

art



Bronx Cheer

Fabrizio Plessi's New York state of mind

Writer: ALICE WINN

Through the fluid illusions of video, Italian artist Fabrizio Plessi's installations at Wood Street Galleries exude the vitality and palpable presence of natural forces. His works seem to suggest that advanced human engineering is patterned after organic models and pales in comparison to them. He tries to alert his audience to the beauties of primal elements and his pieces are sometimes haunted by a pre-apocalyptic impression that real nature may someday exist only as a technological reproduction.

Plessi juxtaposes the timeless fascination with water with the modern information ocean as vehicles of physical, spiritual and virtual transport. He plays with these themes through transforming traditional sculptural media and videography

Fabrizio Plessi/Bronx continues through March 4 at the Wood Street Galleries, Downtown. 471-5605.

into environments that are immersive and intangible, rational and unconscious, ambient and solid. Their threads also trail through his efforts involving drawings (some of which appear at this exhibition), performance, cinema and television. They embrace a nostalgic yearning for a liquid world of non-linear time, heightened sense of perception and infinitely subtle communication.

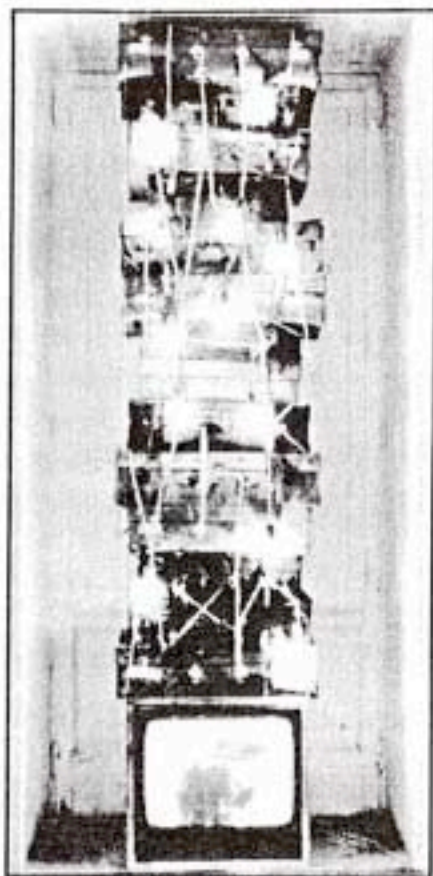
The installations reflect Plessi's classical training and his interest in *Arte Povera*, an Italian movement from the 1960s that invested ordinary, humble materials with meaning. At the same time, his works act as agents for the humanization of technology by revealing its expressive possibilities. They have been exhibited at the Centre George Pompidou, Paris; Museo Español de Arte Contemporáneo, Madrid; Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna; the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art; and, on several occasions, in the Venice Biennale.

Plessi's installation "Bronx" premiered at the 42nd Venice Biennale. Imprisoned behind fencing, a roomful of corroded iron plates surrounds 26 shovels embedded in the animated watery surfaces of 26 video monitors. An overpowering, one-note

drone seeming to embody all the sounds of a city pours industrial noise into the silenced space. The near-static music and alternately moving sculpture clash and rebound off one another in a cacophonous celebration alongside the fleeting effects of rusted light and floating color. The tension implied in the interface between tools and mirage pools refers to "the threat of humans against humans," alluding to the social climate of the Bronx in New York. It implies a collision of individual universes inherent in the need for connection. Here, the subjectivity that is the essence of the human is also the mystery that divides us, irrevocably, from each other. The longing to break free from the limits of our private hall of mirrors to begin to interpenetrate with the images which make up someone else's reality can lead to a shattering forced entry. Each lives in separate realm, unattainable to the other except in the sphere of art or dreams in which we can imagine everything we'd hoped we would find.

"The Caryatids of the Poor" was inspired by the migration of displaced peoples of former Soviet republics. A tightly packed stack of worn, rope-tied suitcases illuminated by harsh light bulbs appears to be holding up the gallery ceiling. A video monitor simulates the movement of an X-ray scan surveying their contents, violating privacies. This bare-bones arrangement transmits a feeling of insecurity and instability. The weathered containers echo the transient position of the body in relation to the world; fragile yet strong, small but full of presence, surrounded by affections and destructive tendencies.

"Liquid Crystals" restates Plessi's installation at the Café Florian in Venice. An overturned wood table set with a single glass is suspended in midair. Below, a large metal bucket catches what was left behind in the vessels – the sound and sight of falling water drops made of video imagery. Their submersion into a deep and mysterious pond possibly represents a romantic desire for dispersion into nature and the unconscious. The water flows on and on, like a blue film of life past our eyes, one existence dissolving into another – holding memories that



The Bronx: Mixed media with 26 monitors, 26 shovels, a video recorder and iron lattice

passed between guests at the restaurant over its 270-year history, which take forms that can't be seen or described, only experienced.

By performing his alchemical magic on supposedly inert materials, Plessi takes the weight from the world, transforming it into light and air. ☞