

WHITNEY BIENNIAL 2012 + DAMIEN HIRST at the TATE

KILLER TEXT ON ART

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OUTSIDE THE FRAME

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Naida Oslina's
MASCULINE
GROTESQUE

Shooting
IN CYBERSPACE

Thomas Demand's
PACIFIC SUN

S&M Décor
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GUEST LECTURE
Jo Ann Callis



PERCEPTUAL CONCEPTUAL

ECHOES OF EUGENIA BUTLER BY PETER FRANK



EUGENIA BUTLER WAS A FORCE TO BE reckoned with. In an art world populated by self-appointed rebels and outsiders, the Los Angeles collector and art dealer was a true oddball, and true visionary, willing to smudge the lines between patron, gallerist, curator and artist in order to blur the boundaries between artistic practices and between art and life. Butler clearly relished her role as aesthetic provocateuse. And she clearly believed in the artists she worked with, supported, and presented to a bemused art scene and baffled general public. Art was her life, and life became her art.

LAND assembled a small panoply of Butler-centric objects, notations, arrangements and ephemera in several sections of a WeHo mini-mall. The presentation was worthy of a Getty Research Institute presentation, and the Getty's PST blessing was all over it, but Butler would have been tickled by its funky installation and its integration into daily life. Certainly, the works displayed sought that integration: even the most self-contained paintings and sculptures, by the likes of Maxwell

Hendler and Llyn Foulkes, provided pictorial reflection on the conflation of art and "reality." The general tenor, however, was even more experimental, the bulk of the things on display melting into daily life—or into nothingness—with playful diffidence.

Butler's moment was that of conceptual art's emergence, her apotheosis that of the movement's rapid dissemination, and her role that of enabler and co-conspirator. If Seth Siegelaub mainstreamed early conceptualism in New York and Europe, Butler third-streamed it in California, stressing its poetic idiosyncrasies and helping turn it into something much more peculiar. She posited Robert Barry and Lawrence Weiner with Marvin Harden and Philip Hefferton, Dieter Roth with William T. Wiley, Stephen Kaltenbach with Richard Jackson, John Baldessari with Paul Cotton—exercising not eclectic taste but sympathetic insight into the concept- and life-stressing mindsets that linked these seemingly disparate talents.

To be sure, Butler had her favorites. Her daughter, also named Eugenia, was one—but, nepotism aside, the brilliant young artist mer-

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ited the exposure, even while a grad student. Butler also doted on especially extravagant eccentrics, even before becoming one, and "Perceptual Conceptual" featured a whole roomful of paper pieces, including elaborate mail art series, by the Zen tickler of orthodox conceptualism, James Lee Byars. Another room was devoted to the autobiographical, and often intensely erotic, faux-primitive comics-like work of Berlin-based American Dorothy Lannone (who is overdue for reassessment in her native land). And for a while yet another storefront was devoted to contemporary artists' responses to the notorious "Barter Drawings" of Ed Kienholz, a genial practical-conceptual joke the spiritual-political conscience of the LA art community played on the entire concept of an art "market." Several of the original drawings were in the main exhibition.

Biographies and novels get written about folks like Butler, and with any luck, one is in the works. In the meantime, her importance to recent art history—especially but not exclusively in LA—can be traced in artworks and documents. Butler's contributions did not go unrecognized in her own time, but they were scattered and diverse, and LAND did recent art history a favor by beginning the process of reintroduction to and retrospection of such a key figure. ☺

Sponsored by Los Angeles Nomadic Division (LAND) at 8126-8132 Santa Monica Blvd., West Hollywood



Left: Barbara Smith and guests viewing the works available for barter. A Perceptual Conceptual Program: LAND's Tribute to Ed Kienholz's Watercolors (Barter Show)