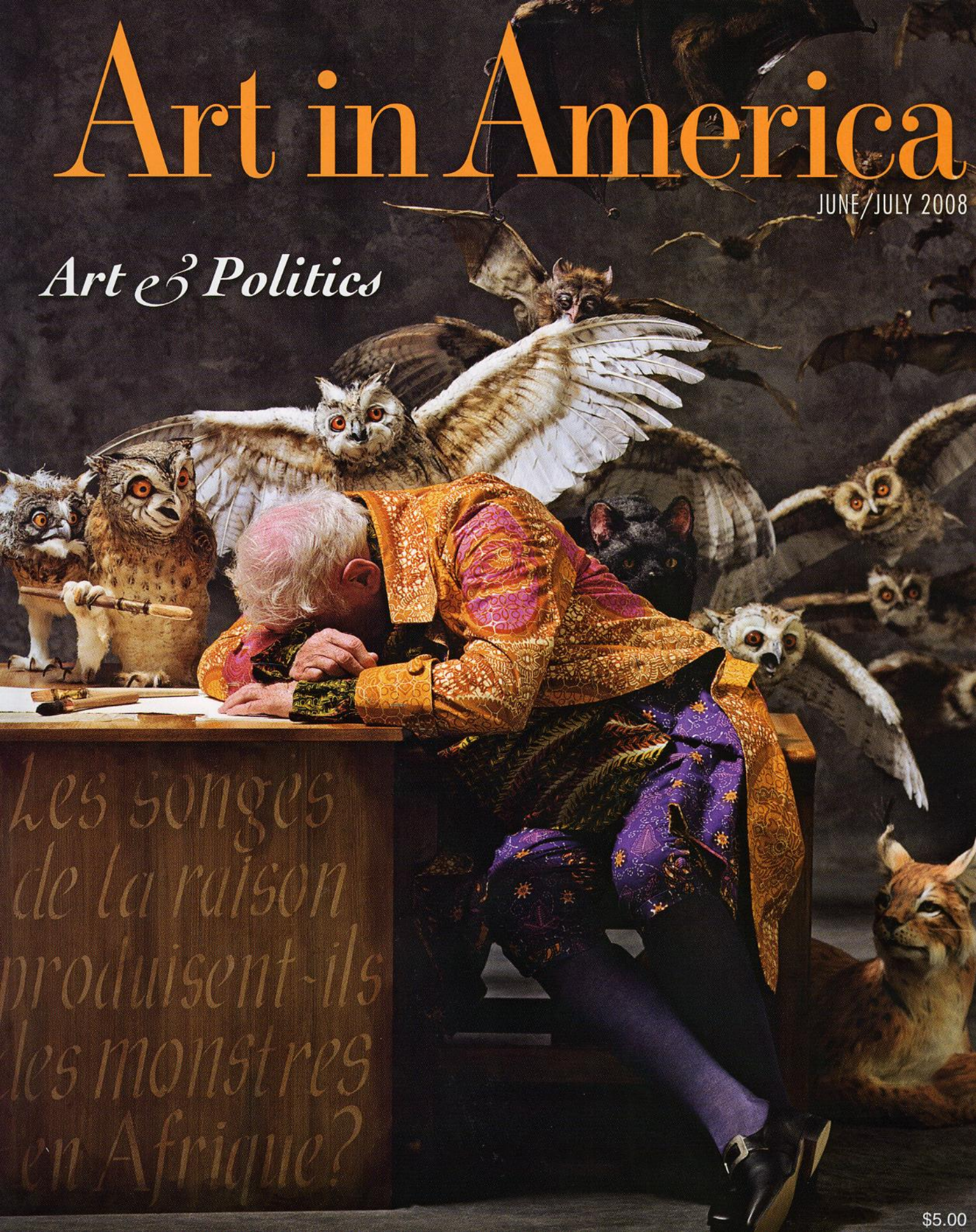


Art in America

JUNE/JULY 2008

Art e³ Politics



Les songes
de la raison
produisent-ils
des monstres
en Afrique?

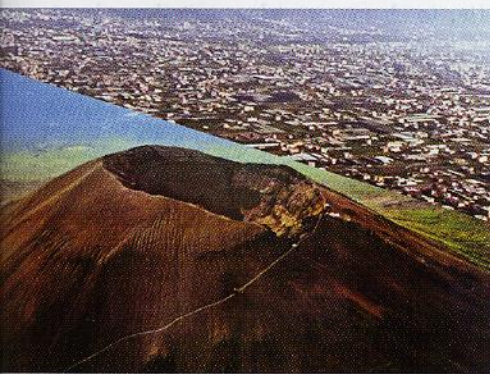
On the top floor of the gallery hung an earlier (2002-03) series of glossy, richly hued abstractions much different in tone. Reminiscent of Rothko in palette and power, the thick coats of crimson and rainbow paint on these canvases provided a sense of release and redemption after the muted colors and morbid theme in the rest of the show.

—Ana Finel Honigman

MILAN

Deborah Ligorio at Francesca Minini

Baroque images of the historic eruptions of Vesuvius and Etna, Italy's largest active volcanos, are a favorite element of upper-class Italian interiors, and many a modern Italian home is outfitted with engravings of lava, fire and mayhem. What, then, could surpass an installation that centers on a video of the cone of Vesuvius, presented in the minimalist interior of a contemporary Milan gallery? This evoc-



Deborah Ligorio: *Vulcano*, 2007, photomontage, 11½ by 15½ inches; at Francesca Minini.

ative and frankly beautiful exhibition by the Berlin-based Italian artist Deborah Ligorio was striking proof that there is no one better than a post-Arte Povera artist to juxtapose rugged nature and elegant decor.

The video (*Il Sonno*, or Sleep, all works 2007) features grainy footage shot from a plane hired to loop around the volcano, so that the artist could document patterns of habitation in the area and, evidently, human indifference to the impending danger that lurks below. Smart editing and partial conversion from color to black and white create the impression of vintage footage, which is accentuated by an abstract audio track sampled from a variety of lyrical and spoken sources, some dating from the 1950s. The audio, explained the artist in an

e-mail, "switches from one sound to the other, exactly as if one is tuning through radio channels."

At the gallery's entrance, a slide show (*La Scomparsa dello Spettacolo*, or The Death of the Spectacle) featured volcano images. Upon entering the main space, one encountered the more complex *Détournement*. For this work, a slide projector spits out images of quotidian objects: a bowl, a square metal film box, a wooden ball, a triangular eraser. Each photo is followed by a slide of a drawing in which the object's form has been reduced to its geometric essence: circle, triangle, square and so on. To complete the work, a faint grid was executed in ballpoint pen on two walls of the gallery, and a selection of photographs, which resembled illustrations from elementary school geometry books, hung on the gridded surfaces.

Ligorio's show continued her preoccupation with representation and mapping systems. In the earlier *SizeScope* (2003), a film on metropolitan living, she explored the languages of technology and grids as a means of documenting domestic space. Her interest in James Turrell's work at Roden Crater, in the conceptual maps of the Art & Language group and in the cinematic studies of John Baldessari were all reflected in the Milan exhibition. One was reminded, too, of the careful diagrams created by Jan Dibbets, Douglas Huebler, Sol LeWitt and Lawrence Weiner, among others,

which said as much about land use in the 1960s as any government study of civil engineering.

To her long-standing concerns Ligorio seems to have added a new one: the role played by human error in calculating the laws of nature. Ligorio notes the seeming obliviousness with which people build and live in a zone of potential disaster—in defiance of construction regulations, government programs to persuade inhabitants to move elsewhere and common sense. Investigating ways to render space and living patterns systematically is the ostensible subject of Ligorio's work. The impossibility of accounting for everything systematically is, perhaps, the conclusion drawn by this exhibition.

—Cornelia Lauf

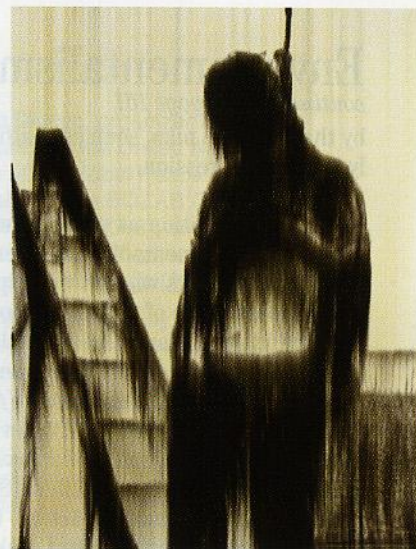
BERLIN

Dean Sameshima at Peres Projects

As the name suggests, "Numbers II—Ode to Johnny Rio" is a sequel of sorts to Dean Sameshima's first solo show at the Berlin branch of Peres Projects. In that first "Numbers" show, the title referred to numerals printed next to colored dots on the California-born artist's large-scale, silkscreen-on-silver-acrylic canvas diptychs. Connecting the dots (as many Berliners did on the poster versions hung throughout the city) would delineate complex, kinky images that Sameshima had copied from a series that ran in the '70s gay skin magazine *Drummer*. The dots' various hues were determined by the "hanky code," an intricate system of color signals developed among gay men decades ago to streamline cruising.

The 29 untitled compositions in "Ode to Johnny Rio" (all 2007-08) are likewise rendered in black silkscreen on a silver acrylic ground, and they expand the expression of nostalgia for the heyday of gay pop culture. Each canvas presents a reproduction of a photograph associated with John Rechy's 1967 thinly veiled autobiographical novel titled *Numbers*. Rechy's book tells the story of Johnny Rio, an aging narcissist obsessed with scoring the highest possible "number" of sexual conquests on the Los Angeles gay scene. In the book's press images and in personal photos, the author is shown bare-chested or dressed in the suave macho uniform of a '70s urban stud. In some of the photographs appropriated by Sameshima, Rechy assumes the poses of beefcake models in vintage muscle magazines, while in others he appears to imitate the sophisticated men in that era's issues of *Esquire* or *Playboy*. We see Rechy at home, talking on the phone at a desk before a wall hung with a triptych of photos of Greta Garbo and Joan Crawford. In yet another re-presentation by Sameshima, Rechy stands shirtless on a porch, exuding a B-movie brand of feral sexuality. Though his sculpted hair and tailored casual clothes may be dated, Rechy's look remains scintillatingly cool.

Sameshima's "Ode to Johnny Rio" is as stylish as Rechy himself. Realized with a medium that acknowledges Warhol's signature esthetic as well as his aura of glamour and downtown sexual chic, and with gay-friendly Berlin as its context, Sameshi-



Rachel Howard: *Jacob*, 2007, household gloss and acrylic on canvas, 72 by 54 inches; at Haunch of Venison.

ma's series might have slipped into self-parody. Instead, the works are smart and alluring.

As viewers of Sameshima's first "Numbers" show knew or learned, to comply with the "hanky code," a "star" wears a silver lamé handkerchief on the left side, and a "starfucker" wears one on the right. With a visual language rooted in the lexicon of Warhol and gay club culture, Sameshima's silver silkscreens of Johnny Rio celebrate Rechy's cult status in Pop and queer history while suggesting something of the limitations of basing an identity on glitz, panache and sexual prowess.

—Ana Finel Honigman

Dean Sameshima: *Untitled (Ode to Johnny Rio)*, 2008, acrylic and silkscreen on canvas, 42 by 29½ inches; at Peres Projects.

