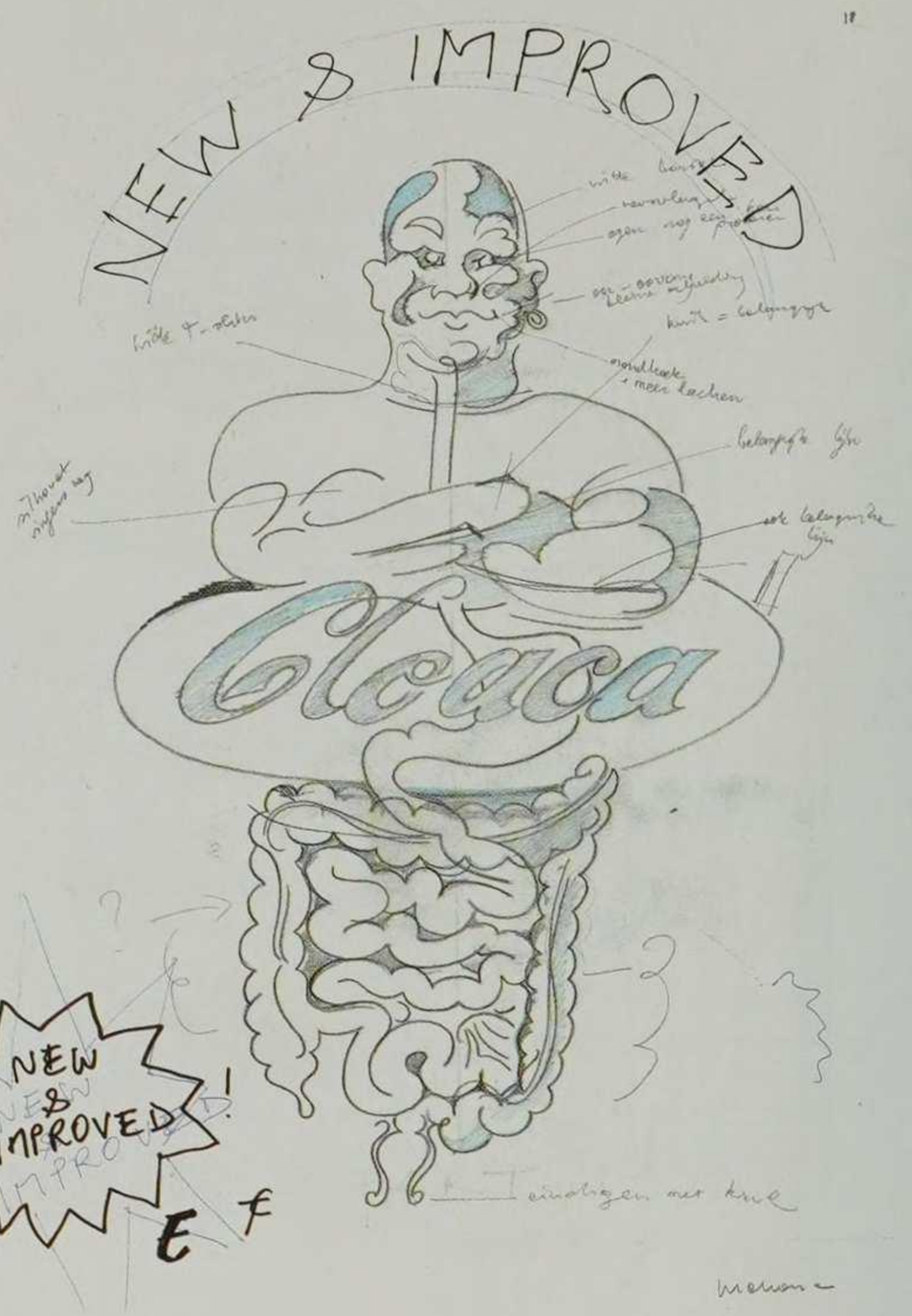
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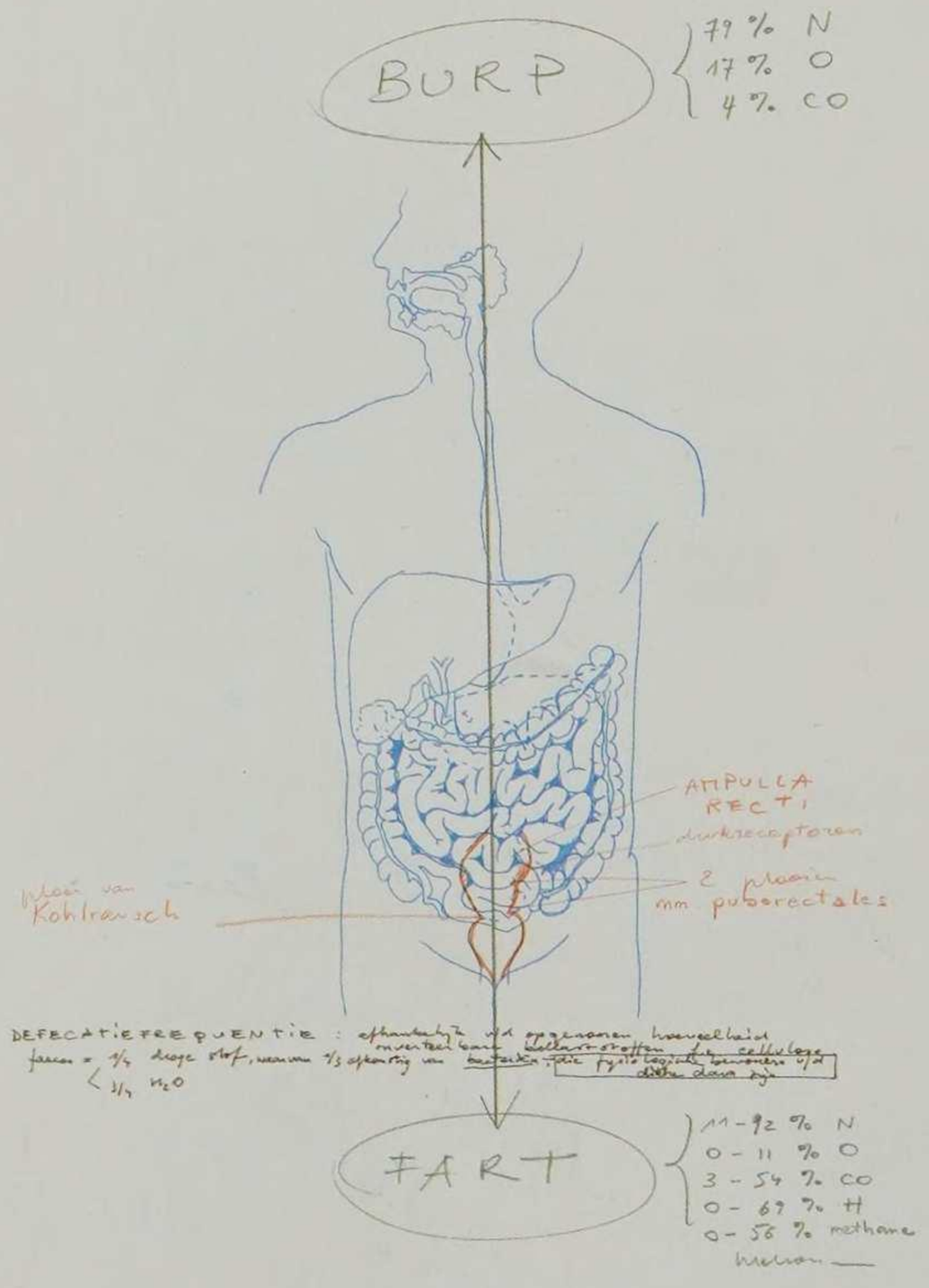
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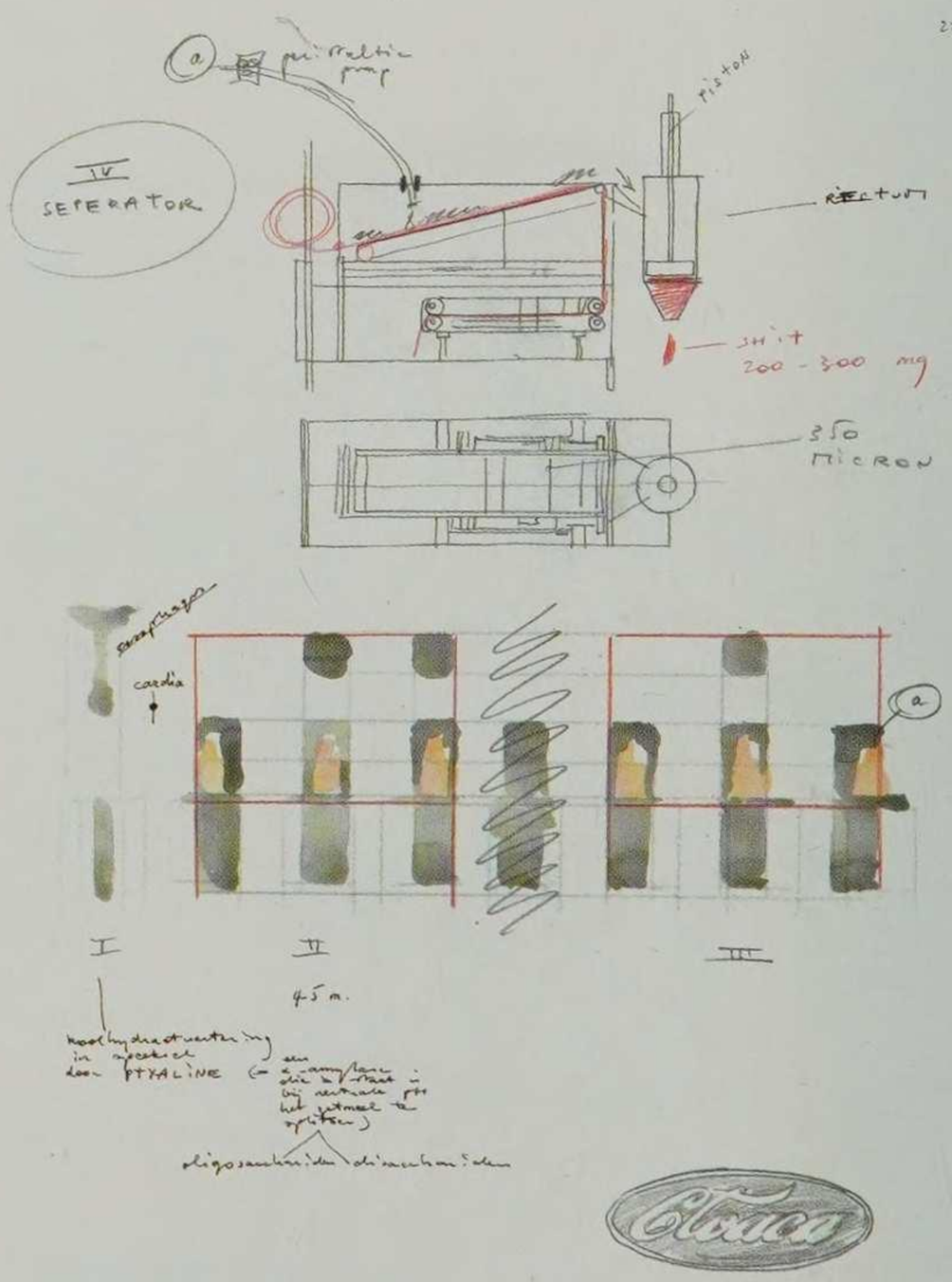
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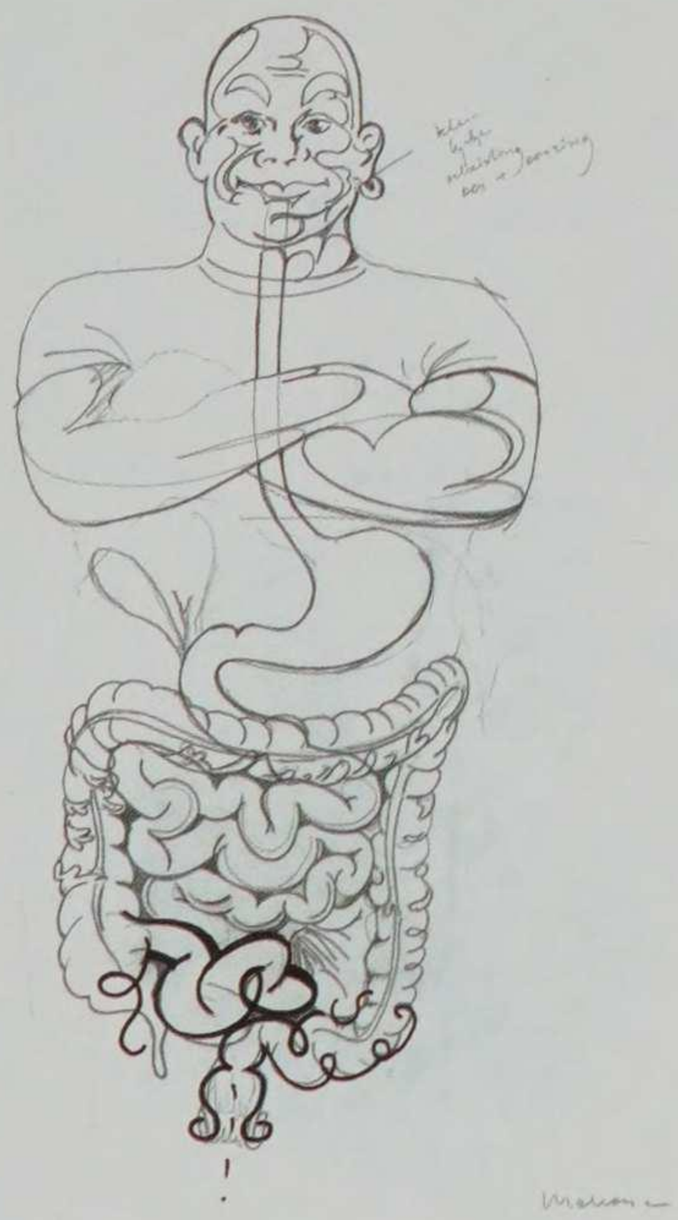
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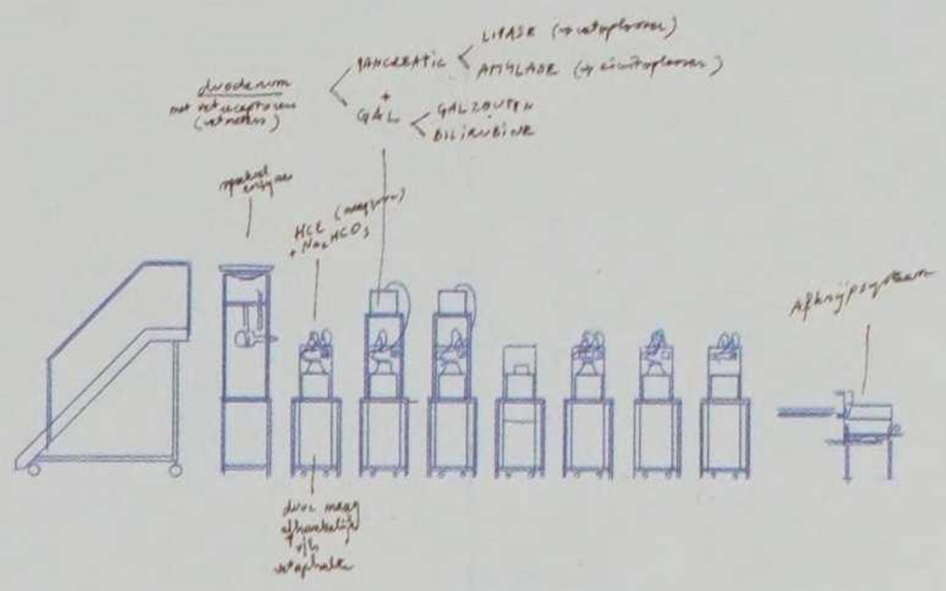
23½ x 17 INCHES (60 x 43 CM)



24 x 17 INCHES (61 x 43 CM)

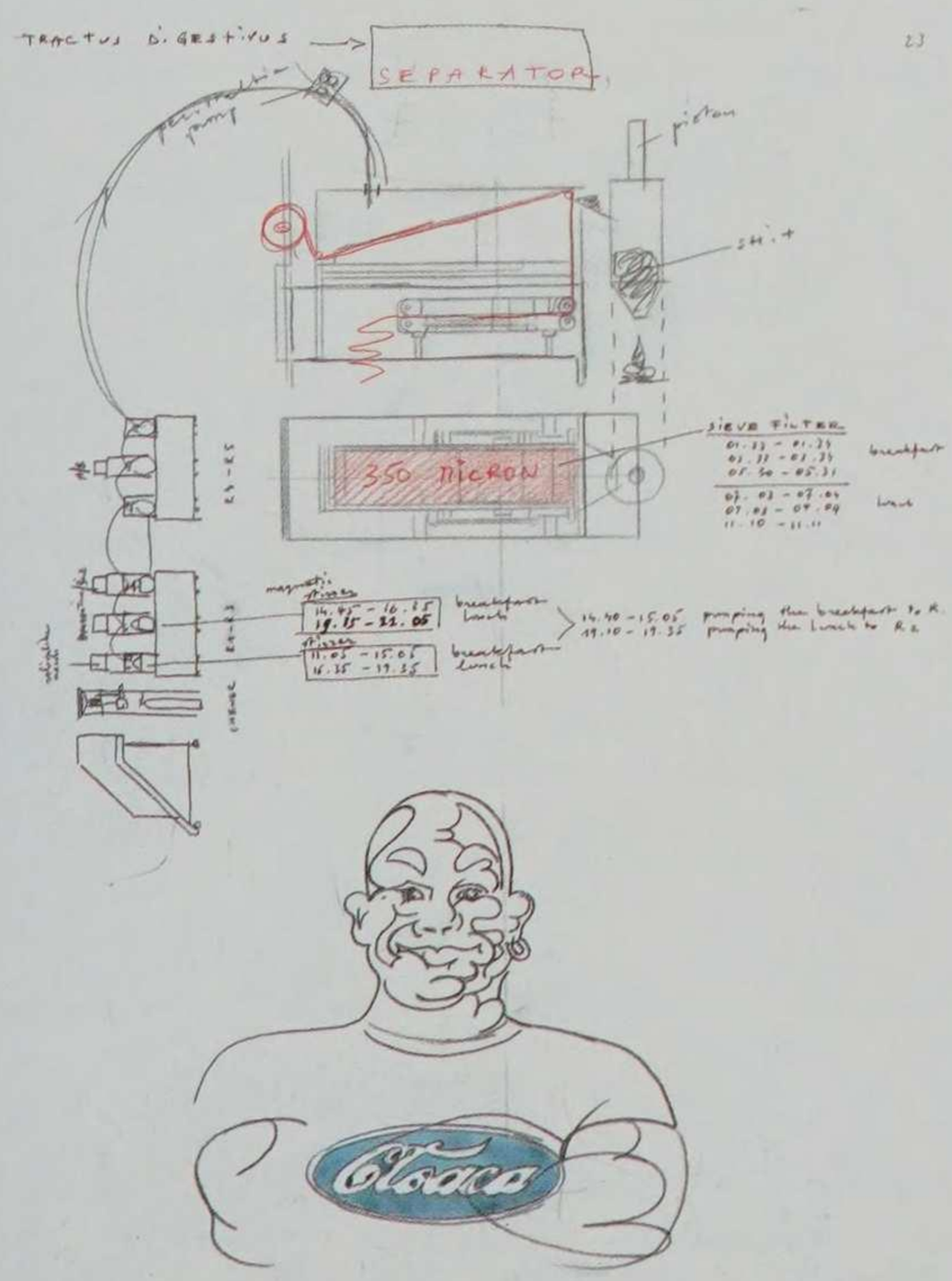


24 x 17¾ INCHES (61 x 45 CM)

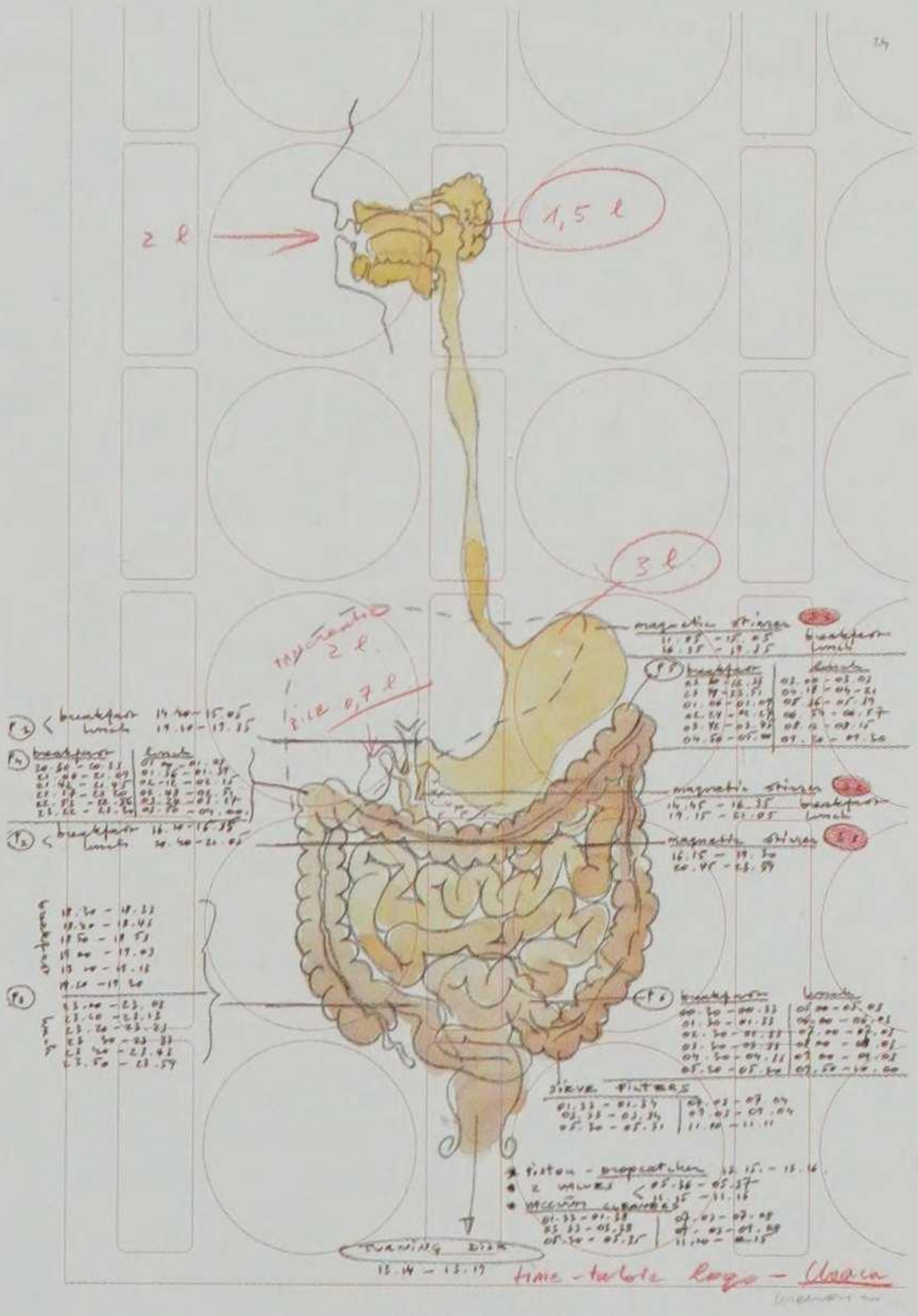




23¼ x 16½ INCHES (59 x 42 CM)



24⅜ x 17 INCHES (62 x 43 CM)



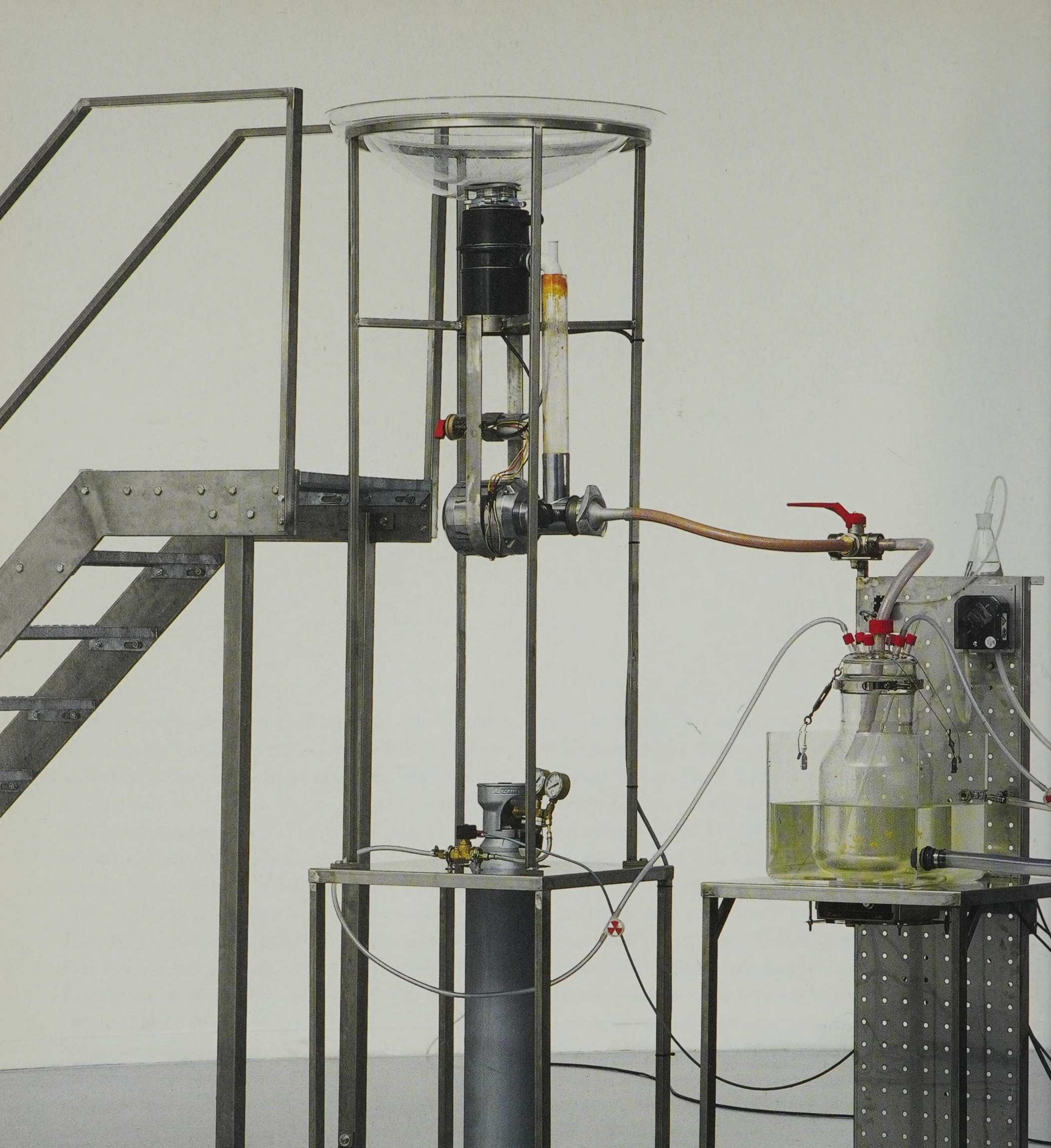
24⅜ x 17⅜ INCHES (62 x 44 CM)

THE THICK OF IT

DAN CAMERON

Years before *Cloaca* was conceived of, Wim Delvoye's work represented a change of direction in contemporary European art—away from the paradigm of transcendentalism reintroduced by Joseph Beuys after World War II and towards a reexamination of reality as constituted by various modes of perception extending from art history to everyday life. Although Delvoye is not alone among artists of his generation in shunning a traditional focus on the expression of beauty and the sublime, his commitment to problems of the real is particularly intense. For most of us, reality is so self-evident that we all but ignore the possibility of challenging the norm in this regard. But once the conflation of our identities with our biological reality—i.e., we perform certain biological functions, therefore we exist—has been upset, it is difficult to restore the status quo. This is the conundrum that *Cloaca* poses.

Since by now the reader will have absorbed various descriptions of *Cloaca*, it is time to explore what makes it such a compelling spectacle. For one thing, technological advances have enabled surgeons to implant fully artificial hearts into patients' bodies and filmmakers to create lifelike simulations of human beings. Faced with a continuous assault on the exclusivity of human experience, we can hardly be surprised when the self's assurances of autonomous existence begin to erode. And yet, if we consider the role of personal computers and the Internet in our daily lives, it is obvious that our tendency to rationalize the intersection between our actions and the machines that surround us is based largely on the usefulness of the latter. We embrace machine interfaces modeled on human thought and behavior patterns for the simple reason that it is easier for us to interact with them, which improves their usefulness. Saving lives, executing decisions, and providing access to important research materials are ideal end results that are made more likely through an interface with machines that best perpetuate the



illusion that one is really interacting with another human being, even one that seems to resembles the user. We have welcomed machines as an extension of our desires and actions and uncritically yielded to them.

One of the most disturbing features of *Cloaca*, then, is its uselessness, which leads to the question of whether or not the technology employed is being wasted in much the same way that the nutrients in *Cloaca*'s food are carefully extracted and disposed of. As Delvoye is aware, this is roughly the same conundrum offered by the presence of art in the material world. Since utility and function determine the value of most things, *Cloaca* is both a contradiction of these values and a result of the artist's efforts to question the ultimate rationale behind them.

If, let's say, *Cloaca* were an assembly line producing plastic artificial flowers, we would not be challenged to identify with its process, and we would probably shrug it off as unimportant. But, if *Cloaca* produced artificial kidneys, we still might not identify with its actions, but we would acknowledge its benefits without hesitation. Or if, to take a third example, *Cloaca* came in the form of a robotic human or animal that, while performing activities resembling those of living counterparts, also produced a form of organic waste, we would quickly minimize this activity as the neutral (or less appetizing) byproduct of a desirable outcome. But because *Cloaca*'s entire function consists of producing the closest imaginable scientific equivalent to human feces, its uselessness is the only reason for its existence. Strain as we might to invent industrial, agricultural, or even psychotherapeutic applications of *Cloaca*'s activity, these would fall short, since our general understanding of the essence of shit centers on the elaborate apparatus we have constructed to remove it from our senses as quickly and thoroughly as possible.



CLOACA, 2000
MIXED MEDIA, 106¼ x 456¾ x 67 INCHES (270 x 1160 x 170 CM)
MUHKA, MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, ANTWERP 2000

Given the fact of *Cloaca*, then, we are probably most comfortable coming to terms with its end product by treating it as a cultural metaphor, standing for either money or art. For most of the Industrial Revolution, particularly over the last century, it has been a standard rhetorical device to refer to capital as excrement, in terms of its role as the end product of manufacturing and trade and of its investment value, serving as a kind of compost as it were. By contrast, the metaphor does not seem to apply when it comes to the individual exchange of money, except insofar as its inherently liquid nature dictates that once we surrender it, it is gone. The role of money in everyday social behavior is almost entirely determined by the inequality of its distribution: a few people have too much and nearly everybody seems to have too little.

As for the matter of treating an artwork as a metaphor for art itself, Delvoye clearly intends for *Cloaca* to be received as such. From the beginning of his career as an artist, Delvoye has been uncomfortable with the tendency of civilization to preserve its art while it discards just about everything else it produces. Acting from the central cultural belief that art is the quintessential product of so-called advanced societies, Delvoye, like many other artists, has questioned this set of values by drawing attention to aspects of life which do not conform to them and thus do not appear to merit the preservation so readily given to art.

Although Delvoye's awareness of the hierarchy of



CLOACA NEW & IMPROVED, 2001
MIXED MEDIA, 78¾ x 393¾ x 29½ INCHES (200 x 1000 x 75 CM)
MIGROS MUSEUM, ZURICH 2001

values concerning art versus non-art puts him in the Duchampian tradition, it is worth noting that Duchamp, who came from the French upper middle class, was as detached as any other bourgeois from the biological dimensions of human existence. If Duchamp's *objets trouvés* ascribed lasting aesthetic value to industrially manufactured objects that otherwise would not have merited the attention they have subsequently received, any critique this might have implied remained squarely within the realm of objects and their representations. While he undermined and eventually reversed established aesthetic hierarchies, Duchamp avoided any direct contact with a broader framework of cultural fears and taboos and the values behind them. Chief among these would be the unspoken and powerful connection between how ferociously we guard and cherish our cultural treasures and how rapidly and thoroughly we rid ourselves of our bodily wastes.



CLOACA NEW & IMPROVED, 2001
MIXED MEDIA, 78¾ x 393¾ x 29½ INCHES (200 x 1000 x 75 CM)
MIGROS MUSEUM, ZURICH 2001

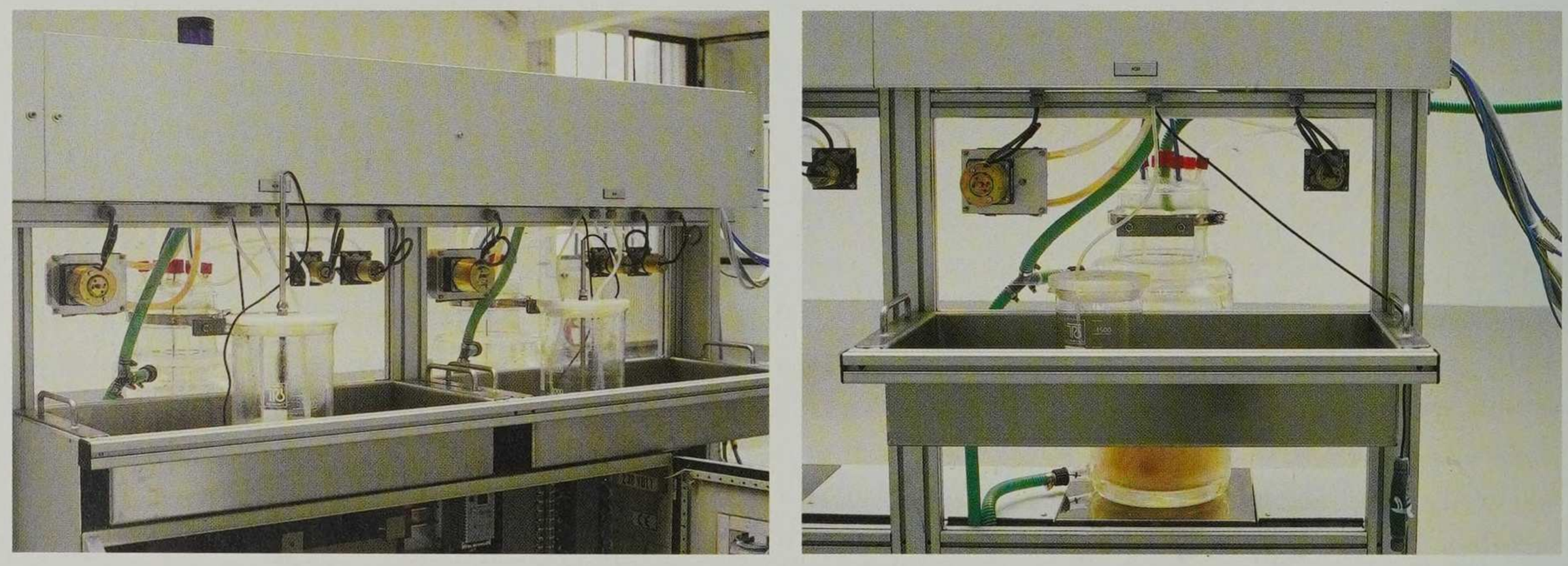
The example of Piero Manzoni, who in 1961 supposedly canned and sold his own excrement under the label *Merda d'Artista*, provides the most obvious historical precedent for *Cloaca*. But there is a fundamental difference. Manzoni treated bodily waste as a product of the industrial process and people who contemplated or even purchased *Merda d'Artista* did so with the tacit understanding that the contents of the can could not be independently verified. In true Duchampian fashion, we accepted it as true because the artist said it was true. In *Cloaca*, since all the mechanisms and processes involved are clearly visible, we can monitor the food as it winds its way through the machine's digestive system.

Despite its transparency, however, *Cloaca* ultimately challenges our notions of what constitutes an educational display. Just as society is unable to recognize that anxieties and discomfort about feces are connected to broader cultural taboos concerning the body and its imperatives, so we still cannot imagine an educational mindset which would treat feces objectively, as if one were studying insects or cloud patterns. Our cultural anxieties about shit are so deep-seated and pervasive that for most people they do not even qualify as anxieties in the first pace. Yet they are closely related to other biological uncertainties, including (but not limited to) guilt - concerning sex, embarrassment over nudity, shame about aging, fear of disease, and death. Because none of these things can be avoided, they remind us of the vast aspects of our most intimate lives and by extension the world at large over which we have no control whatsoever.

Aside from its place in art and cultural history, it is useful to consider *Cloaca* in the framework of Delvoye's career as a whole. Clearly influenced by Pop Art, his first New York exhibitions in the late 1980s looked at cultural identity in a way that picked up on the ironic ambivalence of the neoconceptual generation (Jeff Koons, et. al.) and anticipated some of the identity questions that would dominate the art of the following decade. At their most obvious, Delvoye's works from this early period, including the soccer goals made from stained glass and gas canisters decorated in the manner of Delft ceramics, established him as an artist with sharp critical faculties strategically balanced by sardonic humor. They also conveyed a desire to abandon presuppositions

regarding identity as a cultural given and to treat it as a partly mythic construct based on cliches and half-remembered histories. As a Belgian artist showing internationally, Delvoye expressed both his discomfort at expectations that he produce art with a culturally identifiable trademark and his willingness to accept the challenge to established codes of identity implied by the earliest artistic manifestations of postmodernism. Flaunting a mock version of a regional identity while denying any attempt at authenticity enabled Delvoye to have it both ways, culminating in his full-sized cement truck hand-carved entirely from Indonesian wood, which was shown at the 1999 Venice Biennale. While taking as its primary text the imperialist expansion—symbolized by the cement truck—propagated by Dutch colonists (i.e., his forebears) in southeast Asia, the piece became a knowing appropriation and an extension of the same historical impulses that it simultaneously critiqued.

During much of this period, the art community was roiled by the urge to reconcile artistic practice with situations and events in the outside world. Many artists in the past decade have explored ways in which traditional hierarchies of meaning and value have overlooked, even denigrated, the corporeal experience, in an attempt to replace an iconography of narcissism and power with a new one in which discomfort and pain are tangibly present. With an energy reminiscent of conceptual and performance art in the late 1960s and early 1970s, artists during the 1990s engaged in a wide range of activities—cooking meals for large groups of people (Rirkrit Tiravanija); creating lighting fixtures for architectural spaces (Jorge Pardo); changing the colors of rivers (Olafur Eliasson); living daily life as an animal (Oleg Kulik); guiding pedestrians on tours (Janet Cardiff); undergoing cosmetic surgery in front of video cameras (Orlan); hiring naked women to stand around in public spaces (Vanessa Beecroft); paying drug addicts to receive tattoos (Santiago Sierra); and engaging publicly in radical sadomasochistic behavior (Bob Flanagan). While such efforts to expand artistic activity beyond the confines of the art world have been gratifying, the underlying idea that such undertakings

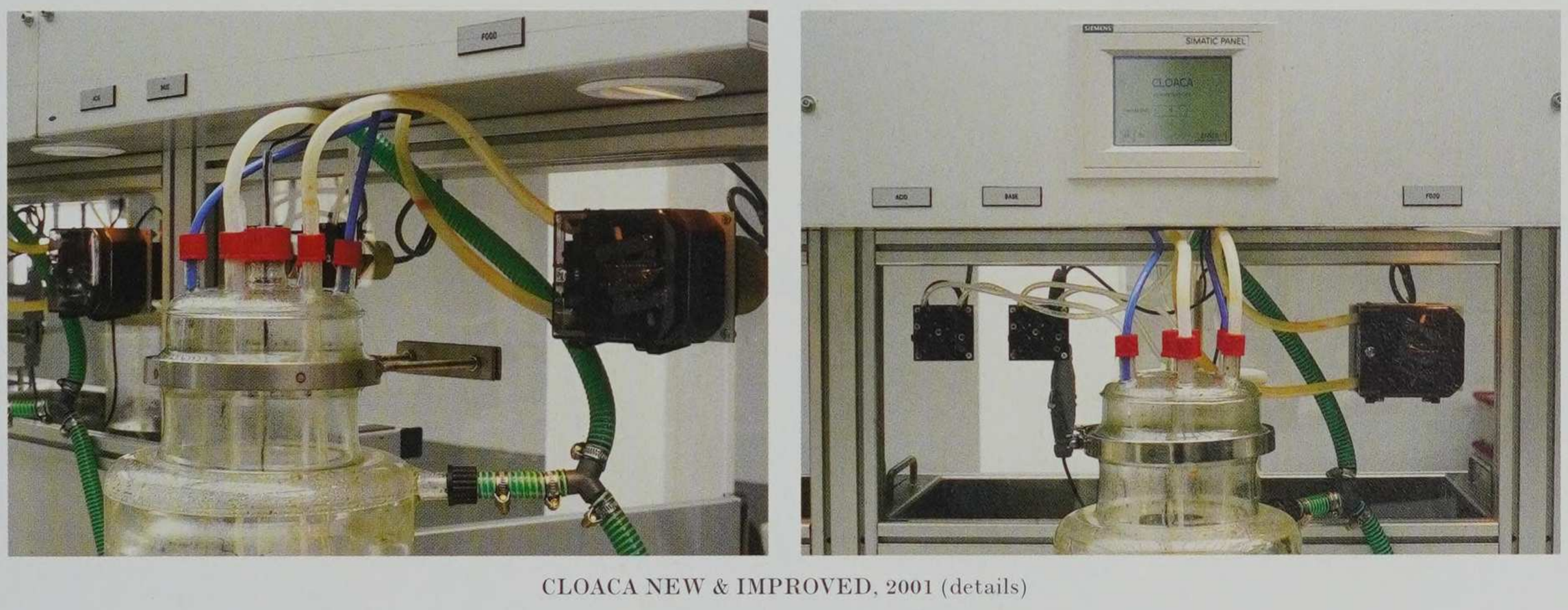


CLOACA NEW & IMPROVED, 2001 (details)

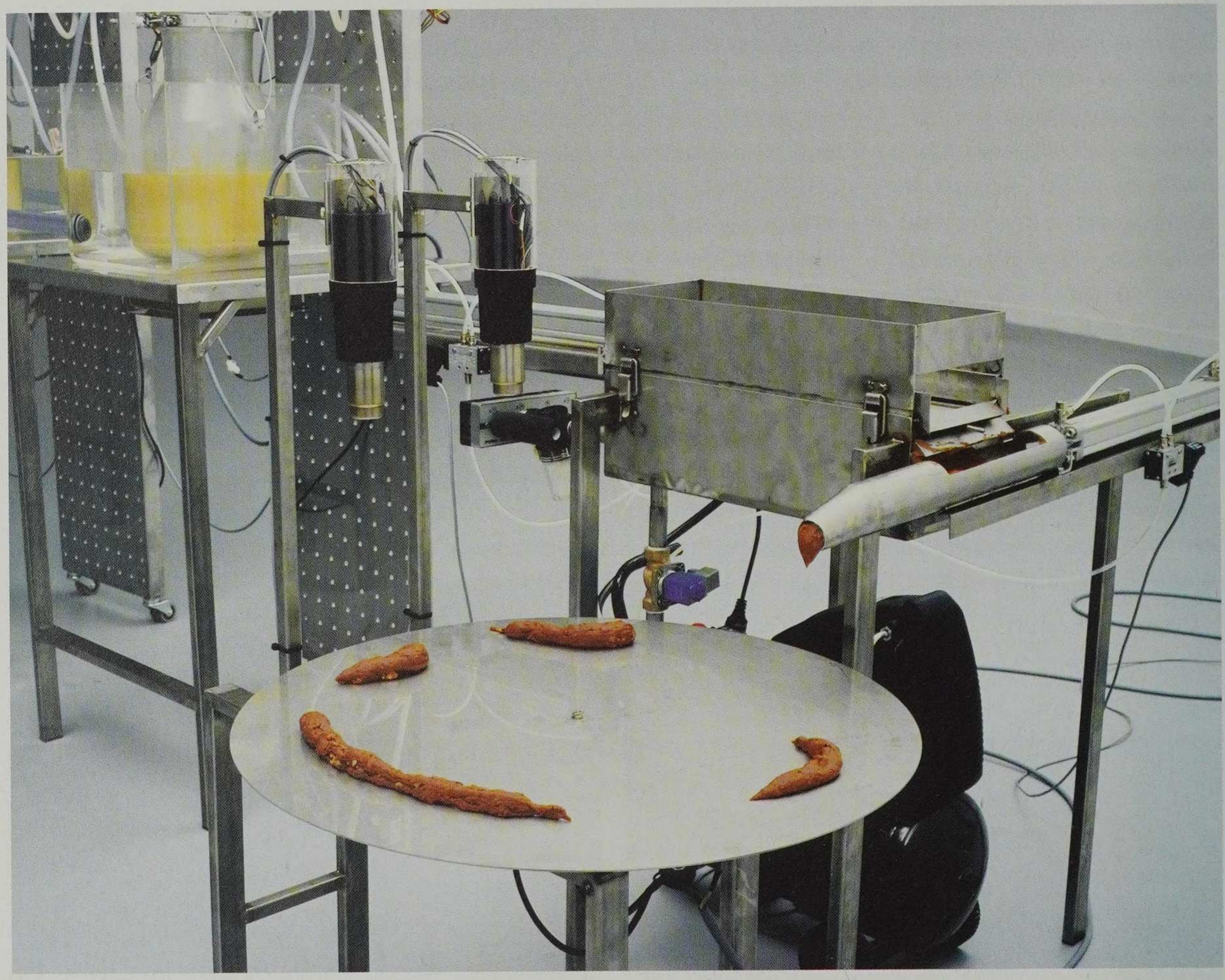
could replace the artist's need to make objects has not been borne out in terms of impact on the public. Delvoye's sculptural projects, on the other hand, have always treated the issue of meaning as performative, in the sense of being largely determined by their context. His creative logic, beginning with a sculpture that performs ideas, has led to an oversized machine that performs a single human function.

A recurring element in Delvoye's art is the contradiction between civilization's cerebral veneer and the tendency of the body to assert itself as a vehicle by which society can rediscover its earthier origins. This can be seen in another series of works (ca. 1997–99) using *terrazzo* tiles to create images of sandwich meats or arrangements of (apparently) human feces, as well as in a more recent group of stained glass panels based on x-rays of animal and human sexual behavior. Such preoccupations suggest that the artist fears that for every technological advance into a brave new future of freedoms without frontiers, there is a corresponding counter-movement backward, in the direction of dogmas and anxieties that limit the ability of the human animal to achieve its apotheosis in tolerance and understanding.

While *Cloaca* has important art-historical precedents and weighted as it is with enough social and cultural baggage to be egregiously misinterpreted, its most significant contribution appears to be in an area of philosophy one might refer to as bioethics. In essence, *Cloaca* confronts the contemporary state of confusion regarding when or where human life begins and ends. Through a monumental simulacrum tracing the path made by what we eat from the mouth to the anus, *Cloaca* makes us, against our will, see the process as something more than simply mechanical, then catch ourselves in the act of self-identification. It has been a given that we would continue to receive challenges to accepted cultural beliefs about what it means to be alive, but we are surprised that this particular challenge has originated outside the field of artificial intelligence. Still, it is consoling to realize that some of the most basic facts of our physical lives are as foreign and mysterious as the deepest secrets about the origins of the universe.



CLOACA NEW & IMPROVED, 2001 (details)



CLOACA, 2000 (detail)

Etaca



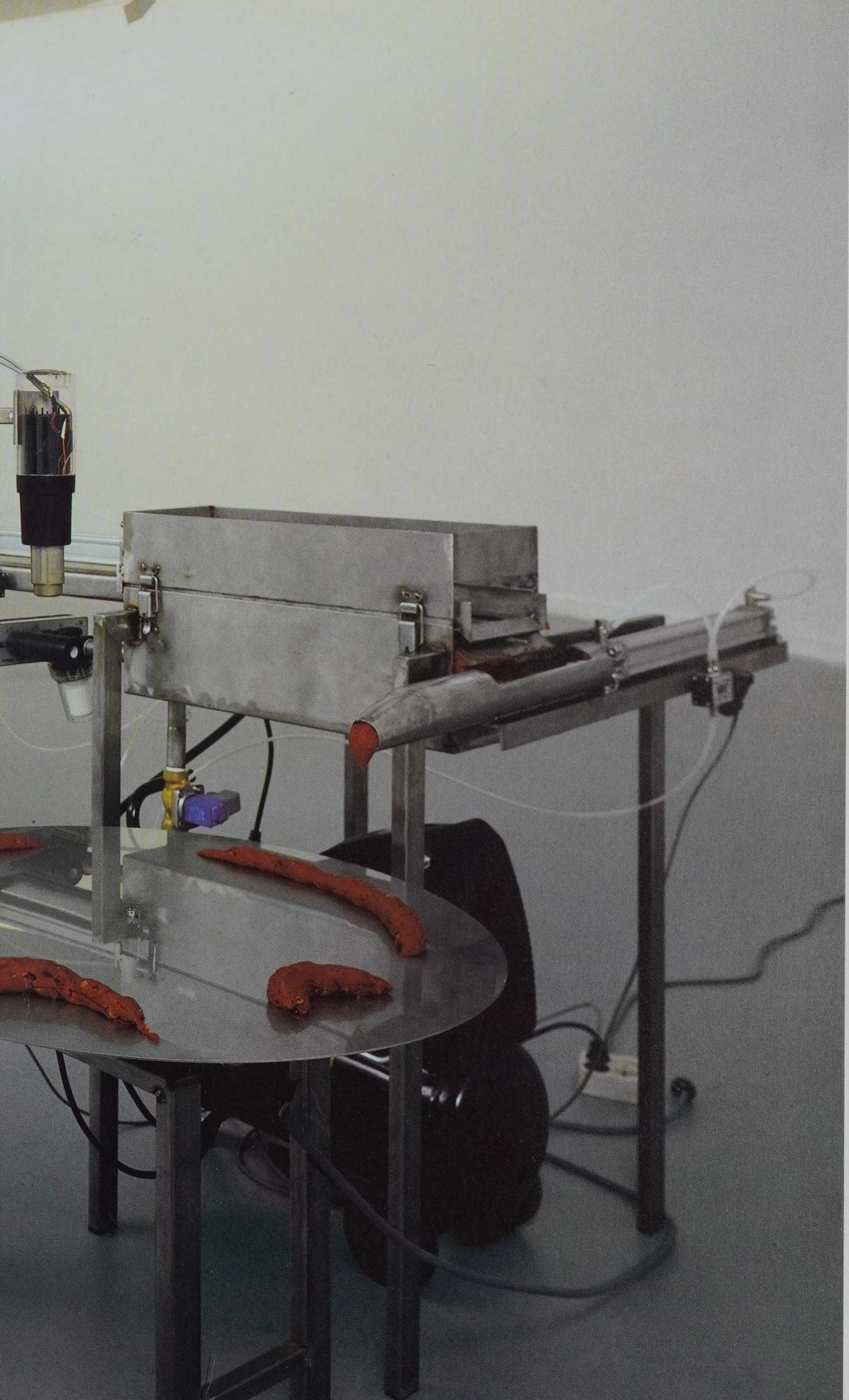
CLOACA

16.09–31.12.2000

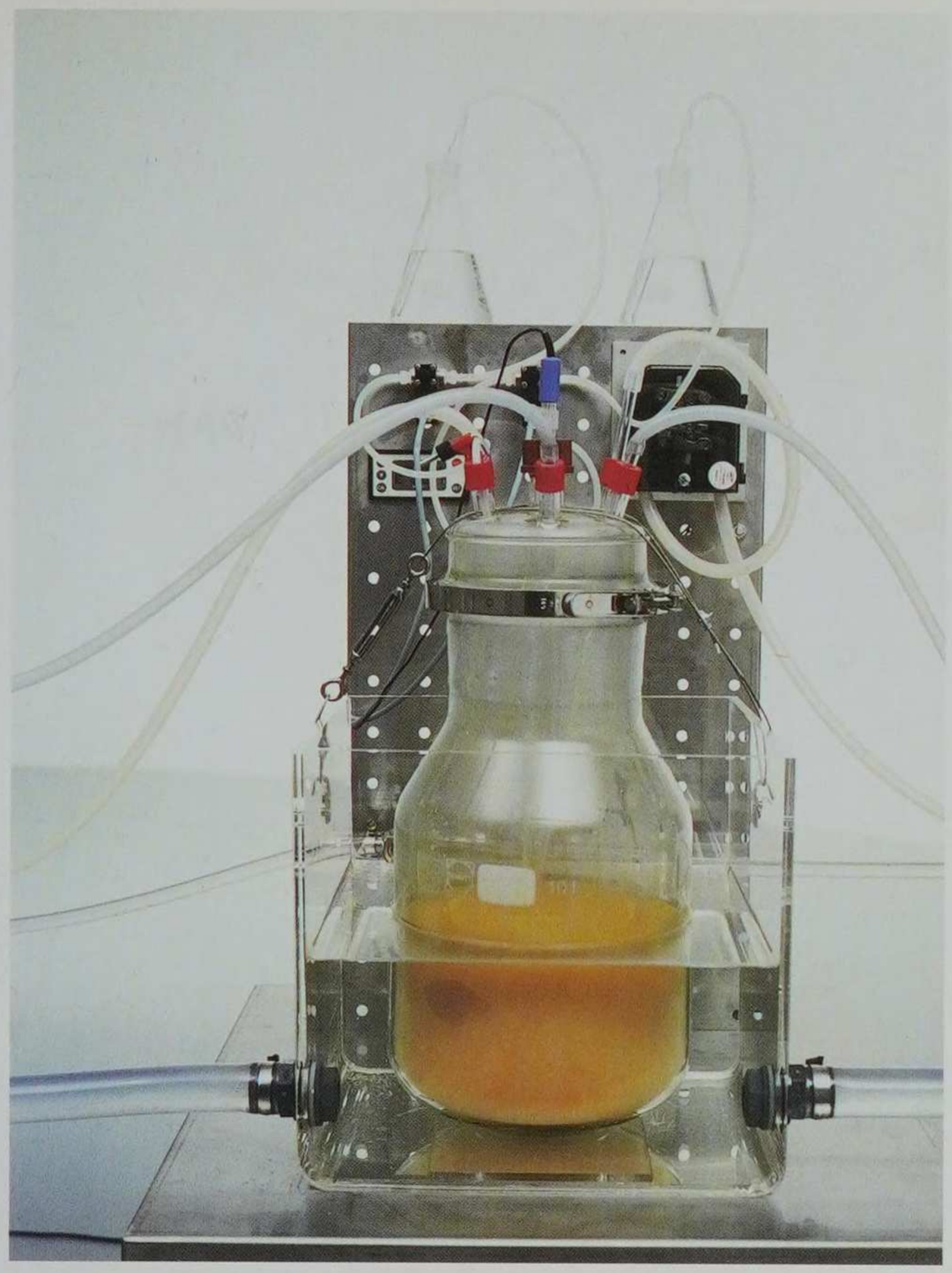
MUHKA
MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
ANTWERP

MIXED MEDIA

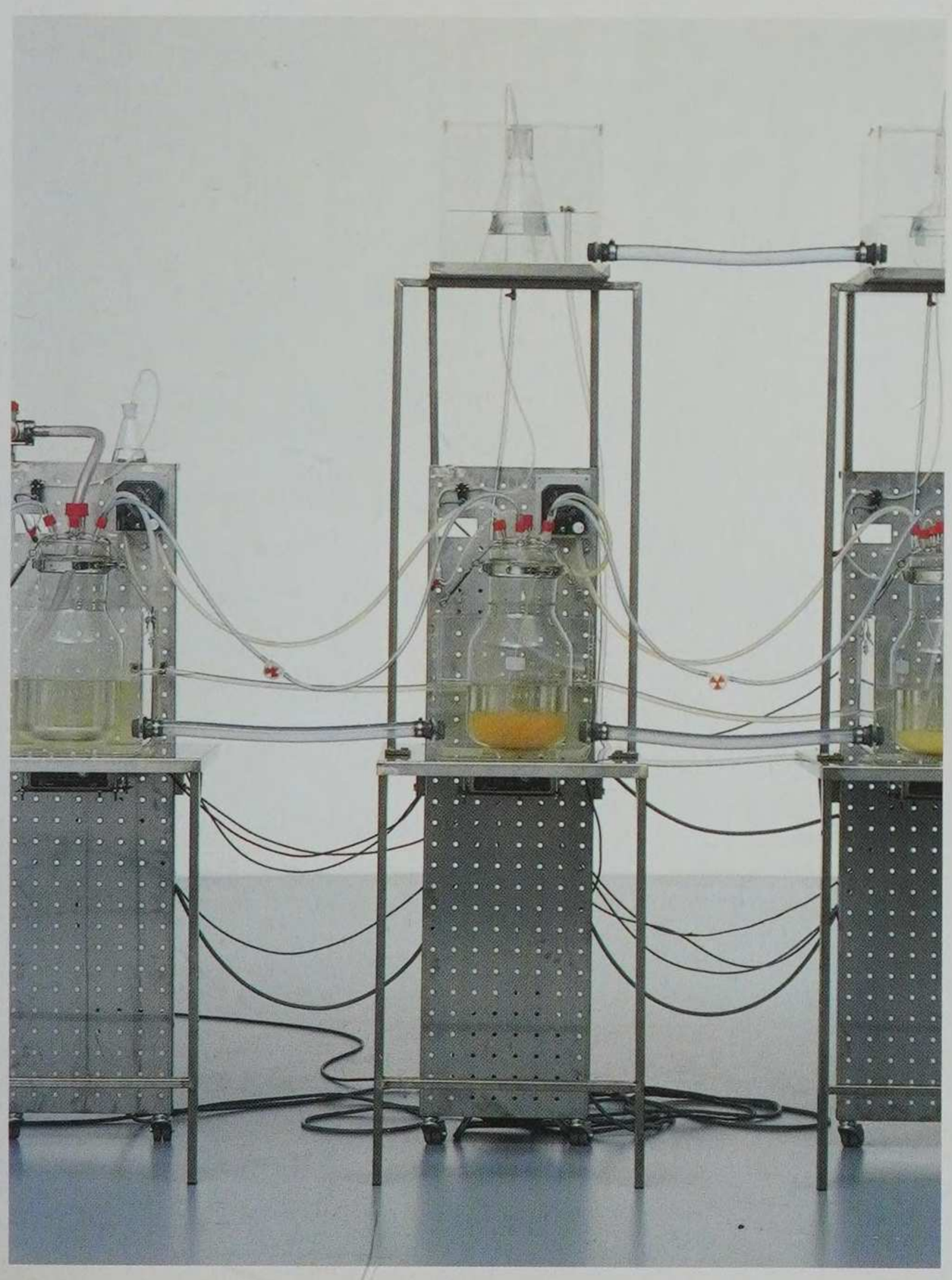
106¼ x 456¾ x 67 INCHES
(270 x 1160 x 170 CM)



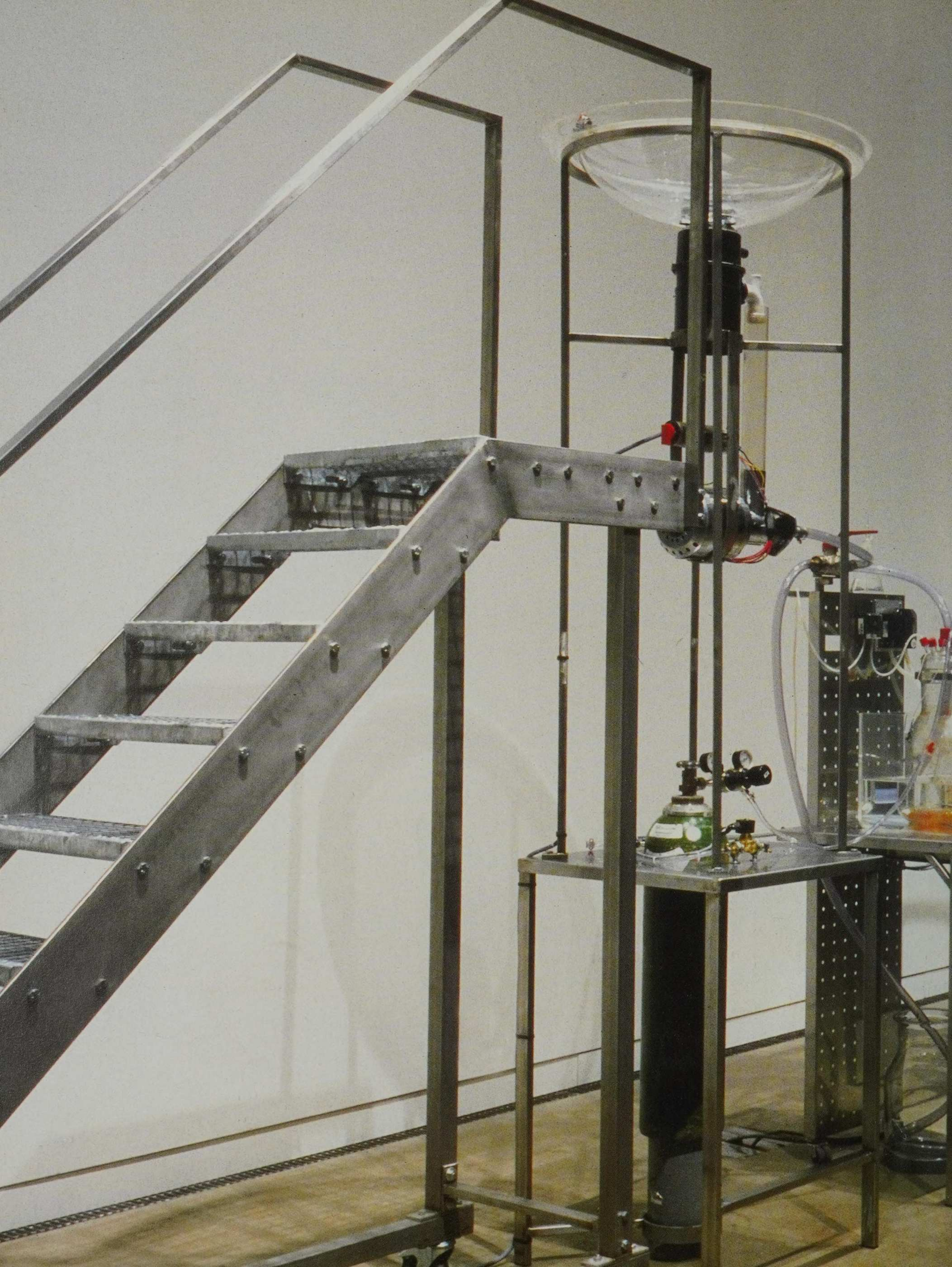














CLOACA

12.06–16.09.2001

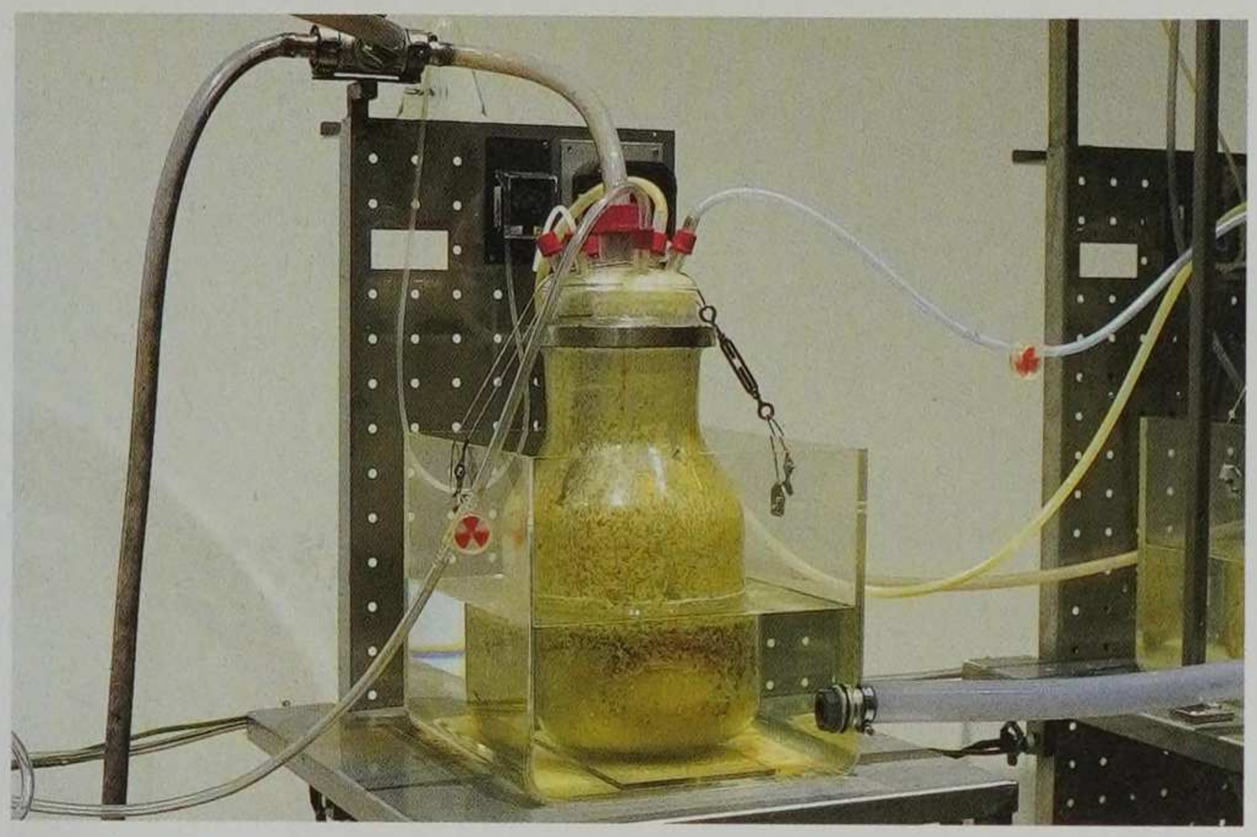
"EINE BAROCKE PARTY"
KUNSTHALLE WIEN
(VIENNA)

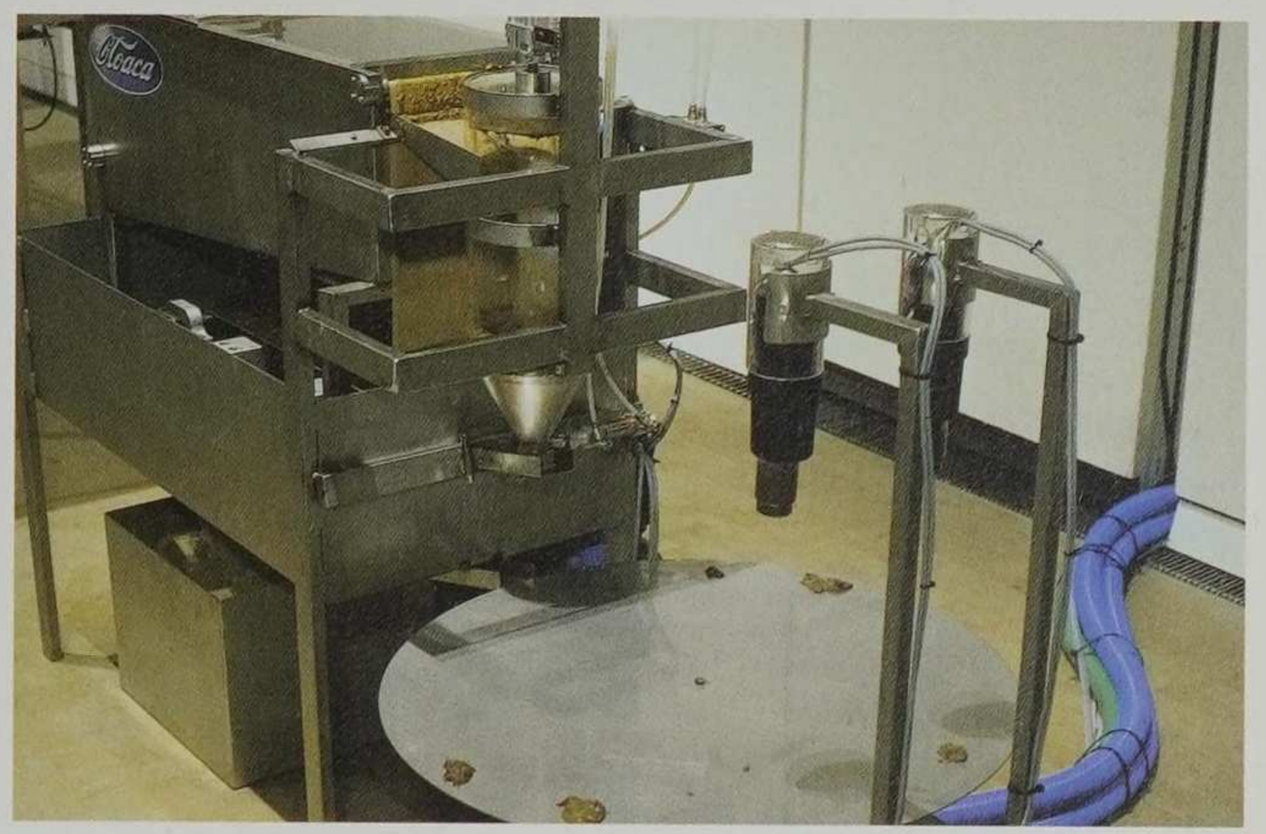
MIXED MEDIA

106¼ x 456¾ x 67 INCHES
(270 x 1160 x 170 CM)


Touca

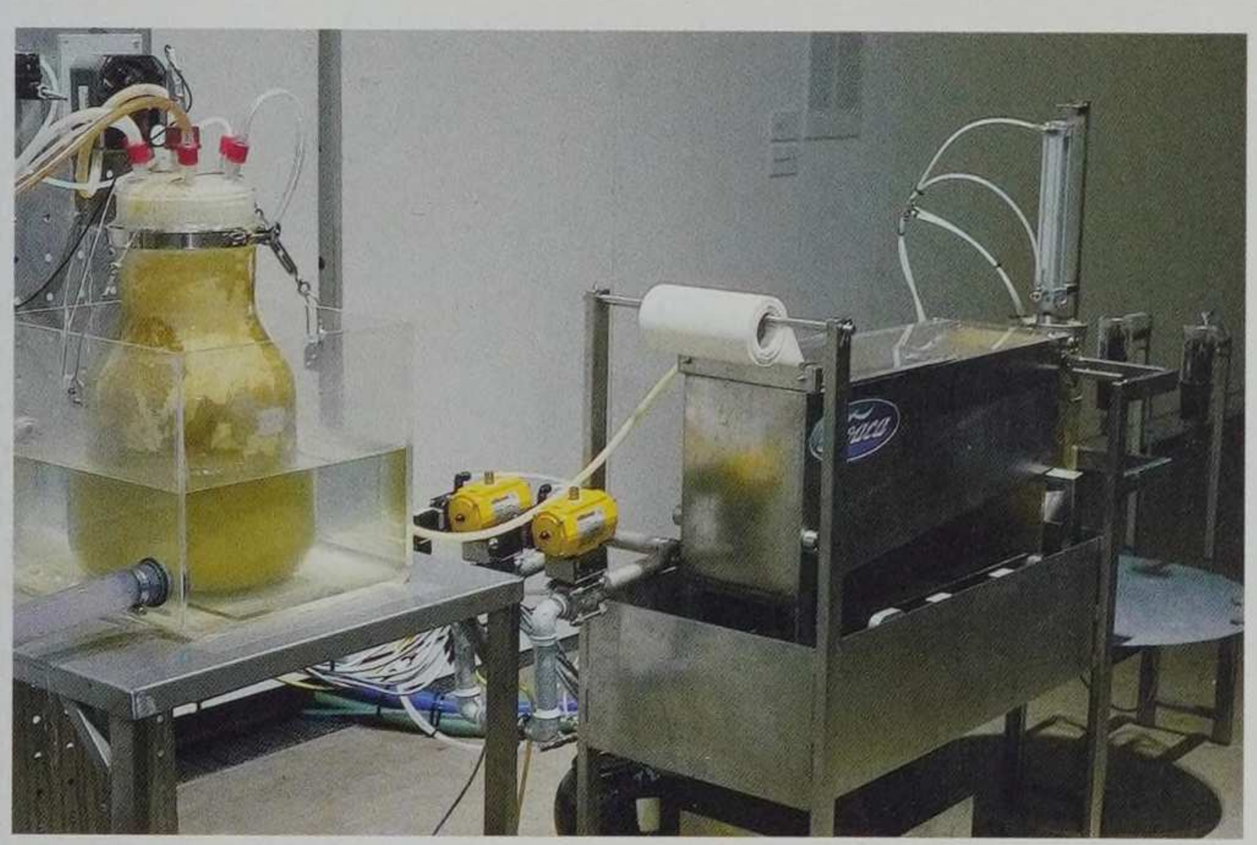








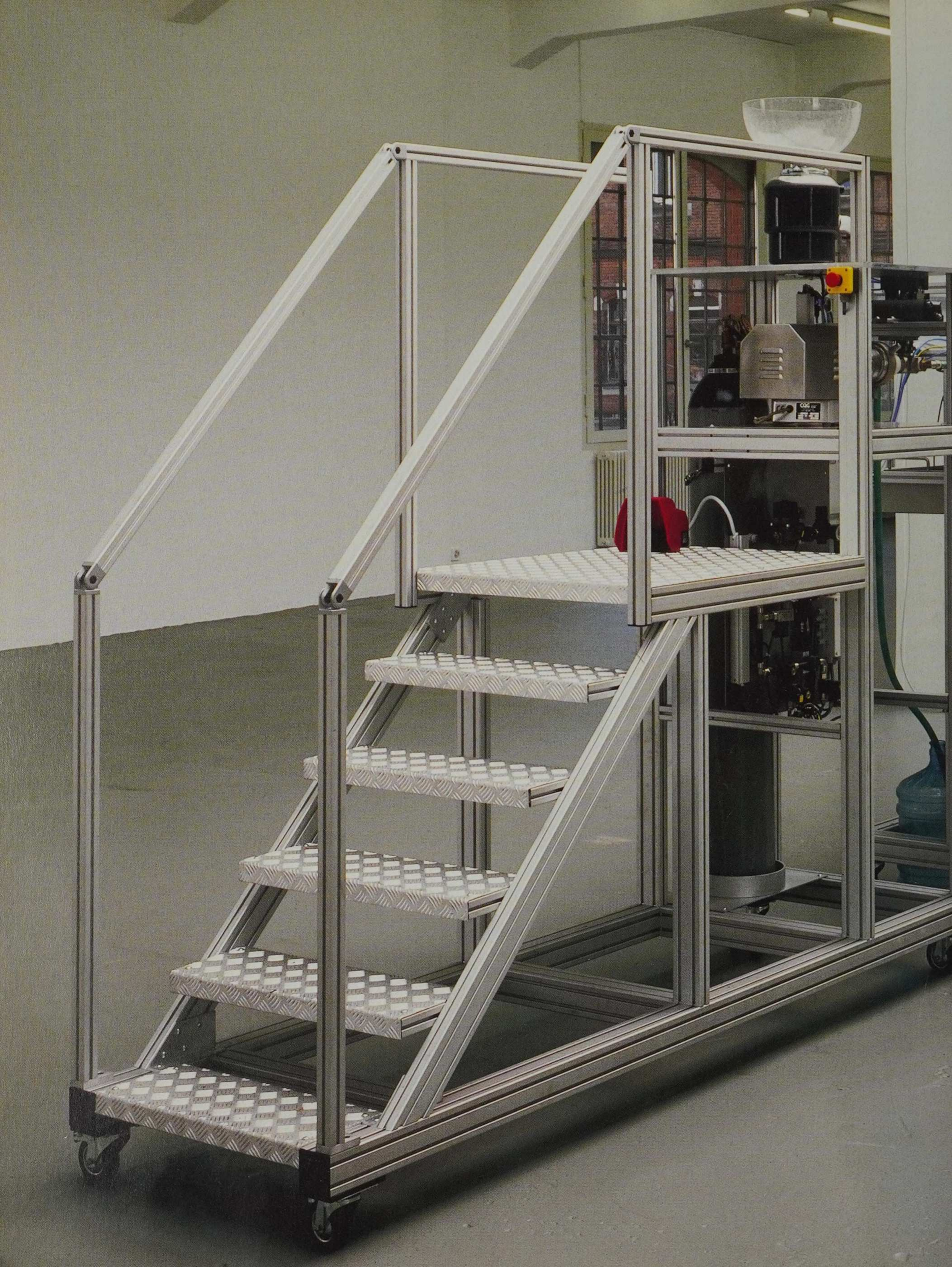














CLOACA NEW & IMPROVED

25.08–14.10.2001

MIGROS MUSEUM

ZÜRICH

MIXED MEDIA

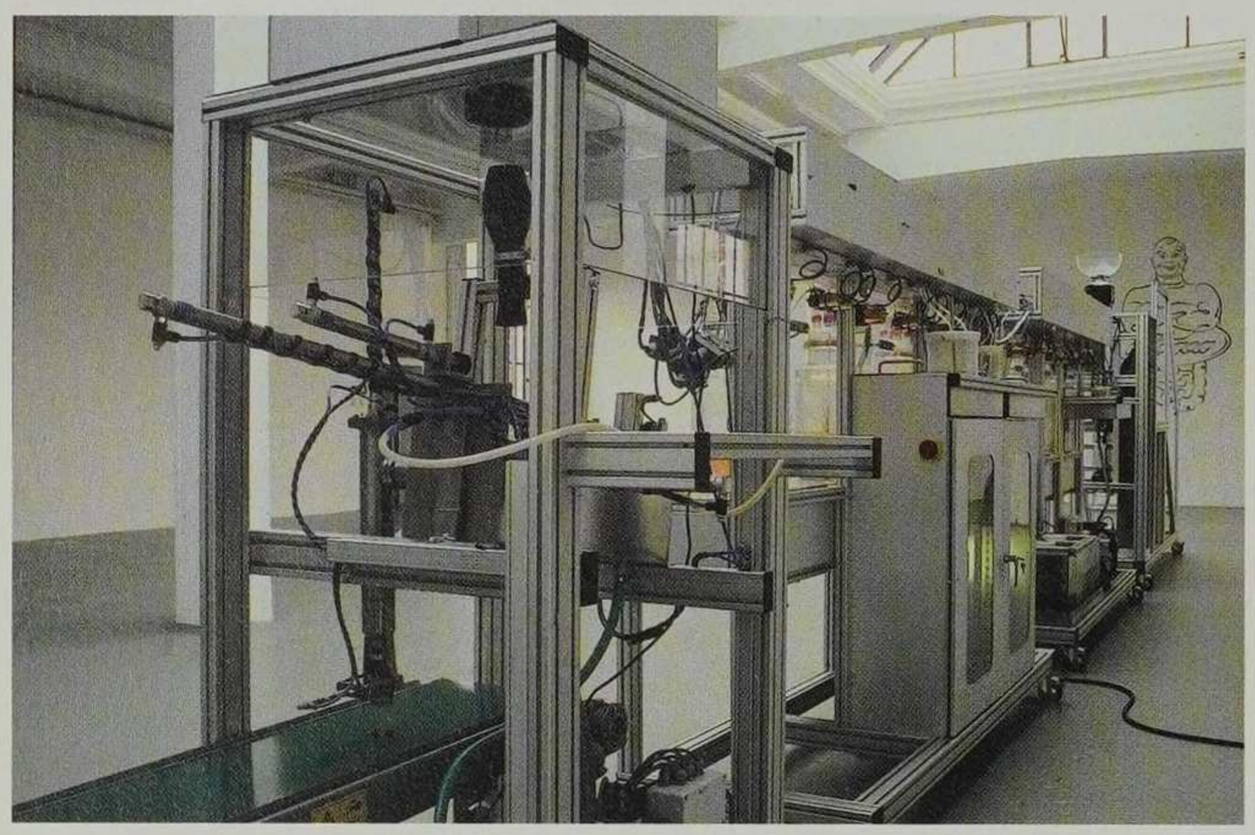
78¾ x 393¾ x 29½ INCHES
(200 x 1000 x 75 CM)


OMEGA
ACID
SIMATIC PANEL
CUDACA









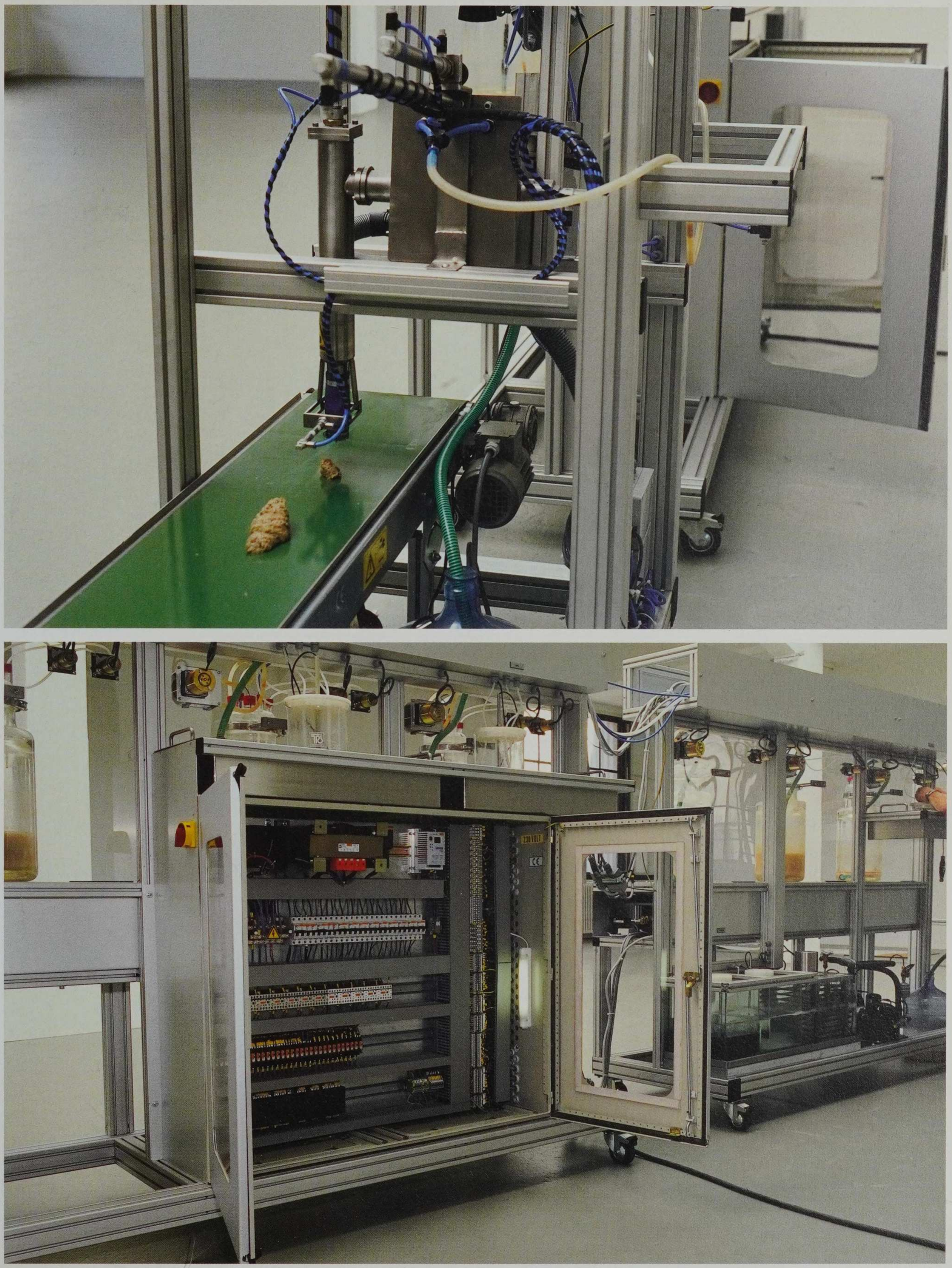


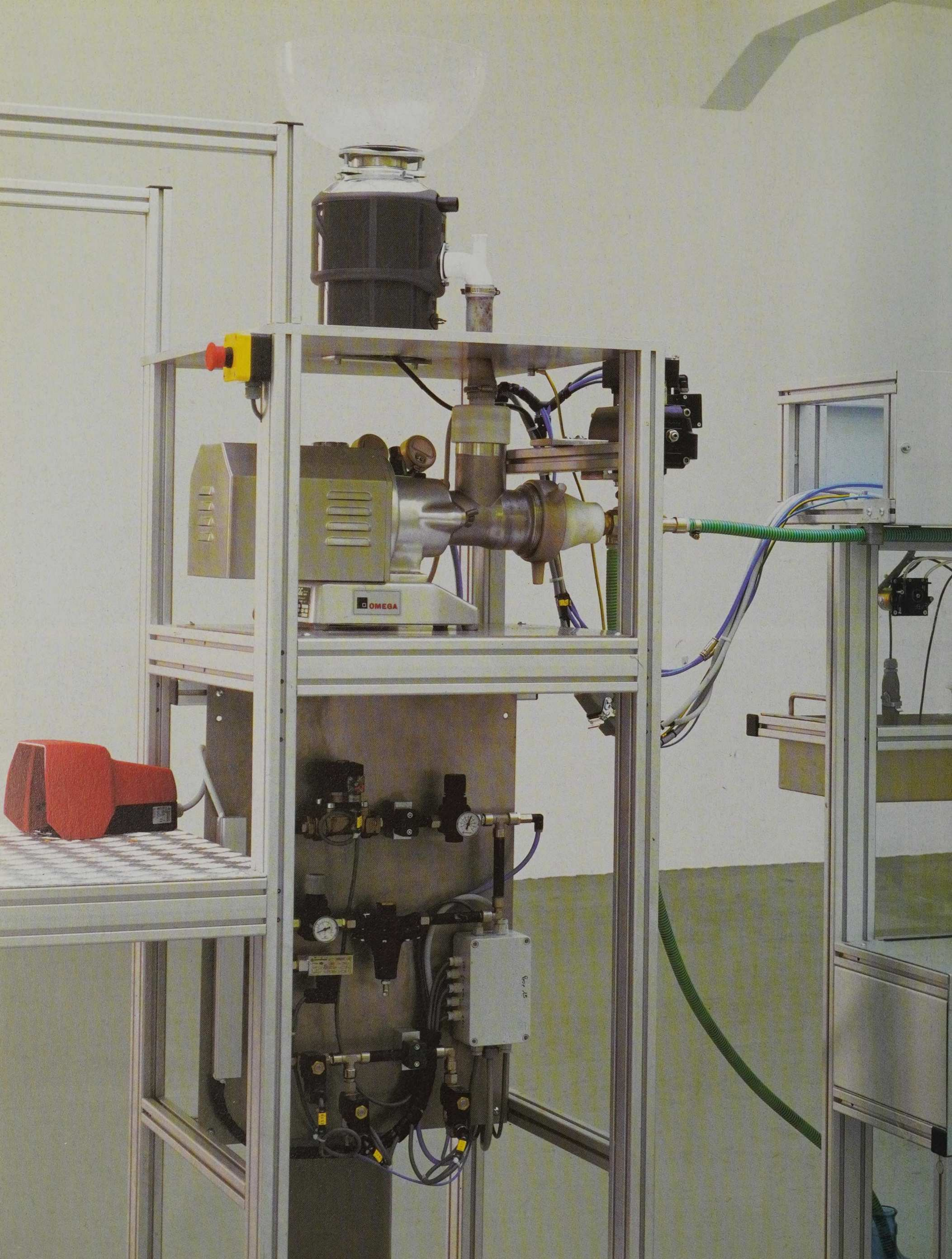









230 VOLT
CE


OMEGA


Cloaca
2002



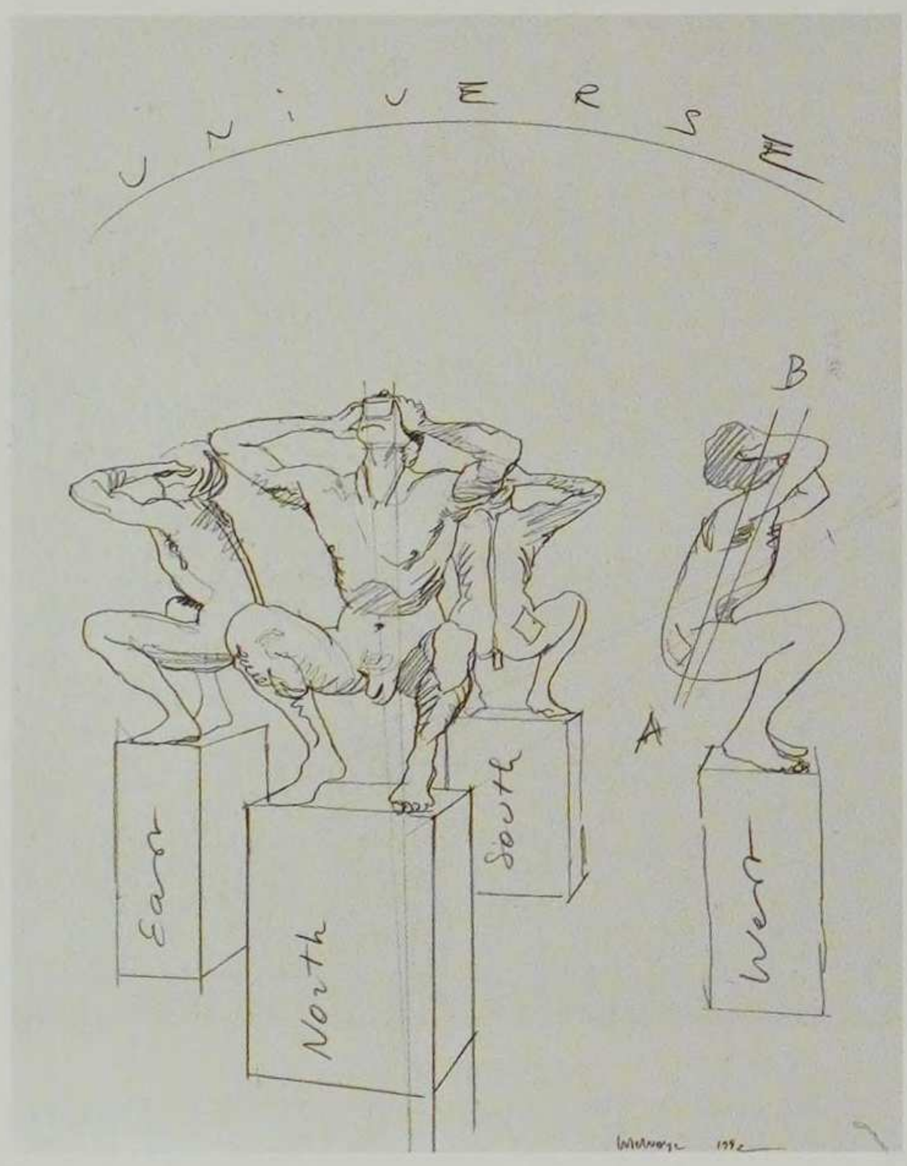
CHANTIER V
1994–'95, CERAMICS, METAL, 55 1/8 x 63 3/4 x 248 7/8 INCHES (140 x 162 x 632 CM)
COLLECTION MAGASIN 3, STOCKHOLM

BACK TO THE TOILET

Truth and Fiction in Wim Delvoye's Cloaca

DIETER ROELSTRAETE

In 1990 the American art historian and critic Neville Wakefield published his much-discussed pamphlet *Postmodernism. The Twilight of the Real*. At that time the subject of postmodernism was still very much the talk of the town, and attempts to record its essential characteristics for posterity equally rife. According to Wakefield's zeitgeisty discourse, the "post-modern condition" was best described as a loss of the *sense of reality*, which was then blown up to almost ideological proportions. Before Wakefield's findings, the *twilight of the real* had already been announced and prepared for by the demise of god, the death of the classic Cartesian subject of modernity, and the death of the author (conclusions derived by Nietzsche, Foucault, and Barthes respectively); of course to this list of casualties one could also add the end of history and of its near-metaphysical, all-embracing master narratives as envisaged by Fukuyama, Habermas and Lyotard, and the end of art as a philosophical and/or political enterprise (Danto, Kosuth, Krauss). At the onset of the 1990s Wakefield considered the time had now come to herald the bankruptcy of *reality tout court*, the *Götterdämmerung* of *the real* as such. Still according to Wakefield, the 90s would be post-historical, post-material, post-physical, post-political, in short, post-real — virtual? — or they would not be. Wakefield's astute and elegant analysis proved to be highly marketable — after all, this was the era of spectacular end-games, and the twilight of the real no more than its crowning glory. However, no sooner the book was published or its theses were belied by certain developments in the visual arts, from which it could be inferred that Wakefield's much deplored reality had instead embarked upon a steady resurrection. Instead of searching for a suitable epitaph for reality, some artists shamelessly and indecently undertook the job of reanimating that same reality, and before Wakefield and his ilk even noticed, reality had resurfaced from the dead, beaming with the light of art as it had never before. In what seemed to be a magisterial *coup de théâtre*, the so-called twilight of the real had been morphed into its triumphant return. In 1997, a book was published that was to finalise the unsuspected rise of reality. Not by chance, and with an equally zeitgeisty sense of the mediagenic, it was called *The Return of The Real*, its author the American art critic Hal Foster, himself once implied in an influential attempt to define postmodernism. In the blurb Foster categorically stated: "After the paradigm of art-as-text in the 1970s and art-as-simulacrum in the 1980s, we are witness to a 'return of the real' — of art and theory that seek to be grounded in actual bodies and social sites." Thus the Real — however it manifested itself — had not pined at all. Which may, if only partially, account for the overwhelming success of exhibitions such as *Féminimasculin* (1995), *L'informe* (1996), *Face à l'histoire* (1996), and, of course, the *Documenta X* (1997), for all of these were exhibitions that quite simply, demagogically even, postulated the un/problematic reality of the Body, Matter and Stuff, History, and Poetics/Politics as the prime breeding grounds of a repressed yet resurgent real — all of which we thought had been overcome and pronounced dead by the catastrophiliac teleology of postmodernism.



untitled (preparatory drawing for ROSE DES VENTS)
1992, PENCIL ON PAPER, 23⅛ x 19⅝ INCHES (60 x 50 CM)

All is well that ends well, and so, reality is back again. But how should we understand this apparent *reality fetishism* in the visual arts? What does this illustrious Real "really" look like, and in what sense

does it differ from reality before the dismantling and deconstruction operations of the 1970s and 1980s? In what way are art and art theory "grounded in actual bodies and social sites?" Foster argues that we should consider the resolutely unmediated reality as literal a physical reality as possible: the return of the real is therefore actually a return of its most challenged and repressed qualities — which, of course, are qualities of an extremely physical, bodily nature. In an outright hilarious passage from *The Return of The Real*, Foster consequently rubs our nose in the malodorous facts of this physical reality: "In the early 1990s this defiance (figures of perversion, that is, of *père-version*, of a turning from the father that is a twisting of his law) was manifested in a general flaunting of shit (or shit substitute: the real thing was rarely found). Of course Freud understood the disposition to order essential to civilisation as a reaction against anal eroticism, and in *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930) he imagined an origin myth involving a related repression that turns on the erection of man from all fours to two feet. With this change in posture, according to Freud, came a revolution in sense: smell was degraded and sight privileged, the anal repressed and the genital pronounced. (...) In this light the shit movement in contemporary art may intend a symbolic reversal of this first step into civilisation, of the repression of the anal and the olfactory. As such it may also intend a symbolic reversal of the phallic visuality of the erect body as the primary model of traditional painting and sculpture — the human figure as both the subject and frame of representation in Western art. This double defiance of visual sublimation and vertical form is a strong subcurrent in twentieth-century art, and it is sometimes expressed in a flaunting of anal eroticism."



CONCRETE MIXER
1991, CARVED TEAK WOOD, VARNISH, 74⅞ x 64 x 38¼ INCHES (190 x 165 x 97 CM)

At last the truth comes out – in peristaltic mode no less: central to *the return of the real* is what Foster labels the shit movement in contemporary art. The return of the real is therefore first and foremost a vengeful *return of the repressed*. The storm troops reality sent ahead upon returning into the artistic arena of the late twentieth century made their appeal to the guilt-ridden conscience of modernity, obsessed as it was by intellectual hygiene and antiseptic purity, an obsession partly resulting from the puritan diet Clement Greenberg and his followers had prescribed modern art for years on end. Greenberg's and Michael Fried's neurotic and monomaniac demand that "art should purge itself of all extra-artistic elements" had indeed merely resulted in a disquieting case of constipation. And when art finally went to the loo, an apocalyptic firework inevitably followed. Nemesis made itself appear in the guise of either a painfully hardened or dramatically diluted turd, taking revenge for the *non du père* underlying *l'ordre des choses* of modernity. In this "shit movement in contemporary art" reality manifested itself in its most tabooed, obscene and/or abject guise. It emerged as the artistic martyr of an age-old psychosocial regime of persecution, repression and sublimation. Just like the prosaic reality of our everyday actions, reality has its dark brown, clotted, impure edge. And after spending years in hiding, the brown undercurrent has now emerged to claim centre stage. The result of this war of liberation was a strongly erotic, "abject" artistic practice that makes use of feces, urine, menstrual blood, sperm and other emblems of bodily waste, deployed with the same utilitarian self-evidence as in former times oils,

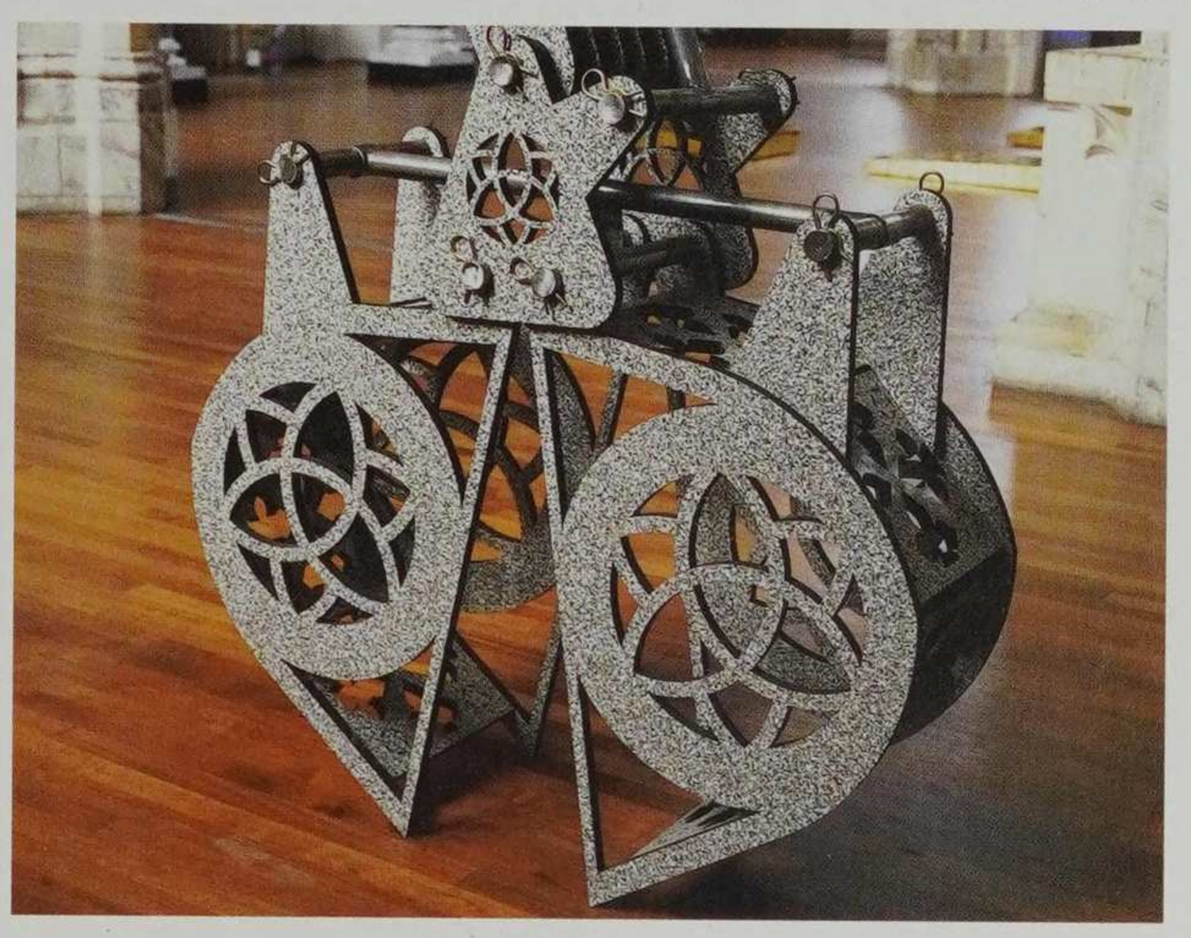


CATERPILLAR
"SONSBEEK 9 – LOCUS FOCUS" 2001, ARNHEM (THE NETHERLANDS) / MDF WOOD, FORMICA, METAL, 124⅜ x 271⅝ x 78 INCHES (315 x 690 x 198 CM)

marble and bronze. The unseemly twilight zones and minefields of the human body, hitherto only considered suitable for transgressive forms of barter, claimed their due. Enter Vito Acconci, Gilbert & George, Chris Ofili, Carole Schneemann, Andres Serrano, Kiki Smith, Andy Warhol. And Wim Delvoye.

Of course, the monolithic idea of a modernity obsessed with the twin spectres of intellectual hygiene and antiseptic purity is a caricaturist, reductionist distortion of a rather more heterogeneous reality. Long before an obvious shit movement in contemporary, postmodern art could be discerned, a number of artists had broken fresh ground, exploring the subversive, infectious potential of the (their own) body. Marcel Duchamp, probably the most oversexed artist of the twentieth century — and maybe therefore the most influential — has in the past decades come to be considered the one and only primogenitor of a dissident strand of "abject" body art; it therefore seems no coincidence that, along with the unlikely inclusion of Gustave Courbet, he was called as a crown witness in the celebrated *Féminimasculin* case. Duchamp's seminal *Fountain*, the bewildering sexual anagram that is the large glass, and the minute *Faux Paysage*, the abstract-expressionist sperm-stained tissue the artist offered as a gift to his Brazilian mistress, are nothing but symbolic beacons guiding Duchamp along his descent into the proverbial abyss of the human body, into the *terrae incognitae* of excrement, defecation and onanism. In the 1950s Piero Manzoni continued this confrontation with the sanitary reality of the artist's body with his

much-discussed series of multiples *Merda d'artista*. Here the human turd for the first time made its triumphant entry through the front door of art history —a satisfying change from the backdoor delivery ethic it was normally being confined to. (Of course this grand entrance had long been prepared by Duchamp's inverted urinal, which now became something to sit on rather than penetrate in upright hominid position.) And when finally dawn broke over the era of performance art, the road lay wide open to a gradual breaking of the spell that had been cast upon our bodies. Endless experiments with the body's orifices and bodily fluids alike were the rule of the day, but in line with the various truculent emancipatory aspirations of the epoch, this body art was in the main exclusively sexualised, or at least had an overriding sexual ring to it. At that time artists were primarily interested in the masculinity, femininity or transsexuality of the body, and less in the body in itself—*gender*. As Barbara Kruger put it with characteristic acrimony, *Your Body Is a Battleground*, and the battle being fought on that ground was by definition one between the sexes or its defining discourses. The sexually neutral category of our bowel motions was therefore not an issue; the anal discourse was only marginally implied in the body art rhetoric when it came, for instance, to the semantics of the gay liberation movement. The latter is apparent from for example Gilbert & George's *Fundamental Pictures*. The theming of scatology in these works is clearly and explicitly related to the gendered issue of the subversive and/or infectious nature of the body, and makes almost exclusive use of the triadic motif of blood, sperm and urine—an obvious reference to the "gay plague" stigma of the AIDS epidemic. Which goes to show that also in this instance the turd, as the emblematic image *par excellence* of the real, is denied its irreducible identity. Once again, human feces have become part of a "master narrative," subject to a "higher" (in a literal sense, as in brain-monitored) signifier. Of course, in his essay on the shit movement in contemporary art Foster lengthily discusses the work of artists such as Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, and Kiki Smith, but also in these cases the scatological motif must by necessity suffer under the weight of the gendered load implicitly interwoven with the theme. Seemingly, shit cannot be "just shit." Kiki Smith invariably presents the brown streak of abjection in a context typified by sexual difference (in that the reddish-brown streak always belongs to the *female* body), while both Mike Kelley's and Paul McCarthy's ostentatious anal display and "general flaunting of shit" is nearly always linked with infantile, and therefore transgressive, forms of abject sexuality. (Special mention should be made of Kelly's own attempt at subverting, or at least complicating, this one-dimensional, gender-based reading in his 1990 photo diptych, *Nostalgic Depiction of the Innocence of Childhood*, and *Manipulating Mass Produced Idealized Objects*). And in Robert Mapplethorpe's and Andres Serrano's photo works, the anus is again little more than a mere stage prop in a sexual war of liberation, and therefore entirely unrelated to the *shit* movement as such.



CATERPILLAR (detail)

Seen from this perspective, then, Wim Delvoye's ongoing obsession with the scatological *per se* and pur sang is a relatively unique phenomenon on the contemporary art scene. Delvoye's interim magnum opus *Cloaca* presents the culmination of a development that



CEMENT TRUCK
"VENICE BIENNIAL – D'APERTUTTO" 1999, VENICE (ITALY) / 1990–'99, CARVED TEAK WOOD, 263¾ x 128 x 88⅝ INCHES (670 x 325 x 225 CM)
COURTESY GIAN ENZO SPERONE, ROME

can easily be traced back to the scabrous early works, which in retrospect acquire the status of defining ground work moments. What was hitherto unseen, and attests to the singularity of Delvoye's work, is the complete (and successful) separation of scatological behaviour on the one hand, and sexual perversion on the other. Delvoye's shit machine is the first to succeed in the *desexualization* of defecation, and the first to succeed in allowing the anus, the synecdoche of the excremental act, to represent and simply *be* itself. The turd appears and eloquently speaks to us as the irreducible piece of shit it is, and as nothing else — a feat which is probably best viewed in the context of Ad Reinhardt's appeal for an "art-as-art and nothing else." Thus Wim Delvoye has truly accomplished a real *tour de force* in this most oversexed of eras. (Of particular interest are the enigmatic red prints of sphincters on fancy writing paper from world-renowned luxury hotels providing a highly ironic, critical complement to *Cloaca*. The anus — which admittedly plays a role of some importance in human sexual behaviour — is cunningly reminded of its erotic significance through the well-tried recipe of sexual differentiation as represented in the use of lipstick. These "arse kisses" of Delvoye's anonymous admirers are, however, entirely asexual, genderless even; instead of carrying the lewd weight of suggestion, they appear rather chivalrous and chaste, somewhat like the dizzying cleavages of the medieval gentlewomen, which, in spite of articulating the semantics of sexual difference to the point of absolute unambiguity, were in fact demure symbols of a typical upper class prudishness).

In the magnificent catalogue which first accompanied the peristaltic wheeling and dealing of Delvoye's

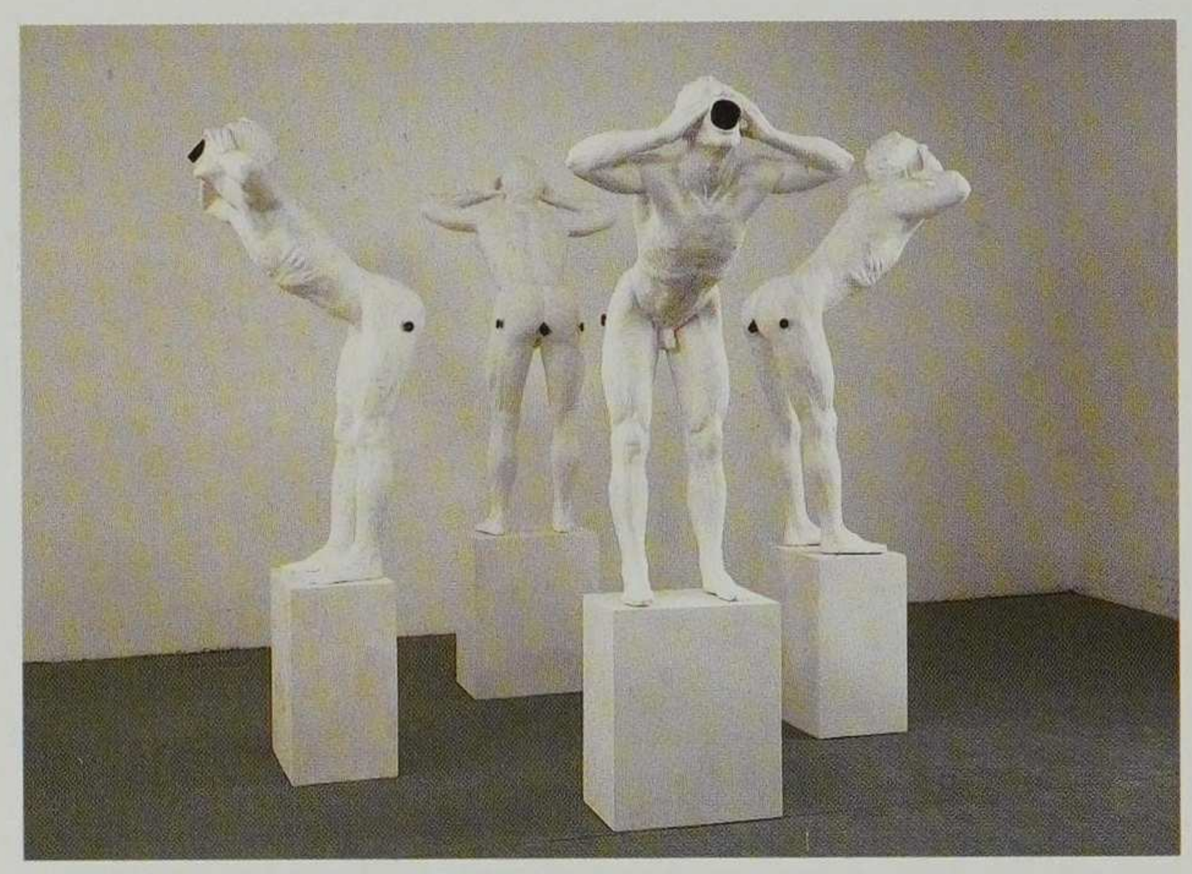
shit machine at its Belgian premiere (featuring texts from Michel Onfray, Georges Perec, Peter Sloterdijk e.a.), the pivotal position *Cloaca* takes up in Delvoye's scatological universe is discussed at great length, for indeed, *Cloaca* is not the first manifestation of the artist's coprophagous preoccupations. In 1992 the art world was treated to a tiled floor installed in the Fridericianum in Kassel, consisting solely of printed samples of the artist's own excrements. In that sense the tiled floor was related closer to the historic precedent of Manzoni's *Merda d'artista* than to his own *Cloaca*. In the wake of the modest controversy that was occasioned by *Cloaca*'s Belgian premiere, many critics have deliberately concentrated too much on the historic example of Piero Manzoni, thereby reducing the wide range of philosophical implications of *Cloaca* to questions surrounding the actual shape *Cloaca*'s final product took on: in what way does an autographed *lump* of shit differ from a *tin* of shit? Many critics thus ignored the fundamental differences between these two works. And one of these resides in the fact that Manzoni tinned *his own turds* — though I have never been able to find out whether Manzoni actually defecated into his tins — while Delvoye has created a *machine* with the explicit aim to depersonalise this "creative" act as drastically as possible (thus once more reinforcing the Barthesian claim to the death of the author). Manzoni's signed *merde* embodied the culmination of the sovereign might of the artist as a modern-day Midas — the artist's turd is a work of art, simply because it is an *artist's turd*, a truly hardline profession of faith to the Duchampian ready-made theology. In Delvoye's *Cloaca*, however, artistic personality and the act of defecation are two entirely separate entities. First of all, Delvoye's well-known predilection for the logic of mass-production — to which Cloaca makes no exception, considering the industrial accuracy with which it produces one turd a day — is in line with Warhol's central creed that "everybody should be a machine." (The theme of the machine as a work of art or vice versa will remain outside the scope of this essay, but certainly deserves further investigation. For *Cloaca* — a machine which in a scientifically watertight, mechanical manner aims to reproduce the human digestive system — inevitably reminds us of the old mimetic dream of Dr Frankenstein, who, putting himself on an equal footing with God, sought to create a *human being*, i.e. to bestow a dead "machine" with human life. Frankenstein's endeavour can of course pride itself on a noble yet troubled lineage stretching way beyond the robotic chic of the Cloaca, including the likes of Paracelsus's *homunculus* — note the subdued echo of the age-old alchemist tradition in Delvoye's digestive machine — and Rabbi Löw's *golem*, as well as the more recent attempts at genetic engineering and genetically reproducing human ears on balding mouse backs. Furthermore, the sterile laboratory aesthetics of *Cloaca* consciously and shrewdly takes advantage of our apparently compulsive tendency to feel sympathy, even within a museum context, with everything that displays the slightest trace of anthropomorphic features. The fact that *Cloaca* eats "our" food, mimics "our" digestive system, and also produces "our" shit, apparently implies that it is all but a person, or that at the very least it must be a living being — and therefore worthy



ROSE DES VENTS – KIMPO
1998, BRONZE, ELECTRIC FAN, 59 x 47¼ x 19⅝ INCHES (4x) (150 x 120 x 50 CM)
KIMPO SCULPTURE PARK 1998, KOREA

of our sympathy. Which it seems to mobilise with a disquieting ease inversely proportional to its lacking even the slightest resemblance to the human figure, as is the case with the "true-to-life" sculptures of e.g. Stephan Balkenhol or Juan Muñoz, who inevitably lose out to *Cloaca* on their ability to trigger an emotional response. Yet more discomfortingly, the "mystery"of anthropomorphisation that lies at the heart of the audience response to *Cloaca* also raises questions concerning its sexual identity...)

On the intersection between anthropomorphic reflexology and scatological motif we also encounter the bronze sculpture groups Delvoye created in 1991-'92. Easily the most famous of these is ***Rose des Vents***: four angelic male figures turn their back to each other, bending over slightly, pressing their hands like binoculars to their eyes; the public is invited to gaze at the stars through a tube connecting their eyes with their arse—in short, *textbook Bataille*. When the work was first shown in America, the artist was interviewed by New York based psychoanalyst Josefina Ayerza for the aptly named online magazine *Lacanian Ink*. One casual remark Delvoye made in this interview proved to be quite revealing: "Everything in sculpture has its reasons, so a position of the hand, a position of the thumb, everything has a reason, you know... That the figure is male is also important, because a male figure can symbolise more easily just the human, while a female figure... It would be too cruel to use a female figure, especially as a male artist." Once more we find that Delvoye is primarily concerned with the *liberation* of the anus from the bonds of his/her libidinous economy—with the *desexualisation* of the anal event. Choosing the more generic "male" anus for ***Rose des Vents*** and the "neutral" anus of the genderless shit machine, the artist craftily avoids the clichés of *le sexe de l'art*. The place where the sun don't shine should be judged on its own merits, and in the end these merits should be viewed from a "post-sexual" perspective, a dissident "liberation theology" that is backed up philosophically—and *politically*—by Delvoye's quoting a hilarious passage from Peter Sloterdijk's epochal *Critique of Cynical Reason*: "The arse seems to be condemned to live in the dark. Among the different parts of our body, it leads the life of a tramp. It truly is the idiot of the family. Yet it would be a miracle if this black sheep of the body did not have a ready opinion of the events taking place in higher regions, just like those who have been rejected by society often express the most sober views of it."



ROSE DES VENTS I – Plaster
1992, PLASTER AND TELESCOPES ON PEDESTAL, EACH FIGURE 88½ INCHES HIGH (225 CM)

By desexualising the anal momentum and/or the scatological motif *in* and through the *Cloaca* discourse, Delvoye also seems to make a modest "political" statement, as we may readily infer from Sloterdijk's quote. For instead of addressing the solipsistic petty-bourgeois questionnaire of sexual identity—in which contemporary art is all too often reduced to a therapeutic exercise in walking the tightrope between voyeurism and exhibitionism—Delvoye's for-all-to-see tactics (transparency might indeed be called the prime material feature of *Cloaca* as an "installation") radically opt for the convivial public latrine of olden days. He resolutely rejects the self-gratifying and juvenile horseplay with infantile shit courtesy of McCarthy & co., advocating instead the basic democratic principle of the village toilet, because public space is only truly—i.e. also *politically*—public if, like in China, we have the convenience of mass toilets—like we actually used to have, with people amiably taking a crap next to each

other and making the most of the instantaneity of public life. Space is public only then when we also shit publicly, *ergo* asexually — as in the instance of *Cloaca*. With which we also uncover the regressive – and, therefore, ultimately reactionary — character of the obsessive gender-based debate that continues to hold its grip on contemporary art. The longer art locks itself in our bedroom or in the phantasmic privacy of the toilet, the longer it remains absent in the much-beleaguered realm of public life. The more fetishistically intimate and the more biographic its motifs, the more difficult it becomes to act meaningfully in the public realm. Oversexed art, no matter how "subversive" its transgressions, poses no real threat: regardless of how the Oedipal conflict is resolved, only the status quo stands to gain. Maybe the anus only became the object of our warring desire after the introduction of the *private* toilet, and the final inclusion of the anal event in adult sexuality may have coincided with that historic moment when the first partitions were built to separate the holes of the collective village loo, resulting in a proliferation of privacies — and an analogous caving of public space. In other words: the invention of private space preceded the invention of voyeurism, and through the invention of private space modern art could become the voyeuristic experience *par excellence*, apt at sexualising and eroticising everything it brings into focus, including human bathroom behaviour.

In the previously mentioned interview with Josefina Ayerza, Delvoye prophesies the "political momentum" of *Cloaca*: "The anus is something in the hierarchy of the body, just like shit... This thing we all throw away is also like an embassy of our body, and the interesting thing of feces is that everybody produces it. I was looking for a portrait of mankind, the one on the *Voyager* — they made a very sketchy drawing, a schematic plate of a male and a female with some particular characteristics — excludes a big part of our population. So, while shit is a part of mankind, it shows no difference between gender, race, age, class, or anything else. The president of America goes to the toilet just like a beggar on the street." Or, to quote Peter Sloterdijk once more, easily the most eloquent apologist of the bowel movement politics: "The anus is a plebeian, the basic democrat and cosmopolitan among our body parts, in short, the elementary Cynic organ. [Indeed, dear reader, Delvoye enjoys the exquisite company here of none other than the satyr and coprophage Diogenes of Sinope.] It provides a solid, materialistic basis, and feels at home on all lavatories in the world. The International of the Bottoms is the only worldwide organization that can do without articles of association, ideology or membership card. The solidarity of the bottoms is unshakeable. Unlike the head, for which limits and possessions carry great weight, the anus playfully exceeds all limits." And so Sloterdijk's eulogy of the anus continues endlessly. Bataille's base materialism — the gritty "stuff" so central to the influential *Informe* show that critically reframed abjection as an artistic strategy — is hailed as a critical antidote to the suspicious lofty heights of pure/purist theory, and thus *Cloaca* is re-evaluated in the light of a recent "social-realist" revival permeating contemporary visual arts... Apparently, the almighty turd succeeds in casting its long shadow even over the most sublime of human experiences. Incarnation through shame. The return of the real = back to the toilet, and back with a vengeance indeed. And in its wake a multitude of controversial revelations and revealing controversies follow suit.

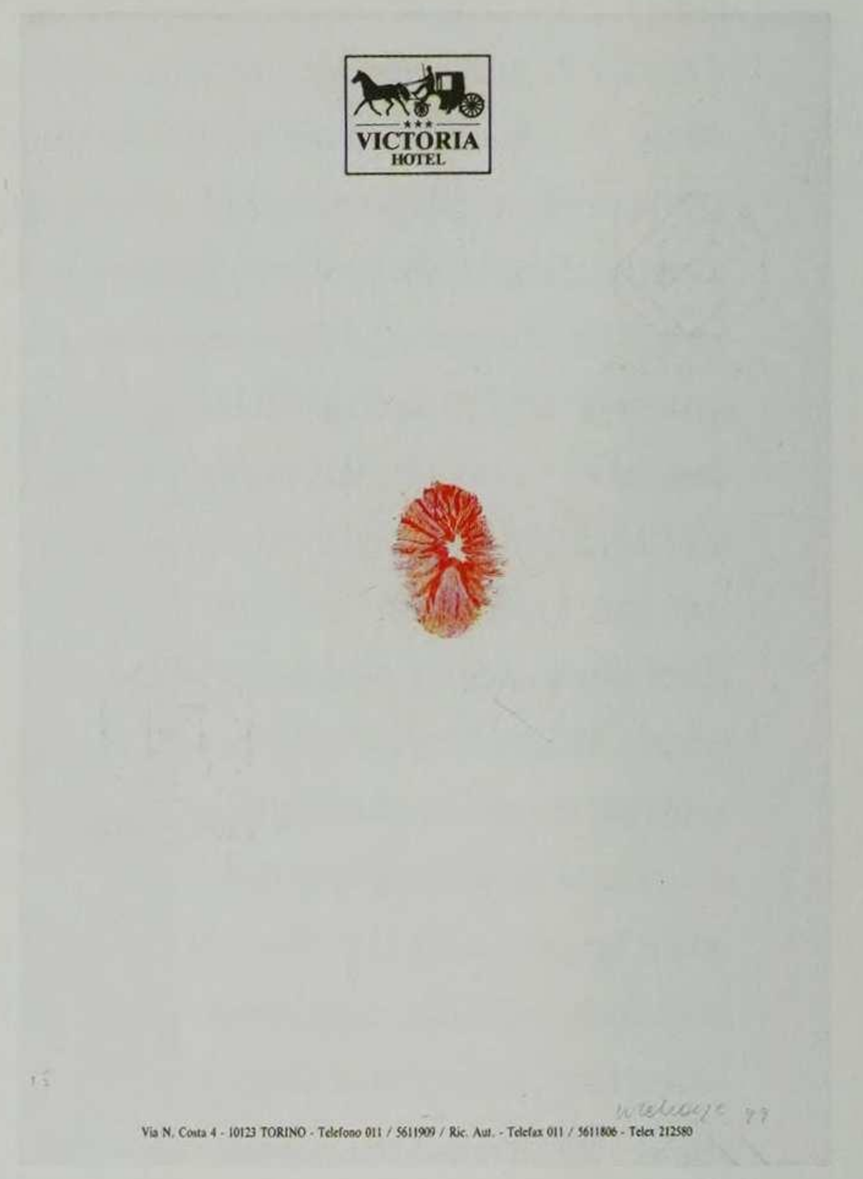
Whether Wim Delvoye really meant it all remains to be seen, open to question and wholly irrelevant to our present reading indeed. Did he expect this wildstyle proliferation of differing interpretations and scatologies, this truly "semiotic diarrhoea?" Maybe he did not, but, all the same, the cathartic bodily wisdom that is diarrhoea necessarily remains the natural superlative of the anal/banal reality of the laws of digestion. Art imitates life, and right at the heart of life gapes the abyss of the anus — and as art has found out at its cost: even in the extremely well-balanced, purified and thoroughly disciplined environment of Delvoye's pristine shit machine, an environment in which nothing is left to chance, nature claims its due and the anus opens its mouth to blurt out the last word: "listen to the truth of shit."

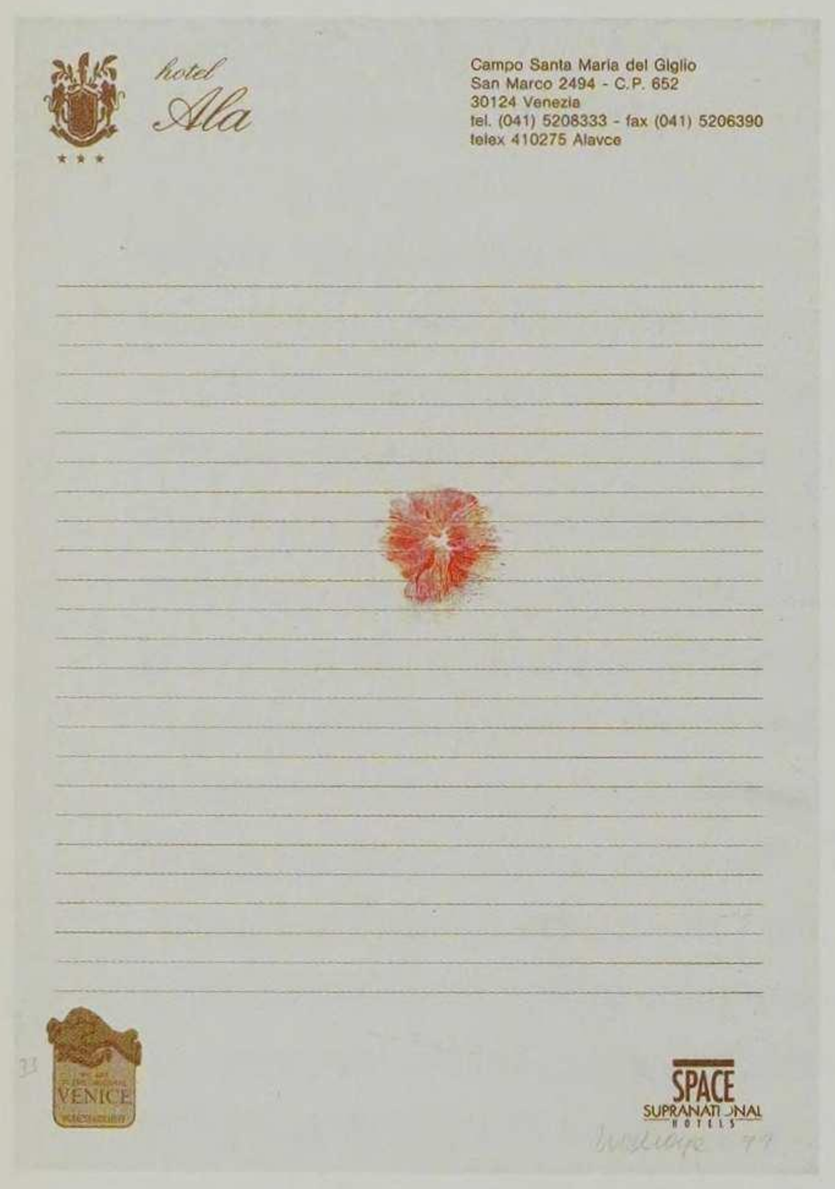
LIPSTICK PRINTS

1999–2000, LIPSTICK ON PRINTED PAPER, 20⅞ x 17⅜ INCHES – FRAMED (53 x 44 CM)

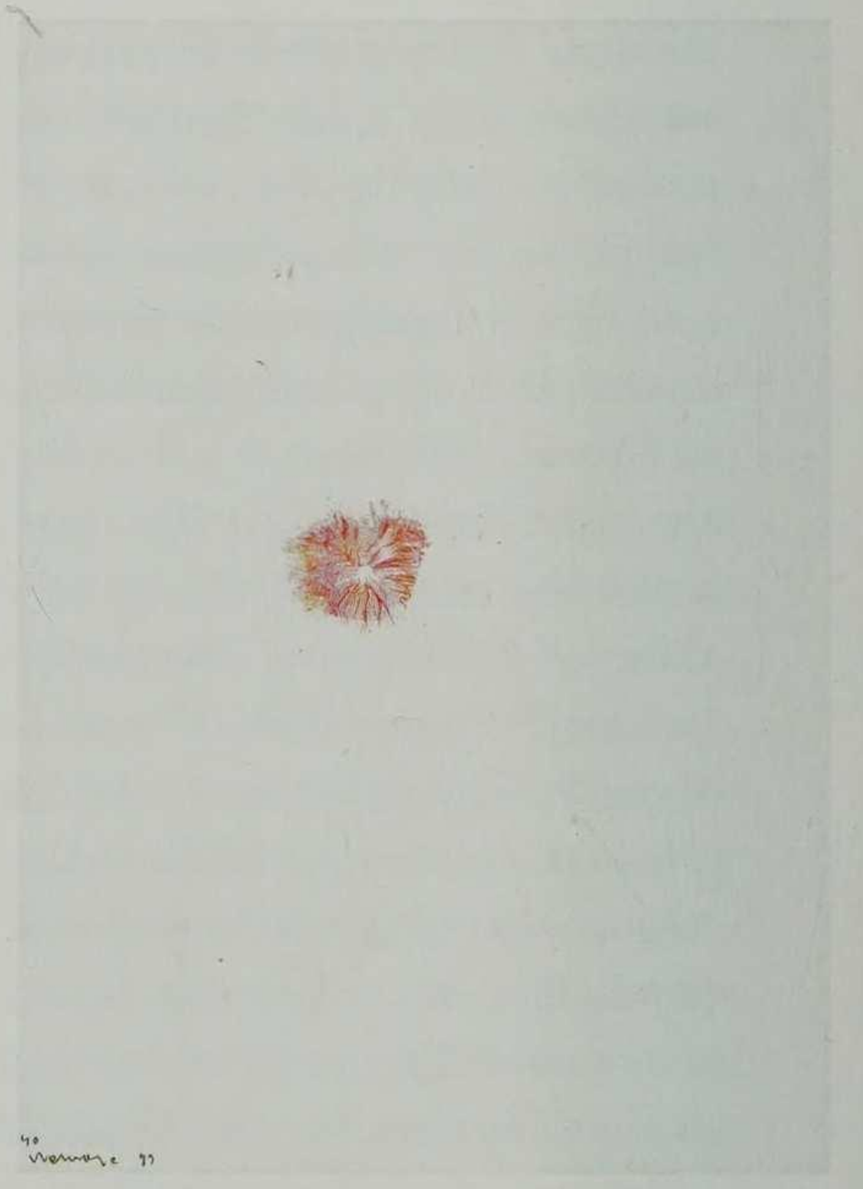












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The History of Shit

DOMINIQUE LAPORTE

Corpses are no more and no less than waste that one buries. The Christian West has long responded with equal terror to the smell of shit and corpses. One finds significant parallels in the morbid effects attributed to their respective odors as well as in the desire to hold them both at bay. The menace associated with the dead could only be lifted once the principle of democratic equality had been extended to dead bodies as well as to living ones. Rescued from the promiscuous anonymity of the mass grave, the corpse became the object of a cult. As an individual, the corpse ceases to be stinking offal and acquires the dignity of a relic; it severs its ties to the *cloaca* and becomes good excrement, piously preserved. Cemeteries and shit heaps find historical unity in this meeting of exquisite refuse and delicious corpses.

In the West, the tomb is a place one cultivates and decorates; that other site of embellishment for Colonial and Victorian Europe was the latrine. Both evidence a similar taste for cleanliness, for finial ornaments and fine materials. Porphyry and mahogany, porcelain and marble served as chapels to waste, and urinals sprouted on street corners like cavalries at crossroads. If, in the future, all our libraries burnt down and the field of anthropology had to be reinvented, our descendants would surely wonder what gods had been worshipped in public conveniences,their odor erased by time and their ruins as enigmatic as the ones thought today to belong to a cult of the dead.

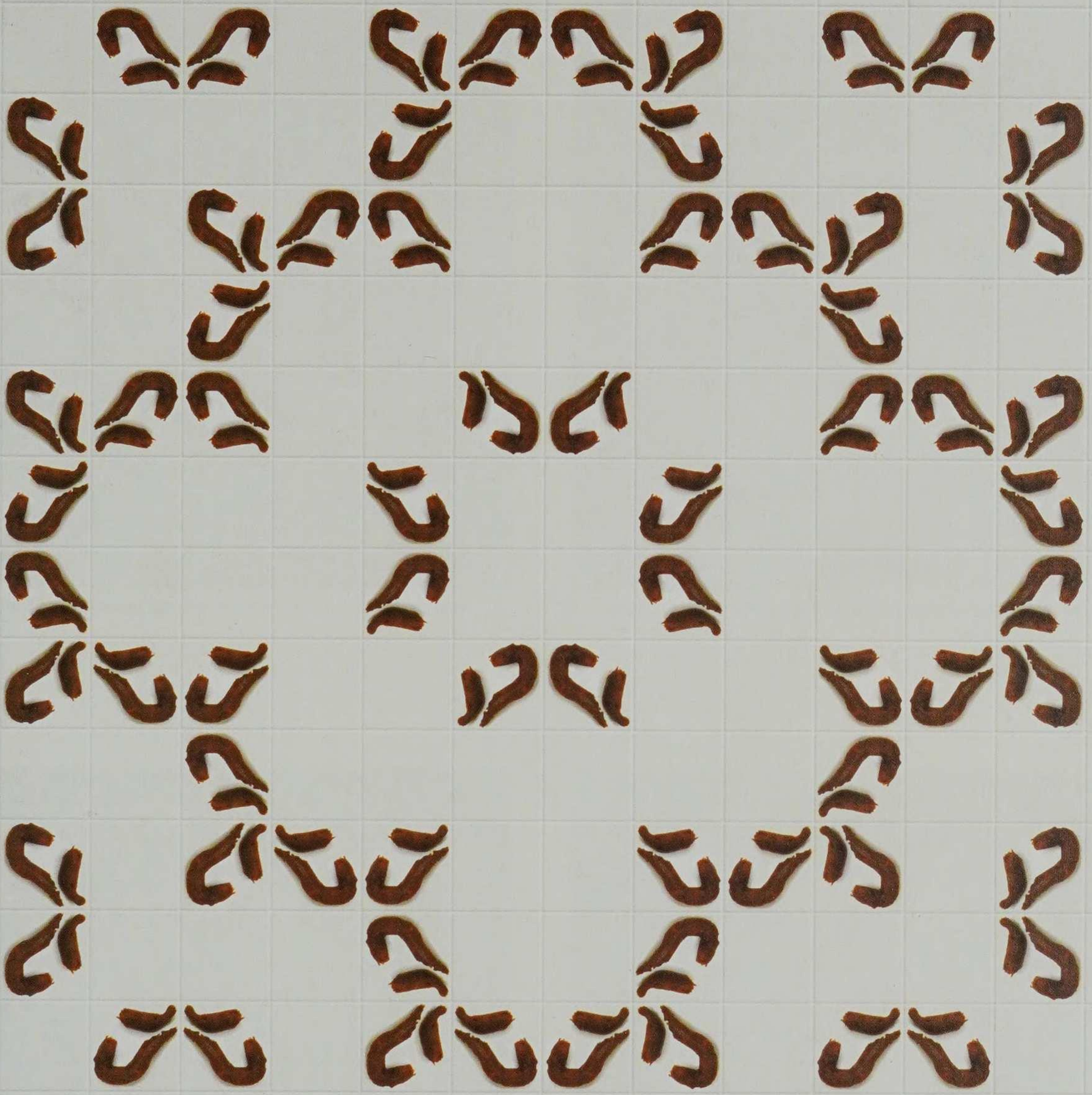
What is Perfume?

In *The Myth of Digestion,* Bachelard points to the "digestive primitive essence" of the bourgeoisie, linking medical theories of excrement and digestion to civilization's essential anality. In much the same way that a well-functioning

digestive system is perceived as a necessary condition of good health, bad smell — whether of shit or of a corpse, from the cesspool or the cemetery — is perceived as intrinsically noxious. All unexplained pathologies are duly attributed to *mephitism* (the buzz word of nineteenth-century hygiene): repugnant exhalations that foul the air and, much like epidemics, travel from house to house spreading illness and death.

Why should fetid odors be immediately associated with morbidity? We find at least one explanation in the myth of wholesome digestion, whereby good health is signaled by the overall absence of smells and a quasi-palatable excremental odor sets the norm. Digestion and nutrition are key factors in the transition from a blood of society to a society of "health, progeny, race, survival of the species, vitality of the social body" — a society where wholesome digestion (the corollary of the odorless) is likely to evince well-being. A wholesome digestion is considered beneficial to health, to the race, and to the reproduction of the species. And hence to reproduction pure and simple. Digestion is wholesome insofar as it eludes the visible and escapes the senses. It ensures and signals the sound functioning of the body by betraying none of its processes.

Translucent bodies: Wholesome digestion belongs to the economy of a society where "even bloodstained money gives away nothing and stands for everything," where the odorless (an indication, even today, of healthy shit) signals exchange and emerges as the signifier for the rich, the attractive, the beautiful. The separation of bodies from their odors guarantees the reproduction of riches, as is witnessed by hygiene's myth of "vanished excrement" whose "liquidation" (olfactory and otherwise) occurs at the very instant of its inscription in the process of production.

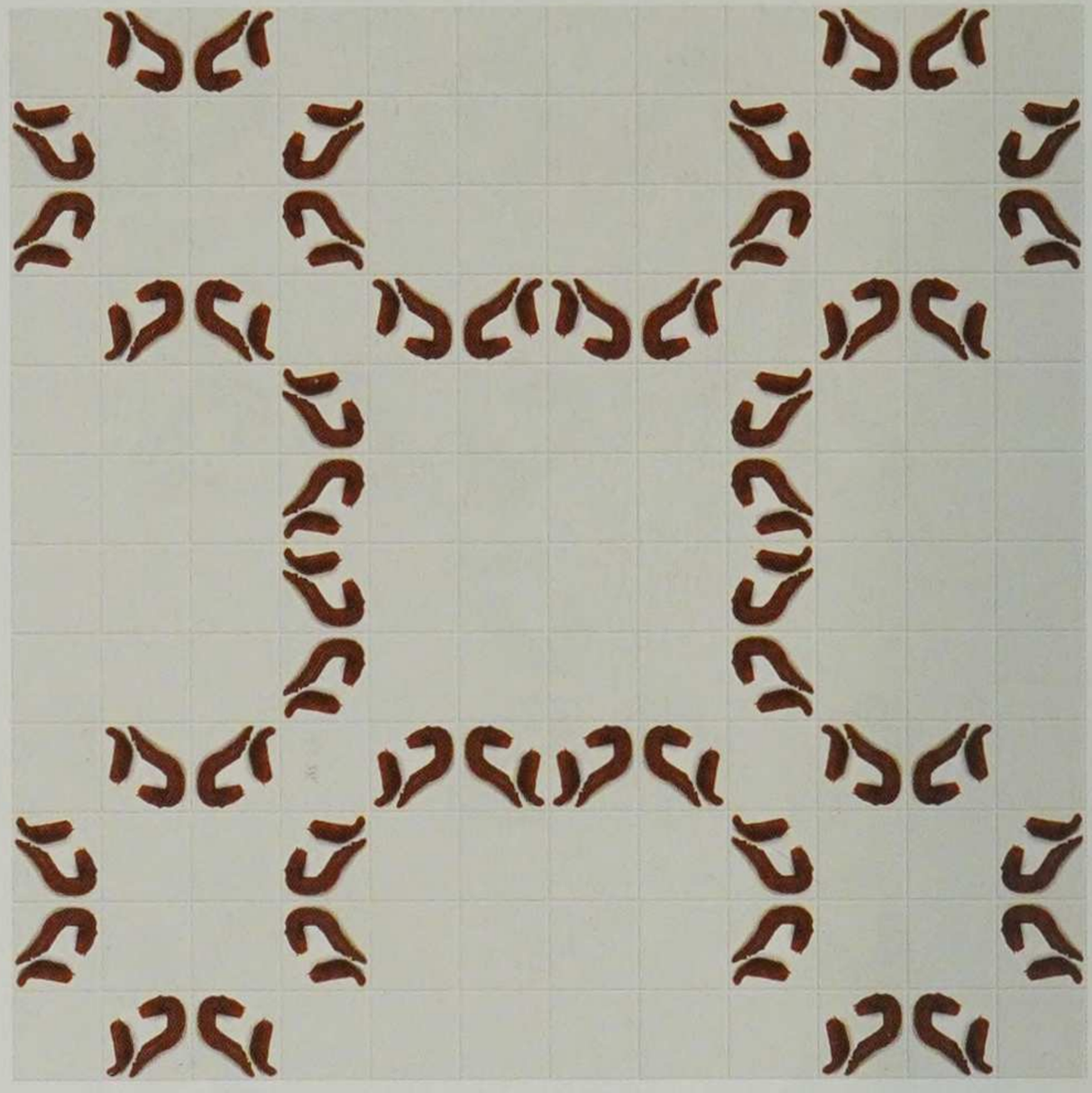


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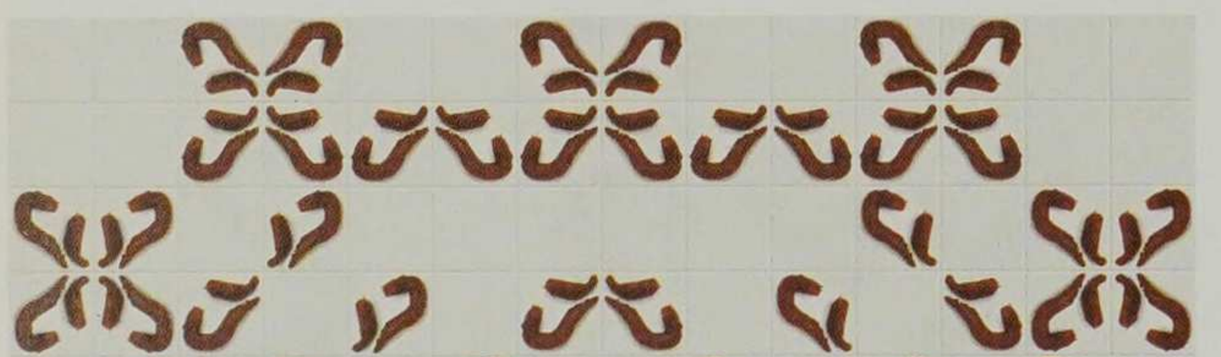
MOSAICS



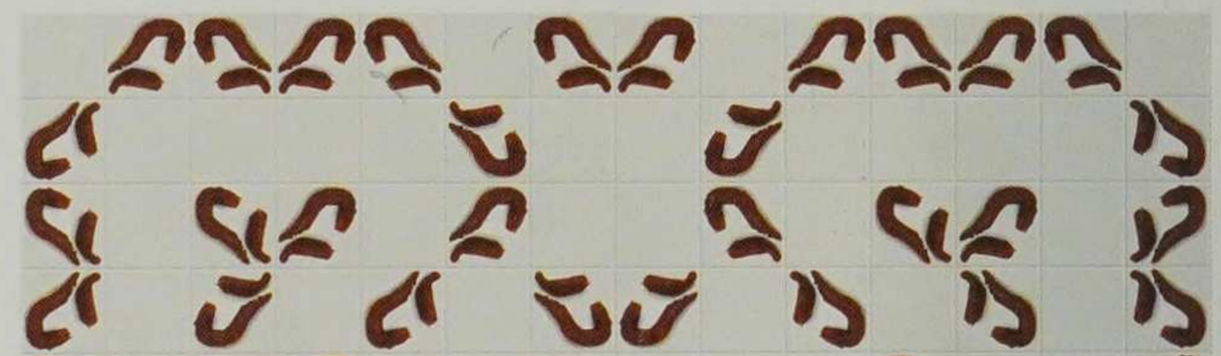
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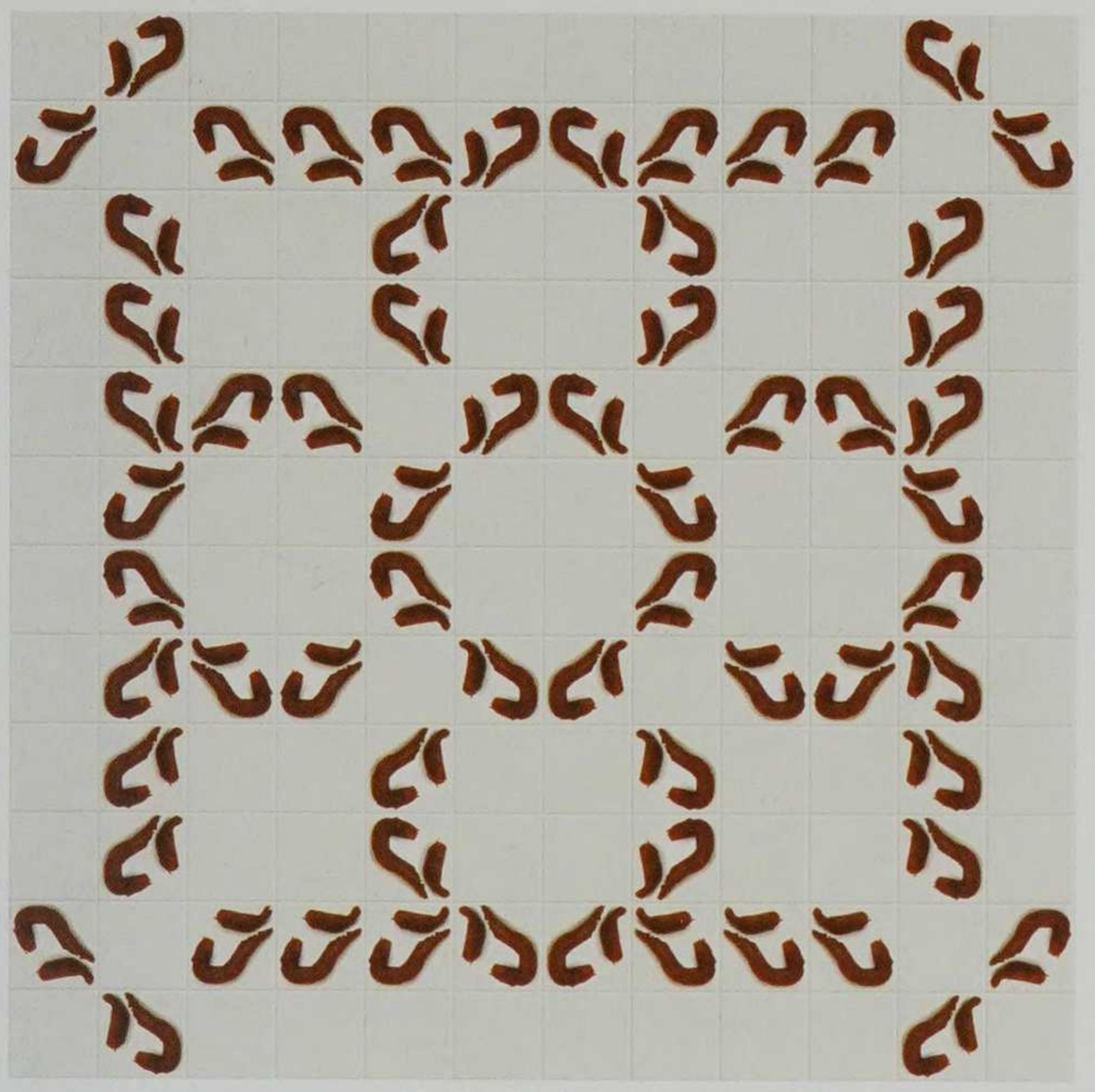
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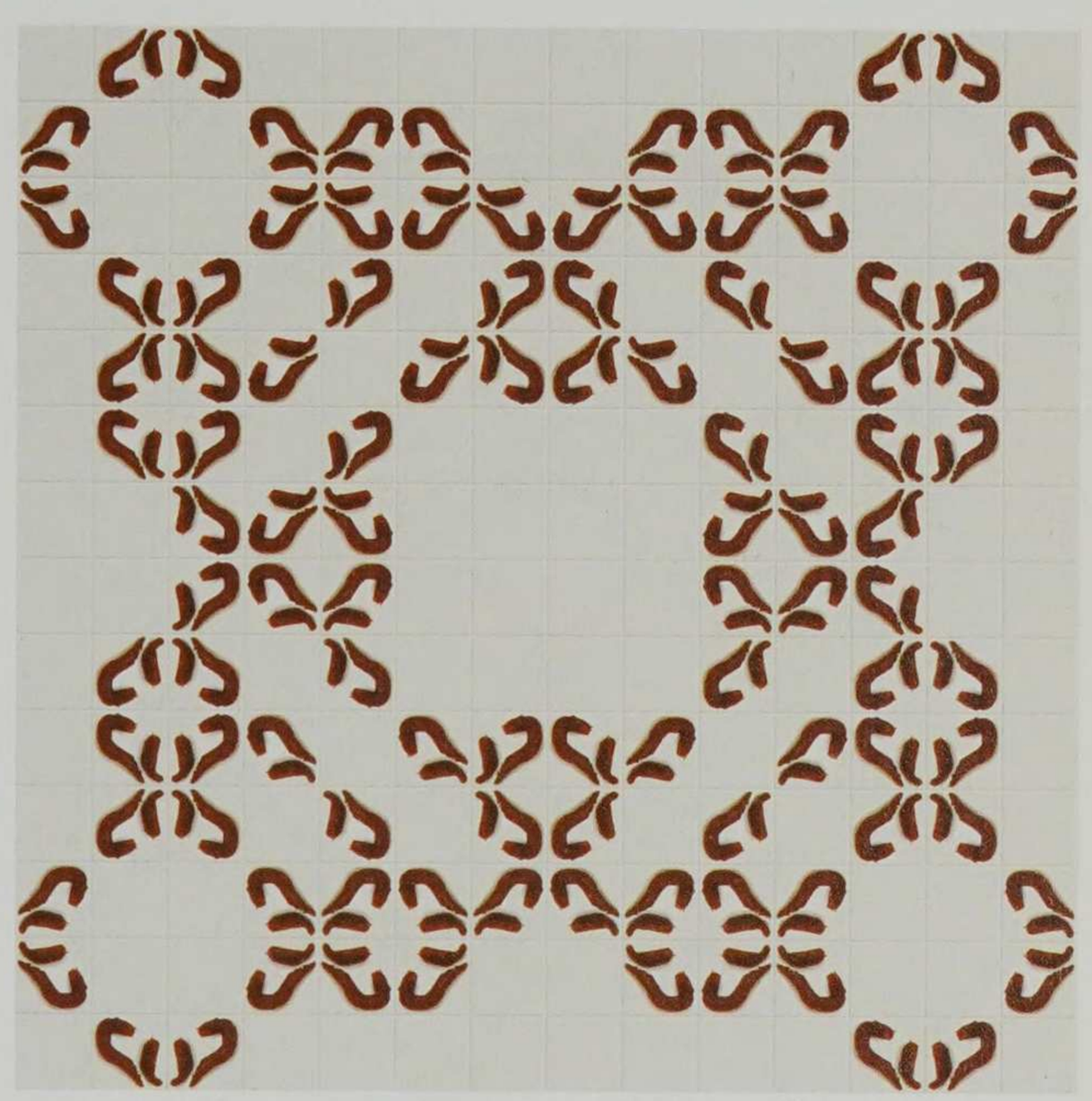
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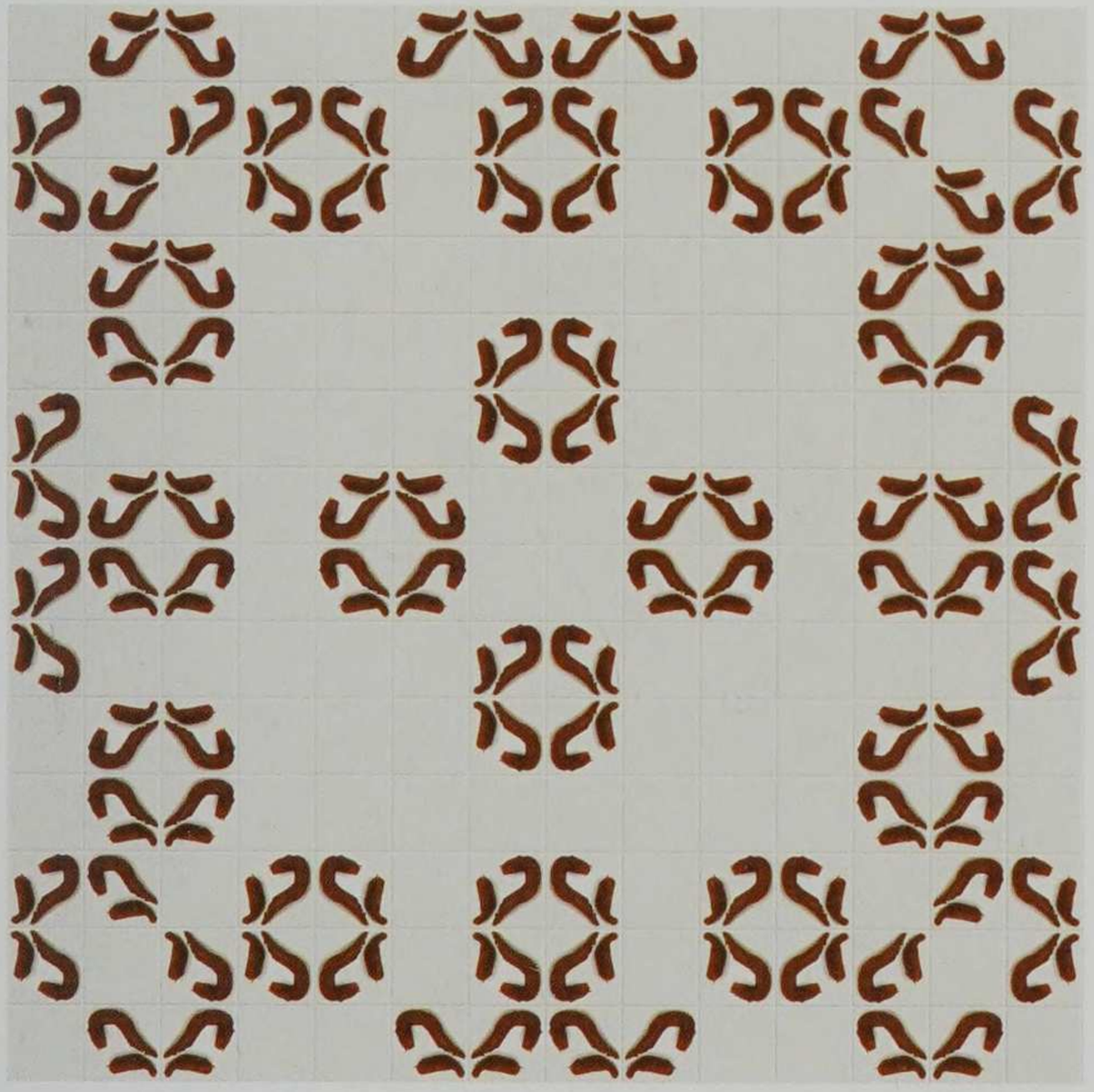
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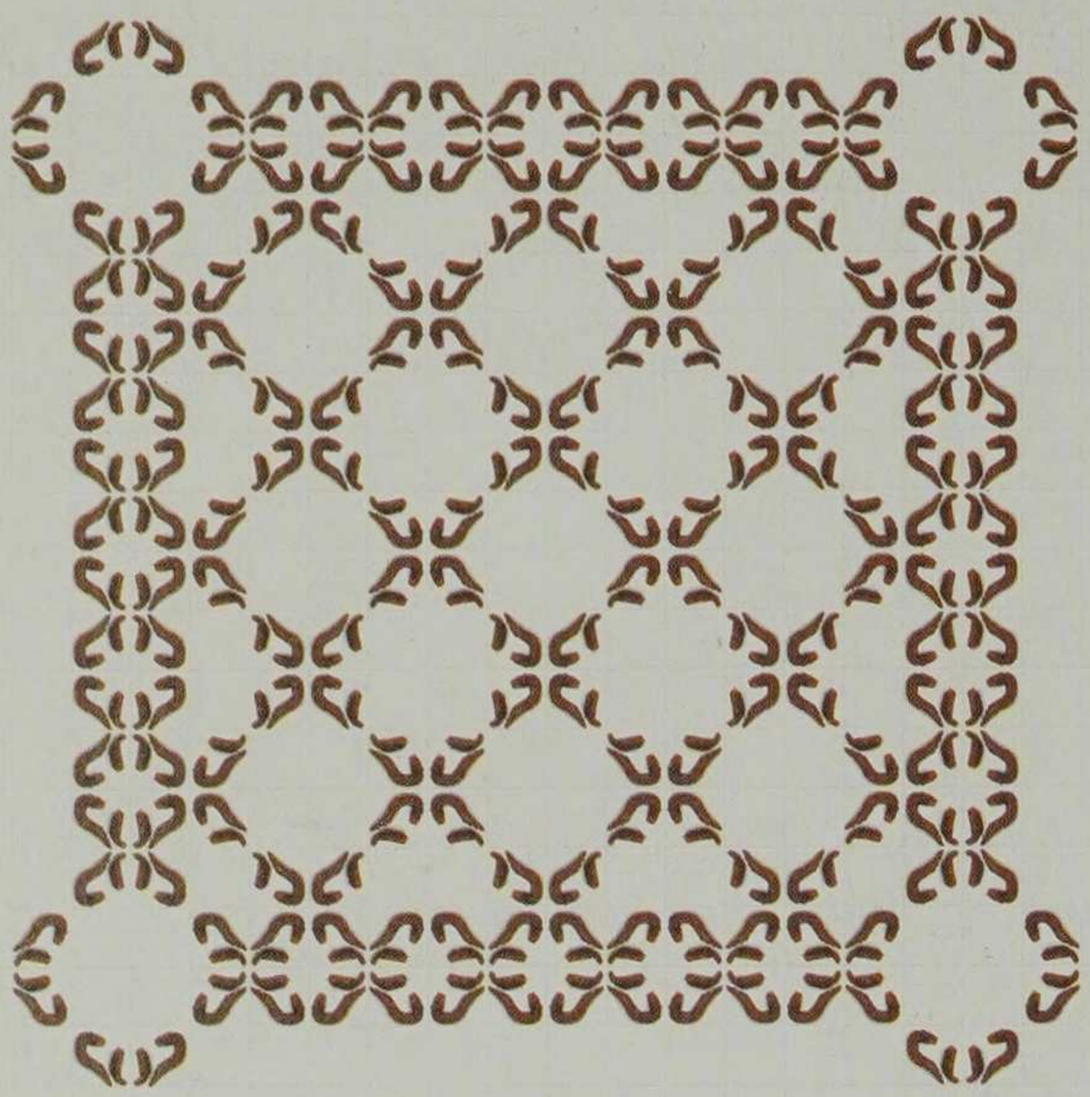
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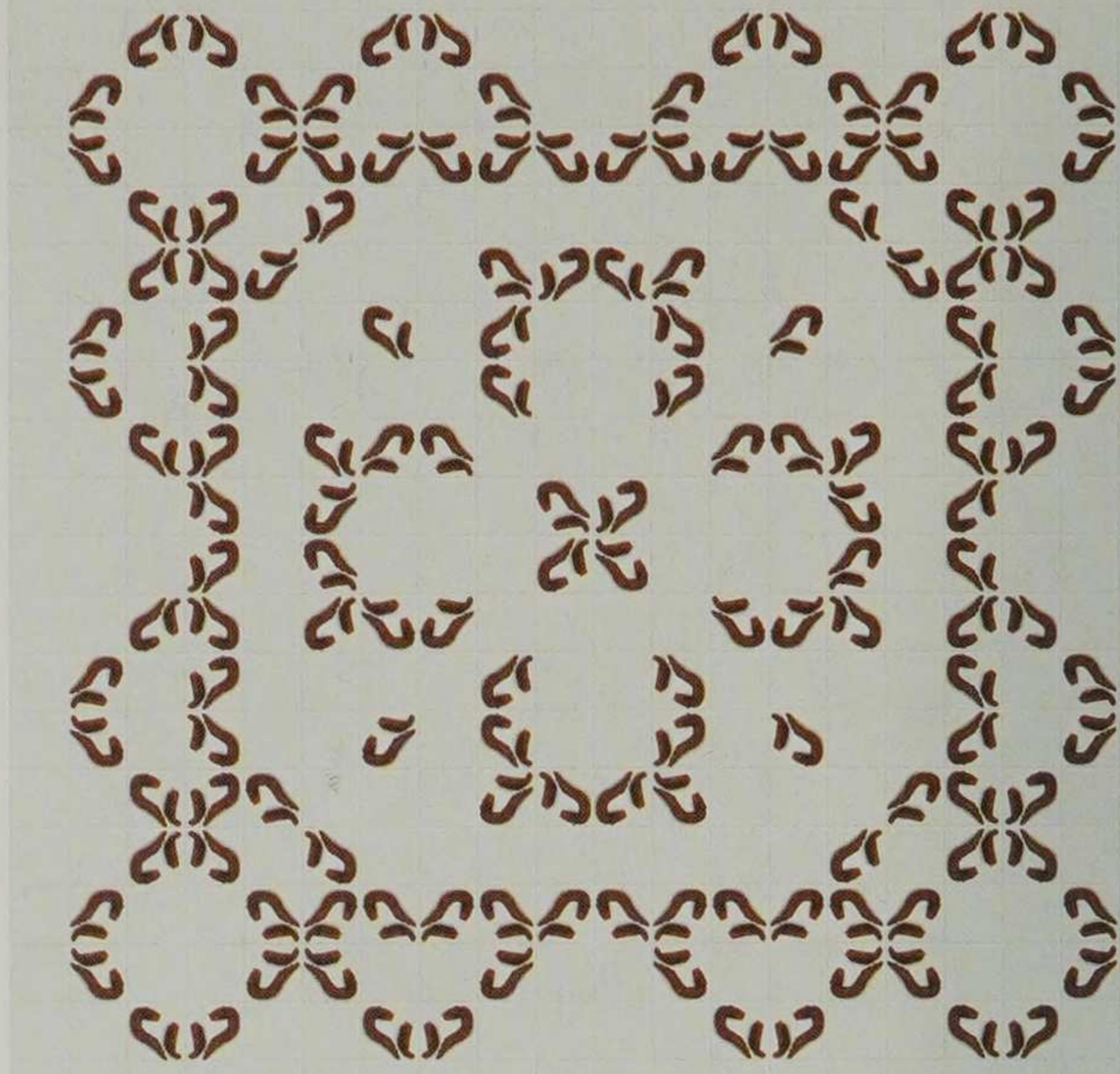
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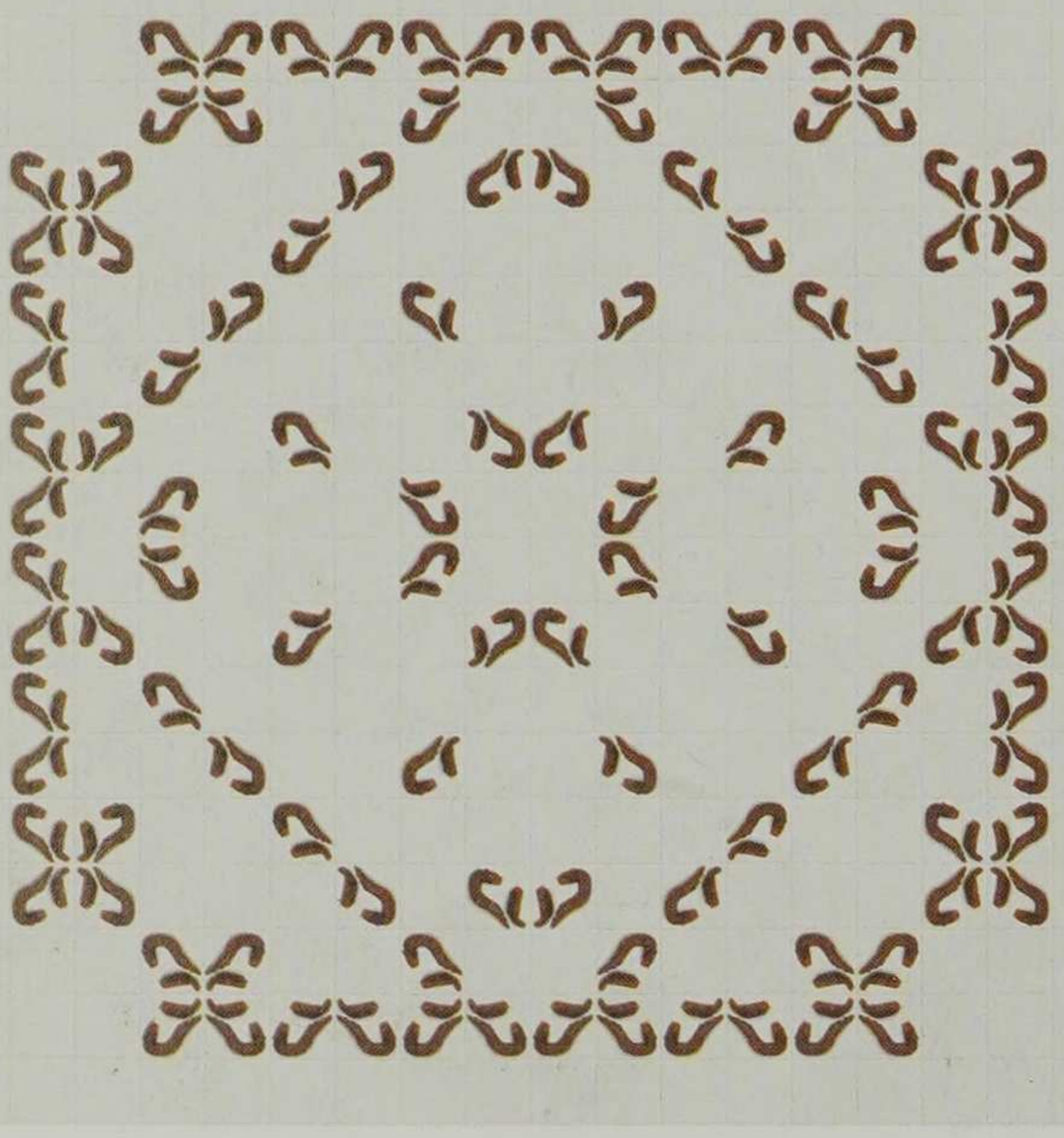
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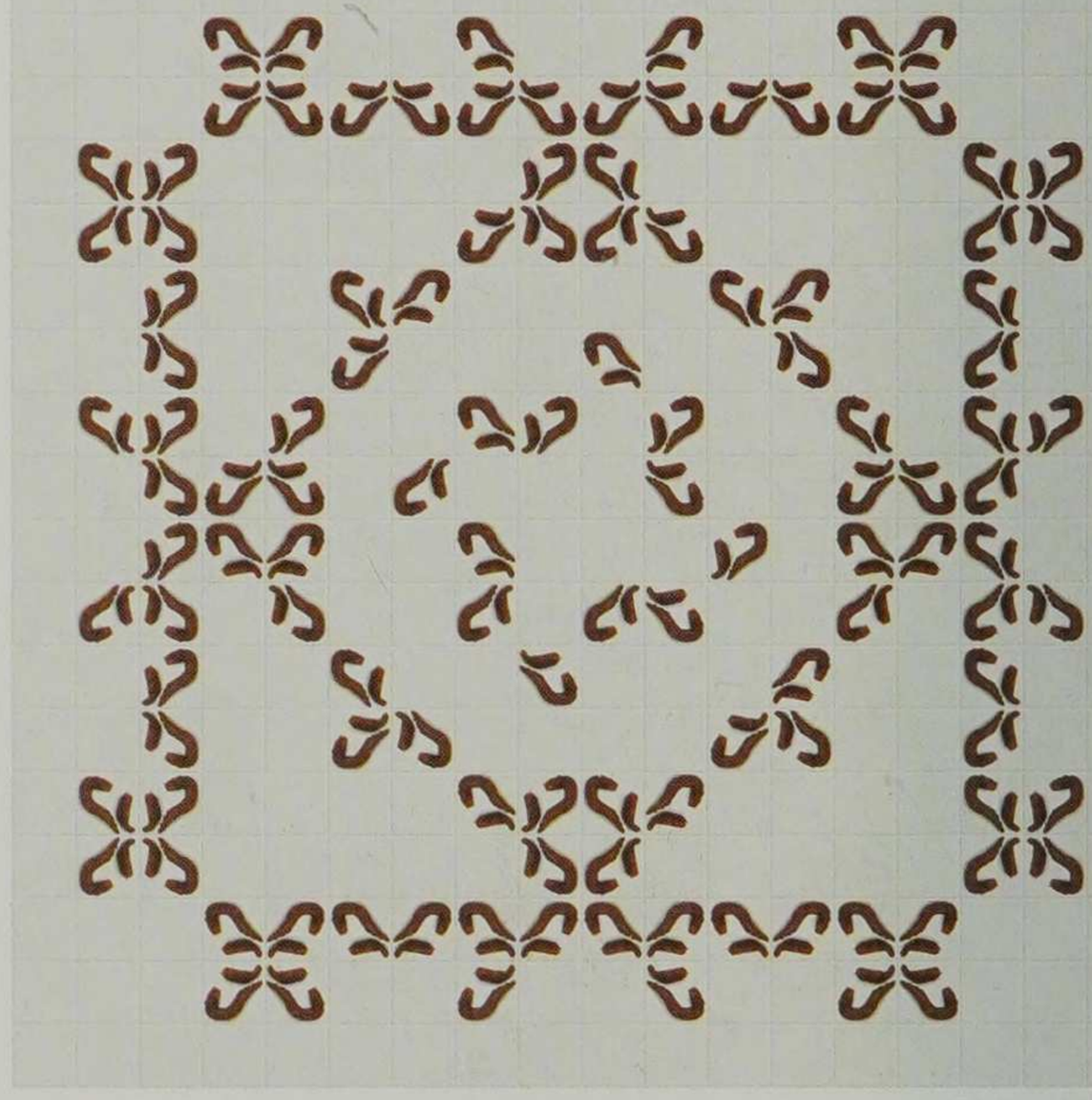
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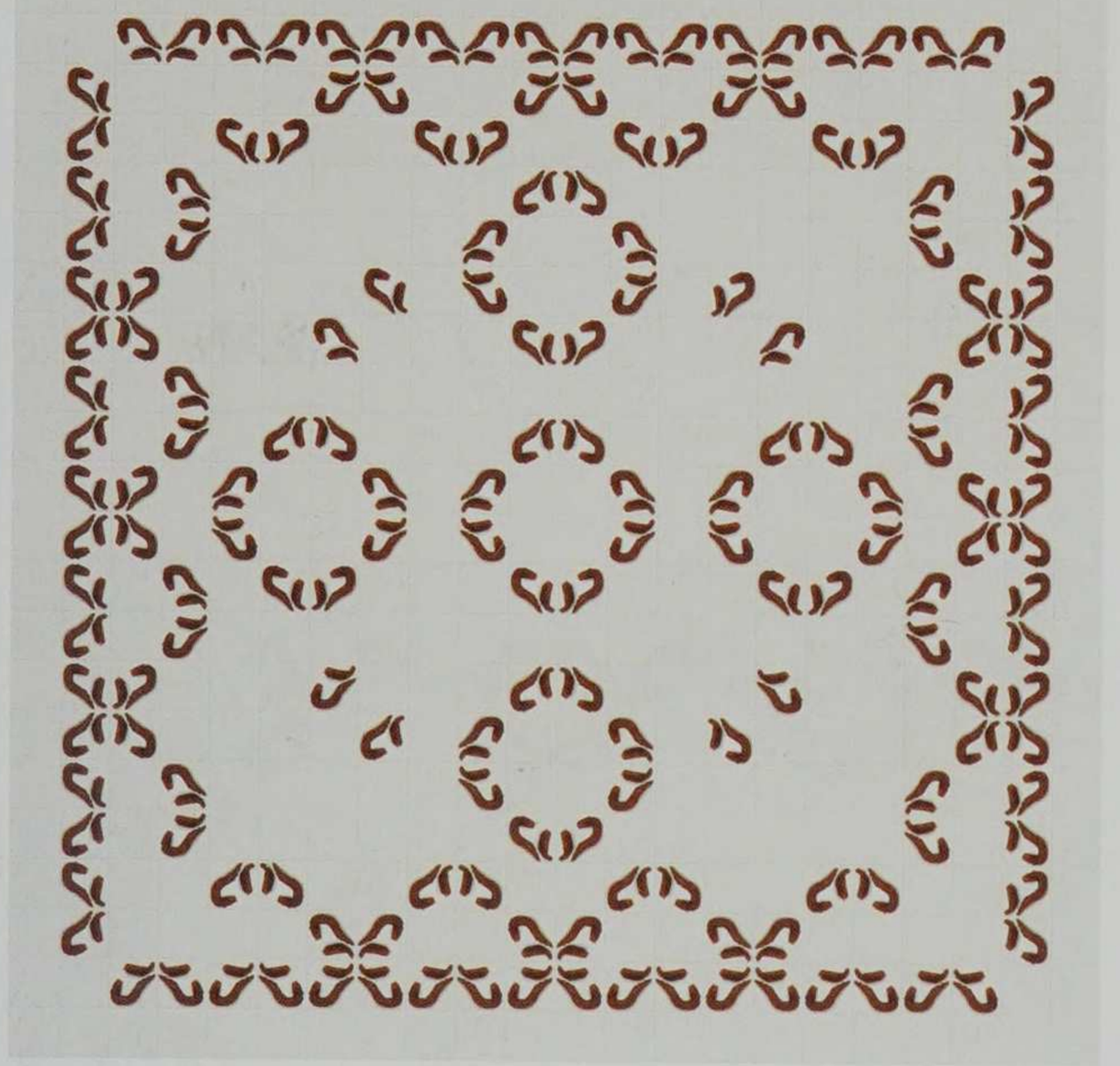
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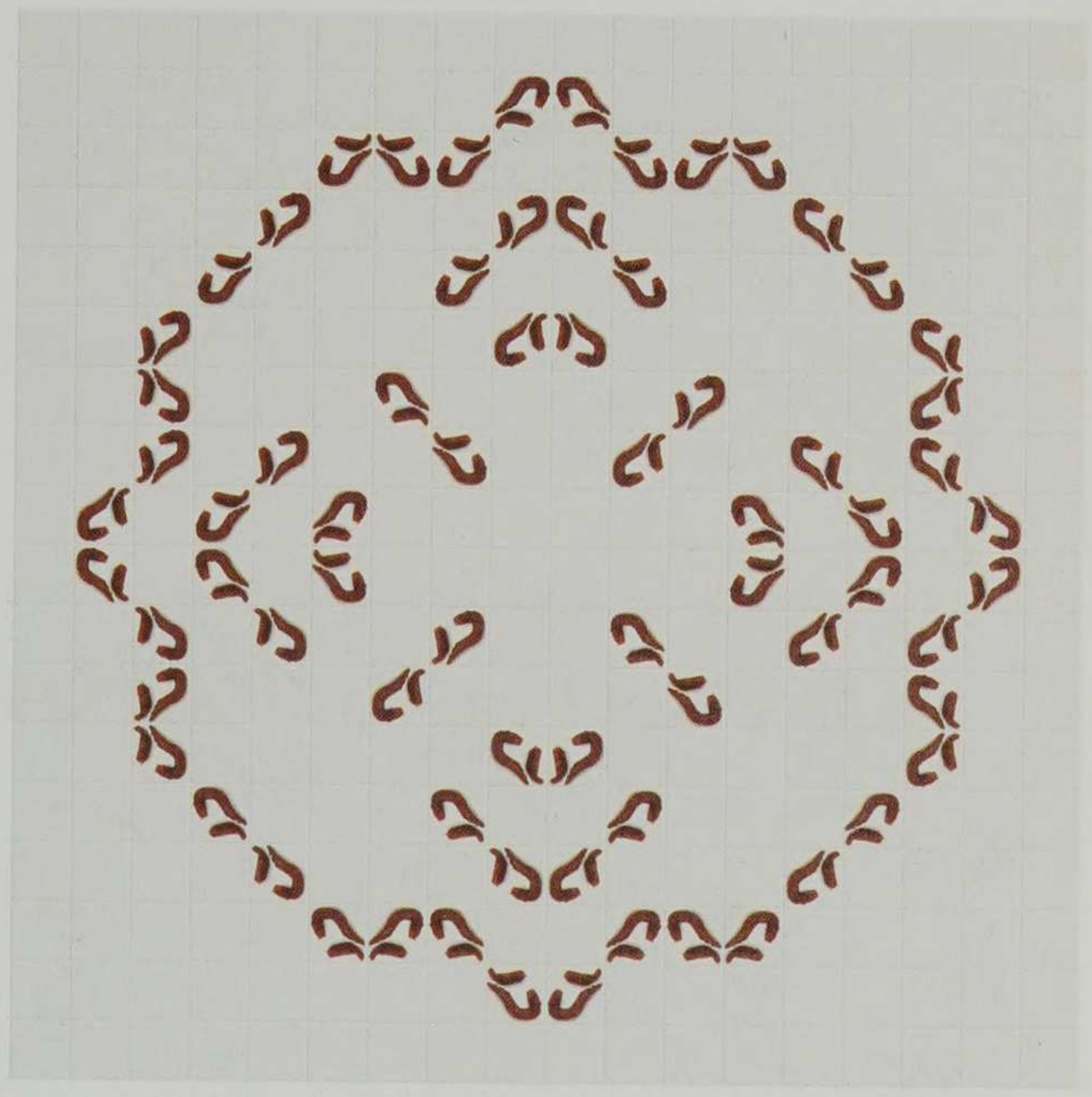
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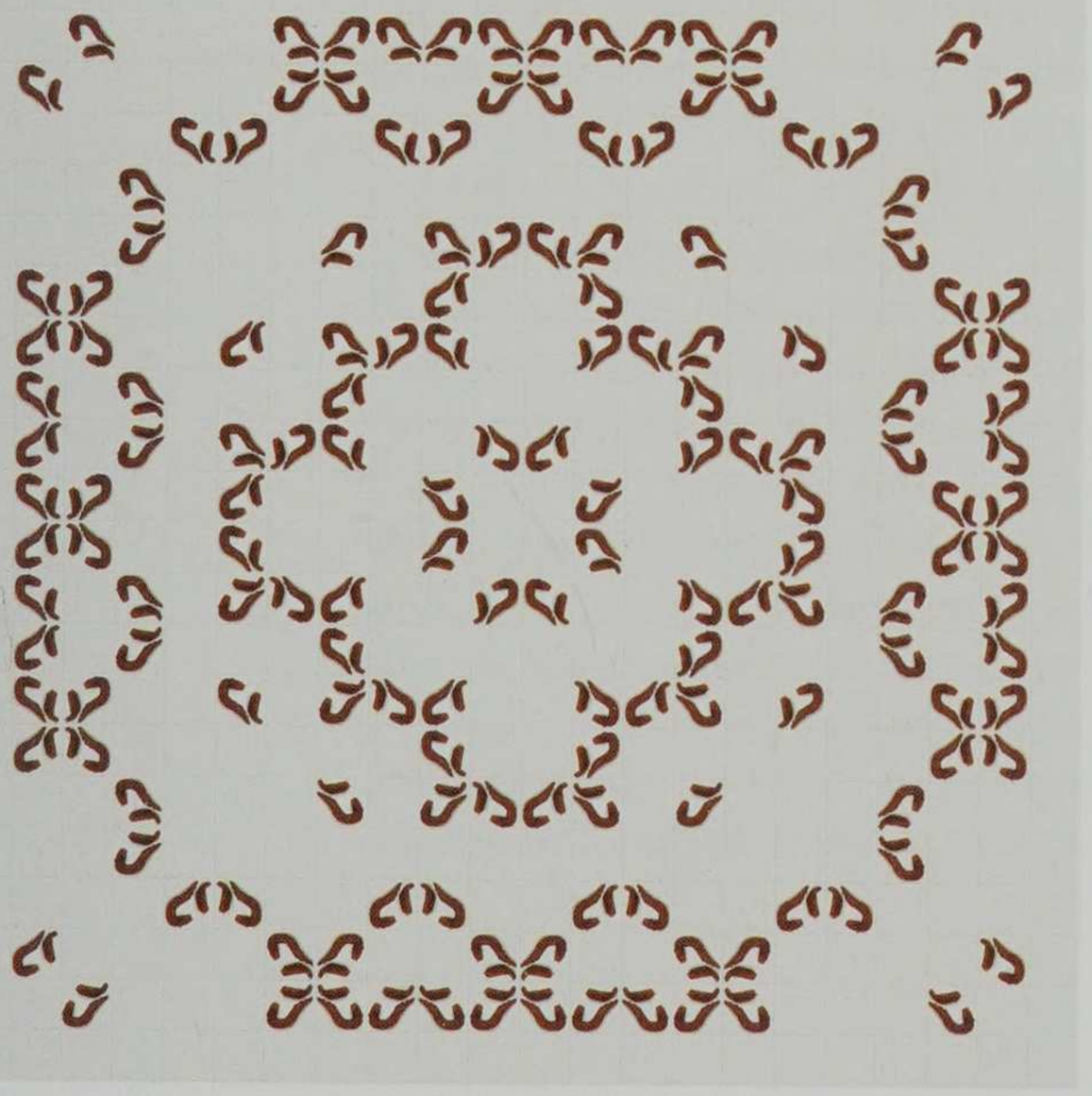
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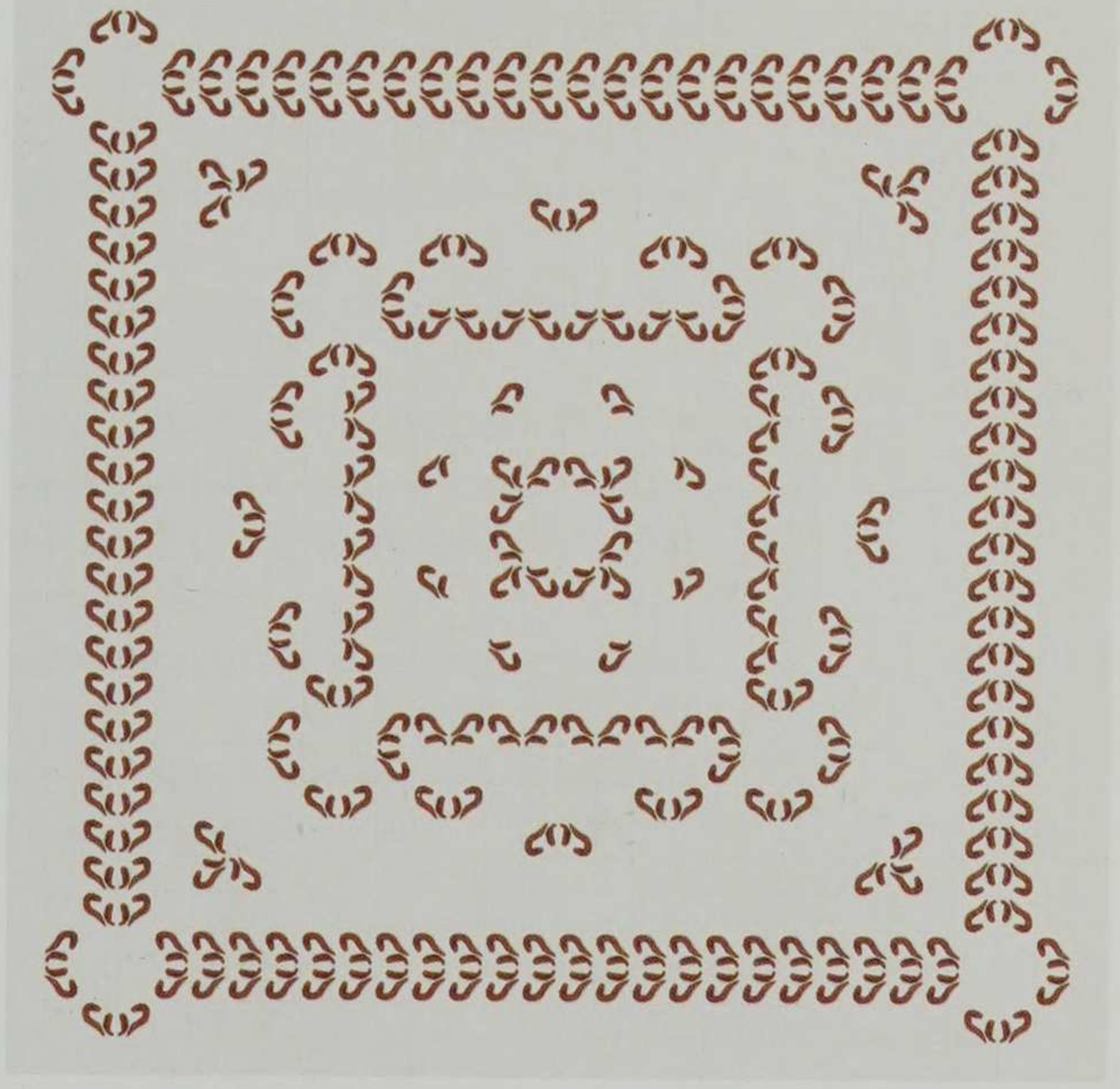
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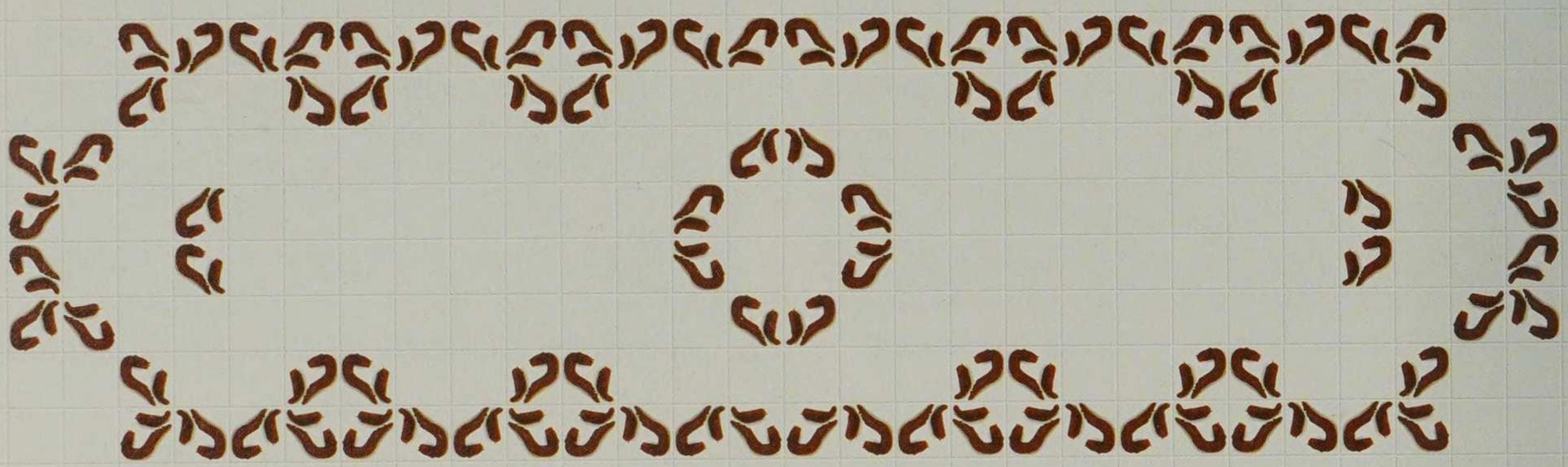
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MOSAIC (90-484-SWA), 1990, PRINTED AND GLAZED TILES, 173¼ x 173¼ INCHES (440 x 440 CM)



MOSAIC (92-900-SON), 1992, PRINTED AND GLAZED TILES, 236¼ x 236¼ INCHES (600 x 600 CM)



MOSAIC (97-300-MID), 1997, PRINTED AND GLAZED TILES, 78¾ x 236¼ INCHES (200 x 600 CM)

The Solar Anus

GEORGES BATAILLE

It is clear that the world is purely parodic, in other words, that each thing seen is the parody of another, or is the same thing in a deceptive form.

Ever since sentences started to *circulate* in brains devoted to reflection, an effort at total identification has been made, because with the aid of a *copula* each sentence ties one thing to another; all things would be visibly connected if one could discover at a single glance and in its totality the tracings of an Ariadne's thread leading thought into its own labyrinth.

But the *copula* of terms is no less irritating than the *copulation* of bodies. And when I scream **I AM THE SUN** an integral erection results, because the verb *to be* is the vehicle of amorous frenzy.

Everyone is aware that life is parodic and that it lacks an interpretation.

Thus lead is the parody of gold.

Air is the parody of water.

The brain is the parody of the equator.

Coitus is the parody of crime.

Gold, water, the equator, or crime can each be put forward as the principle of things. And if the origin of things is not like the ground of the planet that seems to be the base, but like the circular movement that the planet describes around a mobile center, then a car, a clock or a sewing machine could equally be accepted as the generative principle.

The two primary motions are rotation and sexual movement, whose combination is expressed by the locomotive's wheels and pistons.

These two motions are reciprocally transformed, the one into the other.

Thus one notes that the earth, by turning, makes animals and men have coitus, and (because the result is as much the cause as that which provokes it) that animals and men make the earth turn by having coitus.

It is the mechanical combination or transformation of these movements that the alchemists sought as the philosopher's stone.

It is through the use of this magically valued combination that one can determine the present position of men in the midst of the elements.

An abandoned shoe, a rotten tooth, a snub nose, the cook spitting in the soup of his masters are to love what a battle flag is to nationality.
An umbrella, a sexagenarian, a seminarian, the smell of rotten eggs, the hollow eyes of judges are the roots that nourish love.
A dog devouring the stomach of a goose, a drunken vomiting woman, a sobbing accountant, a jar of mustard represent the confusion that serves as the vehicle of love.

A man who finds himself among others is irritated because he does not know why he is not one of the others.
In bed next to a girl he loves, he forgets that he does not know why he is himself instead of the body he touches.
Without knowing it, he suffers from the mental darkness that keeps him from screaming that he himself is the girl who forgets his presence while shuddering in his arms.
Love, or infantile rage, or a provincial dowager's vanity, or clerical pornography, or the diamond of a soprano bewilder individuals forgotten in dusty apartments.
They can very well try to find each other; they will never find anything but parodic images, and they will fall asleep as empty as mirrors.

The absent and inert girl hanging dreamless from my arms is no more foreign to me than the door or window through which I can look or pass.
I rediscover indifference (allowing her to leave me) when I fall asleep, through an inability to love what happens.
It is impossible for her to know whom she will discover when I hold her, because she obstinately attains a complete forgetting.
The planetary systems that turn in space like rapid disks, and whose centers also move, describing an infinitely larger circle, only move away continuously from their own position in order to return to it, completing their rotation.

Movement is the figure of love, incapable of stopping at a particular being, and rapidly passing from one to another.
But the forgetting that determines it in this way is only a subterfuge of memory.
A man gets up as brusquely as a specter on a coffin and falls in the same way.
He gets up a few hours later and then he falls again, and the same thing



ROSE DES VENTS I
GALERIE MICHELINE SZWAJCER 1992, ANTWERP (BELGIUM) / BRONZE AND VIXEN TELESCOPES ON PEDESTAL, EACH FIGURE 88½ INCHES HIGH (225 CM)
COLLECTION KATOENNATIE, ANTWERP

happens every day; this great coitus with the celestial atmosphere is regulated by the terrestrial rotation around the sun.
Thus even though terrestrial life moves to the rhythm of this rotation, the image of this movement is not the turning of the earth, but the male shaft penetrating the female and almost entirely emerging, in order to re-enter.
Love and life appear to be separate only because everything on earth is broken apart by vibrations of various amplitudes and durations.
However, there are no vibrations that are not conjugated with a continuous circular movement; in the same way, a locomotive rolling on the surface of the earth is the image of a continuous metamorphosis.
Beings only die to be born, in the manner of phalluses that leave bodies in order to enter them.

Plants rise in the direction of the sun and then collapse in the direction of the ground. Trees bristle the ground with a vast quantity of flowered shafts raised up to the sun. The trees that forcefully soar end up burned by lightning, chopped down, or uprooted.
Returned to the ground, they come back in another form.
But their polymorphous coitus is a function of uniform terrestrial rotation.

The simplest image of organic life united with rotation is the tide.
From the movement of the sea, uniform coitus of the earth with the moon, comes the polymorphous and organic coitus of the earth with the sun.
But the first form of solar love is a cloud raised up over the liquid element.
The erotic cloud sometimes becomes a storm and falls back to earth in the form of rain, while lightning staves in the layers of the atmosphere.
The rain is soon raised up again in the form of an immobile plant.

Animal life comes entirely from the movement of the seas and, inside bodies, life continues to come from salt water.
The sea, then, has played the role of the female organ that liquifies under the excitations of the penis.
The sea continuously jerks off.
Solid elements, contained and brewed in water animated by erotic movement, shoot out in the form of flying fish.
The erection and the sun scandalize, in the same way as the cadaver and the darkness of cellars.
Vegetation is uniformly directed towards the sun; human beings, on the other hand, even though phalloid like trees, in opposition to the other animals, necessarily avert their eyes.
Human eyes tolerate neither sun, coitus, cadavers, nor obscurity, but with different reactions.

When my face is flushed with blood, it becomes red and obscene.
It betrays at the same time, through morbid reflexes, a bloody erection and a demanding thirst for indecency and criminal debauchery.
For that reason I am not afraid to affirm that my face is a scandal and that my passions are expressed only by the **JESUVE**.
The terrestrial globe is covered with volcanoes, which serve as its anus.

Although this globe eats nothing, it often violently ejects the contents of its entrails. Those contents shoot out with a racket and fall back, streaming down the sides of the Jesuve, spreading death and terror everywhere.

In fact, the erotic movements of the ground are not fertile like those of the water, but they are far more rapid.
The earth sometimes jerks off in a frenzy, and everything collapses on its surface.

The Jesuve is thus the image of an erotic movement that burglarizes the ideas contained in the mind, giving them the force of a scandalous eruption.

This eruptive force accumulates in those who are necessarily situated below. Communist workers appear to the bourgeois to be as ugly and dirty as hairy sexual organs, or lower parts; sooner or later there will be a scandalous eruption in the course of which the asexual noble head of the bourgeois will be chopped off.

Disasters, revolutions, and volcanoes do not make love with the stars.
The erotic revolutionary and volcanic deflagrations antagonize the heavens.
As in the case of violent love, they take place beyond the constraints of fecundity.
In opposition to celestial fertility there are terrestrial disasters, the image of terrestrial love without condition, erection without escape and without rule, scandal and terror.

Love, then, screams in my own throat; I am the *Jesuve*, the filthy parody of the torrid and blinding sun.
I want to have my throat slashed while violating the girl to whom I will have been able to say: you are the night.
The Sun exclusively loves the Night and directs its luminous violence, its ignoble shaft, toward the earth, but it finds itself incapable of reaching the gaze or the night, even though the nocturnal terrestrial expanses head continuously toward the indecency of the solar ray.

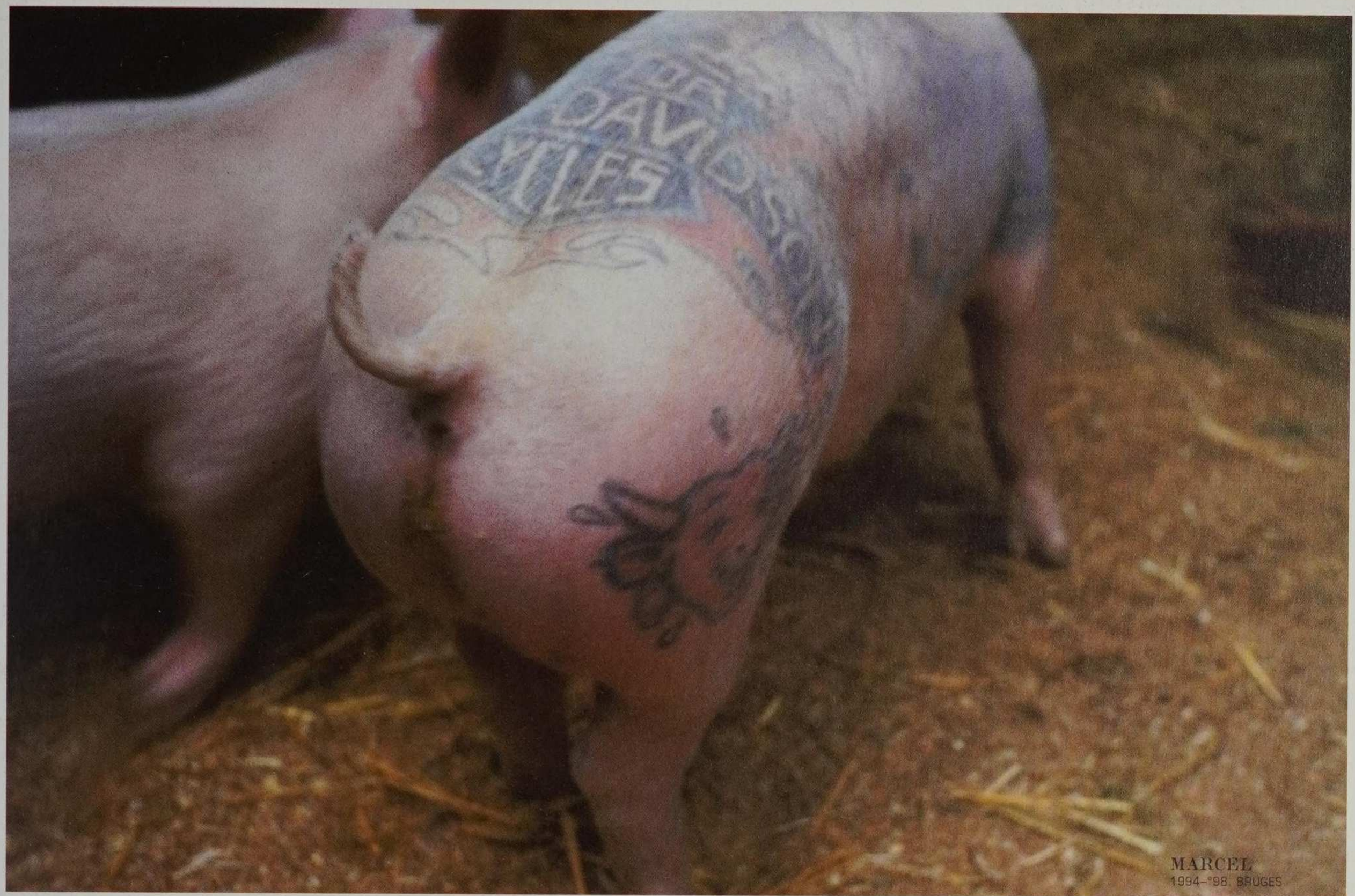
The *solar annulus* is the intact anus of her body at eighteen years to which nothing sufficiently blinding can be compared except the sun, even though the *anus* is the *night*.

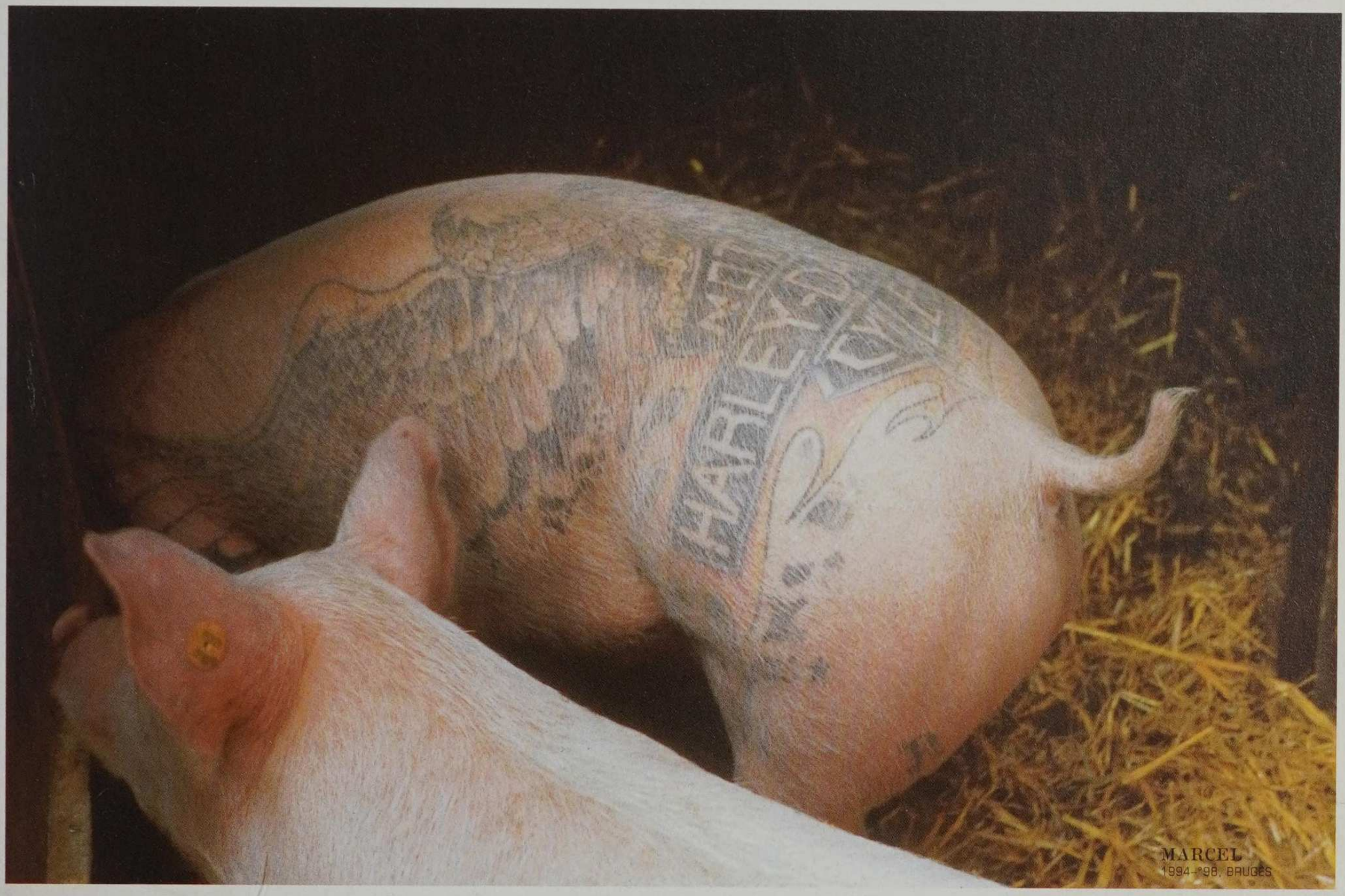
TATTOOED PIGS

KATHARINA & CHRISTOPHER
1994–2000, SAN FRANCISCO

KATHARINA & CHRISTOPHER
1994–2000, SAN FRANCISCO

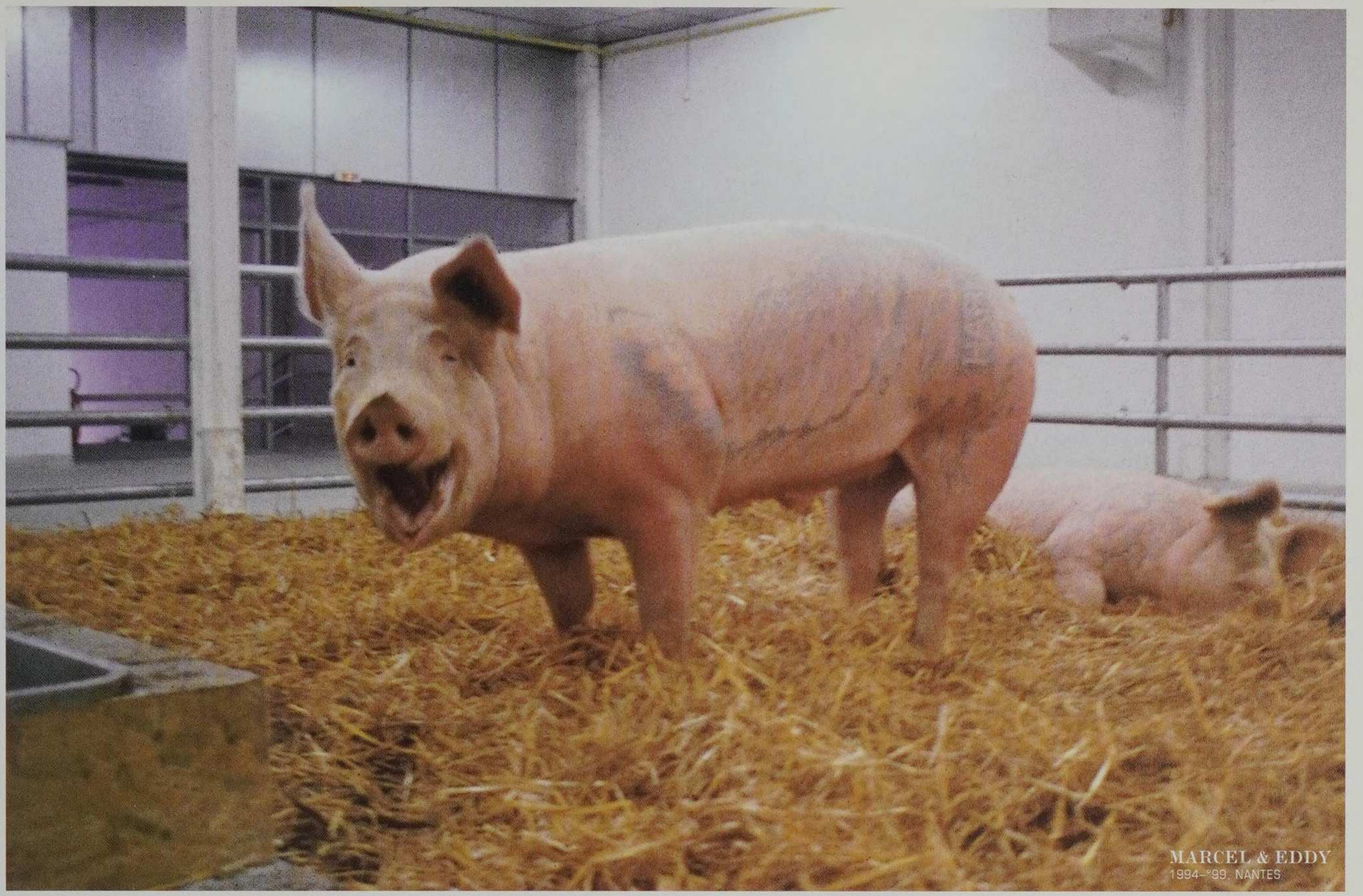
JOSEPHINA & JOAQUIM
1994–'97, MIDDELHEIM, ANTWERP

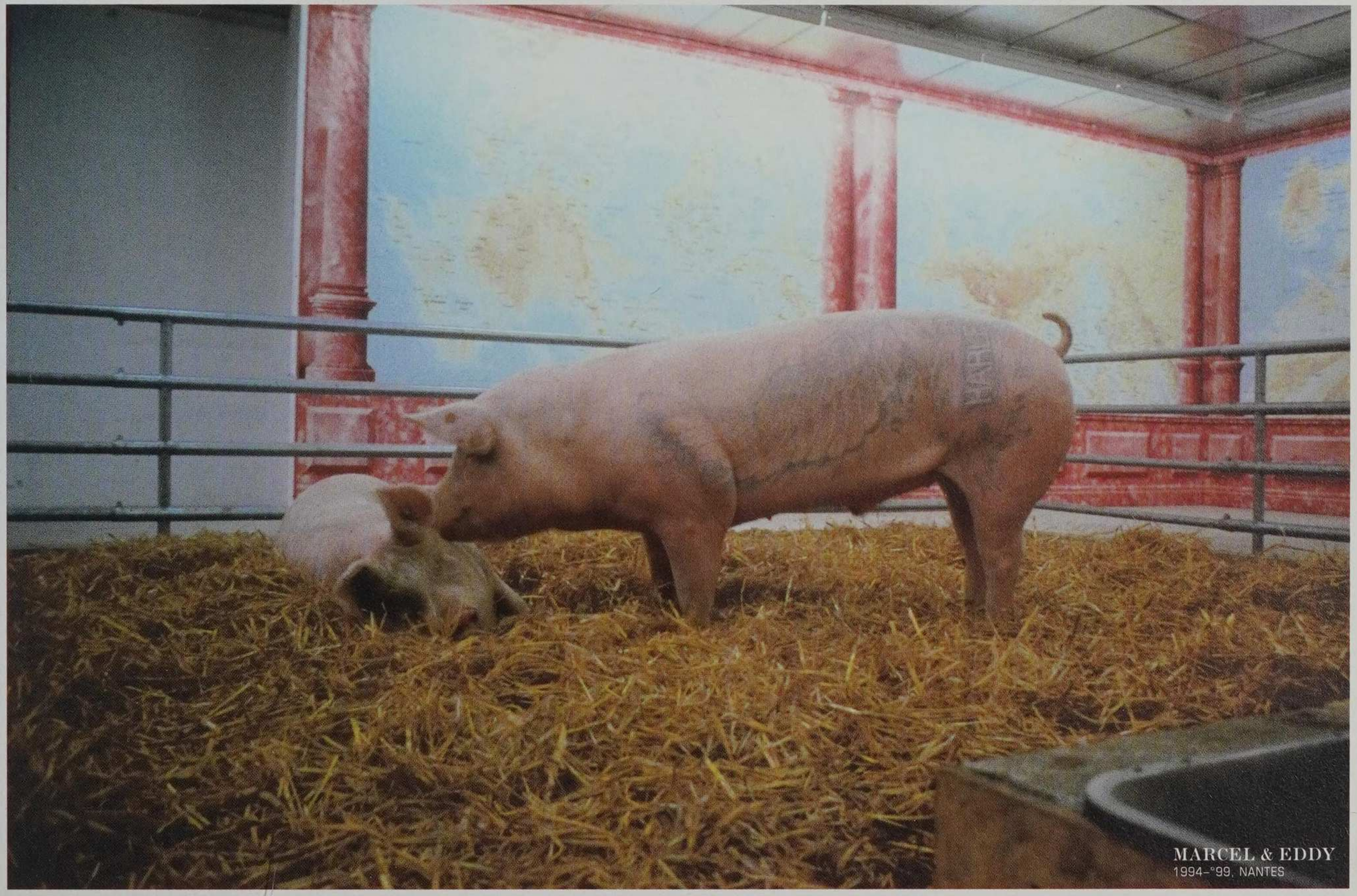

MARCEL
1994-°98 BRUGES


MARCEL
1994-°98 BRUGES

EDDY
1994–'98, MUSEUM DHONDT-DHAENENS, DEURLE (BELGIUM)

MARCEL
1994–'98, BRUGES


MARCEL & EDDY
1994–°99. NANTES


MARCEL & EDDY
1994–°99. NANTES



NOTES ON SHIT, ART AND CLOACA

GERARDO MOSQUERA

Art is the only space where it makes sense to build a machine that produces shit. However, I do not believe *Cloaca* to be the ultimate confirmation of the inutility of art. It does corroborate it *ad absurdum*, of course, and no doubt the piece itself is a comment on this. It also remarks another aspect: art as a haven where almost everything is possible and accepted. What is useful about art is precisely its uselessness, its impracticality. In a world dominated by pragmatism, it guarantees a freer symbolic enterprise in creating much needed fetishes. *Cloaca* stands like an all-encompassing *deus otiosus* of our times. What it actually produces is not shit but meaning. And at the end, its meaning is its very own existence.

* * *

Cloaca is producing shit anyway. Shit and contemporary art are good friends indeed. Many an art work has been dealing with excrements and urine in the recent past. However, actual shit and piss are seldom exhibited in the museum or the gallery. They are merely represented in the final pieces. In cases in which these materials are present, they are most often aseptically framed, hidden from our noses. For our visually oriented culture, to watch seems more tolerable than to smell. Since the sense of smell remains less culturally developed, odors (and especially stinks) connect to the real stuff in a direct way. The visual dwells as a representational domain where hygiene wins at the end. Wim Delvoye's work, on the contrary, not only shows real shit: its conceptual and physical finality is to generate the real thing before the audience.

Cloaca's shit is not genuine shit, though. As Adrian Dannatt has stated, what the piece creates is "'real fake shit' valuable for its inauthenticity." The machine stands as art because of this ambiguity. Moreover, artificiality constitutes the backbone of its artistic discourse. Following the aforementioned general tendency in contemporary art, Delvoye is also representing shit at the end—only he represents it by creating

artificial shit that is also actual, even if it is not true.

* * *

In Cuba and Spain, we constantly verbalize the act of shitting as an interjection. We frequently exclaim in Spanish: "I shit on this... I shit on that!" We shit on everything, from God to everybody's mother, to the hour in which one was born; we even shit over ten people at once. We shit more with our mouths than with our asses. We are shit producers both physically and symbolically, same as *Cloaca*. But the most provocative expression is one that reminds me of a certain tautological sense in Delvoye's work: "I shit on shit."

* * *

The rapport to shit varies among cultures and historical periods. Our radical Western aversion to it is partly the result of the way hygiene evolved from the 19th century on. It is also a matter of age: small children are friendly to their excrements. Repudiation of shit is largely something that is learned—to the point that it has become an internalized habit related to health. Shit is for us the lowest thing, the maximum dirt. The interjection that I just mentioned expresses the idea that we can even dirty and insult shit itself by shitting on it.

Some contemporary peoples have a less confrontational relation with shit, and even use it today for hair dressing and as a cosmetic. In many places, dung has other uses in close proximity to human life. For instance, it is employed as building material and cooking combustible. We are not talking about rarities but about millions of people who directly engage in excrements, one way or another.

The increasingly extended rejection of shit is an unattended fruit of globalization, one on the same level as McDonaldization. Even so, in the context of other cultures, *Cloaca* might still make sense beyond art, or at least be an exaggerated, costly, and hyper-technological utopian invention. Consequently, there are multicultural axiologies and politics of shit, and therefore different paradigms from which to understand *Cloaca*.

The creation of this machine as a work of art constitutes an epitome of our civilization. Its meaning comes from combining art, science and technology (the supreme spaces of intellectual sophistication) in order to artificially produce what is semantically considered their opposite: the least legitimated product of the human body (the dark side of human perfection). The work is thus a metaphor for a brilliant and worthless civilization. More significantly, it is its product.

* * *

Defecating is probably the most intimate, private act in our culture. This feature comes from our view of shit as the dirtiest and bottommost thing, the lowest realm of the impure. To evacuate the bowels is to contradict our spiritual aura, to undergo our animality. This feeling tells volumes about our civilization's pedantry: when we shit we verify that we are not divine. Furthermore, we receive a "daily proof of the unacceptability of Creation," in Milan Kundera's much quoted statement. Luckily enough, for other, more modest peoples, excretion is not such a big deal. It is frequently associated with cleaning oneself instead of getting dirty, and it does not necessarily constitute a private action.

A friend told me that the first time he took Ecstasy, his initial reaction was to feel as if he wanted to evacuate. He was in a deserted beach with his girlfriend, overflowing with love for her, holding her tenderly, and at the same time feeling he would not mind defecating in front of her. This was not a sexual, cophrophilic impulse, but a spiritual one. The feeling came together with a higher dimension of his love for her. Thus, the stimulus provided by the "love drug" included an unexpected reaction: the odd association of spiritual love with shit.

* * *

Cloaca defecates in front of us. This action is a spectacle that goes beyond the visual, with the machine sounding and producing odors. However, *Cloaca* is not a peep show. Nobody sees its action as a private, intimate act that has been turned into a public performance.

There is no exhibitionism involved, at least no more than what is usual in art. Our experience of the work is not voyeuristic due to the absence of the body, which has been replaced by technology. The discussions around Delvoye's piece are mainly focused on art, never on issues of intimacy, gaze or the body.

* * *

Cloaca is not a high-tech machine. It proves that at least we do not need computers to elaborate shit. The piece works as a conceptual device, given its artistic proposition, although it is real and actually functions. However, its appeal is also visual. The machine is beautiful. It has a pristine, enigmatic lab-like elegance, as if coming out of an old science-fiction film.

A glance at its carefully conceived design is enough to perceive that it is not a robot in the strict sense. It needs human participation in order to work. Naturally, the piece looks more like some piece of medical equipment which substitutes for organ functions. In this aspect, it relates to José Antonio Hernández-Diez's early works. It is humanized technology more because of a bodily accent than as a result of its function. Maybe randomly, but also meaningfully, given *Cloaca's* Dadaist stance, the machine also refers in a certain way to Picabia's drawings.

* * *

The ancient Mesoamericans believed that humankind was created from maize. Therefore, they thought that if people would eat only maize they would not shit. There should not be any rejection after eating the very material out of which they were made.

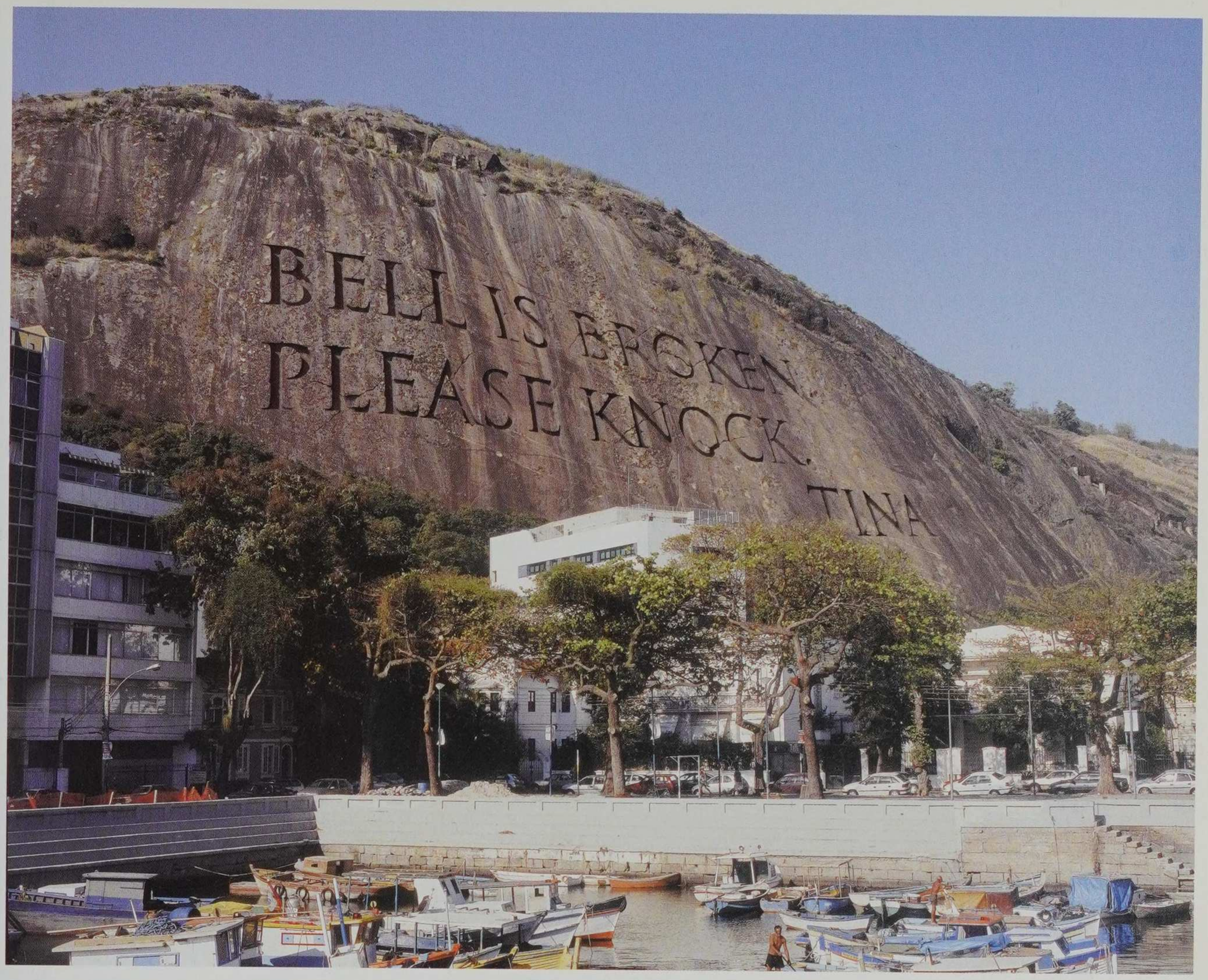
However, shit is not all shit. It always contains useful elements which digestion has not enough time to process and incorporate into the organism. This is why excrements are good fertilizers. The more advanced chicken-breeding system gives the bird its shit back, mixed with other ingredients, for it to eat. Excrements are recycled four times in the animal's diet (one more reason to become vegetarian!). Nicholas Tsoutas once told me that by applying a similar principle of cleaning the shit of shit and enhancing its nutritional elements, a Japanese scientist produced sausages out of his own feces and ate them on a TV program. Thus, shit could not only be a valuable art collectible, as has been discussed in this book, but a politically correct–if perhaps not so delicious– food.

This ecological experiment is in a way the reversal of Delvoye's *Cloaca*, which, instead of recycling, is adding even more shit to the world. In the Spanish Caribbean, the insult *comemierda* literally means shit-eater, and significantly enough corresponds to the term "asshole" in English. If a considerable part of humankind is suffering from starvation and hunger or survives with a very limited diet, perhaps the shit sausage could be a rational way of resolving a most pressing world problem. Maybe shit could impede revolution, or itself be the actual revolution. If that happens, *comemierda* will cease to be an insult and become a compliment. A problem remains: in order to produce shit, food is needed in the first place, and that is definitely the main problem to begin with. The obvious solution would be for the "First World" to donate shit to produce food for people in Guatemala, Ethiopia and North Korea. Should we need to use technology to facilitate such a huge undertaking, we could then transform *Cloaca* from an artwork into a useful machine, and mass-produce it. A joint venture involving Delvoye and the Japanese scientist would be the ultimate dream of joining art and life to save our planet.

* * *

Of course, coprophagy and coprophilia are also part of human desire. However, *Cloaca*'s interest in feces runs in a different direction. It is a clean, even aseptic scatological project. Shit is not its end but its means, although creating shit is its practical goal. Delvoye's scatology focuses on the symbolic content of shit, not on its inspection or *jouissance*. Scatology is just a consistent part of his artistic poetics, which aims to discuss the fetishization of art, the relations between "high" and "low", and the displacements of meaning in contemporary culture, often by simultaneously constructing them.

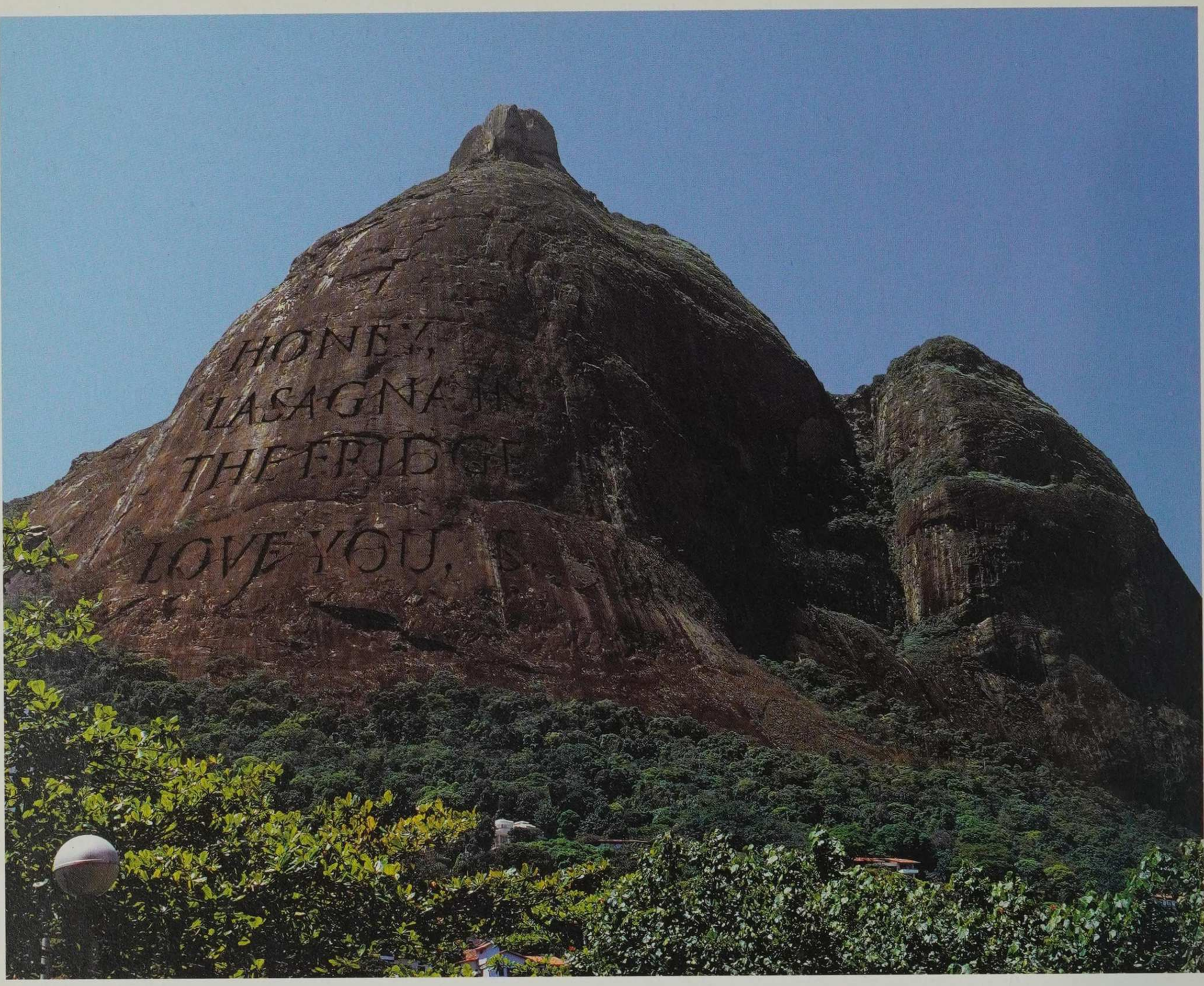
Happy ending: *Cloaca* is the *au delà* of Duchamp.



BELL IS BROKEN
2000, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 39 3/8 x 49 1/4 INCHES (100 x 125 CM)

CRITIQUE OF CYNICAL REASON

PETER SLOTERDIJK



LASAGNA
2000, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 39 3/8 x 49 1/4 INCHES (100 x 125 CM)

ARSES

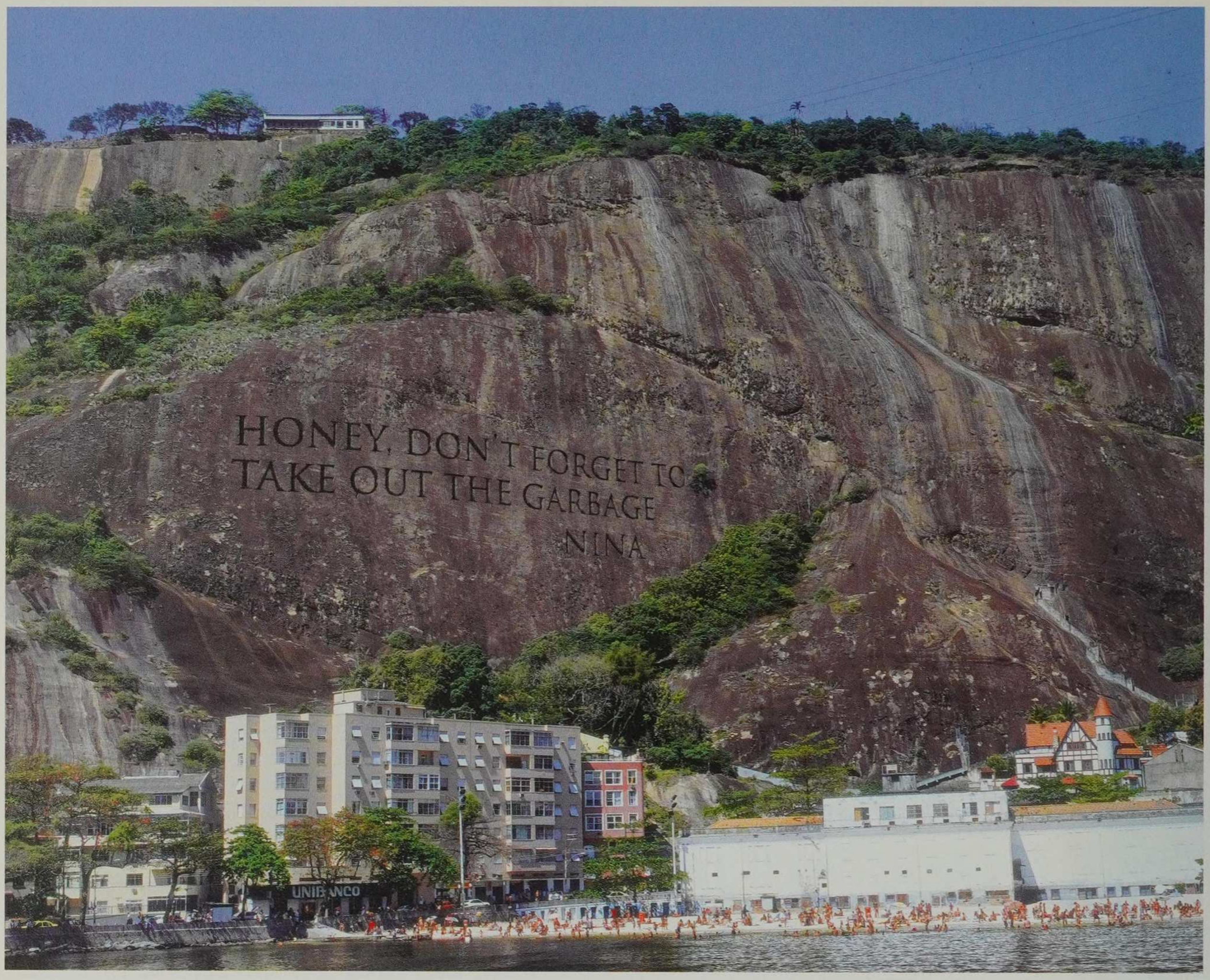
The arse seems doomed to spend its life in the dark, as the beggar among body parts. It is the real idiot of the family. However, it would be a wonder if this black sheep of the body did not have its own opinion about everything that takes place in higher regions, similar to the declassed who often cast the most sober gaze on people in the upper strata. If the head were to enter into conversation just once with its antipode, the latter would first stick out its tongue, if it had one. As in the enlightment film of the *Rote Grütze*, *Was heisst hier Liebe* (What do you mean by love?), the arse would say to the higher spheres: I find that our relationship is shitty.

The arse is the plebeian, the grass-roots democrat, and the cosmopolitan among the parts of the body — in a word, the elementary kynical organ. It provides the solid materialist basis. It is at home on toilets all over the world. The International of Arses is the only worldwide organization that has no statutes, ideology, or dues. Its solidarity cannot be shaken. The arse crosses all borders playfully, unlike the head, to which borders and possessions mean a lot. Without

any objection, it squats on this or that chair. To an unspoiled arse, the difference between a throne and a kitchen stool, a bench and a Holy Chair is not particularly impressive. Now and again, it can also sit on the ground; the only thing it dislikes is standing when it is tired. This proclivity for the elementary and the fundamental predisposes the arse especially to philosophy. It probably registers the nuances, but it would not think of making a fuss like vain heads do when they knock themselves bloody over the occupation of seats. It never loses sight of what really underlies it: the firm ground. In an erotic sense, too, the arse often shows itself to be both sensitive and superior. It does not pretend to be choosier than is necessary. Even then, it is the one that easily raises itself above imagined borders and exclusivities. When the famous Arletty was accused of having had sexual relations with members of the German occupation forces, her answer is said to have been: "My heart is French, but my backside is international." As representative of the kynical principle *per se* (able to survive anywhere, reduction to the essentials), the arse can hardly be brought under government control, although it cannot be denied that many an arsehole has given off nationalistic tones.

Often beaten, kicked, and pinched, the arse has a worldview from below: plebeian, popular, realistic. Millennia of bad treatment have not passed over it without leaving a mark. They have trained it to be a materialist, albeit one with a dialectial tendency, which assumes that things are shitty but not hopeless. Nothing can cause as much bitterness as the feeling of not being welcome. Only the undertone of fascination that can be heard through so much maltreatment gives the oppressed a secret feeling of power. Something about which silence is so stubbornly maintained, even though it cannot be evaded, must have a great power over the spirits. The best energies are often hidden behind the strongest swear words. It is as if all the maltreated backsides are waiting for their hour of revenge in the near future, when everything will again be falling flat on its arse. The feeling for time is generally one of the special strengths of arses, for very early on they develop a feeling for what has to be done immediately, for what can be postponed, and for what a well-padded behind can wait out patiently until doomsday. That is really a political art that today is called timing and that has its roots in a praxis even children's arses learn, namely, to perform what has to be at the right time, not too early and not too late.

The arse triumphs secretly, conscious that without it nothing works. Being there precedes being such and such; first existence, then qualities; first reality, then good and evil, above and below. Thus arses are, in addition to their dialectical-materialist inclinations, also the first existentialists. They practice the existential dialectic in advance: should one decide in favor what has to be in any case, or does one choose to revolt against the unavoidable? Even those who decide to let things take their course have decided, as Sartre says, not to decide. Freedom surrenders to necessity. One can, however, also decide against it—not, of course, against the fact that one must, but against the fact that the must can do anything at all with one. One can struggle against it and hold back what has to be; then one becomes, following Camus, the person in revolt. Nobody must must, says Lessing's Nathan, and the popular saying adds: Dying and shitting are the only things one must do. That remains the kynical a priori. The arse is thus, of all bodily organs, the one closest to the dialectical relation of freedom and necessity. It is no accident that psychoanalysis—a thoroughly kynically inspired discipline—devotes subtle investigations to it and names a fundamental anthropological stage, the anal phase, after the experiences and vicissitudes of the arse. Its themes are Can and Cannot, Must and Must Not, Have and Hold Back. The principle of achievement is contained in it. To understand the arse would be therefore the best preparatory study for philosophy, the somatic propaedeutic. How many constipated theories we would be spared! Again we meet up with Diogenes. He was the first European philosopher who, instead of employing a lot of words in the Athenian market, performed his urgent business. *Naturalia non sunt turpia*. In nature, he says, we

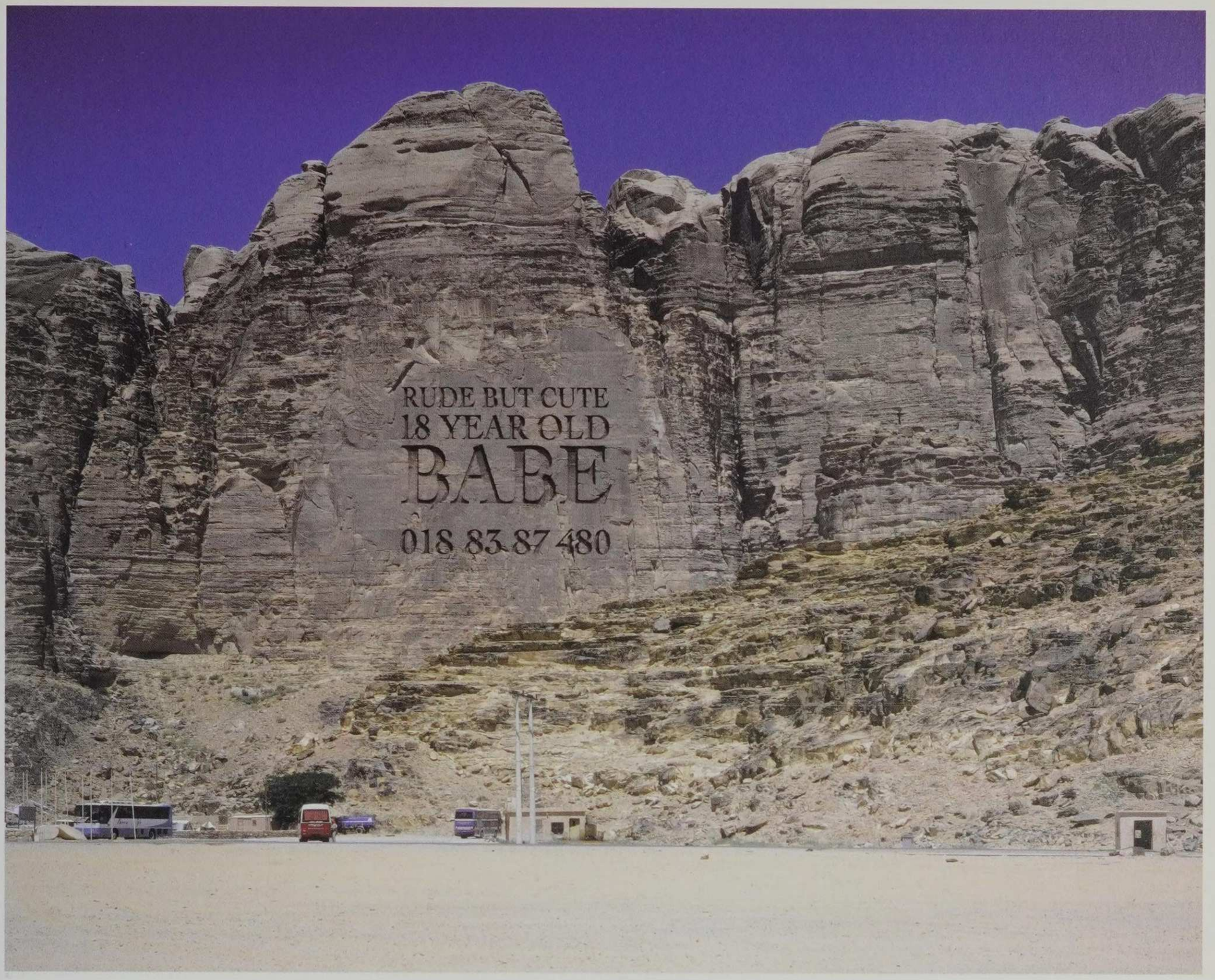


GARBAGE
2000, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 39 3/8 x 49 1/4 INCHES (100 x 125 CM)

find nothing about which we would have to be ashamed. Real bestiality and perverted spirits are found where the arrogance of morality and the imbroglio of culture begin. The heads, however, did not want to recognize that this was an early climax of reason, a moment in which philosophy had found a balance with the principle of nature. For a moment, it was beyond good and evil and beyond turning up its nose. Respectable thinkers, on the other hand, insist on their view; according to them, it can only have been a joke or a provocative dirty trick. They refuse to conjecture that there could be a truth-producing meaning in such a manifestation.

FART

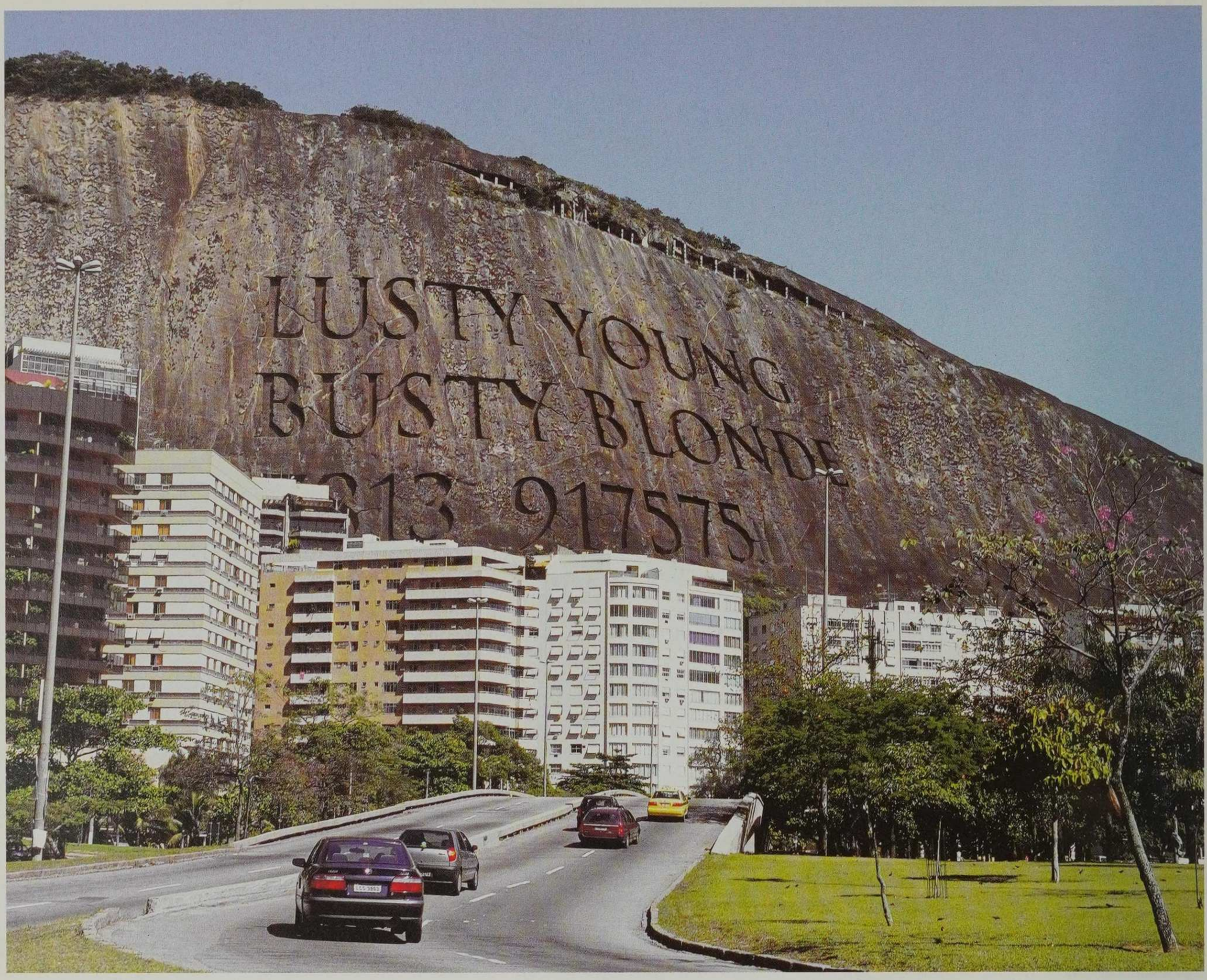
The theme cannot be excused; indeed, it will get worse. I regret this for all sensitive readers, but the fart, even if not emitted, cannot be omitted. Those who do not want to talk about it would also have to have kept silent about the arse. The subject matter demands it, and after we have spoken about oral matters, our presentation, for better or for worse, must go through its anal phase before we come to the genitals. To speak of the fart is not difficult insofar as it represents a sound that always means something in social situations. Witnesses of a fart inevitably interpret the



RUDE BUT CUTE
2000, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 39⅜ x 49¼ INCHES (100 x 125 CM)

sound. All in all, the semantics of the fart is a rather complicated problem, a problem that is seriously neglected by linguistics and communication research. The scale of meaning stretches from awkwardness to contempt, from humorous intentions to lack of respect. Teachers, professors, speakers and conference participants all know the torture of having to stifle a fart because such a sound expresses something that, in reality,one does not want to say. Could it aid our empathy with politicians if, in listening to their speeches, we were to think more often that they are possibly at that very moment concentrating on subduing a fart that has been wanting to interrupt their talk? The art of the vague statement is related to the art of unobtrusive flatulence: both are diplomacy.

Semiotically, we assign the fart to the group of signals, that is, of signs, which neither symbolize nor depict something but rather point to a situation. When the locomotive whistles, it warns about its approach and possible danger. The fart conceived as a signal shows that the lower body is in full action, and in situations where any reference to such regions is absolutely undesirable, this can have fatal consequences. Ernst Jünger noted in his *Paris Diary* about his reading of the historian Flavius Josephus's *Jewish*



LUSTY... BUSTY
2000, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 39 3/8 x 49 1/4 INCHES (100 x 125 CM)

War: "Here I again came upon a passage in which the beginning of unrest in Jerusalem under Cumanus is described (II, 12). While the Jews gathered for the festival of unleavened bread, the Romans positioned a cohort above the hall of columns in the temple to keep an eye on the crowd. One of the soldiers in the cohort pulled up his coat, and with a mocking bow turned his behind to the Jews and 'let forth an indecent sound corresponding to his position.' That triggered a clash that cost ten thousand lives, so that one can speak of the most fateful art in world history" (*Strahlungen*, vol. II, pp. 188-89).

The cynicism of the Roman soldier, whose fart was a political provocation and a "blasphemy" in the temple, finds a counterpart in Jünger's commentary, which crosses over into the area of theoretical cynicism.

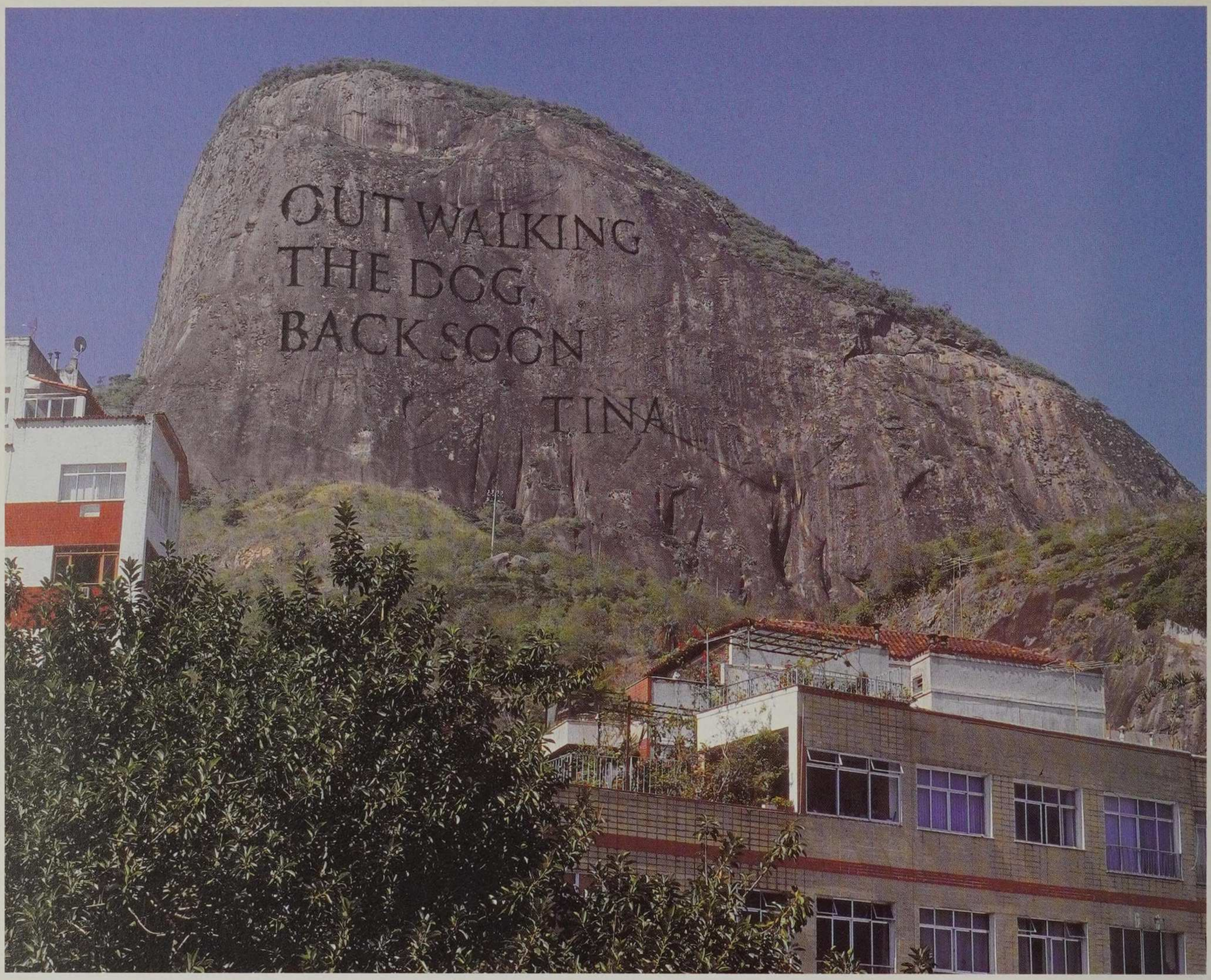
SHIT, REFUSE

Here we come to the whole of the matter. As children of an anal culture, we all have a more or less disturbed relation to our own shit. The splitting off of our consciousness from our own shit is the deepest training in order; it tells us what must happen privately and under wraps. The relation that is drummed into people with regard to their own excretions provides the



MINOU
2000, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 39 3/8 x 49 1/4 INCHES (100 x 125 CM)

model for their behavior with all sorts of refuse in their lives. Hitherto, refuse was systematically ignored. Only under the sign of modern ecological thinking do we find ourselves forced to become conscious again of our refuse. High theory discovers the category "shit;" a new stage of the philosophy of nature thereby comes due, a critique of the human being as a hyperproductive shit-accumulating industry-animal. Diogenes is the only Western philosopher who we know consciously and publicly performed his animal business, and there are reasons to interpret this as a component of pantomimic theory. It hints at a consciousness of nature that assigns positive values to the animal side of human beings and does not allow any dissociation of what is low or embarrassing. Those who do not want to admit that they produce refuse and that they cannot choose to do anything else risk suffocating one day in their own shit. Everything suggests that Diogenes of Sinope should be admitted to the Ancestral Gallery of Ecological Consciousness. The grand act of ecology in the history of ideas that will have an impact as far as philosophy, ethics, and politics are concerned will be to transform the phenomenom of refuse into a "high" theme. From now on it is no longer an onerous secondary phenomenom but is recognized as a basic principle.

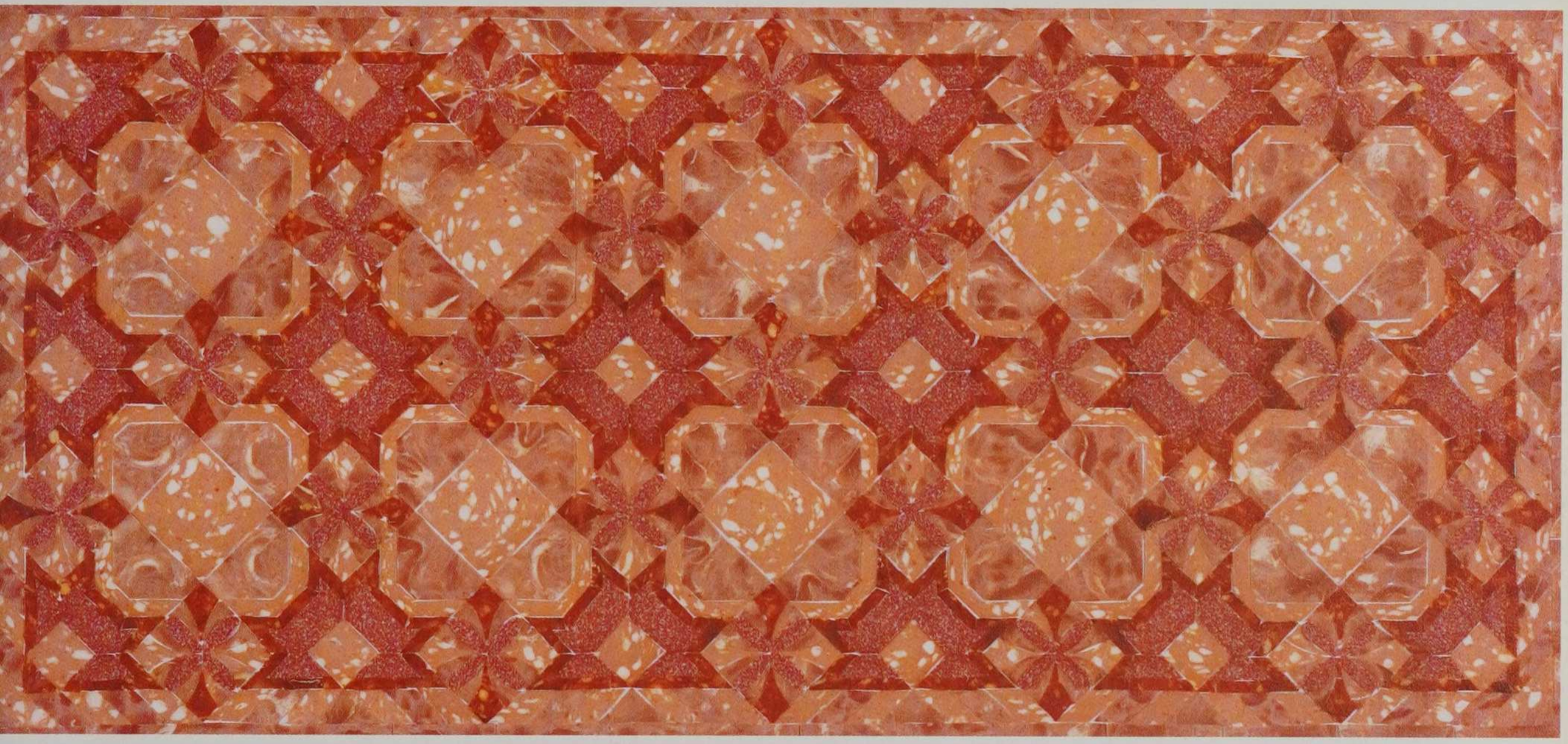


OUT WALKING
2000, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 39 3/8 x 49 1/4 INCHES (100 x 125 CM)

With this, the last hidden positions of idealism and dualism are really broken down. Shit has to be encountered in another way. It is now necessary to rethink the usefulness of the unuseful, the productivity of the unproductive, philosophically speaking: to unlock the positivity of the negative and to recognize our responsibility also for what is unintended. Kynical philosophers are those who do not get nauseated. In this they are related to children, who do not yet know anything about the negativity of their excrement.

MARBLE FLOORS





MARBLE FLOOR #64

1999, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 43 3/8 x 94 INCHES (110 x 239 CM)



MARBLE FLOOR #56

1999, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 43⅜ x 78¾ INCHES (110 x 200 CM)
COURTESY GIAN ENZO SPERONE, ROME



MARBLE FLOOR #68

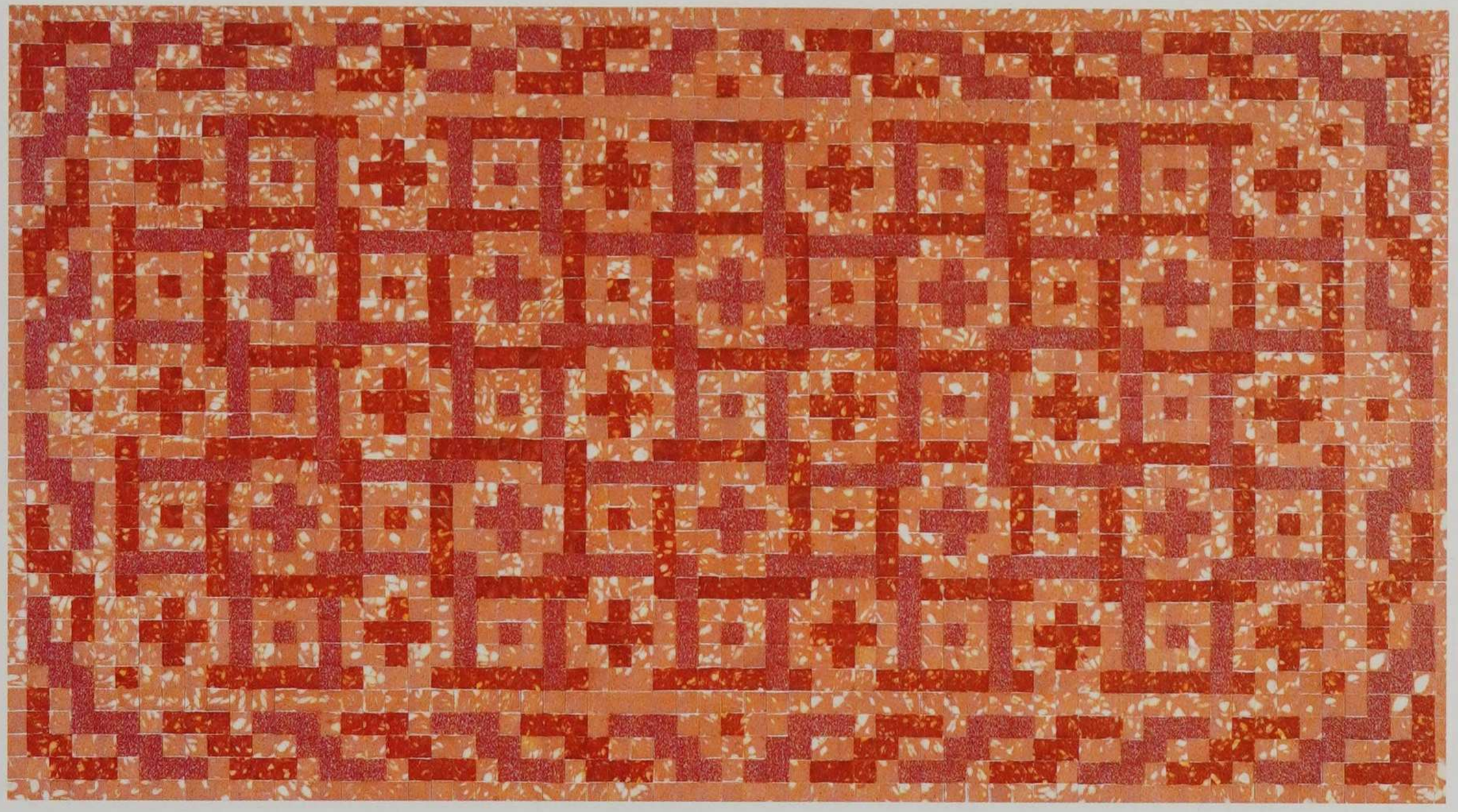
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COURTESY GIAN ENZO SPERONE, ROME



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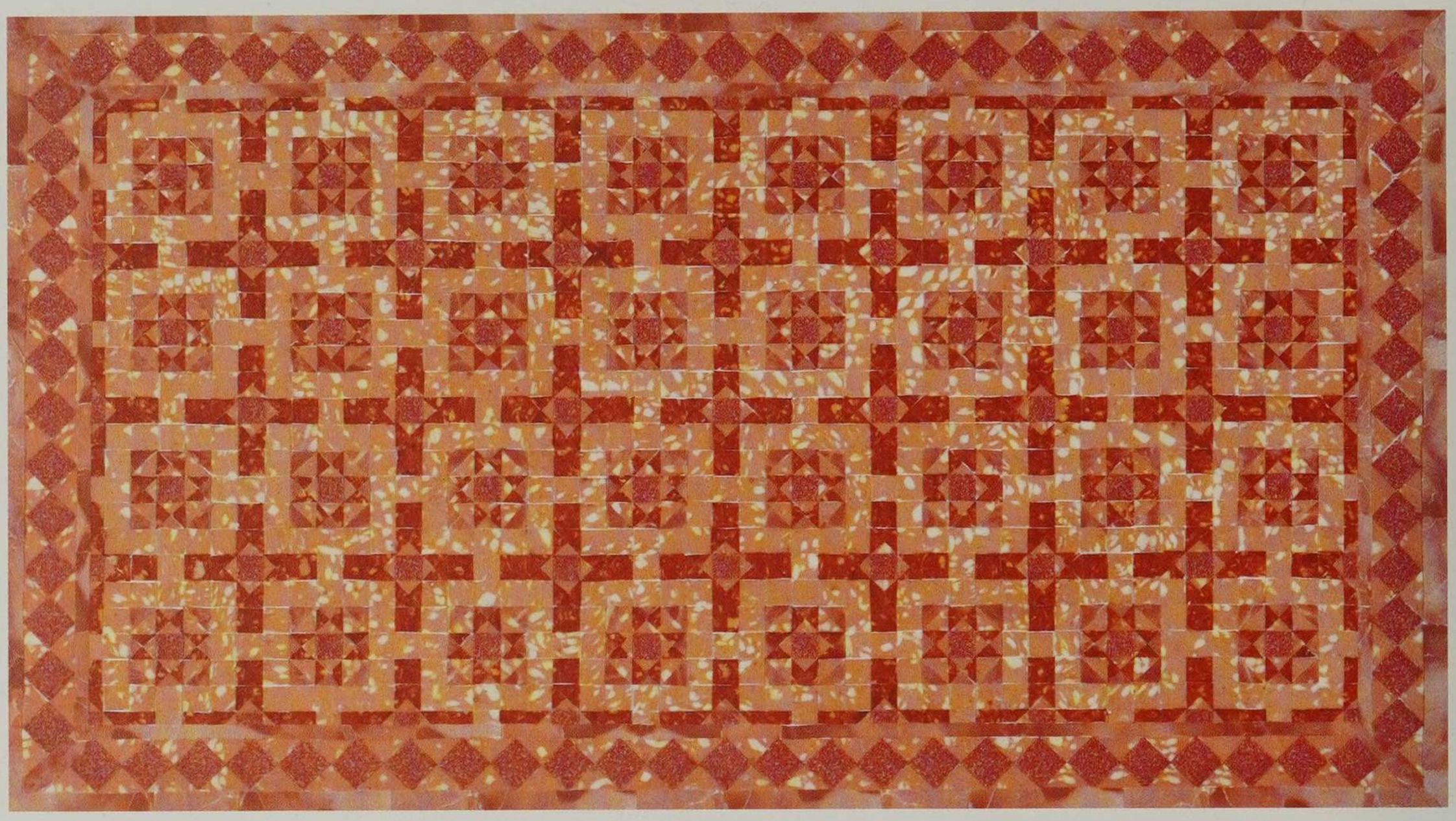
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COURTESY GIAN ENZO SPERONE, ROME



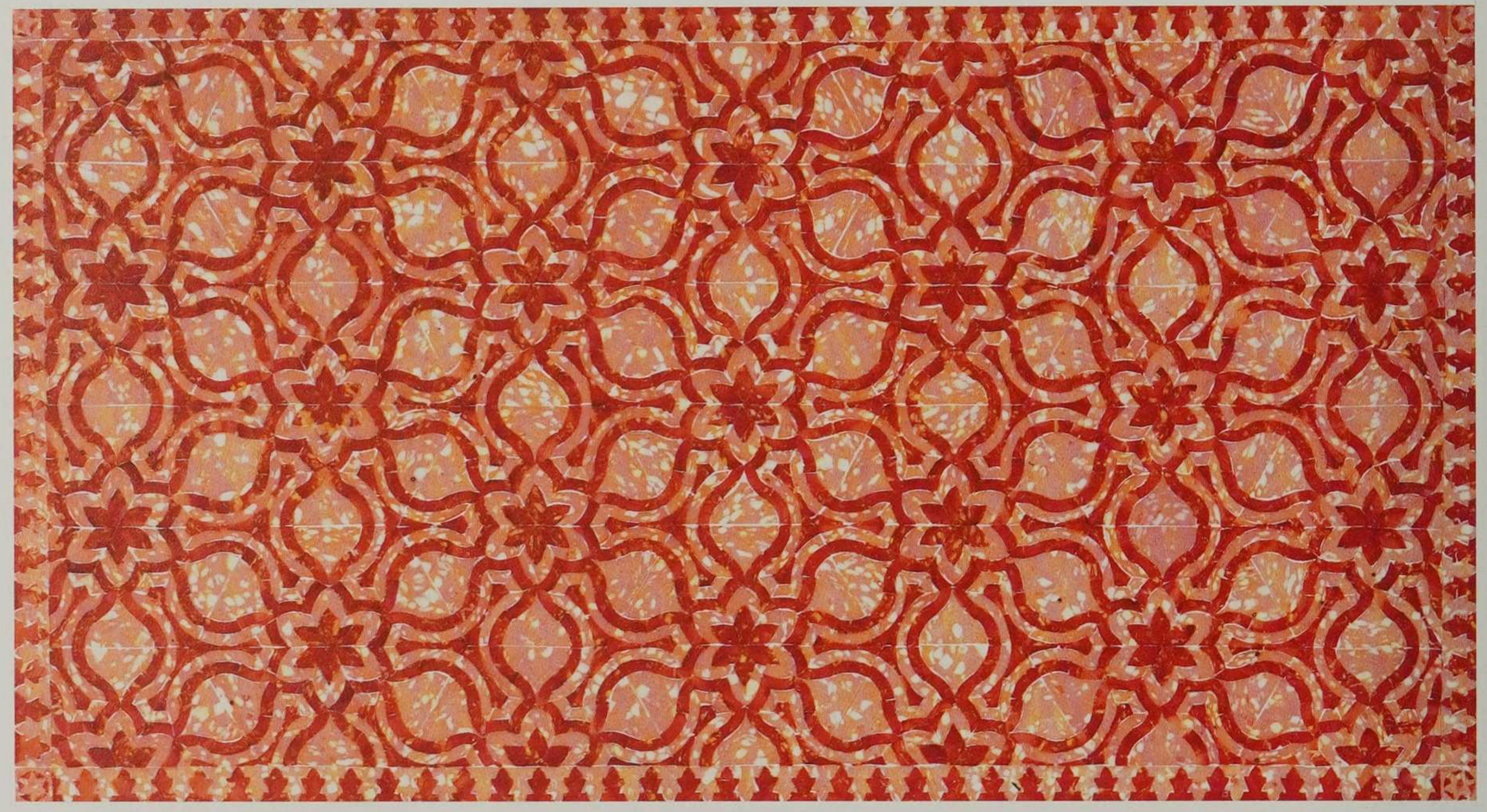
MARBLE FLOOR #95

1999, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 43 3/8 x 79 3/8 INCHES (110 x 201,5 CM)



MARBLE FLOOR #87

1999, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 43 3/8 x 77 1/2 INCHES (110 x 197 CM)



MARBLE FLOOR #103

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MARBLE FLOOR #111

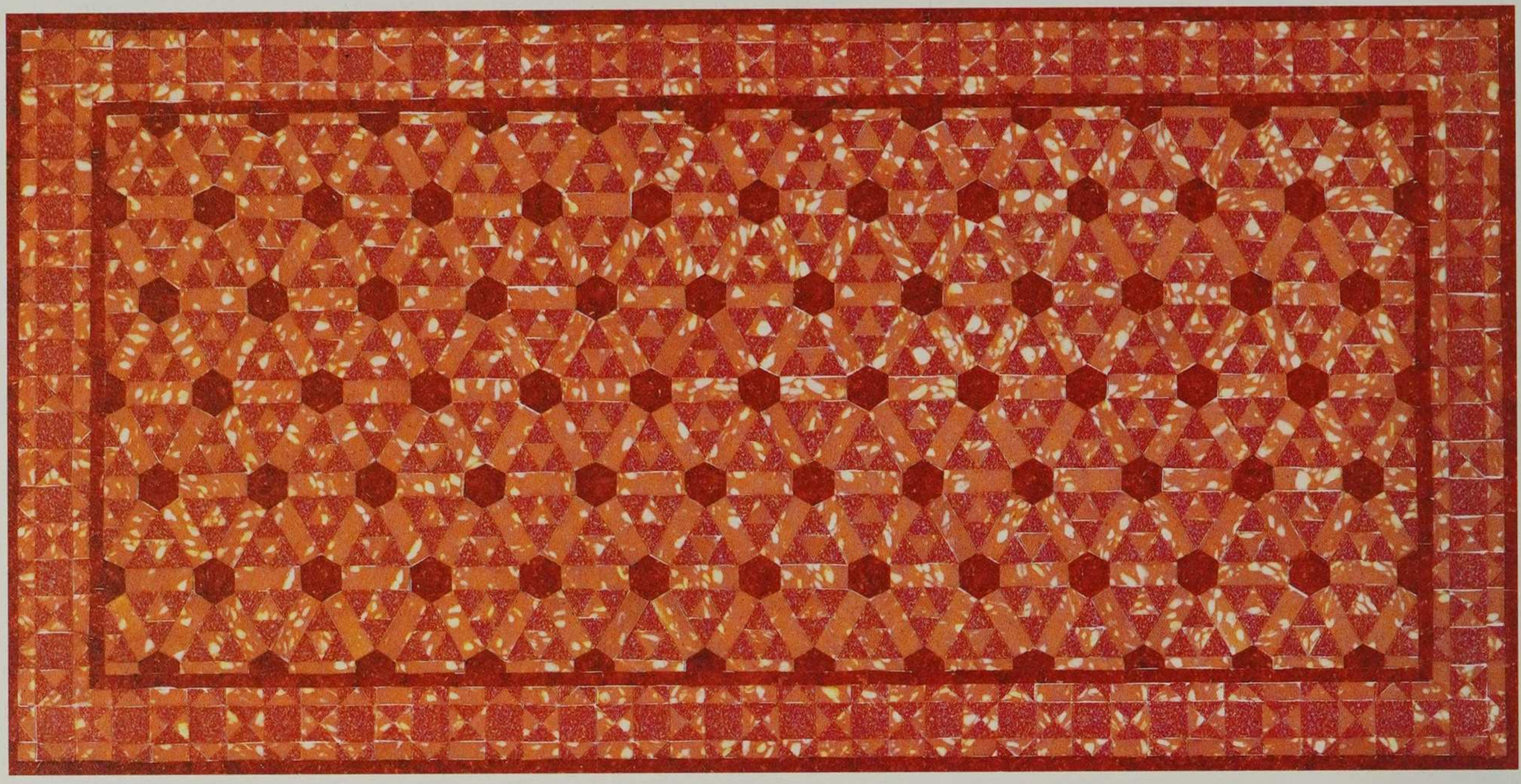
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MARBLE FLOOR #72

1999, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 43 3/8 x 76 3/8 INCHES (110 x 194 CM)

COLLECTION OF PETER NORTON, SANTA MONICA



MARBLE FLOOR #76

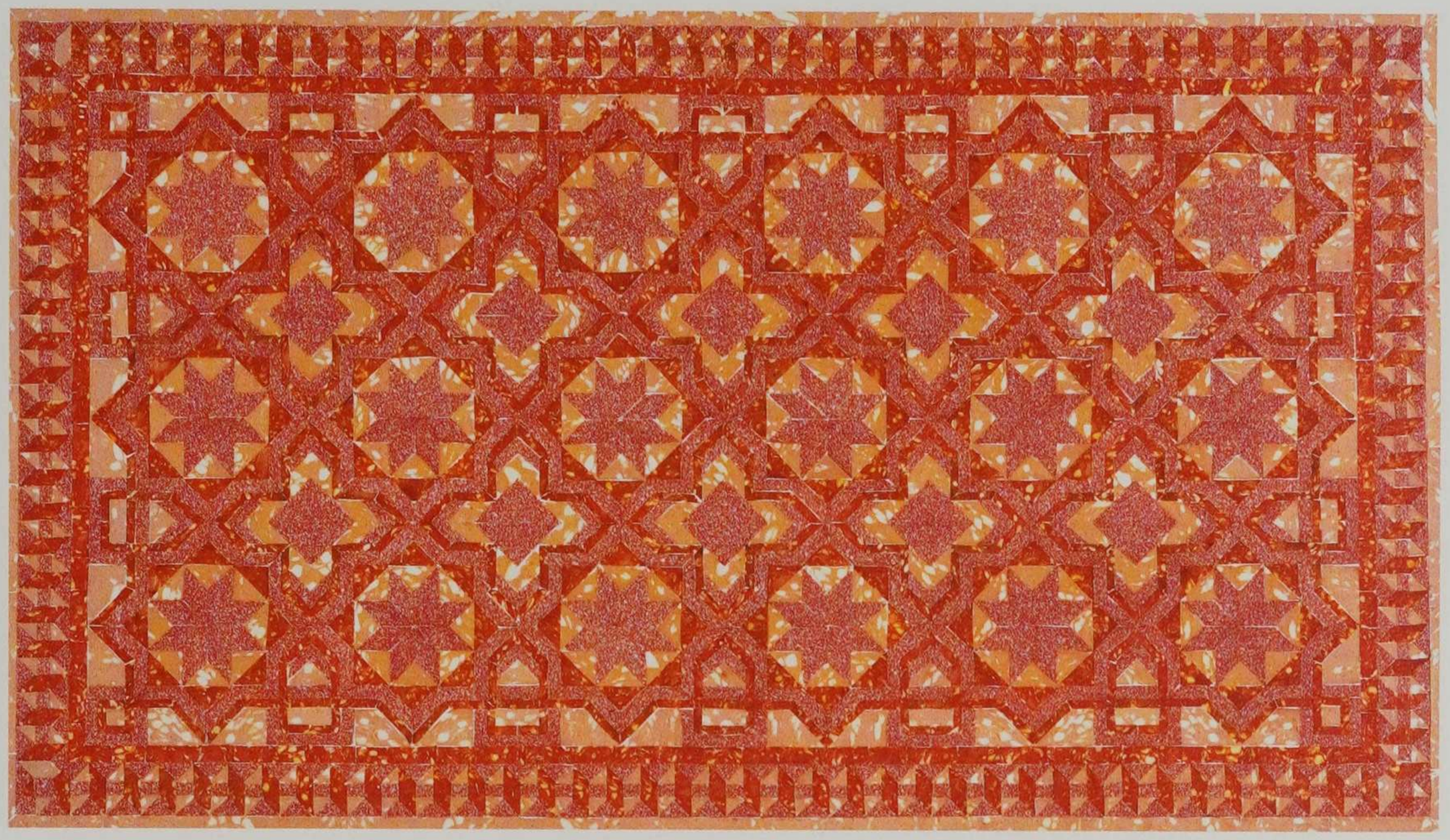
1999, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 43 3/8 x 86 5/8 INCHES (110 x 220 CM)

COURTESY GIAN ENZO SPERONE, ROME



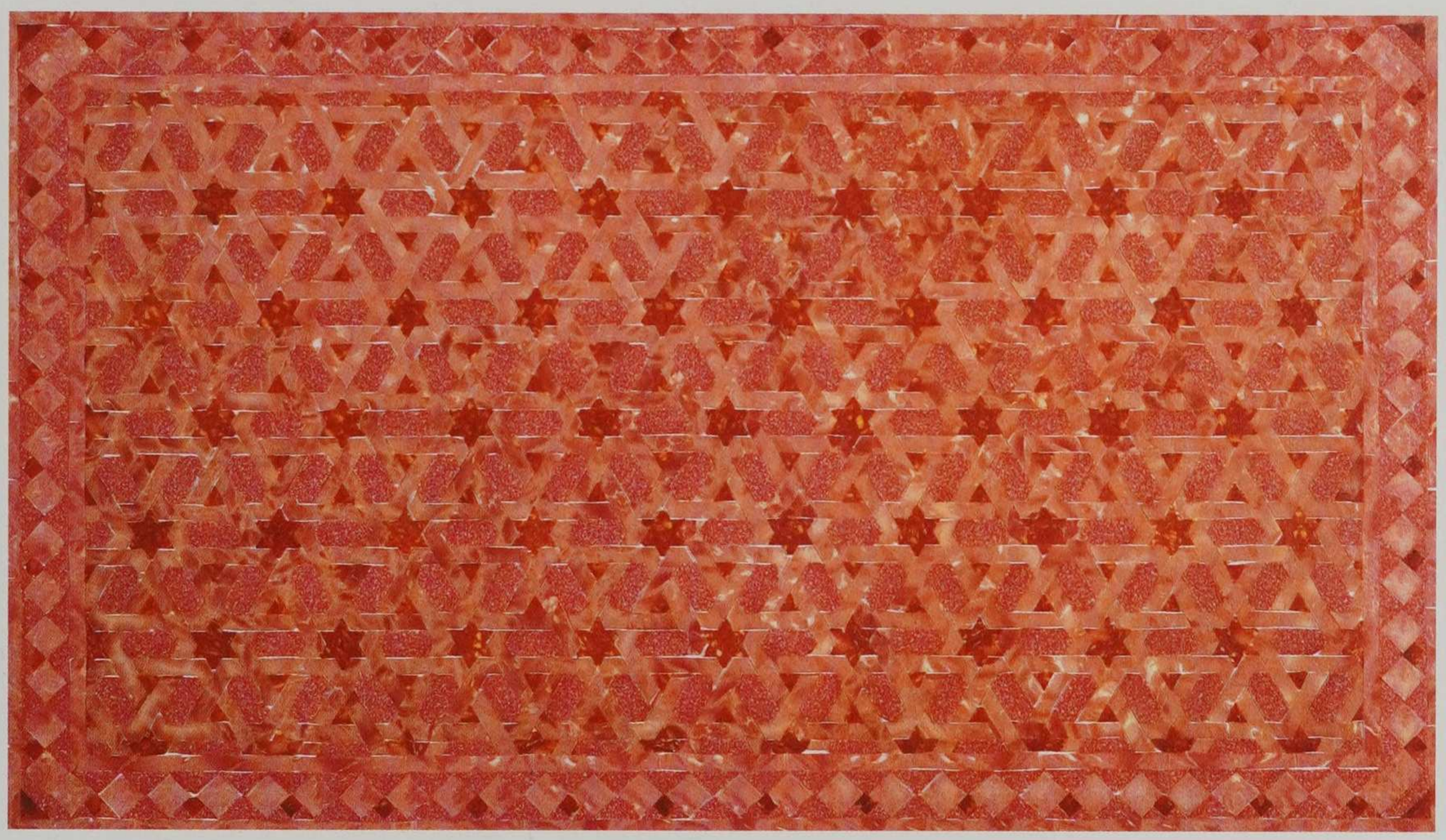
MARBLE FLOOR #80

1999, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 43 3/8 x 78 INCHES (110 x 198 CM)



MARBLE FLOOR #91

1999, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 43 3/8 x 75 3/8 INCHES (110 x 191,5 CM)



MARBLE FLOOR #52

1999, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 43 3/8 x 76 INCHES (110 x 193 CM)
COURTESY GIAN ENZO SPERONE, ROME



MARBLE FLOOR #32

1999, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 43 3/8 x 75 1/4 INCHES (110 x 191 CM)
COLLECTION OF EILEEN AND PETER NORTON, SANTA MONICA



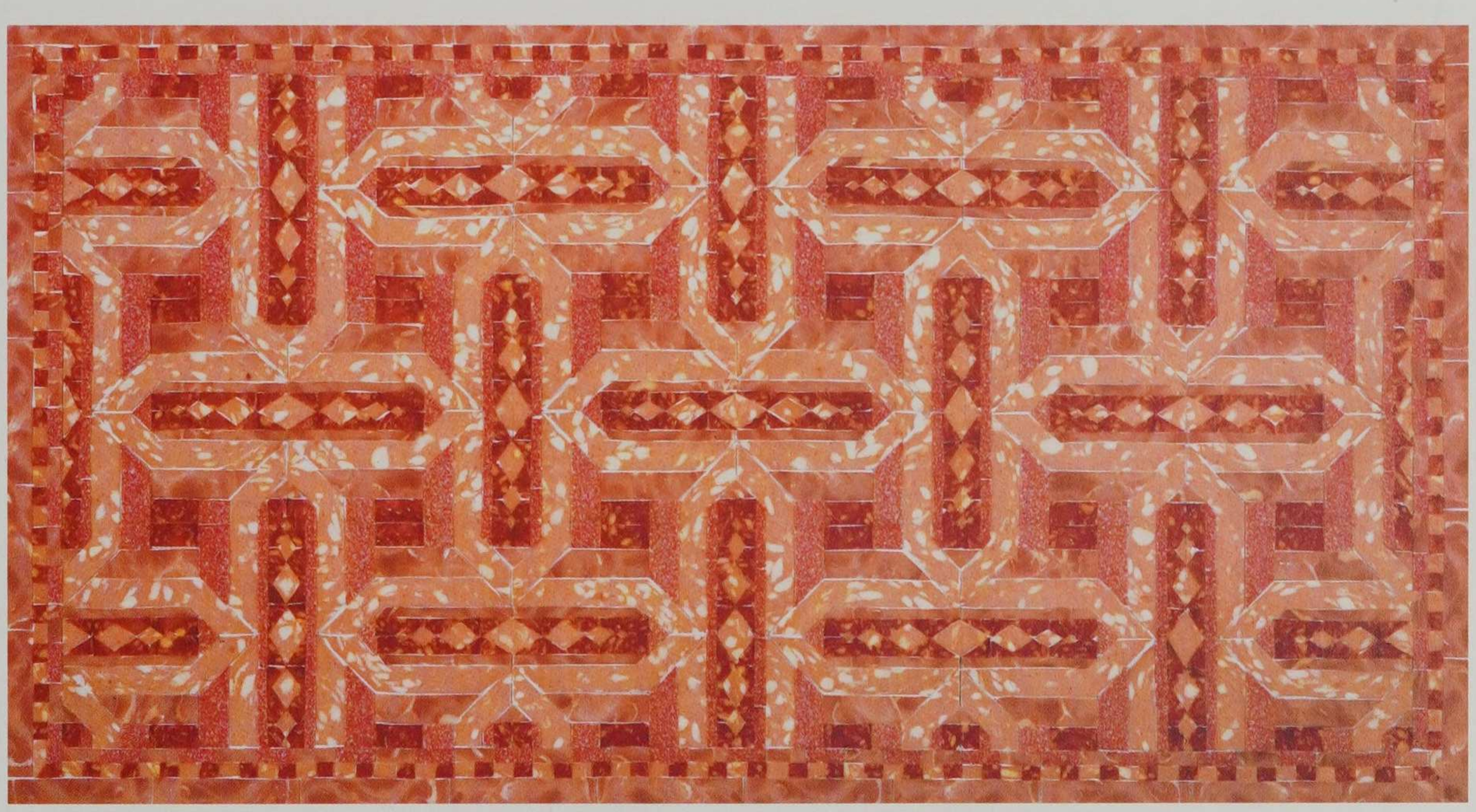
MARBLE FLOOR #60

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COURTESY GIAN ENZO SPERONE, ROME



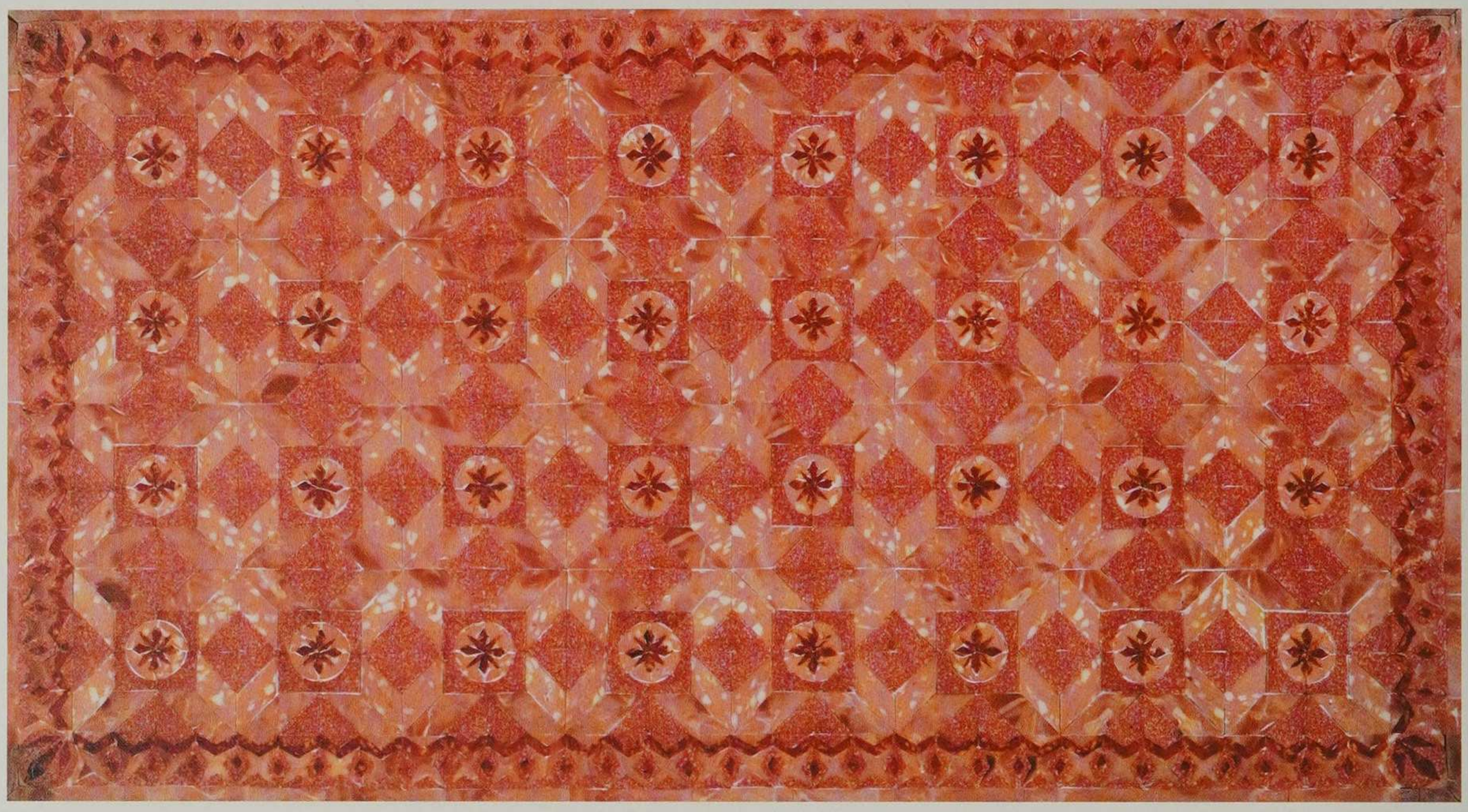
MARBLE FLOOR #31

1999, CIBACHROME PRINT BEHIND PLEXI GLASS, 49 1/4 x 87 3/8 INCHES (125 x 222 CM)



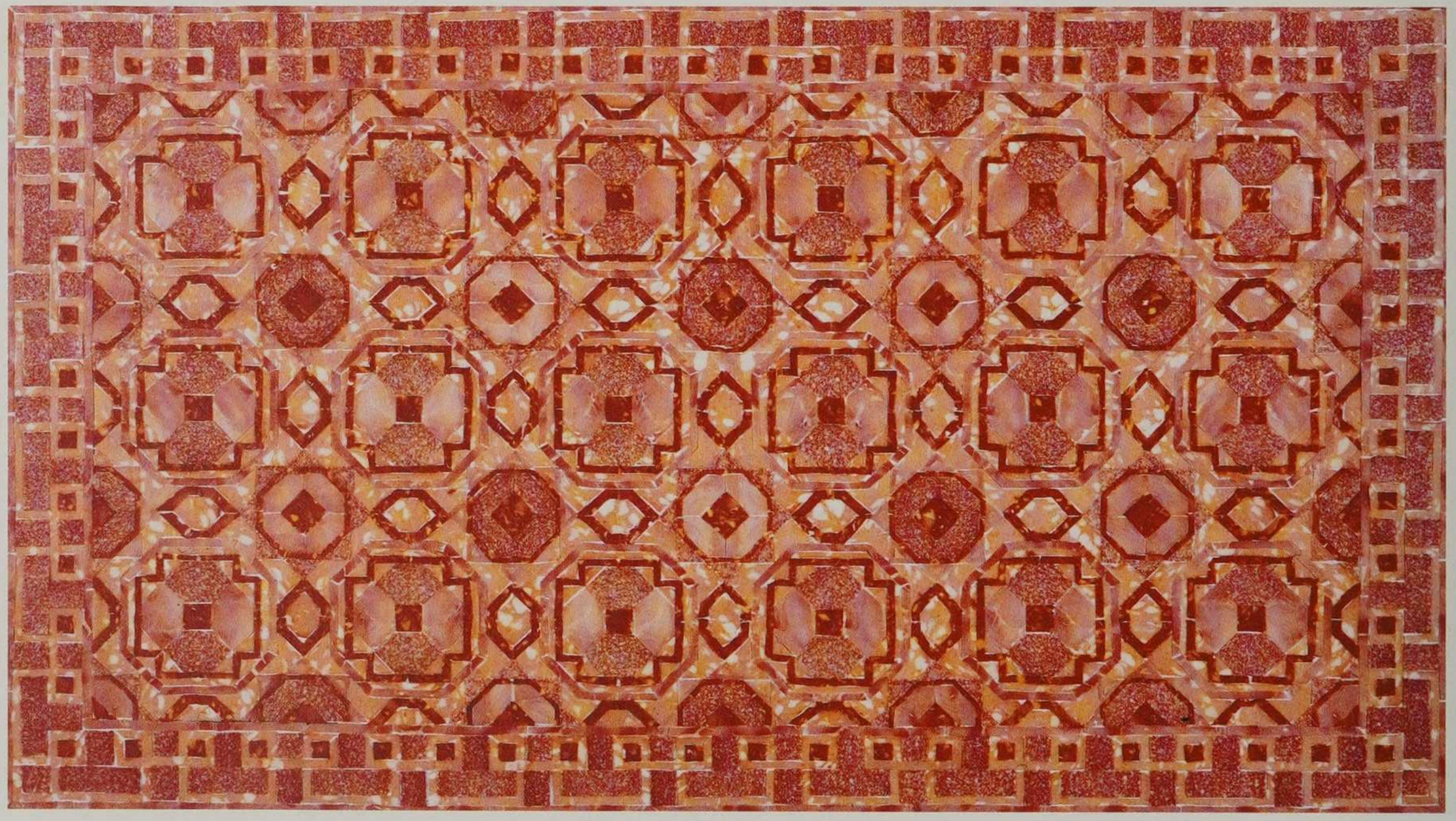
MARBLE FLOOR #36

1999, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 43 3/8 x 80 3/4 INCHES (110 x 205 CM)
COURTESY GIAN ENZO SPERONE, ROME



MARBLE FLOOR #44

1999, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 43 3/8 x 97 1/8 INCHES (110 x 201 CM)



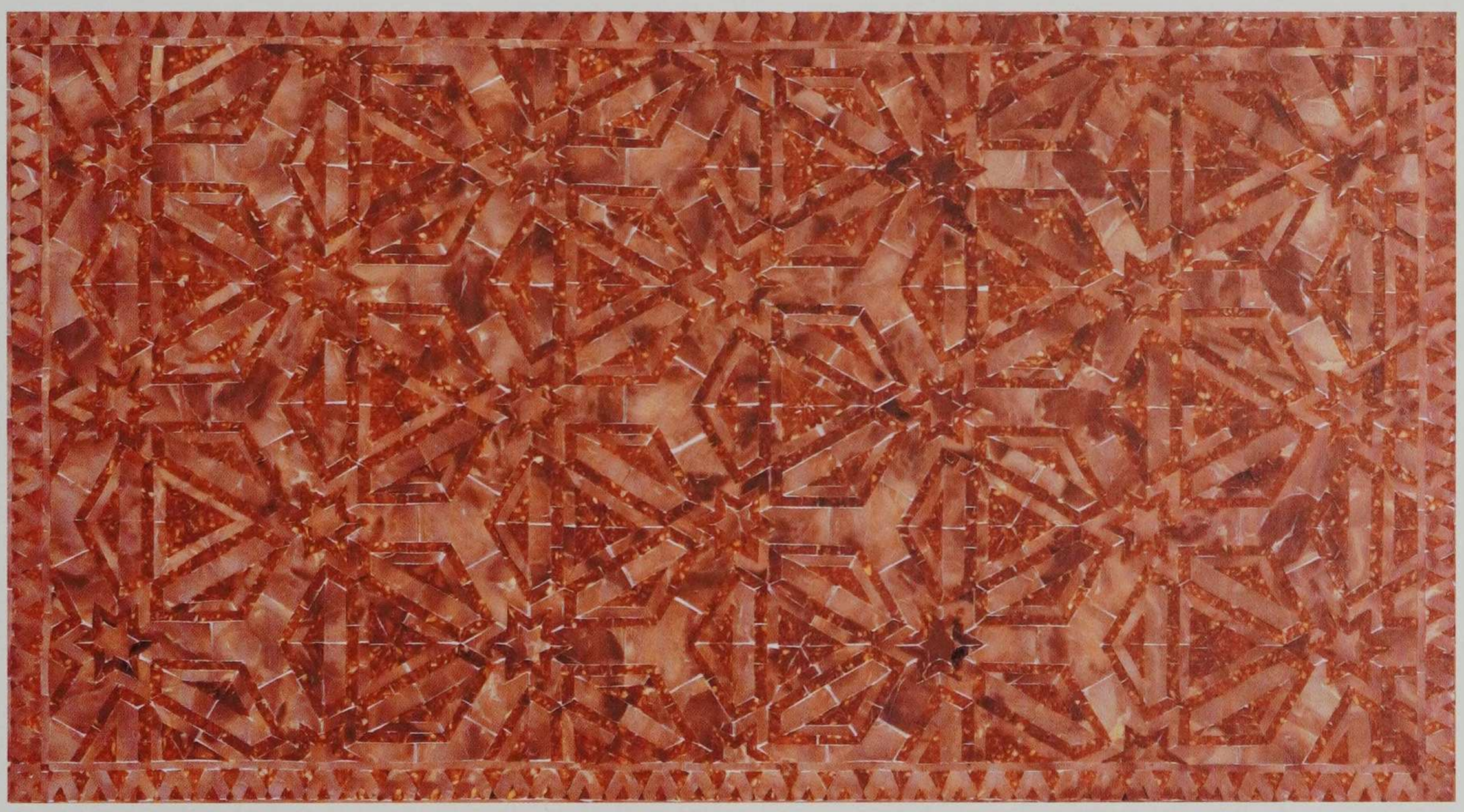
MARBLE FLOOR #40

1999, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 43 3/8 x 77 3/8 INCHES (110 x 196,5 CM)
COLLECTION OF PETER NORTON, SANTA MONICA



MARBLE FLOOR #83

1999, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 43¾ x 76¾ INCHES (110 x 195 CM)
COURTESY GIAN ENZO SPERONE, ROME



MARBLE FLOOR #107

1999, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 43⅜ x 80 INCHES (110 x 203 CM)



KISS

2001, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 49¼ x 39⅜ INCHES (125 x 100 CM)

Blind Opticians

PETER BEXTE

"Existence is a selective blindness" [George Spencer Brown, Laws of Form]

I. Flying blind

In April 1999, as part of the psychological war, Nato dumped pamphlets on the Serbian troops in Kosovo, which read:

"You may hide, but Nato sees you everywhere!"

Try to hide, in caves, tanks or bunkers, in Serbia or in Saarbrücken: "Nato sees you everywhere!' The statement may be exaggerated — to the degree that it becomes an untruth, like all tactical statements done in the course of a war — yet it contains a core of truth that cannot be ignored.

"Nato sees." That sounds like a giant monster gazing. But actually, who is talking here? What does "see" mean in this instance? The reader cannot fail to remember that traditionally the machine of war is not particularly characterized by sharp perceptive faculties, but rather by blindness, by non-seeing. In line with the traditions of the history of art, Rudolf Schlichter e.g. painted the colossus therefore in 1937 as a *Blind Power*. Ares, the Greek god of war went about like a blind berserker. Monsters like Polyphemos were blinded. The Nato war machine, however, claims the power of vision, and pretends it can do so since the age of Enlightenment. In this context "Enlightenment" has a military sense: the military are "enlightened," i.e. informed by reconnaissance planes, observation satellites and other devices for gathering intelligence.

"Nato sees" with the eye of the camera attached to the missile, which keeps sending images till the bomb explodes. Even duds have visual powers! "Nato always sees you!" — with infrared cameras, night-glasses, satellites, radar installations, etc. It sees with "seeing machines" (Virilio), of which the frequency is outside the scope of the human senses. Nato aims at its enemies, without pointing the bead, but by looking at the screen. It observes its enemies without looking, simply calculating the enemy's position from indirect data. Nato sees its enemies without

seeing. These paradoxes are like exact formulae for the abstract, i.e. sensory-extrasensory data which assist the weak human powers of perception. Up to this very day their secondary representational power is still interpreted by disciples of McLuhan as an expansion of the senses.

Mrs Röntgen held other views on this subject. And we can but reply: "Dear Madam, you are absolutely right!" The year was 1895, when she entered the laboratory of her spouse, Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen. Blind to the invisible rays which her husband had just discovered, she did exactly what people do when they are blind: she stretched out her hand. The event became notorious; at www.roentgenmuseum.de her finger bones, adorned with a large ring can be viewed. After she had seen the shadow on the wall of the lab, she never entered it again. And once more we are inclined to say: "Dear Madam, you are absolutely right. To see in this skeletal image the reflection of the traditional *memento mori*, is entirely correct from an iconographic point of view, as every art historian will confirm."

W.C. Röntgen, however, had no more pressing engagements than to write about his views "on the new sort of rays. (Provisional Notes)"

The "provisional" character of Röntgen's notes refers to two aspects of his discovery. In first instances some points remained unclarified. Röntgen examined in vain phenomena of interference and of diffraction with lenses, i.e. he looked for the characteristics of the normal light — phenomena to which X-rays are subject indeed, but the reality of these were to proved only later by Max von Laue. Only then it became clear that also X-rays (like light-rays) consist of photons, but that their energy is much higher than that of the visible light.

Secondly, the notes were "provisional" because of the avant-garde character of his discovery, i.e. Röntgen was ahead of his time in redefining visibility as transparency. This essential concept characterized Röntgen's view from the start. What the concept of transparency actually means, may become clear by looking at the radiogram of one's suitcase at the airport. The examination of our suitcase highlights — in the true sense of the word — the meaning of the concept: the lid of our suitcase is transparent for photons with particularly high energy (e.g. X-rays), which reveal its inner contents to the customs officer.

This quality of transparency is in first instance to what Röntgen referred. In second instance, he also took an interest in quantitative analysis. Transparency becomes quantitatively measurable as a proportional relation. It can be defined by the photometric intensity of the light emitted by a fluorescent screen, as the object

of which the transparency is measured is put between the source of the radiation and the screen. Transparency is thus expressed by a number between 0 and 1; 0 transparency means that the object is entirely opaque, while transparency 1 means that it is entirely transparent. In this way Röntgen defines a new quantitative concept with which he creates an entirely new basis for the opposition visible/invisible.

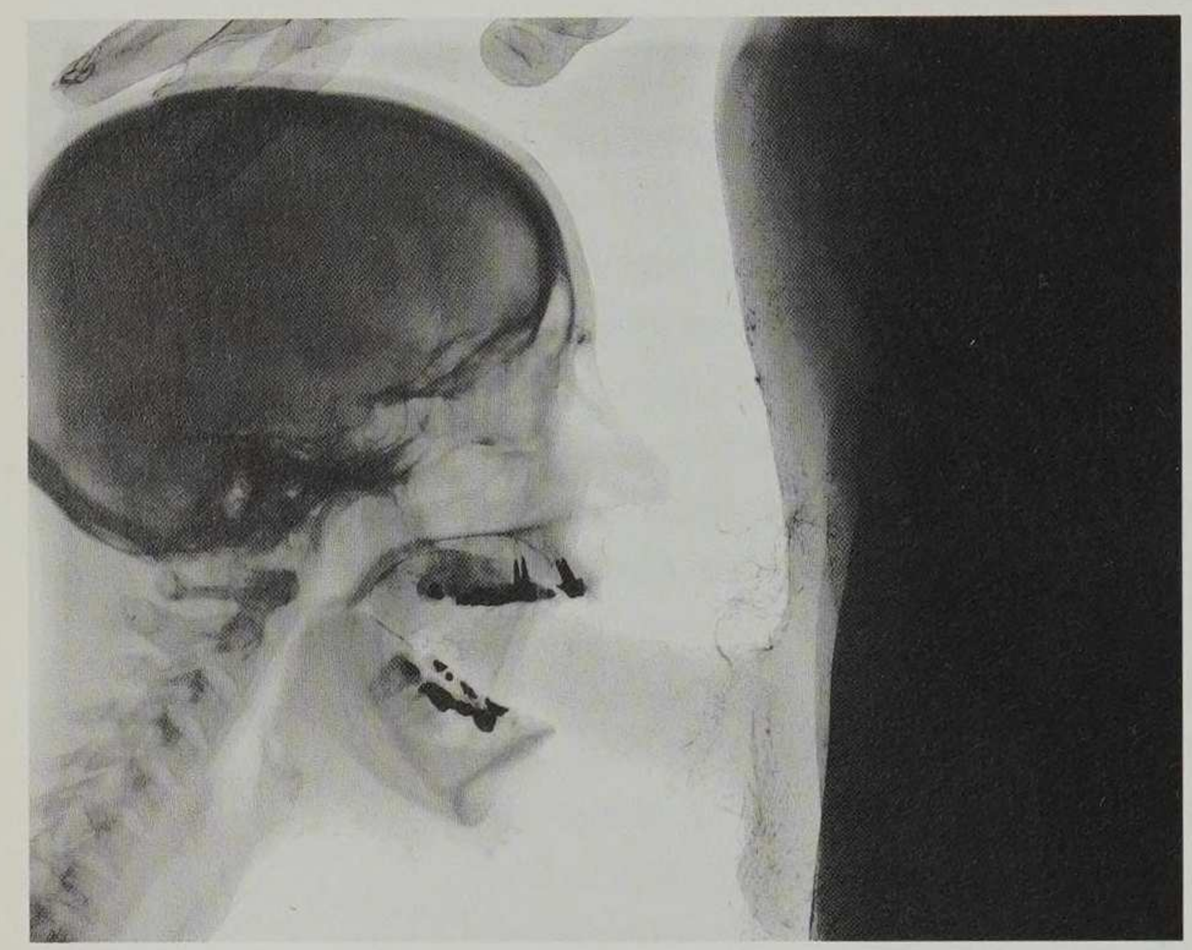
Let us try the following empirical test. Turn your head towards the light. Let the photons clash with your retina (*clash* is expressly the word I use, as light indeed consists of separate photons). Concentrate on the light. And now try to see the air! This turns out to be more difficult than expected. Why? The air is made up of atoms and molecules, like any other object, e.g. this book. But why do we see this book, and why do we not see the air? The answer follows from Röntgen's definition of transparency. A fluorescent screen radiates the same amount of light in a vacuum and in a room filled with air. The ratio of light emitted is thus the same in both situations, i.e. in both circumstances the transparency is 1 (total transparency). Air is transparent with regard to photons, therefore we cannot see air. From this experiment we can also conclude that total transparency means that the object is invisible. Only objects that are to some extent opaque are visible. If and only if we cannot see through an object, we can see something. The bones in our body or guns in a suitcase become visible because with regard to X-rays they are less transparent than skin and flesh or the lid of the suitcase. The latter are pierced to the same extent that Mrs Röntgen felt pierced.

From the preceding remarks it follows that every new transparency creates as many invisible entities as visible ones. In order for the bones to become visible, the flesh has to disappear from the image. The most radical test for this "dialectics of transparency" are the so-called ghosts of the universe, i.e. the neutrinos. They are indeed like ghosts, for they are truly and infinitely transparent. Unlike photons, neutrinos are electromagnetically neutral. They are the only elementary particles subject to the weak interaction. They can therefore travel right through spaceship earth without being stopped by any obstacle whatsoever. Whenever a neutrino reacts with another particle, particle physicists rejoice. For most of the neutrinos, however, the earth is entirely transparent. If on some distant planet someone looked through a neutrino telescope at the earth, our "blue planet" would neither appear blue, nor any other color: it would simply be invisible.

There is an ancient children's play, *I see, I see, what you don't see*. This riddle acquires a mysterious sense when looked at as a transparency rampant with invisible entities.

Every new transparency creates new invisible entities that must be compensated by erecting more screens. Röntgen's small, primitive fluorescent screen is the medium of theoretical importance in the attempt to create an order that can also be read backwards: screens presuppose invisible entities.

Since the creation of devices that produce images, the number of military invisible enemies has grown. Now we live in a world of invisible suitcases and transparent objects. Parallel with these developments X-ray cameras have been used in the science of art as the ideal public for a painting. This has led to charming essays with e.g. titles like *The Invisible Rembrandt*.



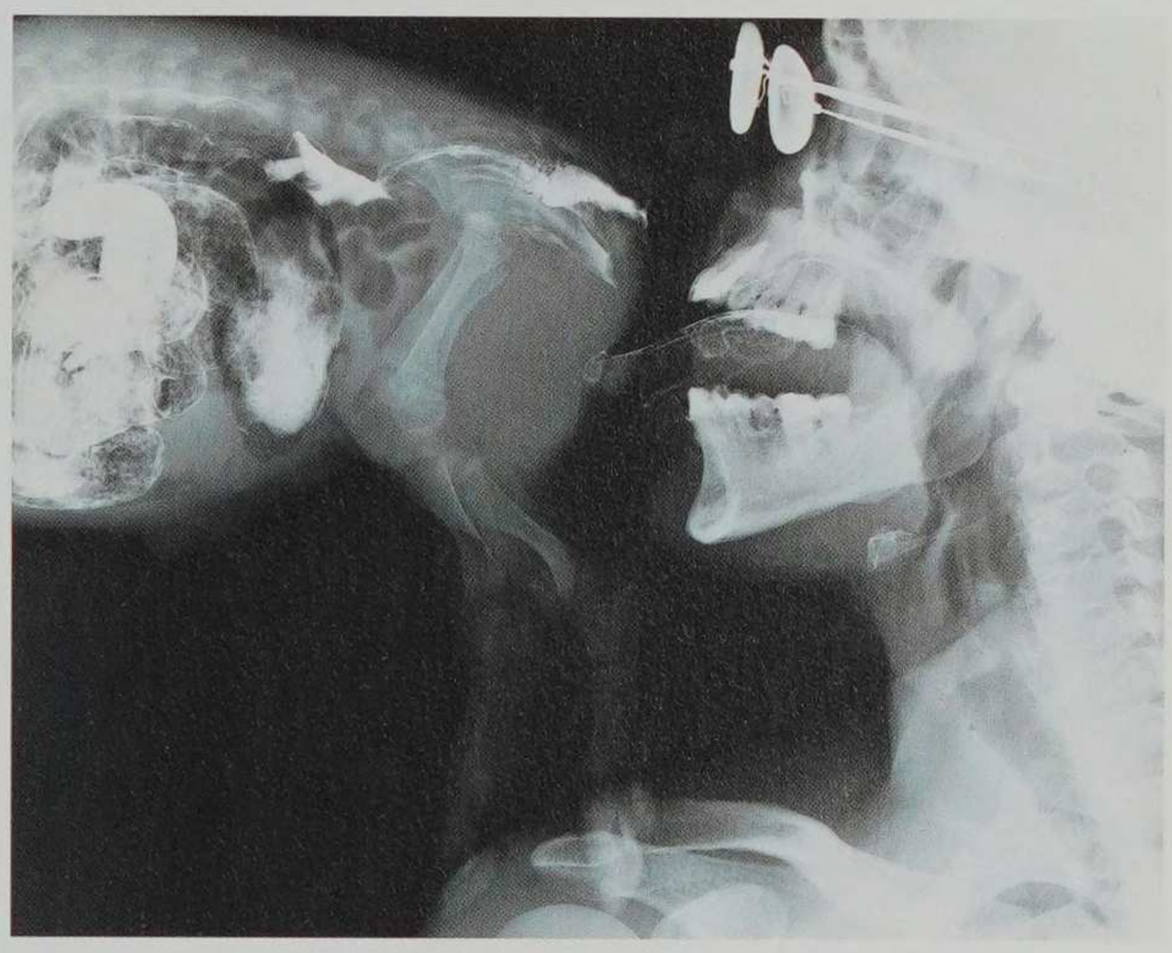
PIPE 1
2000, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 39 3/8 x 49 1/4 INCHES (100 x 125 CM)

Technical means of observation lead to another type of visibility. Invisible aspects are made visible to the eye, i.e. to the screen. Thus invisible enemies or invisible Rembrandts can be visualized. But what is supposed to be there remains invisible in itself. It is as invisible as a ghost and as mighty. An ever-increasing number of our actions are steered not by observations, but by readings from instruments, readings which refer to things we cannot see. Pilots use a strikingly appropriate expression for this phenomenon: flying blind. The secondary perception used for flying blind characterizes our contemporary seeing as an uncast glance, a perception without perception that creates invisibilities in order to visualize things. That is what Nato means with the phrase "Nato sees!".

What is visible and what is invisible was traditionally determined by culture, but the traditional structure of visibility and invisibility has been overturned. The drowsy expression "world view" has acquired a dizzy sense. Since people have landed on the moon, we no longer look exclusively at the earth as something under our feet, but we can look at it at a screen. Obsessed with the illusion of visibility, in blind fury, our culture has now really unchained the powers of the immaterial and the invisible. The Latin word for the expression "I see" mocks us from every street corner: VIDEO. I see something. But what? And the ingenious answer is: What you don't see!

II. Blind spot

Visualization is the opposite of sensory certainty — or so we would like to believe. Unfortunately this immediately confronts us with the question: what exactly do we mean by sensory certainty? To answer this question, we will perform a simple experiment. Lean back in your armchair, open your eyes as wide as you can. Now, try to perceive your own sight.



LICK PIG
2000, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 39⅜ x 49¼ INCHES (100 x 125 CM)

As you will notice, the perception of one's own glance is not without difficulties. The seeing eye does not see itself. "...the senses receive no impression of their own organs," as Edme Mariotte crisply remarked.

This situation may seem trite, but it contains a problem with far-reaching consequences. No less a philosopher than Denis Diderot has concluded that in order to see our own perception, we must become two-headed monsters. Head to head, eye to eye with ourselves we would finally be able to see our own perception.

Two-headed monsters would be ideal theoreticians of the sight. Actually, the need for such theoreticians has never been greater than now, when our perception has become the dark object of our desire. No other sense has been the subject of so many theories, has been automated, simulated and fetishized to such an extent. In short: our sight has been overdefined. It has grown to phallic proportions. And as to the literature regarding the subject, we could recall the words of the possessed man in Mark ch. 5, v. 9: "My name is Legion, for we are many." However, as long as the monsters mentioned above do not turn up to explain how we can see ourselves seeing, seeing remains in its own shadow, i.e. it remains in the shadow of not-seeing itself.

In the preceding paragraph we referred to Edme Mariotte's apparently crisp remark: "the senses receive no impression of their own organs." But the simplicity of this statement is indeed mere appearance, for it contains a fundamental insight into the eye: in 1668 Mariotte discovered the blind spot.



DICK 2

2001, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 49¼ x 39⅜ INCHES (125 x 100 CM)

Everyone has it, no one sees it. How is that possible? For two thousand years people had been preoccupied with optics, until a clergyman entered the dark and discovered a logical monstrosity that can be formulated thus: "A Cretan sees that all Cretans are blind." It took one hundred and fifty more years, until the development of physiological optics, before this assertion found its place within a theoretical framework.

The physiological facts are familiar. Where the optical nerve is connected to the retina, there are no light sensitive cells. This in itself is indeed remarkable: in the center of our perception there is no perception! Precisely here there is a large black hole. But no one has ever managed to see this hole, except Hermann von Helmholtz, who, after practicing for a long time, managed to let the tip of his finger disappear in the optical void.

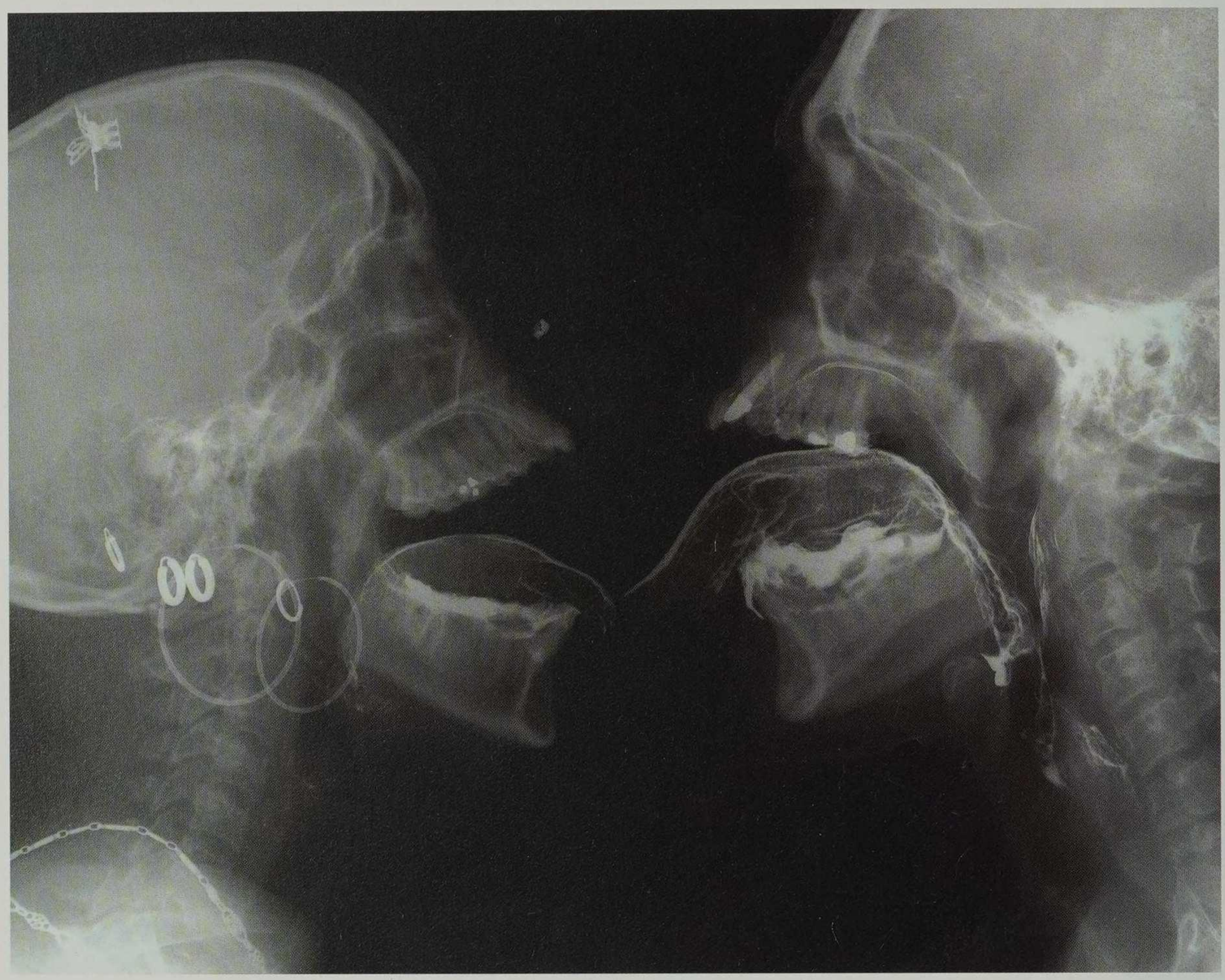
Ordinary mortals will find it hard to accomplish this feat. The reason is that our brain is full of tricks: the missing data are interpolated, so as to produce a complete observation, based on incomplete data. "We don't see that we don't see," Heinz von Foerster used to say. Seeing is the result of a construction. Consequently, the blind spot became the standard example to which constructivism referred. This entire essay is actually a homage to Heinz von Foerster, the grand old man of cybernetics. Anyone who is familiar with the writings of this wonderful freethinker appreciates the fact that I call him the Socrates of cybernetics. Like Socrates spoke about the knowledge of not knowing, Heinz von Foerster spoke about the sight of the non-sight.

The blindness of the blind spot is prerequisite in order to see. Someway or another data have to be sent to the brain, and that involves that the optical nerve needs some sort of interface. Seeing is only possible through this non-seeing.

We have therefore once more arrived at the double structures we are already familiar with. Nato's seeing turns out to be a perception without perception. An isomorphous paradox can be used to describe the blind spot: it is the imperceptible center of perception without perceptive powers. We can "see" that the so-called "perceptive certainty" has not much certainty to offer. Whether we examine "seeing machines" or the eye, paradoxes always result. The ambiguity of these paradoxes contrasts sharply with the one-dimensional view of unlimited visualization, with the illusion of an infinite visibility, an illusion that blinds contemporary thinking. It is time to refute Nato's claim that it always sees us, and its pretences to be the eye of God. The logical flaw, as embodied by the paradoxes above, may help us in doing so.

The paradoxes we have derived, allow us to formulate a basic principle:

Whenever we talk about seeing, blindness is near!



LICK

2000, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 49¼ x 39⅜ INCHES (125 x 100 CM)

This hypothesis holds for the widest variety of visual paradigms, i.e. it is valid for geometrical, physiological, neurological, radiological and other forms of seeing. Blindness is the excluded third party in the perception of perception. It is like the background noise in the theory of communication: as the opposite of the signal we can never get rid of it.

It should be obvious that in this discourse I do not consider blindness a deficit. On the contrary: blindness turns out to be prerequisite to see. In other words, to quote Foerster once more: "If I don't see that I am blind, I am blind. If I do perceive, on the other hand, that I am blind, than I see."

James Turrel's art originates from this double observation. Turrel's works are fascinating, because time and again they guide us through the deepest darkness to the dawn of seeing. The works touch upon a basic element of the parables of blindness from the history of art. The blind Tobias, painted by Rembrandt, Gerrit Dou and others, gains insight through his blindness. Hermes breaks the spell of Argus' eyes. Samson is blinded, Eros is blindfolded, Amaryllis appears as *Colin Maillard*, Belizar as a blind beggar. Blinded, Saul becomes Paul, which means "darkened by the light" — exactly the words Meister Eckhart used to describe his blackout.

In seventeenth-century paintings from the Netherlands the scenes are depicted over and over again. The blind person thus becomes the protagonist in the medium of visibility *par excellence*: the image. Turrel's works seem to fit in this tradition. Wherever the artist evokes the act of seeing, he presupposes a blackout. Once more we are reminded of the paradoxical double structure we are familiar with.

III. Blind Man's Buff

Former times were apparently less problematic in this respect. At universities blind people even held university chairs of optics. The most famous example was the blind professor Nicholas Saunderson (1682–1739). "Amazing things are told about him," Diderot wrote. In his book with the wonderfully ambiguous title *Letter on the Blind for the Use of the Sighted*, Diderot writes extensively about Saunderson:

"At Cambridge University Saunderson studied mathematics with amazing success. He taught optics, lectured on the nature of light and colors, explained the theory of sight, expanded on how burning-glasses function, how rainbows originate, and treated many other problems related to the visual faculty and its organ."

In first instance, let us note that Saunderson was both a mathematician and an

optician. The reader already suspects that we will expand here on calculator-based images. Saunderson was blind from birth. He had developed a calculator that could be operated by touch. The device enabled people to understand the true nature of mathematics, as Saunderson read the calculated values with his fingers. Saunderson's talents caused him to become famous all over Europe. Not only Diderot wrote about him, but so did d'Alembert in his article about blindness (in his Great Encyclopedia). Upon his deathWilliam Hogarth praised the "unequalled mathematician and miracle of his time, the late Professor Sanderson [sic]" Also Arthur Schopenhauer referred to Saunderson.

The subjects the blind teacher of optics treated, correspond exactly with the problems René Descartes dealt with in his essay *Dioptrique*. Descartes's contemporaries therefore believed that Saunderson was the living proof of the problems discussed by Descartes. It was as if the philosopher's word had become flesh. Descartes's essay had been published in Leiden in 1637, i.e. 45 years before Saunderson was born, but it seemed to prefigure Saunderson's portrait: the blind man, seeing with his hands. The book contains several illustrations of a blind man with a dog and two sticks, who represents Descartes's model of seeing.

Blind teachers of optics rising from the grave of philosophical writings to enlighten us on our sight: that indeed must seem strange to ordinary humans. It is both logical and absurd, or, in short, it is the irritating consequence from the paradigm Descartes was the first to express with clarity.

To elucidate the point, let us perform the following experiment. Next time you drive out to the country, take a compass with you. While driving, determine some landmark (a house, a tree,...). (For those who do not posses a compass: at the end of this essay you will find an algorithm to generate a compass rose that can be printed and cut). Having determined the direction of the landmark, you slowly count up to ten (i.e. continue driving for ten seconds) and then you redetermine the direction of the landmark. Now you have constructed a base line (of which the length is solely determined by the speed of the car, which can be read from the speedometer) and two angles. These data are sufficient to draw a triangle: from the base line two sidelines are drawn which meet. The distance from the landmark can then directly be calculated.

This sort of triangles is used by artillerists, land surveyors, navigators and painters (to paint a correct perspective). All of these use the same spatial geometry, which focuses on a *vanishing point*.

In this respect the art of warfare and drawing meet. Artillerist hit the landmark with the same precision as the chessboard pattern seems to flee to the vanishing point.

The Renaissance discovery of the geometry of sight may seem today as little exciting as any other modern sort of technical drawings, but at the time people must have been greatly impressed. The old image of God's eye was therefore modified in the seventeenth century. Since then it looks down on us from the same triangle that still adorns the American one-dollar bill. The fact that since the seventeenth century God's eye is placed at the top of a triangle means that perception has become a geometrical function. The geometrical character of space is a fact we can blindly believe, as can be inferred from the fact that the blind geometrician Saunderson was able to learn optics. Also a blind person can measure base lines and determine angles with a stick.

The Cartesian blind person consequently became a model of perception. His blindness obeys the recalcitrant logic of the vanishing point. Calculator-based images do not require visual faculties.



BLOW 1
2001, CIBACHROME PRINT ON ALUMINIUM, 39⅜ x 49¼ INCHES (100 x 125 CM)

Imagine this blind person before your mind's eye. See how the person stands there with eyes glancing at nothing in particular, the hands stretched out. Take his or her hand, close your eyes and play the old game that delights children and philosophers alike. In French it is called *Le Collin Maillard*, in English *Blind Man's Buff*, in Italian *La Moscacieca*, in Dutch *Blinde Koe*, and in German *Blindekuh*.

Our last experiment will be a game of Blind Man's Buff. From it, you will learn how to see blindfolded, through your hands. Whether one uses a blindfold for this game, or a virtual reality headset, is of no importance, as the results are strikingly similar. "Existence is a selective blindness." The cyberpilot with his headset is the new embodiment of the old allegory. Blind Man's Buff is the predecessor of flying blind.

In short, it is time to reconsider the old parables of the blind from a high-tech point of view.


Cloaca


Coca
Coca
Coca

SYBILLE II (videostills)
1999, VIDEOTAPE, 4'20"



Aerodynamic appearances of "beings-objects"

SALVADOR DALI 1934

Beings-objects are alien bodies in space.

The mysterious vertigo of alien bodies

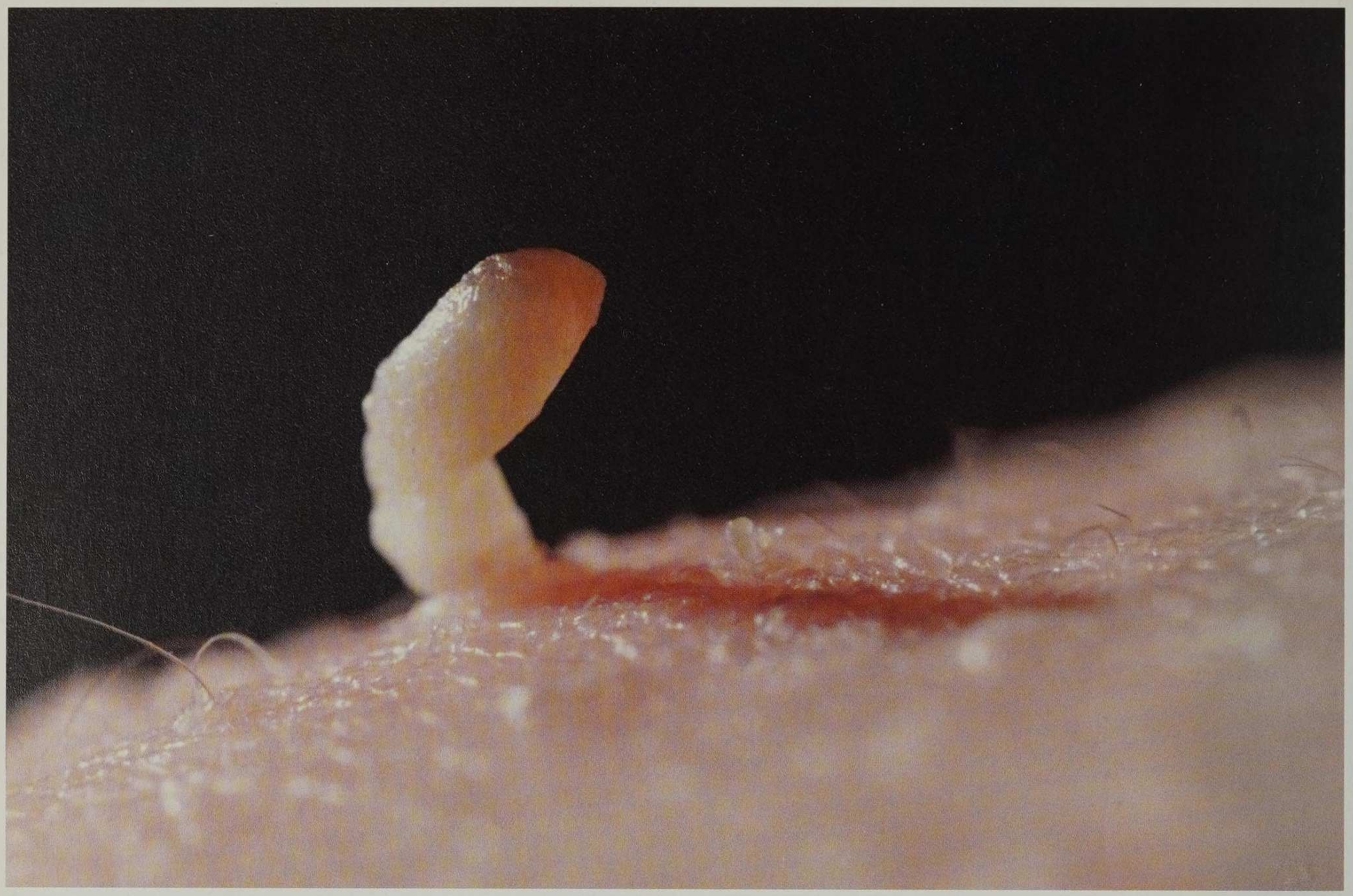
All of my readers doubtlessly have had the pleasure of experiencing the stubborn relentlessness, the mesmerizing obsession, the anxious perseverance, a feeling as if one is overcome by vertigo, which precedes the happiness of the intimate act of causing to emerge from the pores of the nose a slippery, fresh and aerodynamic comedo — more commonly referred to as a blackhead — by applying a skilful and painful pressure around the aforementioned comedon.

There, of course, is great beauty and satisfaction — especially after several awkward and vain attempts — in the final, adequate squeeze which causes the alien body to leave the flesh of one's own nose serenely, or that of someone else who has stoically volunteered to undergo such action, which, as I already have intimated, is above all compelling, fascinating and irresistible.

The pleasure of this diverting and mysterious game apparently resides essentially in the actual "neurotic ceremonial" we initiate, a ceremonial which through "skilful failures" is to prolong voluptuously the "hasty slowness" of the action, to postpone the climax of this elastic, enigmatic pleasure surrounded by moral conflicts, a pleasure we derive from the ritual extraction of the terribly concrete blackheads. Once the last one has been squeezed out, we find ourselves in utter distress. Desperately, panic-stricken we search for the slightest possibility to continue this divine game and scrutinize all pores for the ultimate, smooth, precious larva.

The comedo of space

Do not simply shrug your shoulders, those of my readers who consider the squeezing out of blackheads a matter of trifling importance. Know that this apparently



ultra-prosaic clean-up actually represents the ultra-concrete embodiment of what is the most vital and most lyrical in contemporary moral, scientific and artistic thinking. Consider, for that matter, the actual, soft entity, the nutritious, modern, supergelatinous, compressibility of which Salvador Dali incessantly talks and which he teaches on every suitable occasion, referring explicitly to the apparatus of the paranoiac-critical action. Indeed, my attentive reader knows as well as I do, that in our era everything that is of fine, sensational quality, is derived from the evolution of space, which, as we recall, once was merely an abstract sort of food, without taste nor substance, but which—as we shall see shortly—evolved into a most succulent and rich food for contemporary thinking.

In Euclid's view a point, a plane or an intersection were nothing but the idealized form of material objects; space in his view never reached a greater degree of solidity than that of a perfectly utopian and cold tapioca broth.

It is only through Descartes' view of space as a three-dimensional entity that the insipid gravy starts to thicken and, above all, that our salivary expectations, already whetted by the extravagant cuisine of space, were really stirred. Space finally gained its full nutritional richness and its characteristic heaviness with Newton's apple; as we all know, this scholar suffered indisputably from inertia and a considerable appetite.

But up till Newton, as it is easy to observe, space appears to us less as a piece of meat than as the receptacle for the meat, as a vessel, a container for the force of gravity of the meat; the role of the receptacle remains merely passive and is at all times masochistic. This state of affairs continues until the discovery of the "wave theory of light" and the electromagnetic theories of Maxwell and Faraday, when space can finally announce: "this apple is mine," i.e. (to stick to the language of physics) "this dynamics is mine." But at the time, scientists considered it utterly absurd to attribute "physical state functions" to space; they had therefore to resort to the ductility of the ether before they deduced the modern theory of relativity. The latter considers space so important, material and genuine, to the extent that it acquired four dimensions, the fourth being time—the surrealistic and delirious dimension par excellence. For these various reasons space has nowadays become this delicious piece of meat—terribly



enticing, voracious, and personal — which with disinterested, soft enthusiasm is constantly squeezing out the smooth delicacies of the "alien bodies," as well as those of the "beings-objects" — the latter also being more or less alien bodies. There is reason to be distrustful, therefore, when these days anyone expounds on the air, for this is simply the word happily used by the mentally retarded to refer to the dense, perfectly viscous, and full-blooded space. And all those aerodynamic, gelatinous, flattened, dented vehicles, with their endlessly smooth curves and spells, with their massive salivatory anatomy, with their pot-bellied thighs and their saggy bellies (Mae West style), all those aerodynamic and atmospheric vehicles, with their fat, compressed, exuberant, sticky intestines, are nothing but the true "comedo" which have emerged, slippery, solemnly, atmospherically, sublimely, from the nose of space itself, from the flesh of space. That is what Salvador Dali tells you, and you can take his word for it.

Comedo! Comedo! We are sliding!

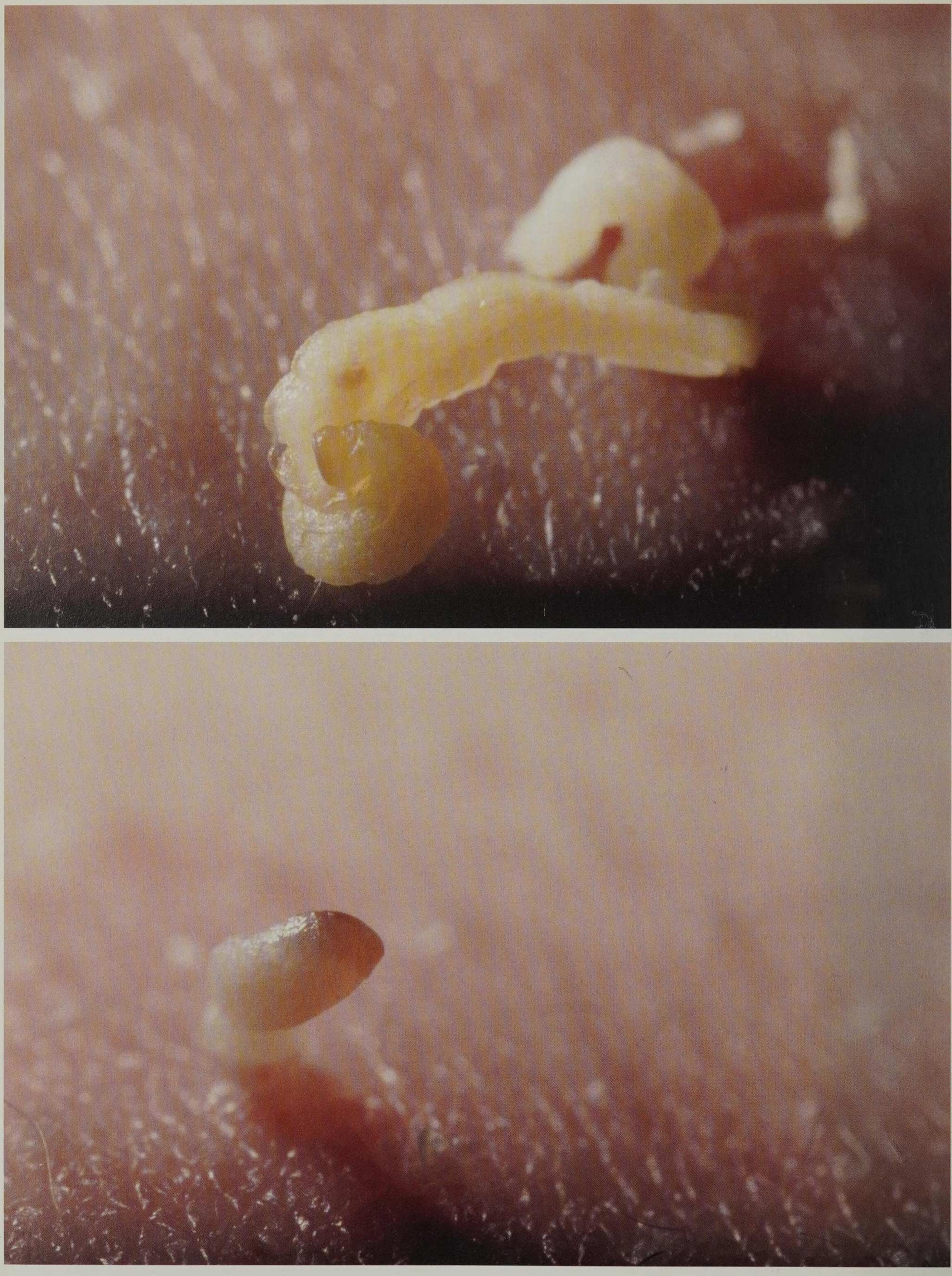
After an era of amazing rigidity and unsuccessful, failed functionalism, the science of "mechanics" will get to know the sticky, outrageous and sublime internal secretions; floating kidneys match with floating, soft engines, because the "epoch of softness," the epoch of "soft watches," of "soft cars," of "soft bedside tables," cut up through their supersoft, Hitlerite back by tender, atavistic wet-nurses, has been announced by the modern, creative media of the famous soft cathedral in Barcelona. Its central salivatory apparatus will pervade the aerodynamic curves of houses which are about to be built, houses which are soft, vaginal, curved, ornamental, imperial, recreative, imaginative, distressing, vicious and surrealistic.

Away with the architecture of self-punishment.

Make way for the perverse, glandular, wonderful aerodynamics.

The sphinx of the comedo

Behold the first aerodynamic beings-objects, the recent comedo, the alien bodies which have emerged from the flesh of our dense and personal non-Euclidean "space-time." But before you start to delight in your aesthetic joy



— which is probably already making you shine with artistic self-seeking — and before the new formal solutions of the aerodynamic curves start to intoxicate you with their aphrodisiac strength, turn back your mind to the well-known sculpture of the stooping youth, mesmerized by the thorn he carefully tries to extract from his foot. Look carefully at this sculpture. The boy's back is curved, showing the same suspicious pose we are familiar with from the typical "Angélus de Millet." Look closely and you will notice that the boy bends his back to examine the thorn with the same fossil immobility with which Narcissus stoops to examine the silver blackhead of his own dead.

The barbarism of the comedo

Somewhere, ornamental, polychrome windows are being launched for the recent aerodynamic vehicles.

Examples of the "comedo-object" (physical aerodynamics)

A large nose (the size of a small melon), made of a flexible, elastic material (a suitably compact rubber); perfectly embedded in the aerodynamic curves of the nose there is a multitude of "alien bodies," not in the least disturbing the superb smoothness and homogeneous continuity of the surface. An overall general squeezing with the two hands will be sufficient to make hundreds of minute objects (bedside tables, skulls, bottles, lampshades, etc.) appear slowly, bristling (like the Paramount orchestra) from the previously superbly smooth surface.

This is the artificial, concrete, affectionate comedo.

Example of an "aerodynamic being-object"

Borrow an extremely decrepit old woman; exhibit her dressed up as a toreador, with on her — preferably shaven — head an "omelette fine herbes," which will tremble by the woman's incessant shaking of her head.

A 20- franc coin may be put on top of the omelette.

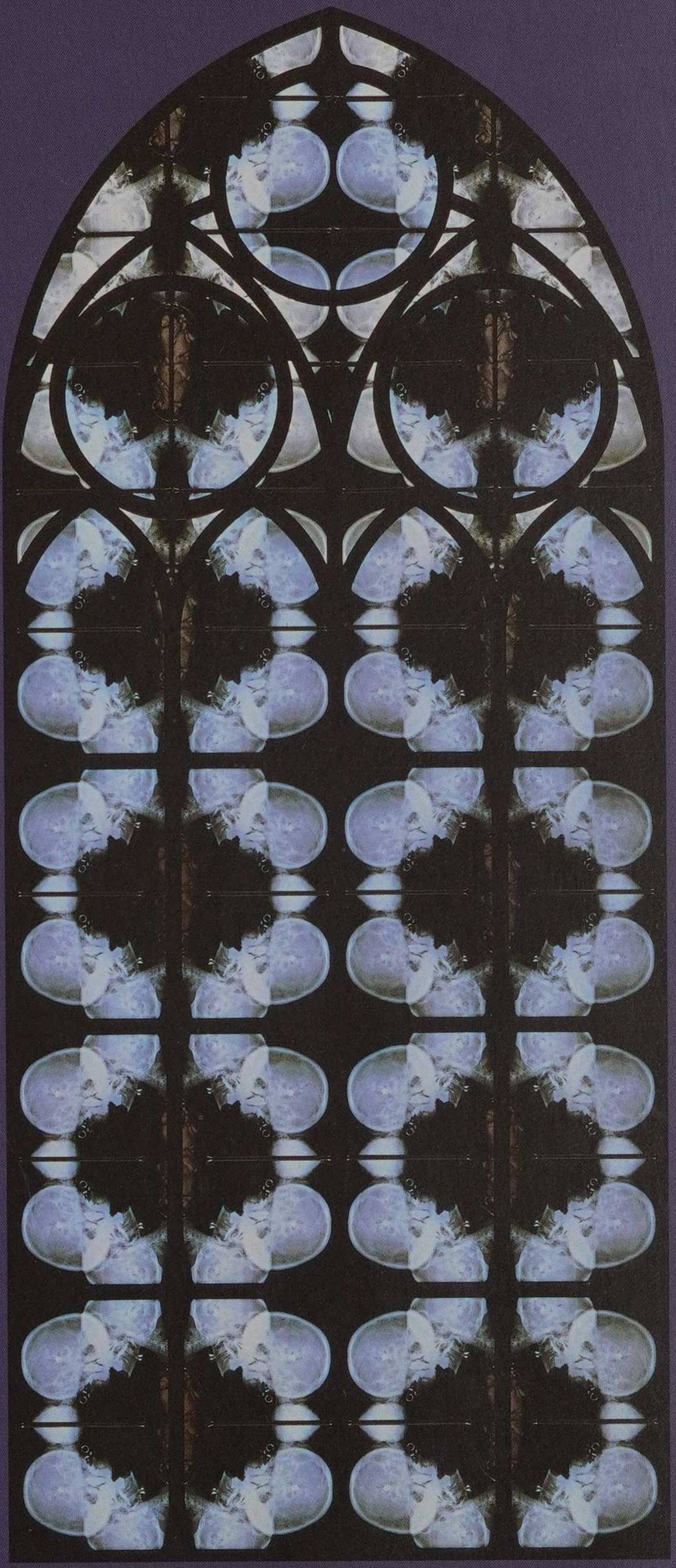
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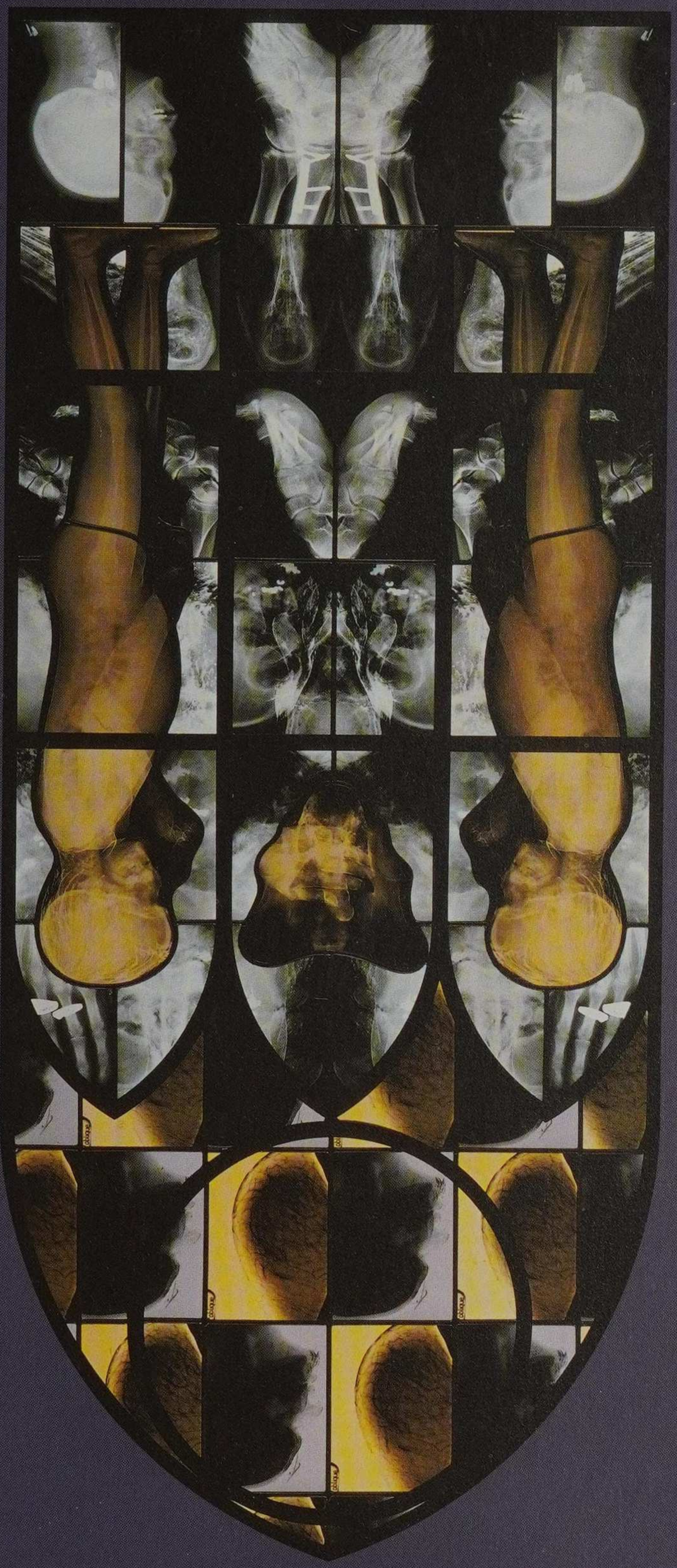
JANUARY / FEBRUARY / MARCH / APRIL / MAY / JUNE / JULY
AUGUST / SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER / NOVEMBER / DECEMBER

2001, STEEL, X-RAY PHOTOGRAPHS, LEAD, GLASS, 96 x 41 INCHES (244 x 104 CM)

PHOTO COURTESY GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA, PARIS













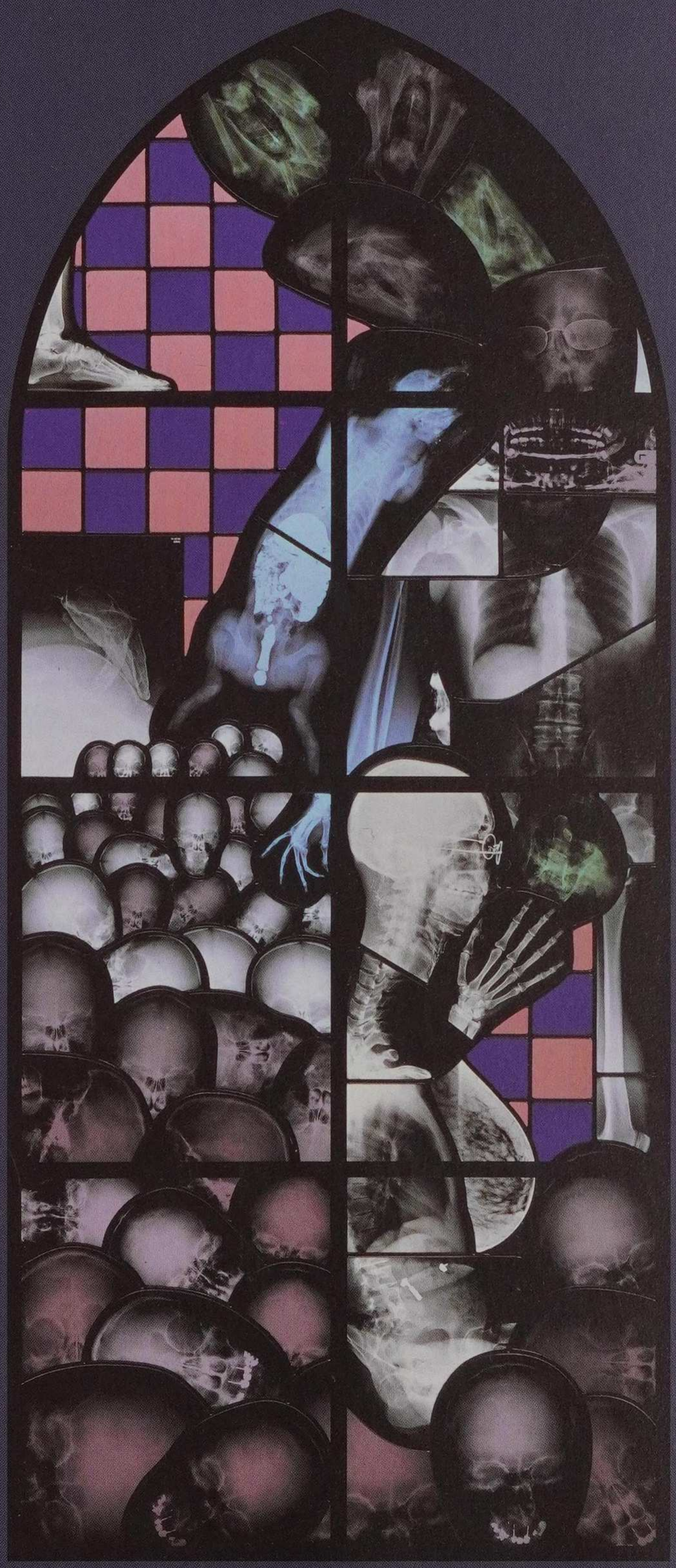












WIM DELVOYE

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

(1990–present)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1990 Jack Tilton Gallery, New York
1991 Sonnabend Gallery, New York
— Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
— Castello di Rivoli, Rivoli, Torino
1992 Kunsthalle Nürnberg, Nürnberg
— Galerie Micheline Szwajcer, Antwerp
— Sonnabend Gallery, New York
— Ruth Bloom Gallery, Los Angeles
1993 Galleria Tucci Russo, Torino
— Galerie Ghislaine Hussenot, Paris
— Galerie Lehman, Lausanne
1994 Galerie Beaumont, Luxembourg
— Center for the Arts, San Francisco
1995 Galleria Sperone, Rome
— Galleria Cardi, Milan
— Gallery Tanit, München
— Musée Départemental de Rochechouart, Rochechouart, Limoges
1996 Galerie Ghislaine Hussenot, Paris
1997 Open Air Museum Middelheim, Antwerp
1998 Sonnabend Gallery, New York
1999 Galleria Sperone, Rome
— Galerie Ghislaine Hussenot, Paris
— FRAC des Pays de la Loire, Nantes
— Galerie Micheline Szwajcer, Antwerp
— Galerie Laura Pecci, Milan
2000 *"Cement Truck,"* Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris
— Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna
— *CLOACA*, MUHKA, Antwerp
2001 *CLOACA – New & Improved*, Migros Museum, Zürich
2002 Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York
— Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris
— Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf
— *CLOACA – New & Improved*, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1990 *Aperto*, Biennale di Venezia, Venice
— *Belgique, une nouvelle génération*, FRAC de la Loire, Clisson
— *Confrontaciones*, Museo Espanol de Arte Contemporaneo, Madrid
— *Kunstenaars van Vlaanderen*, Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Ghent
1991 *Kunst, Europa, Belgien, Niederlande, Luxemburg*, Kunstverrein, Düsseldorf
— *Desplazamientos*, Centro Atlantico de Arte Moderno, Las Palmas
— *Altrove*, Museo di Arte Contemporanea, Prato
1992 *Documenta IX*, Kassel
— *9th Biennial of Sydney*, Sydney
— *Post-Human*, FAE Musée d'Art Contemporain, Lausanne; Castelo di Rivoli, Rivoli and Deste Fondation, Athens
1993 *Post-Human*, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg and The Israel Museum, Jerusalem
1994 *EV+A Invited*, Limerick
— *Depois de Amanha | The Day after Tomorrow, Lisboa 94*, Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisboa
— *Cocido y Crudo*, Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid
1995 *ARS 95*, Nykytaiteen Museo, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki
— *Issues of Empire*, Guggenheim Gallery/ Chapman University, Orange, California
1996 *Everything that's interesting is new | The Dakis Joannou Collection*, Athens School of Fine Arts, Athens
— *Sammlung Sonnabend. Von der Popart bis heute*, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg
— *Interzones (Copenhagen 96)*, Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen
— *Under Capricorn (Art in the Age of Globalisation)*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam en City Gallery, Wellington

1997 *Kwangju Biennale*, Kwangju
— *Biennale de Cétignie*, Cétignie, Montenegro
1998 *Spatiotemporal*, Magasin 3 Konsthall, Stockholm
— *Patchwork in progress 3*, MAMCO, Geneva
— *L'Envers du Décor*, Musée d'Art moderne Villeneuve d'Asq, Villeneuve d' Asq (France)
— *Baroque*, The Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava
— *The Summer of 1998*, Het Domein, Sittard
1999 *De opening*, S.M.A.K., Ghent
— *L'Envers du Décor*, Institut d' Art contemporain, Villeurbanne
— *Ruralia*, Porin Taidemuseo, Pori
— *48th Biennale di Venezia, d'APERTutto*, Venice
— *Zeitwenden – ausblick*, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Bonn
— *Dehors – dedans*, Musée d'Art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux
2000 *Dust & Dirt*, Witte Zaal, Ghent
— *Over the Edges*, SMAK, Ghent
— *Le fou dédouble*, Chateau d'Orion, Orion (France)
— *Zeitwenden – ausblick*, Künstlerhaus Wien, Vienna
— *Partages d'exotisme, 5th Biennale de Lyon*, Lyon
— *American Bricolage*, Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York
— *Visiones de Latinoamérica – No es sòlo lo que vas. Pervertiendo el minimalismo*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid
2001 *Give and Take*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London
— *Eine Barocke Party*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna
— *Confidences*, Casino Luxembourg, Luxemburg
— *The Silk Purse Project*, Arnolfini, Bristol
— *Sonsbeek 9*, Arnhem
— *Un art populaire*, Fondation Cartier pour l'Art contemporain, Paris
— *Irony*, Fondaçion Mirò, Barcelona
— *Marking the Territory*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin
— *Sense of Wonder*, Herzliya Museum of Art, Tel Aviv (Israël)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When *Cloaca* was first described to me in near-reverent tones by Gerardo Mosquera, my reaction was momentary disbelief, followed by a feeling of triumph-by-proxy: Wim Delvoye had finally created the single work that would gather all of his artistic concerns together, offering the summary achievement of his career to date. Having known and admired Wim's work for many years, I always suspected that behind his otherwise normal artistic ambitions lurked the desire to produce a statement that aspired to escape the category of art altogether. For that reason especially, it is an honor to present the new, improved version of *Cloaca* in its American debut.

The New Museum would like to express its deepest gratitude to Wim Delvoye, as well as to his team of highly capable and gracious collaborators in Belgium, Gianni Degryse, Christoph Neerman and Philippe De Wilde for the enthusiasm and devotion with which they have tackled the formidable task of adapting *Cloaca* for America. We are also grateful to Rectapublishers and to Kim Beirnaert, designer, who have spared no effort in creating what is certain to be a landmark publication in the field of contemporary art.

This exhibition would not have been possible without the direct involvement of many of my colleagues at the New Museum. As always, Director Lisa Phillips' courage and dedication to artistic vision makes it possible to do things that other curators only dream about. Gerardo Mosquera had the insight, when he first saw *Cloaca*, to know immediately that it was destined for the New Museum. John Hatfield and Peter Gould have expertly worked through the mountain of technical details involved in getting it to the U.S. and presenting it in all its complex and delicate glory. Dennis Szakacs has overseen the administrative direction of the project, and William Stover coordinated the catalogue and managed the project curatorially. Allison Berglas, Blair Winn, Lauren Tehan and Amy Shaw have all been instrumental in guiding *Cloaca* through the numerous potential hurdles of marketing, media and fund-raising, while Anne Barlow has expertly developed insightful interpretive programs for the museum's public.

Dan Cameron

I would like to express my utmost gratitude to all the people at the New Museum, who were a tremendous help with regard to every aspect of this exhibition. I would like to mention especially Dan Cameron, Gerardo Mosquera and John Hatfield, who were the main initiators of this great opportunity and fantastic experience.

Furthermore, I would like to thank Jef Cornelis and the Flemish Community of Belgium; their generous support was essential in the development and construction of *Cloaca* and *Cloaca – New & Improved*. This project would not have been possible without the technical knowledge and experience of Koen Mertens, Roel Wouters and everyone at CTE / Carpentier N.V. (Danny Kestelein) and the loving care of Christoph Neerman and Philippe De Wilde.

I would also like to express my thanks to everyone involved in creating this catalogue: Kim Beirnaert (graphic design), Gianni Degryse (editing), Bart Leijnen (logo's), Dan Cameron, Gerardo Mosquera (text revision by Adrienne Samos), Dieter Roelstraete and all photographers. A special acknowledgment goes out to Mr Bernard Soens and the people at Cassochrome for their support in printing this book.

I would like to dedicate this book to Sebastian Delvoye, who, as a newborn, is truly a more wonderful Cloaca in his own right.

Wim Delvoye

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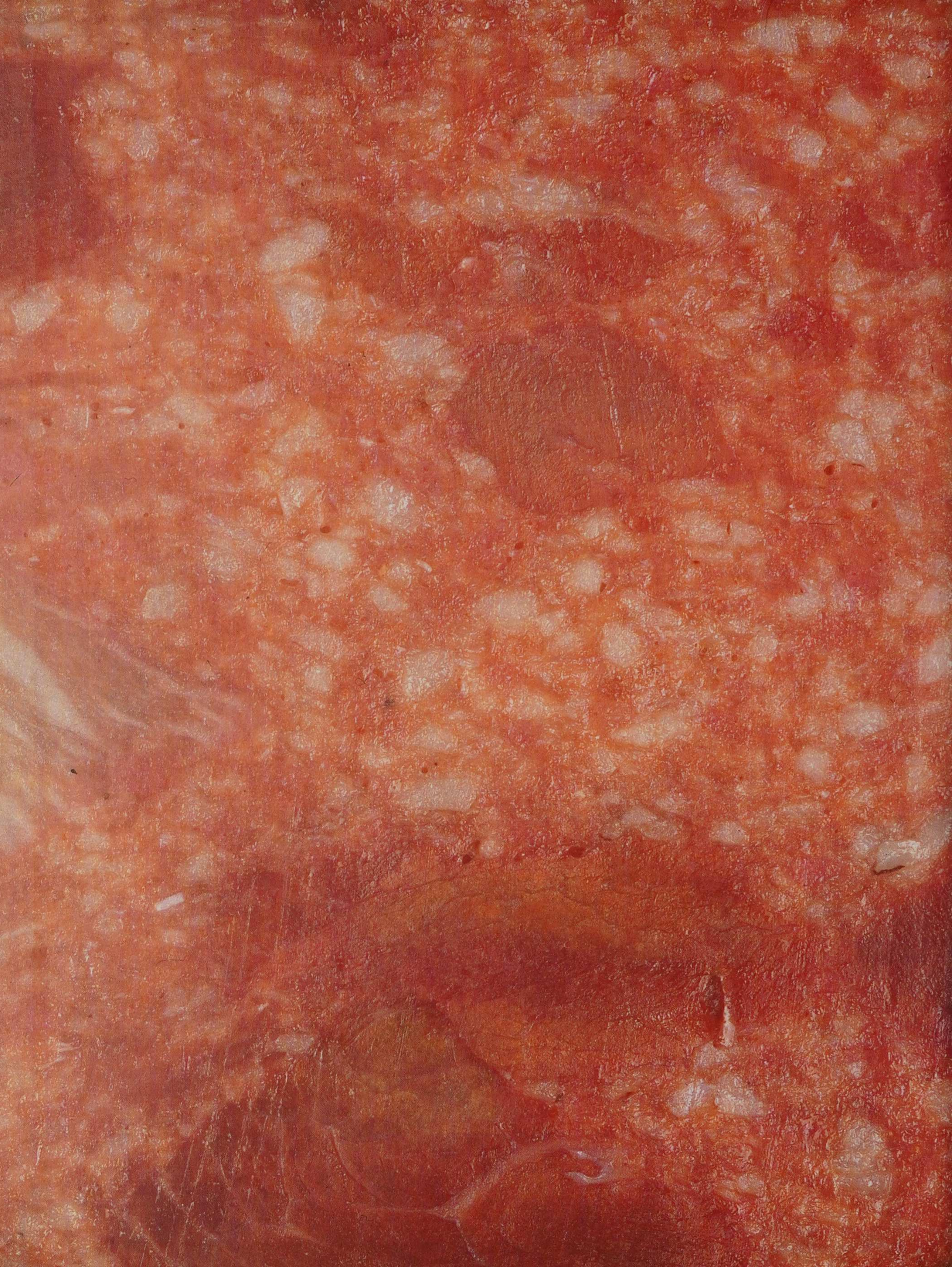
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