

While I was waiting for the 6:00 free admission to the Whitney Museum so I could afford to see the '95 Biennial, I thumbed through one of the thick catalogues that were layed out in the large display. The catalogue was intended to be *at least* as important as the biennial itself, and is one of the first things you see when you walk into the museum. That, along with an empty elevator car dropped onto the floor next to the museums elevators, the sculpture of Gabriel Orozco. The catalog was also intended by the curator of this biennial, Klaus Kertess, to document and portray with contemporary art, his enthusiasm for the theories of the Nobel prize winning neural physiologist and geneticist, Gerald Edelman.

Unfortunately the catalogue wasn't provocative as either a book art experience or an instructive document of what the theories of Gerald Edelman might be involved in if they could be translated into an *art lan - guage*. So fairly quickly, I grew weary, and still waiting for 6:00, I walked over to the books for sale near the coat check. This is where the postcards are along with the books the museum has published and thinks are ok, but is having a hard time selling. While browsing there, I had a suprize, I noticed two somewhat rare catalogues with essays by the artist Robert Irwin, who in the seventies had his retrospective at the Whitney, and it is not clear whether he will be having his current one on his own terms at the MoMa. They were for sale for rediculosly low prices considering there importance.

And this was ironic because Irwin's whole project like that of Bruce Nauman who flamboyantly declined to be in the biennial for this same reason, is in effect the embodiment of the ideas Kurtess attempts to display in his very very strategic installation, and over worded catalogue.

Irwin who is as brilliant a writer as he is an artist, has written important essays explaining his views of perception and the art experience, and some of them are in these catalogues of his.

One essay from the retrospective catalogue of Irwin has the title of: "Notes Toward a Model," with the first chapter called: "The Process of a Compounded Abstraction..."1. Perception/Sense, 2. Conception/Mind, 3. Form/Physical Compound, etc.

A typical visionary quote from it goes; "We shall define perception as the originary faculty of the unique individual, our direct interface with the phenomenally given, that seemingly infinitely textured field of our presence in the world... We should note that perception as indicated here is an actual process or state of being, having identifiable form - hence a form of knowing, (That is to say, we know the sky's blueness even before we know it as "blue," let alone as "sky")." Kertess should have read this

half feet from the floor ten feet opposite each other and meeting in the middle almost seamlessly. It is held in balance unbelievably by just its weight and the one foot by one foot friction of its two touching forms. But it's a hood ornament coming from Serra.

Pinched in the corner between the two of these big "Guys" is new work by the sculptor, and designer, Andrea Zittel (a young woman, get it) it is also cubic in format. Kertess places her in the corner behind a partially hidden wall. Zittel has several pieces which are supposed to be functional living units or domestic organizers for office, bedroom, entertainment, etc. They are punctuated by inserted video monitors which display a stereotypical enactment of what might go on in them in a dreamy way, but Kertess makes her the insert between the two blue-chip sculptors on both sides of her work. Just as above the Serra sculpture, on the wall opposite again to the Zittel works, there are aerial views of huge Serra sculptures in ship yard warehouses, a reminder that the "real" thing or true thing isn't representable in the "loaded", "limited, and "artificial" context of a museum.

Kertess in hoping to illustrate the relativity of the categories of: abstraction, representation, sight and language, wants us to see that they can seem like the "same thing" or are as extensions of each other. And he is right, they are extensions of each other. But again a show has to be a show, unless you are really an artist, rather than it being a backdrop for the catalogue. And if you insist on this idea, you had better make a stunning catalogue.

There are several really good works in it. Great paintings by Brice Marden, who's webbed ganglia patterns must have suggested to Kurtess the patterns of neural fibers, but they are strategically located between the painters who are "extensions" of Marden paintings, as in Oedipus myth. His wife Helen Marden who's work is bad is to his right, and Cy Twombly, who's supposed to be seen as his father or something, is to his left. And formally, there's a definite tinge of Joan Mitchell nostalgia in this room (she's long been a hero of Kertess'.) There are very new Terry Winter paintings behind the Mardens, which are jagged and painted badly in a good way in a move away from his usual sensuous biomorphic motif. There's a great piece by Rikrit Tirijivana, which is a plywood room inside of which is a set of rock and roll equipment available to be played on by anybody who wishes to: (you hear it while you are smelling- seeing- the burnt plate oil in the three dreamy Milton Resnick paintings that precede them.

There are the great light box photographs by Jeff Wall, one is a contemporary version of Hokusai's most famous Mt. Fuji painting, next to

Edelman describes the brain is networked by many different regions that specialize aspects of mind yet are all inter-connected in detailed cross referenced ways Edelman calls re-entrant. He proposes that the entire show act just as a kind of imagined illustration to its thick catalogue in the same way that he interprets Edelman's explanation of how the perceptual field of the brain functions by its pre-wired image analogic "maps"- "That's the only thing that really lasts anyway," "Memory - you know..."

So, Kertess deliberately hangs the large abstract & monochromatic painting (Ryman) next to the diminutive figurative sculpture Ray, next towards, ("high conceptualism" - Weiner) lettered directly onto the museum wall. Then there are cold & geometric paintings (Martin) hung next to the warm, textural Ryman's. Martin being an old, and sincere (female) has the young, "jaded, gay," Jack Pierson (so is Martin, "Get it") who is on the opposite side of the wall from her.

Actually, manipulating a show like this is really not a bad idea, and it's method is fairly unrecognized and has a long tradition in the history of art and Philosophy going back to Duchamp, John Cage, Fredric Keisler and Art Povera, even though Post Minimalist anti-form art was a recent example that never really disappeared. And also in Philosophical practice: Wittkenstein, Pierce and Bergson, and very influential more recently, Arthur Danto. The main problem here is that the show never becomes a show, there's no experience, because the body is left out, it doesn't bring anything to the viewer, the viewer doesn't want to bring anything to the work, the show doesn't even function in a real "dead" way that might stop time and might have been daunting.

Kertess takes the role of the artist himself. He's being manipulative and free in making his point that the formal categories of art are relative. Trying to show that if you want to, you can find two artists that you thought were opposite in their approach and show them to be similar or mistakable for each other, on the other hand you can also find two similar artists and show them to be very different from each other, even mutually exclusive to each other.

Up on the fourth floor we get _____ immediately and hung like posters, but not enough so. To the right we get a group of dead end cast cubes and cylinders (in cement or plaster) as an installation by Berry Le Va with drawings above them, kaddy corner to which is at least an intended token Richard Serra sculpture. (test holes for the footings to hold up the large sculpture he had hoped to place outside the museum that would rise up from the basement level beyond the height of the sidewalk outside, pierced a river under the museum). It is forged steel in the form of two one foot thick square stock right angles rising about three and a

connections to other circuits and this continually drifting "re-etching" procedure.

This "selection" principal explains many things about perception and knowledge. First of all, it explains that these "categories" of neural pattern have "content" in advance of the incoming data, rather than that we "read" content out of the external world. It really is Emanuel Kant's "A-Priori," just backed up by lab work.

The function of "neuronal group selection," is the justification for Edelman's theory of "Neural Darwinism." Because the chosen circuits chose other appropriate circuits and so on they evolve a kind of design for the subject they are representing to the rest of the brain. If some other eschalon of selections of selections evolves a more formidable argument it wins out and takes primacy over the previous one. Exactly in the way that Darwinism explains that species compete for primacy in an environmental niche. It also explains how novelty and mutation and truth-hoods and falsehoods are established degree by degree, and not in a binary black/white way, because: everything we know and sense in our consciousness, is a tiered construction, an empirical generalization if you will, so what's real or fake is not only relative but is continually open to a debate only biased by the plastic weight of this new filmic understanding of memory.

Basically, Kertess latches on to one or two of Edelman's ideas without *any body* but himself. To do this, he takes the art he deems worthy, and uses two techniques, but first the show:

The first room on the second floor is one of the best rooms in the show. As you enter, straight ahead is a nice large white, Robert Ryman painting, it is intended to be in contrast to the "figurative" sculpture located to its right - . This piece is intentionally ironic and small in contrast to the large bright red toy fire truck he fabricated for the Biennial of 1993.

To its immediate right, is an extended wall with four or five hand lettered statements by Lawrence Weiner. They are conjuncted in between with a bold + sign carved into the wall through its various layers of paint that must be three quarters of an inch thick.

Between the Ryman and the Ray is a doorway through which we see parts of a video installation projection by the artist _____. The work is Tarkofskiesque and seems interested in memory (as the whole show is,) and a romantic take on industrial landscape.

To the left of the Ryman are three new Agnes Martin paintings, they have been strategically hung on the wall oppositely backing a long computer image "painting" by Jack Pierson.

Klaus Kertess' aims to hang the show in an analogous way to the way

Kertess had a plan, a strategy , it was to show that all the categories of art are relative, and that artists place themselves into the genre they participate in because it has unused potential, that it is a niche. His justification and inspiration being in the work of Gerald Edelman, who has written many dense and wonderful books, delineating pioneering theories of how the brain functions, and how the mind has evolved over the span of mankind's development.

To demonstrate the theory Edelman calls Neural Darwinism. In broad strokes, Neural Darwinism proposes that perception is based on memory, which has been discovered to a large extent when vision is concerned, to operate by analogously mapped patterns on the brains surfaces which correspond to any visual input which addresses them. Also, that the smallest circuits of the brain are in perpetual competition with each other, in the same way animal species compete with each other in an ecosystem; or in how the varieties of genetic information (the origin of memory, according to Edelman) gets passed on through chromosomes to offspring, both mutate, and evolve new forms through a process of selections of selections, rather than through a process of mechanized plans.

The radical aspects of these understandings are that one can find origins to memory and perception in a one to one direct relationship with sensory-visual data in the world basically backing up Gestalt Psychology's claims for Expressionary Theory, which said that we have empathy with certain forms and visual dynamics because we construct analogous forms and dynamics in our brains perceptual field. A typical example of this is the Gestalt claim that: we understand and see a waterfall because a "mini-waterfall" is constructed some how in our brains neural apparatus. One proof that these neural maps (as neural physiologists call them) exist is that amputee victims feel ghost limbs often for the rest of their lives or until neighboring neural circuits take over the un-re-established circuits allocated to the limb.

Another understanding of Edelmans' is that neural patterns at all scales have varieties of pattern in the way they interconnect that vary in advance of their application in a neural instance or firing. In other words, incoming signals always chose the appropriate neural group from a type of menu if they are mistaken we miss "see." Even more strangely when these circuit firings occur, they must re-occur again and again at incredibly high speeds in a way that drifts. That the "chosen" pattern when it cycles through again is "re-etched" at not quite the same place the next time, thus explaining hallucinatory "trails" and the fact that physiologists have never been able to "locate" any classical categories in the brain, like: "red" or the sense of humor etc. they just don't exist in any one local because the self same circuits have multiple functions by their multiple

can participate in the quasi artificial lexicon of thought. Thought being but another pragmatic method of memory and one that never loses its foundational principals in the more basic existential bodily experience. It is inextricable from it's existential foundation. The "language" of thought, even the cold logic used in math would be completely unintelligible without these founding premises.

This is also Bruce Nauman's thesis. Since he felt he would be misrepresented in this show (the impossibility of having a show about the perceptual functions of the brain etc. without including the body and experience) he even made an art work out of the way he chose to decline participation in the Biennial. As the story was told; It was of primary importance for Kertess to have Nauman as the "center piece" for the Biennial. So Kertess went to great pains to court Nauman. That is, to get him interested in it. Nauman responded by having a message sent to Kertess to have a meeting with him at a bar in town, on a certain day, and time, to talk about it.

But Nauman lives in New Mexico. So, Kertess flies to New Mexico, and rents a car, and finds this bar where he's to meet Nauman, and Nauman isn't there.

Kertess then asks the waitress after some time goes by, "Have you seen Bruce Nauman today?" The waitress says, "I don't know who that is." Kertess describes him, and then the waitress goes, "Oh, big Bruce." "No, I haven't seen him today." So after a while, Bruce Nauman shows up and listens to Klaus Kertess' ideas about the exhibit. After hearing him out, Bruce just says something like, "I'm sorry, I just can't, I don't have any new work, at all." "You know, I'm doing this big retrospective at MoMa." And that was it. Klaus just had to leave town empty handed. Nauman's and Irwin's work show that it goes without saying that perception makes thinking possible, and that concept makes perception possible, eliminating the mistake that places "conceptual" art as separate from "visual art." Because of the understanding that "conceptual art" functions not by it's idea but by how the seeing it makes you think.

Since Kertess fundamentally mis-appreciates the legacy of these two artists not to mention mentioning their antecedents as in: Warhol, Rauchenberg, Beuys, Duchamp. It is no wonder that they; along with the Philosopher and art critic for the Nation, Arthur Danto, who is probably the most influential art writer of the last tens years in New York (his focus is completely this issue of stereotype/image and the relativities of representation and artifice) -- *all the people in the know*, declined to participate because they sensed a misrepresentation of their views in the works.

essay in 1977.

The other catalogue entitled: "Being and Circumstance - Notes Toward a Conditional Art" in its introductory essay, after a few pages with the help of quotes by Mondrian such as: "This consequence brings us, in a future perhaps remote, towards the end of art as a thing separated from our surrounding environment, which is the actual plastic reality, but this end is at the same time a new beginning..." and then coming to a conclusion of: "Quantities are no more *real* than *qualities*, Intellect is no more *true* than *feelings*, Truth [ultimately] is no greater an aspiration than *beauty* ." Then Irwin: notes, "It can be considered that context and knowledge are virtually synonymous. Even in simple perception this contextual binding is the critical factor in knowing. It is indeed the fact of the contextual nature of experience which will allow for the further compounding of the abstraction. This compounding is now achieved through the observable evidence of similarities vs. difference, patterns of occurrence and place, etc. Overlaps considered to have sufficient affinities are quickly considered to form sets. Behavioral form, language form, artistic form, etc."

Irwin makes the same point about artwork that Kurtess intends through the ideas of Gerald Edelman, but is unable to demonstrate. It is the conditionality and relativity of the spectrum of categories of artwork. That is, it goes without saying that all genres of art (abstract-geometric/biomorphic, representational, conceptual - text/documentation/pop/ironic, etc.) come about through their pre-existent archetypal categories in the brains perceptual methods.

When Kertess writes about these ideas in his catalogue essay, and curates and installs his show, he makes a big mistake of leaving out the *body*, probably because he felt forced to, because the last two biennials were to a greater part about it.

The whole point of Edelman's thesis, is that the brain is the extension of the nervous system, an outgrowth of the spinal column, and that the eyes are but further extensions of the brain.

The nervous system's original design is to send and receive messages that are practical, useful in maintaining our vitality. These messages are proactive, reflexive/involuntary or voluntary, or somewhere in between. They make up early forms of "mind" which is but the sensitivity or feeling that amounts to being a vital form of information, a form of memory that is practical too. Memory is how this useful information about the environment and the bodies participation in it, is stored and referenced.

Consciousness, in general, is just a more sophisticated form of these rudimentary principals, in "consciousness": the information of the environment and human body is voluntarily manipulated in complex ways that

them are good film stills by Mathew Barney and Co. in the usual polyethylene frames we're all getting tired of. Barney has tried to remake the point Warhol already made - that a film is a series of consecutive photographs, though he's out of real time . The hot young artist Jason Rhoad's seems a bit inhibited in his first major American museum appearance. He cobbles together an installation on the next floor, a pile of suburban garage detritus that's spread over celery colored shag carpeting. The installation is topped by flip juxtapositions of Brancusi studio shots beside suburban basement shots they are inside funky home made frames.

And of course Charles Simmon's is in the show, with a great miniature sculpture installation. His lumpy bumpy, orifice riddled forms fit the shows look well. He gets into every Biennial, his terra cotta pueblo has been permanently installed on a ledge in the museums staircase for umpteen years, that's really what memory is all about.

Paul Dickerson