



**SAMPLER**

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

Chris **Caruso**  
Andrea **Champlin**  
John J. **Richardson**  
Mee Kyung **Shim**

Essayist **Cynthia Greig**

**25 MAY - 13 JULY, 2001**

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As the variety of the environment magnifies in both time and space and as the structures that were thought to describe the operation of the world become more progressively unworkable, other concepts of organization must become current. These concepts will base themselves on the assumption of change rather than stasis, on the assumption of probability rather than certainty.

Brian Eno<sup>1</sup>

While *Sampler* introduces the work of a diverse group of emerging artists, and is not organized around any one particular theme, the exhibition reveals a shared interest in exploring the complexities of contemporary experience and the paradoxical nature of perception. Just as Copernicus' discoveries destroyed the established belief in the Earth as the center of the universe, we too have approached the threshold of conceiving new realities. The ubiquitous technologies and scientific discoveries of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are altering our experiences of both time, space and ourselves. High speed cables and satellites transmit information from one part of the globe to another in a matter of seconds. Studies in quantum physics confirm that, in an expanding universe, the observer affects the observed and subatomic particles do not behave according to previously accepted theoretical principles. Experiments in genetics have raised perplexing questions regarding the distinctions that define individuality as well as the categories that distinguish biological species. Digitally altered images further blur the distinction between fact and fiction. Much of the art made in our postmodern era evidences a rejection of concrete definitions and absolute truths. Well aware of the uncertainties of reality in a rapidly changing world, the four artists included in *Sampler* explore uncharted

territories and new perspectives as they reconsider the finite categories and stereotypes that limit both perception and experience. Now living in Michigan, New York and Indiana, all the artists have roots in Detroit, and have come together to exhibit the compelling visual results of their most recent investigations.

Less than a quarter-century since the introduction of the Internet, the onslaught of information increasingly dominates our everyday experience. Whether transmitted via print, airwaves, cable, modem, or satellite, we are inundated with more information than we can sort, retain, synthesize or use. Chris Caruso's paintings and constructions present us with the carriers of information: folders, headphones, sound wave patterns and graphs from computer programming manuals. Referencing various systems for translating data or transmitting sound, he investigates the nature of communication and the changes that occur when one form of information is transformed into another state or form. For example, music becomes a pattern of changing lines on an audio system's wave form monitor; a computerized language renders words and ideas into a series of numerical symbols. In *exit music (blueprint)*, the headphones hanging on a blank white panel transmit no sound, and the pair of corresponding sound jacks reveal their connections to be incomplete. The piece simultaneously suggests the possibility of transference and the futility of communication, and invites the viewer to contemplate the distance between here and there, the sender and receiver. What is gained or lost in the transference of information from artist to audience? Pointing toward this gap, the interplay between his objects and images invite the viewer into their exchange, invoking Marcel Duchamp's observation that,

The onlooker is as important as the artist. In spite of what the artist thinks he's doing, something stays on that is completely independent of what he intended....The work of art is always

based on these two poles of the maker and the onlooker, and the spark that comes from this bi-polar action gives birth to something like electricity.<sup>2</sup>

Offering the elements of an embryonic narrative that may or may not be completed by the viewer, Caruso's quiet paintings and constructions reveal the formative potential of information and the mutability of meaning. Ultimately, the work suggests that the answers lie not in information as an end in itself, but in how we use and interpret it.

Recent developments in virtual technologies and genetic science have increased our ability to simulate reality and expand the possibilities of human experience. Andrea Champlin's large, colorful paintings vacillate between the physical and the digital worlds as she combines the tactile brush strokes of painting with the electronic vocabulary of pixels. Using the tools of both the digital artist and painter, she subjects a photographic self-portrait to various permutations on both the monitor and canvas. Both the process of transference and the artist's choices transform the visual information from the portrait until it is no longer recognizable as a representation. Its original identity as a human figure dissolves into the painted image and emerges as a new, abstracted subject. In concert with their forms, the titles of her most recent paintings, such as *Cherry Bomb* and *Whiplash*, suggest explosions, violent movements or moments of impact. Although contained within the boundaries of bursting splatters and billowing clouds, the squares of painted pixels—depicted as if seen from a 'blow up' or magnified view—appear to expand to wider proportions or blend into the surface color of the raw canvas. Combining a highly stylized treatment with the more fluid gestures of swirling or smoky forms her paintings seem to hover in a state of perpetual metamorphosis or suspended animation—between representation and abstraction, movement and stasis. Exhibiting the tangibility of paint as well as the ephemerality of an electronic transmission, the

equivocal forms of Champlin's paintings allude to the tentative nature of a reality transformed by the digital age, and anticipate the increasing complexities of human experience as physical and virtual realities collide.

Uniting disparate qualities into one form, the beautifully crafted and enigmatic sculptures of John Richardson challenge the limitations of a cognitive system based on categorizing the world in terms of opposites — inside/outside, geometric/organic, visible/invisible. His sculptures conjoin the mechanical with the biological, referencing both the repetition and rational geometry of minimalism, and the more expressive and organic forms of post-minimalists like Eva Hesse. Painted with thin layers of white gesso and then selectively sanded through to reveal the warm tones of the wood grain beneath, the forms fluctuate between opaqueness and transparency, painting and sculpture. Their white-washed surfaces and general absence of color act as a camouflage, mimicking the whiteness of a blank canvas or contemporary gallery space. Likewise, in contrast to the traditional base of a white column, the floor pieces rest upon round, slate blue pedestals that hug the grey gallery floors. Although seeming to blend in with their environment, the sculptures simultaneously assert their presence as one section juts away from the whole or a delicate, tendril-like form rises up from its more geometric base. Breathing organic life into more minimalist forms, the sculptures defy categorical descriptions as they appear to vacillate between two and three dimensions, isolation and integration, presence and absence, asking us to contemplate the paradoxical nature of the perceptual experience and reality itself.

The compelling imagery and rich surfaces of Mee Kyung Shim's paintings investigate the shifting boundaries of identity and culture in a world marked by globalized economies and multicultural communities. Born and raised in Korea, and later educated in the United States, she works with the traditional subject matter of the self-portrait to explore how her life reflects an ongoing dialogue between two cultures.

Although many of her paintings depict the human figure in a landscape, *Double Self-Portrait* portrays Shim as both artist and subject as she sits in an otherwise empty room. Posed as if in front of a *tabula rasa*, the visual dialogue between the two figures creates a kind of hybrid identity. Sitting in profile the artist draws from another version of herself who sits in a more rigid and iconic pose while facing the viewer. Her tightly combed hair and Korean wedding headdress reference a style more traditional than the soft flowing curls of the artist's long black hair. Images of Buddhist deities printed on the model's colorful blouse allude to her religious heritage and contrast both with the western style blue jeans she wears and the two self-portraits that seem to melt into the fabric of the artist's dress. Although Shim directs our attention to how we outwardly express identity, she looks inward toward the diversity of her experience to portray herself as someone who is more than just an artist or a wife, Korean or American. Creating a continuum of visual relationships and contrasts between multiple selves, her paintings explore the evolving and complex nature of the Self and its representation. On the single surface of the canvas, Shim presents us with a multi-faceted characterization, one that reflects an ongoing dialogue between east and west, being and becoming.

The work in this exhibition reflects the complexities of contemporary life and challenges the validity of beliefs and perceptual systems based on preconceived notions and strictly defined categories. The artists explore the more ambiguous territories that exist between information and communication, the physical and digital, mutability and permanence, past and present. Embracing the interplay between perception and experience, their work invites us to contemplate our positions as both spectator and participant in the worlds of art and life, and question our own assumptions about the nature of representation, and reality itself.

Cynthia Greig is an artist and independent curator living in Metropolitan Detroit. Her photographs and installations have been exhibited throughout the U.S. and Canada, including The Alternative Museum, Houston Center for Photography, SFCamerawork and Gallery 44, Centre for Contemporary Photography. She recently curated the exhibitions *Containers of Memory* and *Images of Resistance: Photographs of Women in Pants, 1850-1930* (co-curated with Catherine Smith).

- 1 Brian Eno, "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts," *Studio International*, vol. 192, no. 984, Nov.-Dec. 1976
- 2 Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors*, New York: Penguin Books, 1968, 18.