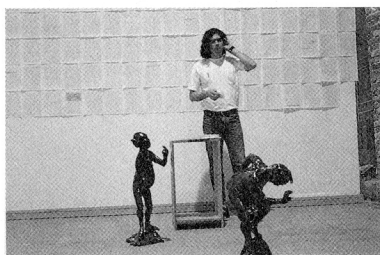


Flash Art

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SEAN LANDERS



SEAN LANDERS INSTALLING HIS WORK AT APERTO.

Dear Flash Art,

Being invited to participate in the Aperto was a huge lift for me psychologically. It came at a time when I was feeling dejected and psychotic. With the lure of the successes of Jeff Koons and Cady Noland in past Aperto's reverberating in my mind, I had myself entirely worked up. Telling myself, "Okay Sean, this is your big chance, your proving ground; you not only have to look good in this show, you have to win." I got to Venice in a horrible state, my love life was in crisis (as always) and I could think of almost nothing else. By the time I dragged my sorry ass over to the Aperto, and passed by the pizzeria/ cafe/bar outside the front doors, and saw all the beautiful, important, and brilliant people of the art world throwing their heads back, carefree, in laughter, my heart sank.

Upon entering the great hall the reality of the situation hit me. Total chaos, artfair booths, way too many artists, every television crew in Europe swarming around Damien Hirst, innumerable video monitors, Benetton sex, gratuitous sex, disturbed sex, poetic sex, sexless sex, and sex, monumental art to Xerox art, so much art together in one space just all looking like shit no matter how good it was. By the time I reached my cubical I felt I'd already been defeated. The feeling was something like the first day of art school. Naturally, my space was not what I'd asked for. I'd have to either abandon my installation plan and conceive of a new one or attempt to improve my situation to suit my original plan.

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Like a fool, I decided to attempt to get my space changed; little did I know what awaited me. Nothing, nothing awaited me. For two days I searched for anyone who'd own up to actually being a member of the "organizational staff." I never found one. I entered the realm of "problem artist." In Italy, squeaky wheels get the grease; I guess I couldn't bring myself to squeak loud enough. After two days of hearing yes to my requests, I learned that "yes" in fact means "no." After a lot of whining and

complaining I decided to change my show idea, to relax, and let the Aperto govern my limitations, to do what I could and get drunk. As one Italian friend put it to me, "All things in Italy are very chaotic, but just relax, it always works out at the last

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minute." I suppose it did, I don't really know, I'm not fatalistic but I admit that there was something reassuring about knowing that there was so little I could do to change anything. I left feeling like I'd done the best I could do with my situation which contrasts the feeling I have when I leave shows in France or Germany where they'll do anything you want — with limitless opportunity I always feel I could have done better or more.

Upon returning to New York I saw the film *The Third Man* in which Orsen Wells says to James Cotton, "In two millennium of chaos and disorder Italy has produced geniuses like Leonardo and Michelangelo. When in Switzerland for over 500 years, peace, democracy, and brotherly love has reigned and in those 500 years what have the Swiss produced? The cuckoo clock." Nothing against the Swiss but one has to admire Italy's cultural chaos. After all, necessity is the mother of invention. Like on *Gilligan's Island*, or *Robinson Caruso*, or *Swiss Family Robinson*. You see, the Swiss aren't hopeless after all.

Sean Landers