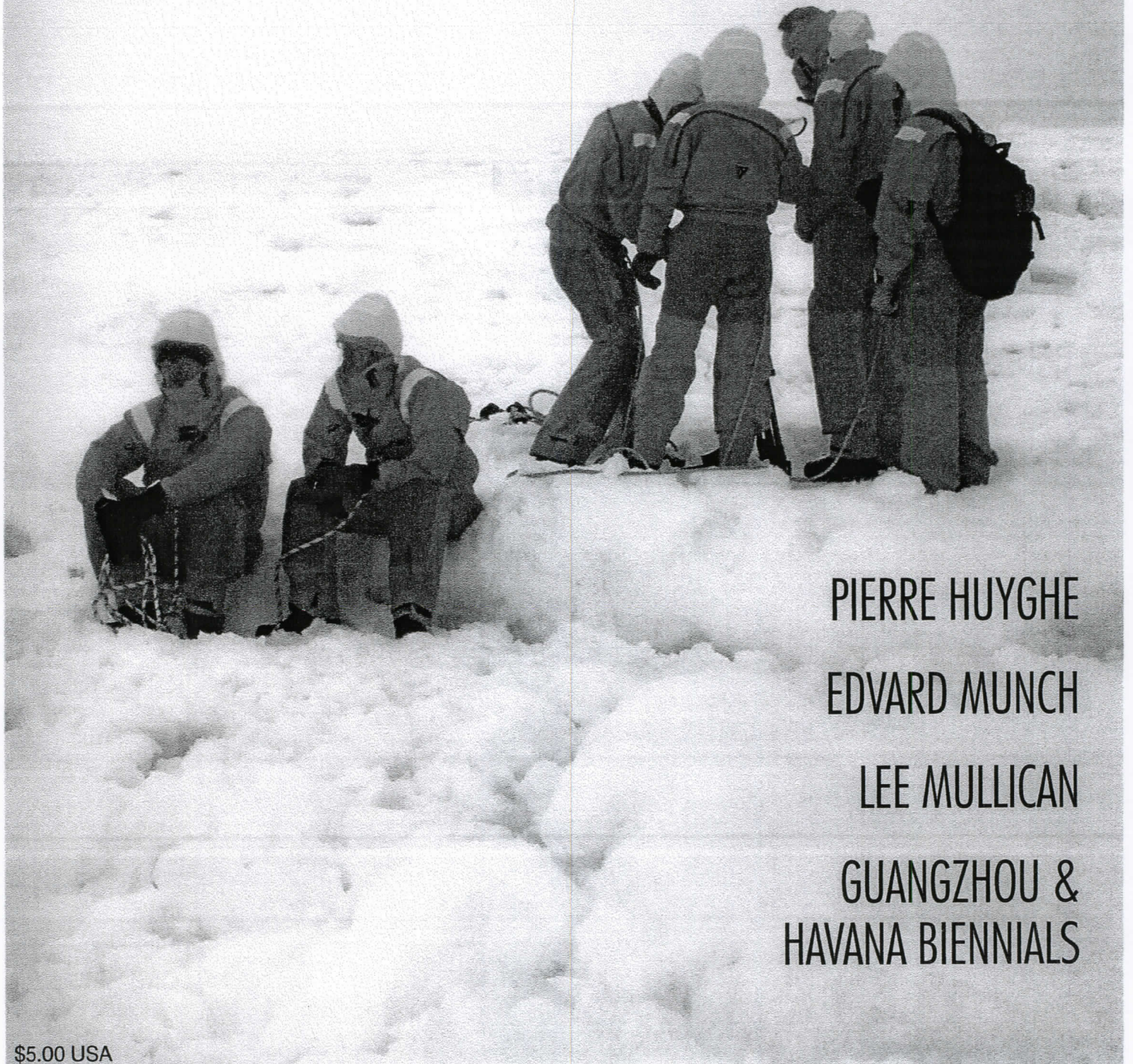


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torso. A crop of hair sprouts from its smooth chest; from underneath the hair, a putto's crossed legs hang down into empty space.

The Gegenwart (whose bilingual title might be translated as "Der Present," 23 by 20 by 19 inches) similarly combines animal and human parts: a boar's head supports sections of human torsos, topped by a gracefully bowed human back. From it bursts a mass of epoxy, giving the impression of bubbling, foaming liquid, out of which emerges a disembodied pair of slender human hands, recalling Louise Bourgeois's marble sculptures of the 1990s.

Helbig's large abstract paintings aspire to a similar effect of messy births and roiling energy, but less successfully than the sculptures; without the force generated by the unlikely combinations that mark the three-dimensional works, the paintings carry less charge. Amid washy fields of Frankenthaler-esque stained brown in *Schöpfung* (63 by 83 inches), a hazy triangle outlined in blue rests atop lines that shoot across the canvas like Kandinsky's vectors or recede into space. A distant sphere sports Saturn-like rings, as though the painting illustrated the Big Bang itself. In *Fremde Vernunft* (Strange Reason, 94 by 75 inches), passages of dilute blue-gray paint recalling ranges of misty mountains surround a blue sphere near the canvas's center. Alternately washy and waxy passages of paint surround a dark gashlike vertical at the painting's center, above which hovers a pale gold halo.

In an art world dominated by irony, one welcomes Helbig's apparent sincerity in approaching ambitious themes such as creation and spiritual renewal. If the results seem, like the ele-

ments in his sculptures, not yet fully formed, he has certainly made a promising debut.

—Brian Boucher

Ranbir Kaleka at Bose Pacia

Born in 1953 in Punjab, Ranbir Kaleka is based in Delhi. In the '90s he became known for intensely hued Neo-Expressionistic paintings with dense, libidinal narratives, recalling the work of Sandro Chia. Since the late '90s Kaleka has also created installations involving stripped-down realist paintings with video projections superimposed upon them. His tableaux no longer feel congested, even though video can carry more imagery and variety than paintings alone. The three installations at Bose Pacia were first shown in the iCon (India Contemporary) exhibition in Venice during the 2005 Biennale.

In the simplest of these, *Man Threading a Needle* (1999), a video image of a middle-aged man moving slightly as he squints to thread a needle is projected over an oil painting on an easel of the same subject. The synchronization of painted and video images could be seen as something like the coordination of hand and eye that the man requires to perform his task. The colored light in the video reinforces the loosely painted hues, creating an unusual tonal richness.

In the looped, single-channel video projection *Man with a Cockerel* (2002), Kaleka dispenses with painting in favor of a vertical-format blank board. In the upper half of the image, a man is shown from the waist up holding a rooster. In the bottom half, the figure is vertically "mir-



Still from Mika Rottenberg's *Dough*, 2005-06, video sculpture, 7 minutes; at Nicole Klagsbrun.

rored" and appears upside down. Sometimes, as the bird struggles, the "reflection" diverges, or both halves chimerically dissolve. The quality of the background, which looks as though it has been hand-brushed, along with the liquid distortions of the imagery, gives the piece a painterly effect.

The most complex work here was *Crossings* (2005), a four-channel, 15-minute video loop projected onto four 6-by-8-foot paintings hung in a row. The paintings depict figures against blank white backgrounds, including a family setting out on a journey, a bird seller, a suited man and two Sikhs engaged in dyeing a turban. Sometimes the video projections activate the blank areas of the paintings, so that, for example, a cross-legged man sitting on the ground in one painting is suddenly in Delhi, with traffic flowing past. At other times the video sets the painted figures in motion, layering over them slight changes in pose.

One action, nearly abstract in close-up, and divided among the panels, shows the scene of cloth being dyed in a village pond, then wrung and dried in the wind by figures unseen but for their shadows. An elderly Sikh then winds the cloth into a turban on a younger man's head. Animations of whirlwinds gradually cover all four panels, obscuring the various characters. In the end, the figures reappear

next to a modern expressway.

Hybrid formats can be fragile and demanding. Kaleka combines video with painting in a way that revivifies both mediums, infusing his keen formal skills with a contemporary awareness of movement and time.

—P.C. Smith

Mika Rottenberg at Nicole Klagsbrun

Five women, among them one who is monstrously fat and another gaunt and tall with fingers like long twigs, populate a bizarre assembly line in the video that was the focus of Mika Rottenberg's exhibition "Dough." The seven-minute loop is an absurdist parable concerning the alienated labor that produces the Western world's commodities. In it, female workers are shown separated from one another in an interior composed of almost cartoonishly cramped cells located on successive floors. Wearing an expression of blank resignation, the laborers feed a string of glutinous goo through holes in the floors, along a Rube Goldberg-like conveyor belt powered by children's-toy pulleys and wooden cranks.

The amusing process begins in the uppermost chamber, where a sweet-faced, elephantine woman wearing a blue visor, who is so cramped in the space that she herself appears like yeasty dough straining against the sides of a container, kneads a huge mass of dough into a cord. Eventually, after being fed through the holes, a loaf-shaped glob of dough plops onto a table in the lowermost chamber. Signaled via

Ranbir Kaleka: *Crossings*, 2005, 4-channel video projection on 4 paintings, 15 minutes; at Bose Pacia.



a vacuum-cleaner-hose communication device by another laborer, the fat woman sniffs a bouquet of colorful daisies, causing her eyes to water tears that drop (so the video makes it appear), like the dough, through the successive chambers. This is evidently part of the leavening process. In addition, another weary woman treads up and down on a bellows made of garbage bags, a contraption that, as it sends air traveling through a garden hose, also helps the dough rise. Finally, the lump is catapulted down a chute to be vacuum-sealed and dropped onto a pile of similar plastic sacks. The plump woman rejuvenates herself with an asthma inhaler, and the process begins again.

Rottenberg, who was born in Buenos Aires and lived in Israel, is a recent MFA from Columbia University. She has already produced several witty video-based works on the wages of capitalism, to some acclaim. For this first solo gallery show, Nicole Klagsbrun's entire space was put into service. Three large-scale drawings were pinned to one wall, their fetching, spidery marks resembling ladders and projectile sprays coming from small red and yellow reservoirs. Here and there in the room were gray sandbags that resembled the vacuum-sealed end products of the women's labors. The video-viewing area itself, a lean-to cobbled together from two-by-fours and plywood, was crammed to one side of the spacious gallery, seeming intentionally marginalized, not unlike the female workers in their forlorn corners. Leaving the video room, one entered a desolate gallery that had a small hole in the low ceiling. From time to time a drop reminiscent of the

allergy tears from the fat woman would fall, sizzling, onto heated flooring exposed beneath cheap linoleum. This was spotlighted by a fluorescent fixture aimed dramatically at the sizzling drop, as if to suggest, quite literally, that we were in a sweatshop.

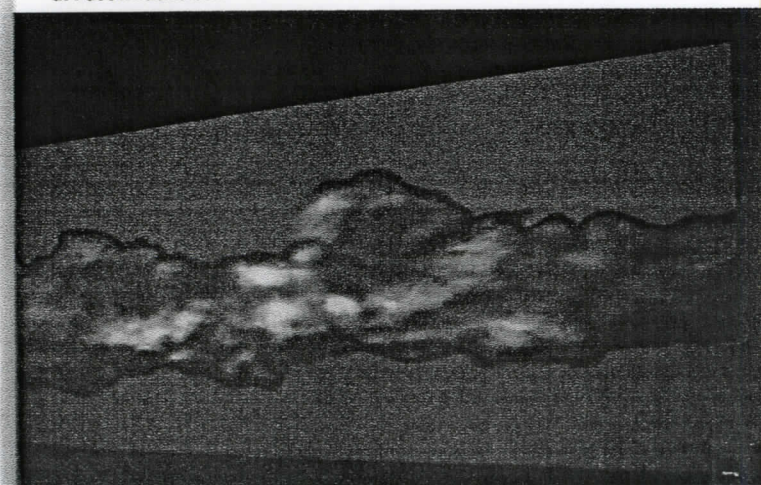
Which reminded us, gently, that the gallery world, like everywhere else, is a lot about making dough. —Carey Lovelace

Michal Rovner at PaceWildenstein

Abstraction in video art does not have much of a history. It was largely practiced by early, technologically oriented artists (Ed Emshwiller, the Vasulkas, Nam June Paik), and its formalist appeal has not found much welcome in recent decades. The representational image remains central, with abstraction left to structural avant-garde filmmakers. Fields of Fire (2005), Michal Rovner's newest digital video, with sound by Heiner Goebbels, is not only one of the most historically significant works of abstract moving-image art, it is one of the most original works of video in the last decade.

Based on footage Rovner filmed in the oil fields of Kazakhstan (a piece of background information totally unnecessary for enjoyment of the work), *Fields of Fire*, a 9½-minute loop, makes a viewer feel present at both the beginning and the end of the world. Projected in a totally blackened space, it is a horizontally elongated video of what appears to be some kind of organic mass moving very swiftly across the large, wide screen. Like a volcanic eruption, this form snakes through a gray space changing colors

View of Michal Rovner's *Fields of Fire*, 2005, digital video projection; at PaceWildenstein.



Karen Gunderson: *Everest from Kala Patar*, 2005, oil on linen, 52¼ by 61½ inches; at Artists Space.

from red to white to black and back again. The mass seems to bubble up, subside, then explode, then reorganize. Goebbels's masterful and essential sound environment pulsates with a deep rumbling accented by the echoes of a distant chorus. Thin strands of red (the footage sometimes looks like a moving painting) pass seamlessly into fields of brown and black as the noise heralds earthquakes or tornados, not explicitly, but powerfully.

This perfect blend of sound and image makes for a mesmerizing experience. Unlike other artists of her generation who are attempting to compress complex stories into the time limits most gallerygoers impose, Rovner seizes upon the short form and maximizes its potential to engage, disrupt and thrill. Viewing *Fields of Fire* is like white-water rafting into oblivion. This work surely contains within it the spirit of Rothko and Newman, but it is fundamentally a work of digital art, dependent in full on digital aftereffects of the sort produced by "Flame" software.

In this sprawling show of paintings and videos, Rovner's other works are at a distinct disadvantage. Nothing can compete with *Fields of Fire*. The paintings—pure pigment on canvas—and the flat-screen videos all seem like outtakes from the main event. Only the small metal-framed LCD screens, presented in groups of two and three on shelving, hold their own. In these miniature scenarios, with silhouetted worker figures reminiscent of William

Kentridge's animations, black oil pumps move against a white background, and dark lines of flames ascend silently into a pale sky. —Michael Rush

Karen Gunderson at Artists Space

This modest exhibition, titled "Mountains and Constellations," featured four large all-black paintings by Karen Gunderson that conjure vast landscapes and celestial vistas through the deft working of surface texture alone. Over the past 18 years the Wisconsin-born New York artist has perfected a technique whereby pictorial illusions result from white light reflected off the raised edges of varied brushstrokes. Contrasting brushstrokes appear as fine white lines combed into the black. The recent oil-on-linen works were installed on three walls painted dark gray. Above each painting a single spotlight illuminated shifts in direction of meticulously arranged wide and narrow brushstrokes; they form intricate lines capable of conveying refined imagery.

Following her earlier series of black monochromes of sunflowers and portraits of kings, Gunderson's recent images are difficult to discern at first. The constellation painting, *Danish Rescue: Copenhagen, Denmark, North 10/1/1943* (2004) features small circular patches in which the raised lines formed by tiny brushstrokes reflect brilliant light. A pale nebula is thus visible surrounding the larger, dense patches, while