

These exhibits by Cheryl Sourkes and Nomi Kaplan derive sympathy from their status as projects. That is, the work is deemed to be more than the common issue of artistic practise; it represents the concentration of the artist on a particular subject or format in service of a greater 'vision'. While a cursory viewing bears this out – Kaplan merges graffiti with the art historical canon, and Sourkes now uses coloured papers for her large scale photo-montages – the nomination of 'project' imparts a distinct privilege to the artists. They are accorded the retrospective ability of being capable of distinguishable types of production, and they are divorced from criteria of accessibility since the work stands in for the project rather than composing the 'work' *per se*. The implication is that the project resists normal exhibition opportunities, and my question is whether the idea of a project (as in a council grant) stands as an alibi for the non-productivity of the work.

This sense of privilege is compounded by the textual and administrative presence of independent curators Jill Pollack and Christos Dikeakos. With the addition of the curatorial premise, is clear that the projects need interpretation to explain their presentation. Yet what links the curators most strongly is their ability to dodge discussion of each project's (de)merits. Dikeakos provides a cogent reading of the developments in Kaplan's work, but advisedly skirts the initial problem of appropriating the form for documentary, montage, or collage procedures. Pollack offers a less useful text on Sourkes, delivering little more than the appearance of continuity as she relates the new work to previous production. Pollack's use of a confused formalist and unexplained terminology results in such indulgences as, "[Sourkes] creates work which acts as a spiral of deductive and inductive reasoning as a way to encourage a comparison of contrasts". One would hope that clear explication would override consonance particularly when reason is used as a spinning top.

Even so, the difficulties the curators face are instructive. Sourkes' work does resist explication, for, as her framing title would suggest, her project is the pursuit of deep structures. Deploying diagrams, photographs, and reproductions across a field of negative printing, Sourkes collapses urban imagery, scientific representations, and art historical citations into a general provocation of automatist musings. In this way, streetscape façades are overprinted with communications-theory schematics, while antique eroticism and pistol/penises provide more assertive references. The overall textuality of the work prompts something other than a "comparison of contrasts", insinuating some grand plan left incomplete, some whole from which the competing fragments have been spliced off. Compositionally, the sheets take the Rauchenbergian flatbed approach as a path towards a mystic bed of oneiric unity – we witness the dream of the present as a familiarly de-legitimated narrative of scattered signification.



Nomi Kaplan, *Paterfamilias* (1986), colour photograph, 99 x 99 cm

## PROJECTIONISTS

The recent jump up in scale, and the addition of washy fluorescent colour amid a laboured installation context, is a direct attempt to flesh out the imagery and lend it greater impact. Yet this exhibit is oddly anaesthetic – what ought to represent ludic dispersal comes across as technical fussiness. As a concept "The Environmental Unconscious" intimates some correspondence between archaic potentials of the mind and contemporary reality, but I wonder if fragmentation does not work against the realization of this state. By breaking up and layering her material, Sourkes is dependent upon dilletantish correlations between elements so that imagistic free association is thwarted and the royal road becomes blocked with contrived niceties. Ditto with the 'environmental' positioning of the pieces: the photographic sheet so thoroughly frames the compositions that the fragments find enough comfort in an established (b)order that any psychic or physical spillage beyond the frame is merely incidental. The wholeness of some entropic vision is timidly enforced by such conventions, with the result that the project amounts to automatism made negative and academic. That Pollack's lack of definition of the project plays into this strategic end-run is no accident: what we have is a proffered package of curation and intention while the goods (or good will) to fill it is distant, brooding.

"Brooklyn Illuminations" is a less ambitious project, but, where Sourkes's conventions block access to her goal, it is Kaplan's goal itself that is problematic. The adoption of graffiti was one of the least respectable incursions of the art world into social unconsciousness. The spray-painting fad among students and the 'elevation' of graffiti to gallery art sorely proved the adage that the current market lives off the energies of sub-cultures since it lacks a vision of its own. Kaplan's work of-

fers an eclectic codicil to that legacy. Starting out documenting messy walls covered in marks, she moved to collaging and mounting images and decorative borders from early renaissance and Oriental art into the scene. With this addition, the emptied signatures and cryptic messages of *graffitistes* represent some form of hermeneutic expression while the dubious appearance of art historical and biblical analogy generates commentary on that expression. While this notion occasionally devises some ironic juxtapositions – lovers from the Kama Sutra imaged above the text "Fuck the World" – the general effect renders the streets of Brooklyn as backdrops for a historicist equation of urban desuetude with the day of judgement. Following an almost uninflected train of thought, the reality of sub-cultural oppression is incorporated into pseudo-millenniarist liberalism. The demons of hell find the comfort we lack, right in the heart of a Brooklyn someone else has to inhabit.

The condescension of this attitude is supposedly muted by Kaplan's dedication to the project. She made three trips to the site of her inferno, retreating home to rephotograph the supplemented documentation till it became a seamless series of 'quality' colour prints. At this level, where reproductions float deliciously at home against the gestural colour swatches of spray paint and the tight grid of bricks and mortar, the urgency of the graffiti is made decorative, secondary to the sumptuary high expression of the European, white cultural canon. The overall project becomes assimilative, assuming that the marginal defacement of walls is equivalent to the authorized walls of the museum and cathedral – mistaking the furtive signature for an indicator of valorized subjectivity.

In what is perhaps the most stunning work, the signature assumes a special form. *Illuminated Corners* has a series of angled shots of a wall formed into a panoramic frieze implying labyrinthine paths; this documentation is fitted into a border taken from renaissance decoration with the signal addition of Kaplan's own tag into the graffiti cacophony. In the quiet of the studio, she takes on the role of both wild style writer and high cultural assessor, making her project complete with a wide leap into the trans-cultural void of aestheticization. Labyrinthine indeed, and, like the endlessly mannered combinations open to Sourkes, one finds that the artist has projected onto the material rather than examining its appropriation and deployment.

Nomi Kaplan, "Brooklyn Illuminations", Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver, March 23 to April 24. Tours to: Saskatoon, Windsor, Montréal, Québec City; Cheryl Sourkes, "The Environmental Unconscious", Or Gallery, Vancouver, March 22 to April 9. Tours to Montréal.