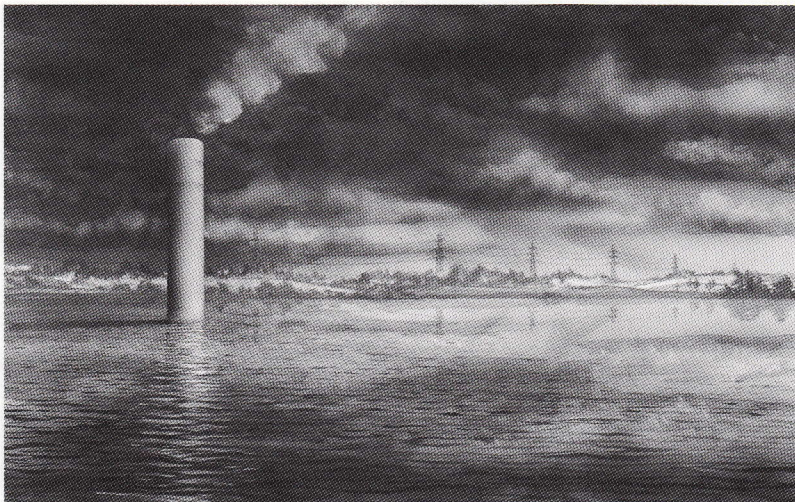


slipping, *One Great Leap*
2002, concrete,
ent, 58' 5" x 29' x 11'.



Cornford & Cross, *Coming up for air*, 2001,
commissioned illustration; watercolor and gouache on board, 22 x 30 1/2".

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—Wolf Jahn
man by Sara Ogger.

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'Arena,' diametrically opposite the potential spectators, on the other side of the wall, where I won't be seen, I will screen, at full size, the film I just shot in Lisbon, in a fifth floor brothel. Thus I will be at the same time the spectator, the artist, who exhibits, and the object of desire, that is displayed, even though this display is prohibited by the very characteristics that the exhibition demands. The 'Arena' shows and hides as it shows . . . it exhibits and rejects its own existence as an object that determines the parameters of desire."

And in fact this was the fifth building of McBride's *Arena*, first presented in 1997 at Witte de With, Rotterdam. The sculptural semicircle, which mimics the lines of athletic shoes in its transparent seating construction, imports the mass dynamic of sporting events into the realm of art. One could imagine frenetic applause echoing in the soundless space, thus underscoring the isolation that the artwork faces despite all its forays into the world of consumerism and spectacle. Even the rattan *Toyota*, 1990, a fifth-generation Celica, conveys acceleration made static, as it mimics the linear structure of rotating 3-D simulations while utilizing the material of domestic comfort in the form of garden furniture.

McBride's multipart exhibition engaged with the generous size of the rooms in the new building of the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein; her work here reflected it as architecture and as an institution. In *Backsliding*, *Sideslipping*, *One Great Leap* and the "Forbidden," 1994/2002, she quotes the interior of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye within the museum space as the exhibition architecture for her own works as well

as a selection from the permanent collection: Joseph Beuys, Ben Vautier, Gerhard Richter, Umberto Boccioni, and Wilhelm Lehmbruck. With the folklike dance of her *Hunchbacks*, 1994, McBride introduces into the model of modernism she has thus quoted a narrative explicitly excluded from it. The repressed doesn't just return; it shoulders its way in. Between sculpture and architecture, this monument to modernism is a room within a room, as if it were a ruin from some long-lost culture housed within a museum.

The exhibition's title, "Naked Came the Stranger," was taken from an extremely successful soft-core novel by an anonymous group of journalists at the end of the '60s. Naked and vulnerable, the stranger appears, divested of all myth—just as McBride strips modernism of its ideological trappings: *la modernité mise à nue*.

—Hans Rudolf Reust

Translated from German by Sara Ogger.

LONDON

CORNFORD & CROSS

NYLON

In the past, Matthew Cornford and David Cross have ironized their corporate-sounding nom de guerre by using a business card that reads "Cornford & Cross: Problems Solved." "Problems Generated" would be nearer the mark, and their first London solo show (an overdue event, given the scope and ingenuity of their work since 1996) featured eight project proposals their prospective patrons judged too problematic to realize. They include

plans to deposit a severed chunk of oil pipeline somewhere in Afghanistan (*The Treason of Images*, 2001/2002); to erect a section of highway overpass in London's Green Park (*This England*, 1998/2002); to half-sink an industrial chimney in a Midlands reservoir (*Coming up for air*, 2001); to ferry Liverpool Biennial visitors around that city inside the contemporary, privatized equivalent of a Black Maria (*The End of Art Theory*, 2001/2002); and to fly the flags of three nations ostracized by UK diplomacy—Taiwan, Bhutan, and, of course, Iraq—from the dignified roof of Liverpool's Cunard building (*The Ambassadors*, 2001/2002).

These thumbnail descriptions suggest a practice founded on the supposedly obsolete avant-garde strategies of provocation and transgression. Via their completed projects, Cornford & Cross have indeed earned their share of spluttering news headlines, and it's easy to imagine, say, the 2002 Liverpool Biennial selectors quailing at having to go through the public-relations acrobatics the civic display of an Iraqi flag would have demanded. But if this is a nostalgia trip, it's an entirely self-conscious one. For example, the artists summarize *Avant Garde*, 1997/2002—a proposal to reproduce a 1964 photo of overheated mods and rockers mistreating deck chairs as a giant billboard on the Brighton seafront—as "an official commission which aestheticizes youthful rebellion" and "an example of recuperation, the process by which the social order is maintained." The term *avant-garde*, their proposal intones owlishly, "became widely used to describe anything fashionable . . . [then] reached exhaustion and fell out of contemporary use."

At one level, the show probed the commissioning bodies' requirement that artists speak an officially acceptable language of "dissent" in order to win support for their work. Cornford & Cross are expert at composing critically fluent mission statements; arguably, their core activity is not making objects or negotiating opportunities but skillfully generating and controlling discourse about their projects (via written statements, catalogue essays, discussions, and so on)—winning consensus that a work genuinely "deals with" (in that exasperating phrase) its stated agendas. But the irony is that none of this show's projects actually hit the funding jackpot. Cornford & Cross's rubrics, always clever, are sometimes just too corrosively, nastily cynical for selection committees to stomach. A good example is *Painting as a Pastime*, 2001/2002, a proposal to organize an

open-submission landscape-painting competition in the grounds of a stately home. A panel of celebrity pundits would award a prize of ten thousand pounds. The title, invoking Winston Churchill's 1932 bible of Sunday painting, flags the project's covertly facetious challenge to its shortlisters' liberalism.

This reading shunts Cornford & Cross's work into another supposed cul-de-sac; the practices that have come to be called institutional critique. Yet maybe the problem here is not the work but the globalizing critical discourses that discount this or any transgressive gesture as *modus operandi*. Generalizing post-avant-garde or "postideological" arguments makes a blanket assumption that transgression and institutional critique do no more than nourish the systems they try to attack. The controlled but evident anger in this work, however, articulates a specific local mood: the bitterness of a UK generation who feel themselves stripped of real democratic rights and seemingly attainable political dreams. This mood demands and deserves expression, and Cornford & Cross prove that allegedly obsolete tactics do the job pretty well.

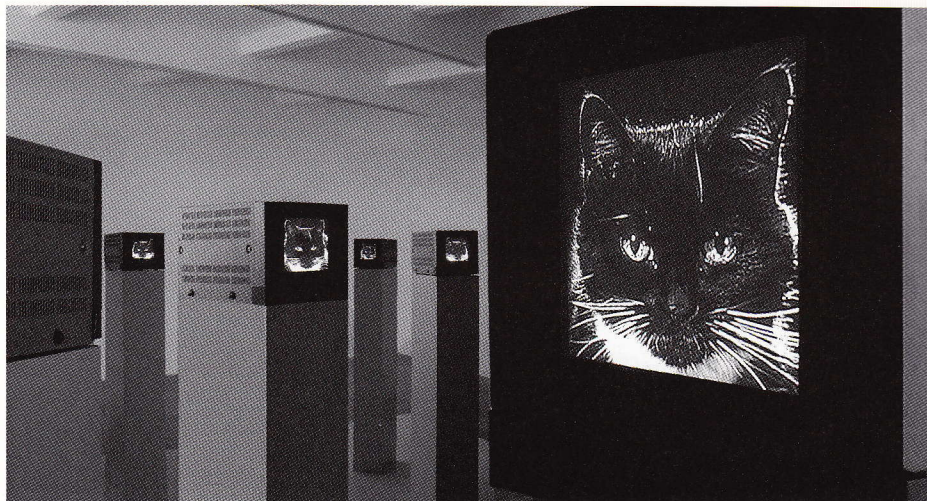
—Rachel Withers

MARION COUTTS

CHISENHALE GALLERY

In her laconic sculpture and video installations, the British artist Marion Coutts mythologizes the mundane. With the insouciance and economy of a professional magician, she makes the one-dimensional multidimensional and transforms stale habit into compelling ritual.

This is evident in her works of the last few years. *Fresh Air*, 1998–2000, consists of three Ping-Pong tables shaped and marked with the asymmetrical layout of three London parks; the rules of the game were completely changed, inside became outside, private became public, and the mind wandered away. In *Eclipse*, 1998, a small garden greenhouse is periodically filled with artificial fog, which is then allowed to disperse. Meteorological white noise was thus imbued with an ominous rhythm and density: The conservatory was redolent of a gas chamber. *Assembly*, 2000, featured a blue-tinted film of aerobatic flocks of migrating starlings projected precisely from overhead onto the top of a plain wooden lectern. This flickering *mise-en-scène* suggested a routine lecture, speech, or sermon in which the presenter suddenly ignores the



Marion Coutts, *Cult*, 2002, color DVD, 45 minutes, 9 monitors on pedestals on platform. Installation view.

script and lets instinct take over.

Coutts's most recent (and highest-profile) London exhibition was devoted to a single new work, *Cult*, 2002, in which she has wryly transfigured the domestic cat. The cavernous interior of the Chisenhale Gallery was dark except for a dim light emanating from nine video monitors mounted at head height on slender gray pedestals. Those at the corners of the cluster faced inward, while the others looked out in various directions. There was just enough space for a single person to squeeze between them. The screen of each monitor was only large enough to contain a life-size close-up image of the black face and white neck of a well-groomed cat against a black background. The footage plays on a forty-five-minute loop, made up of individual sequences of between three and seven minutes. The cat remains almost completely still, occasionally blinking its eyes.

Cult evokes prehistoric standing stone circles as well as hieratic Egyptian cat sculpture—in ancient Egypt, the cat goddess Bastet was the patroness of family happiness. Here, the emphasis is on distant admiration rather than domestic bliss. *Cult* underscores our separation from the animal world and the animal world's basic indifference. It keeps cuteness at arm's length and thwarts attempts to project affectionate feelings. The cat, multiplied nine times (no doubt in accordance with its proverbial "nine lives"), seems blissfully self-sufficient. It narcissistically basks in its own image, enclosed in its own charmed circle. Its egotism pricks the bubble of our own. I didn't even feel tempted to leave a saucer of milk.

—James Hall

PAUL MORRISON

A SPREYJACQUES

Black was everywhere in this show—in the treated film imagery, in the darkened projection space, and in the painting's bifurcating forms, which promised to bleed off the canvas and onto the surrounding black walls. What Paul Morrison managed, though, was to hold in abeyance any sense that this darkness was unremitting. Instead, he invited viewers to find from within their own experience whatever color there might be in his starkly black-and-white works. A large painting of tree branches in silhouette against a white ground hung in one space, the walls of which had been painted black. In the other room Morrison played a short film—barely two minutes long—looped onto DVD. Both works bear the same title, *Cambium*, 2002.

The cambium is the part of a tree just below the bark, in which the plant's new growth occurs, the cellular deposits forming each year's growth ring. Morrison's use of this botanical term is an indication of his interest in the idea that, whether or not he is himself qualified to do so, nature is observable in scientific ways. The word also means exchange, a process that is more broadly appropriate to Morrison's ongoing conversation—carried on through his highly stylized imagery—with the tradition of painting in general and landscape painting in particular. Observational exactitude gets filtered through radical caricature.

At around nine by thirteen feet, the canvas is Morrison's largest yet. Though much of its area is covered by the forkings of branches and twigs on what looks like a pine of some sort, the painting is dominated by two main boughs that run diago-

nally down from side. It's a weird "Unfurled." The ing, whose spatial mated through the interference amo bizarrely become resentation of na over, used gravit that always insist which refused to conventional, pe versely, *Cambium* looking as it were a surface, but up to the sky above.

Cambium the excerpts from a clip showing some There is a view of a leaf floating do moving in the wi behind it, a water rocks, and so on. ing more than thunderclap, the for designating the malign forces. M footage consider it of color; but th their precise orig *The Evil Dead*, o ognize that the s from films repres from thriller and cal. Here, as thro the painting, the back in again, an existence flicker are by turns idyll and seductive.

Paul Morrison film transference