

GEORG HEROLD

NEW WORK

SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART



The Bow, 1989

NEW WORK: GEORG HEROLD

MAY 3 – JUNE 24, 1990

Born in Jena, East Germany, in 1947, Georg Herold studied art for four years in Halle before attempting to escape to the West in 1973. He was captured and jailed, but nine months later, through the efforts of the West German government, he was freed with a number of others convicted of similar crimes. Herold went to Munich, where he continued to study art for two years, and then settled in Hamburg. There he attended the Academy of Fine Arts, where he studied with Sigmar Polke, among others, and met Albert Oehlen, Martin Kippenberger, and Werner Büttner. Although Herold's work has often been discussed together with that of his three artist friends, with each of whom he has held two-person exhibitions, the resemblances between them are not great. Oehlen and Büttner are first of all painters, and Kippenberger has been primarily a painter until relatively recently; Herold practices the art only intermittently. Their artistic alliance is more a matter of their approach to art itself—irreverent and occasionally sardonic—than stylistic affinities in the usual sense.

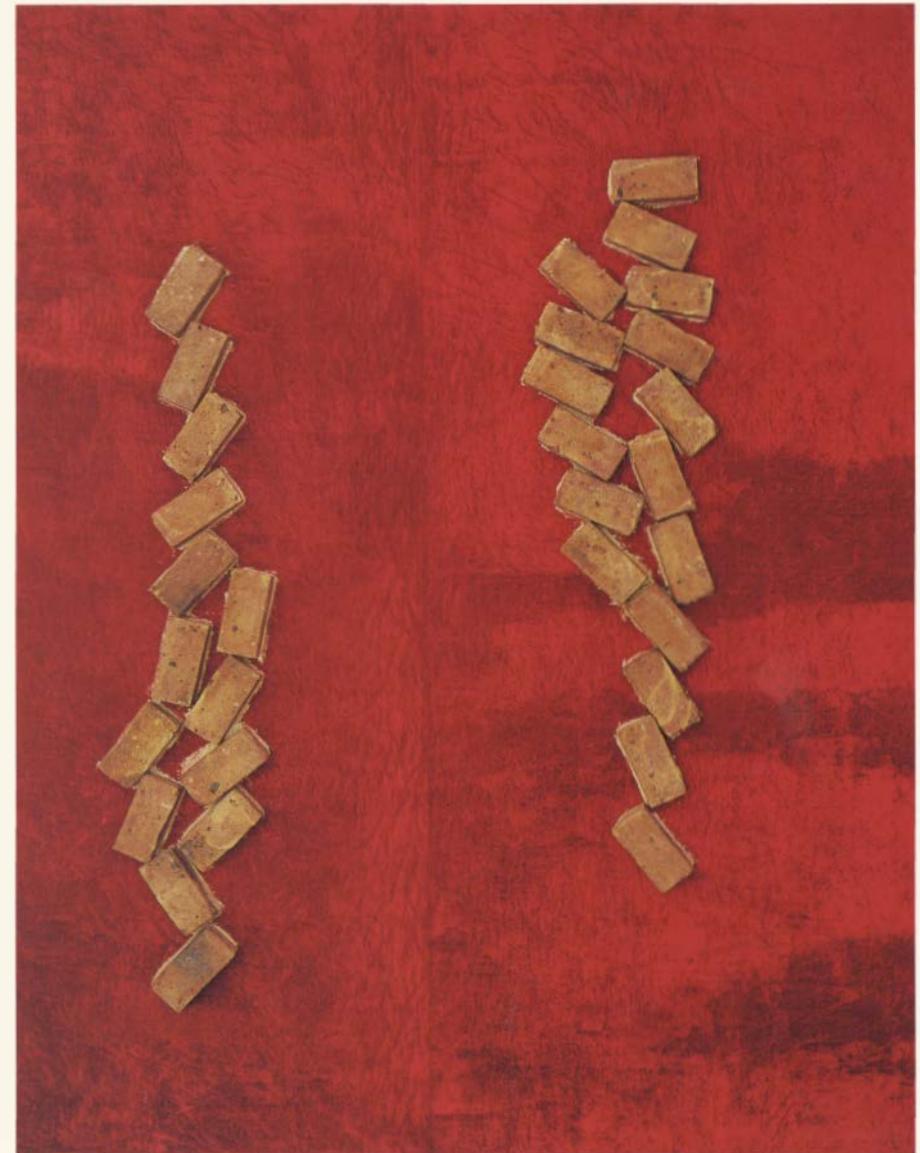
Herold's relationship with Sigmar Polke is another matter. For example, Herold's sculpture entitled *Dürer's Rabbit* of 1984 is an interpretation of the best-loved work of art in Germany, worked out in stacks of wood lath, that shares its parodic intent with Polke's painting of the same subject from 1968. More recently, the caviar paintings Herold has made over the last two or three years clearly refer to Polke's paintings over the last decade, many of which, such as *The Spirits That Lend Strength Are Invisible, III: Nickel* (1988, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art) are made with unadulterated minerals covered with resin. Yet Polke's work of this nature, especially in comparison to Herold's, is unabashedly serious, and his methods often are transformative in relation to their materials, whereas much of the point in Herold's using caviar to make his paintings depends on his medium's remaining clearly recognizable. In fact, these works are best seen as part appropriation, part tongue-in-cheek homage to the work of his former teacher. Similarly, Herold's occasional practice of electroplating paintings and sculpture is also, in part, an ironic reference to Polke's "alchemical" use of materials.

The sources of Herold's art are in fact quite complex. Like many German and, increasingly, American artists, Herold's mature work owes much to the example of Joseph Beuys. Like Beuys, who worked almost entirely as a sculptor and draftsman, Herold uses the most ordinary materials—plain wood lath, bricks, electric cords, underwear, buttons, and the like—usually altering them very little, if at all. Beuys, too, typically left his materials in their original state, but his choice was often highly personal, such as the felt and fat he had been wrapped in to treat burns suffered when he was shot down over the Crimea during World War II, or other materials such as roses, pianos, bathtubs, or batteries that had complex aesthetic, scientific, or philosophical meanings and associations. Often, Beuys's works have the aura of sacred relics, an effect that comes both from their use in his many "actions" (live works that took on something of the character of performance art) and lectures, and from their clear connection to his own complex and charismatic personality. Finding an aura surrounding a work by Georg Herold is impossible. What is ordinary in his materials stays that way, and his occasional references to his own life are deliberate non sequiturs.

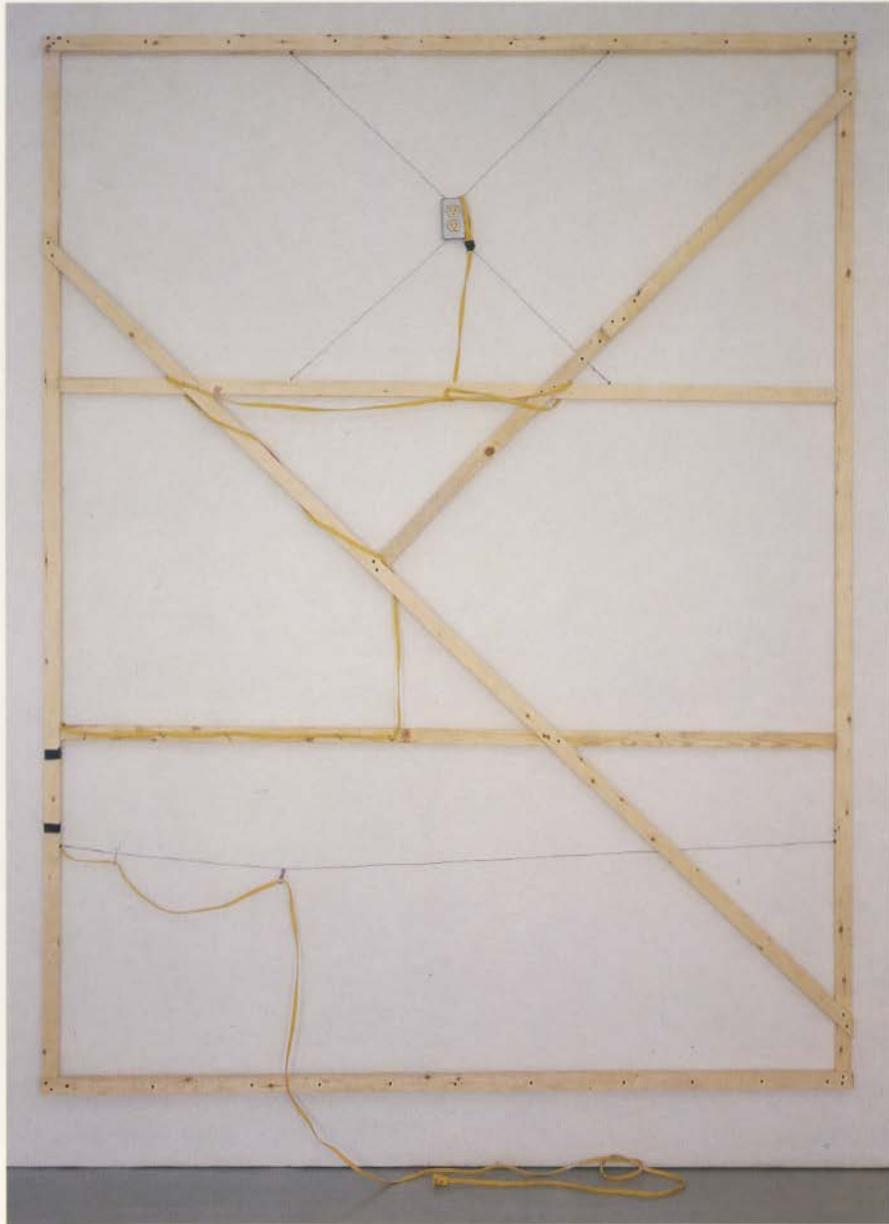
Herold's choice of materials and the way he uses them owe at least as much to the practice of American minimalist artists as they do to Beuys. His brick painting, *The Bow*, recalls the brick sculptures Carl Andre made in the 1960s. Yet the differences are at least as important as the similarities. Unlike Andre's work, which almost without exception is arranged in compact geometric forms, Herold's bricks have at best a very loose order. To be sure, they are attached to the canvas in a more or less straight line, descending diagonally from right to left, but here, truth to materials has led to imperfect geometry. As the bricks descend the canvas, their accumulated weight causes it to sag to an alarming degree, throwing the bricks out of alignment and creating the impression that the canvas itself is about to give way. The result is at once absurd—even funny—and pathetic, as the work of art seems to be bent on destroying itself. Herold has made an object that is inherently unstable and irregular, and it seems to the viewer to be both alarming and ridiculous, a most uncanonical combination in minimal art. It is precisely in this area of what might be called undermined or endangered minimalism that the visual beauty of Herold's work often lies. The materials themselves are beautiful, and Herold's use of them—austere and rigorous, even when most comically absurd—gives the work a kind of honesty that comes paradoxically as something of a relief. After the excesses of so much neo-expressionist art in the 1980s, Herold's work, tragic and imperiled as it is, has credibility of a kind that much of the art being made today sadly lacks. It is real and irreducible, and, though often funny, never a pose. Standing before Herold's work one tends to think that this, at least, is still here; this much, at least, of the edifice of art remains standing.

Indeed, Herold's work raises significant questions. In the traditional language of art, a brick painting is an impossibility. If a brick is included in a work the work must be three-dimensional and therefore sculpture; yet Herold's brick painting is a "painting" too: a pigmented medium attached to a flat, or nearly so, canvas. Herold's subversion of the ordinary criteria of art does not stop there, however. He has made a work that is not only difficult to classify but one that refuses to satisfy even the most "minimal" definitions of what constitutes a work of art. Ordinarily, art is something that has form and meaning, and Herold's work comes close to having neither. Its meaning is deliberately obscure or absent, and its form seems imperiled, as in the brick painting, or even more often, random. One thinks of Marcel Duchamp's urinal which he inverted, entitled *The Fountain*, and exhibited in the Armory Show in New York in 1913. Duchamp made a urinal sculpture only once. Herold, by contrast, constantly produces objects that are as arbitrary and irreverent as anything Duchamp ever attempted—for example, sculptures made of underwear or pantyhose—and at the same time they are formally irregular and imperfect. One tries in vain to discern any reason for the placement of the screws in his *Screws behind Glass*, and the sewn lines in *Galipoli* are deliberately random in their course. Sometimes, too, the very structure of his work seems haphazard and sloppy. In *Members Only*, which we may take as an absurd representation of a clubhouse or a treehouse, the cardboard box is held together by strips of plastic tape that are obviously only partially attached, so that the whole structure seems endangered. Duchamp's urinal, on the other hand, could have lasted forever had he chosen to preserve it.

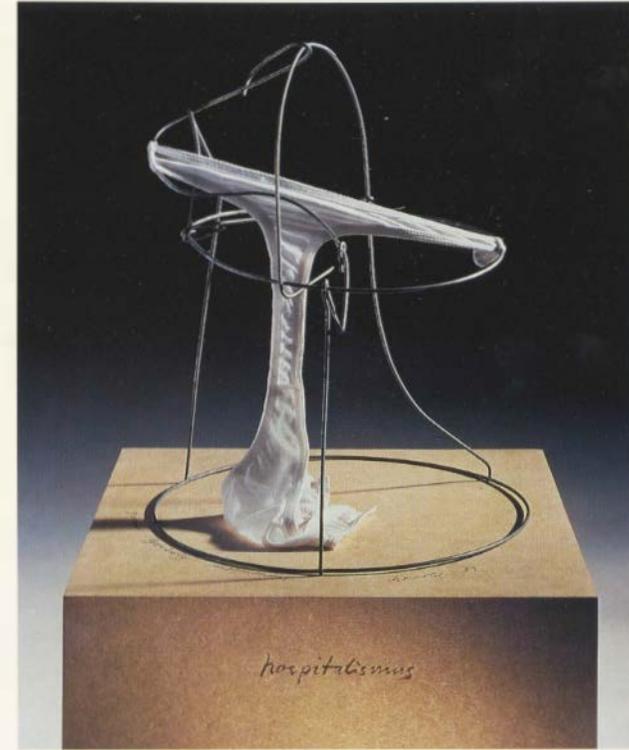
Clearly Georg Herold is skating on very thin ice. Yet equally clearly, since he makes works that resemble each other, they are not simply experiments, or Duchampian gestures. He has,



Untitled, 1990



G.O.E.L.R.O., 1988



Hospitalismus, 1989

in fact, as even an exhibition that is limited in scope makes evident, chosen to work consistently at the boundaries of art, approaching the moment where non-form becomes un-meaning. This in itself is surely part of the meaning of his work. As viewers, we watch a dangerous, repeated game played for high stakes, and our pleasure in his work includes a high level of apprehension. In one sense, it is like watching a child running happily along the edge of a cliff; a single misstep and Herold's art falls into the abyss of meaningless detritus. We are reassured and fascinated, however, by two things: his wit, his evident pleasure so plainly transmitted to us in the form of humor, which suggests that he knows exactly what he is doing; and the honesty of what he makes. Looking at the bare framework of a painting with two yellow extension cords attached in *G.O.E.L.R.O.* (initials of the Russian name for Lenin's 1920 plan for the electrification of Russia) gives us a curious pleasure, a sense that some irreducible point has been reached and a hope that a truth has been arrived at. We look at Herold's work as if traveling with him to the edge of the abyss, and then, reassured by laughter as well as his obvious seriousness and skill, rediscover that the ground, though crumbling, is still under our feet.

John Caldwell

Curator of Painting and Sculpture

GEORG HEROLD

Born in Jena, East Germany, 1947

Lives and works in Cologne, West Germany

EDUCATION

Halle, East Germany, 1969–73

Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Munich, 1974–76

Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Hamburg, 1977–82

INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS

1977

Latte, Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Hamburg

1978

Laser, private exhibition, Wilhelmsburg

1982

Goethe-Latte, Galerie Gugu Ernesto, Cologne

1983

Ein Kreuzweg, Galerie Klein, Bonn

1984

Ich komme nicht zum Abendessen, Galerie Max Hetzler, Stuttgart

P.F.U.I. Diffusa dello Cultura, Galerie Max Hetzler, Cologne

1985

Unschärfrelation, Realismus Studio der Neuen Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin (catalogue)

Galerie Max Hetzler, Cologne

1986

I: I, Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster

1987

Galerie Max Hetzler, Cologne

Galerie Borgmann-Capitain, Cologne

Das Heil in der Kunst, Galerie Peter Pakesch, Vienna

Richard Foncke Gallery, Ghent

Schrauben, Nägel, Öfen, Knöpfe, Juwel, Kunstraum München; Galerie Christoph Dürr, Munich

Kunsthalle Düsseldorf

1988

Richard Foncke Gallery, Ghent

Koury Wingate Gallery, New York

University Gallery, University of Massachusetts at Amherst

1989

Karsten Schubert Ltd., London

Interim Art, London

Daniel Weinberg Gallery, Los Angeles

Galerie Massimo di Carlo, Milan

Lawrence Oliver Gallery, Philadelphia

Multiplies, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne

Georg Herold, Kunsthalle, Zurich (catalogue)

1990

Galerie Max Hetzler, Cologne

Robbin Lockett Gallery, Chicago

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1978

Wer hat Angst vor der Hamburger Krankheit, Galerie Grolitsch, Munich

1979

Made Nervo, with Albert Oehlen, Künstlerhaus, Hamburg; Galerie Arno Kohnen, Düsseldorf (catalogue)

1. ausserordentliche Veranstaltung in Bild und Klang zum Thema der Zeit: Elend, Kippenbergers Büro, Berlin

1980

2. ausserordentliche Veranstaltung in Bild und Klang zum Thema der Zeit: Aktion Pisskrücke (Geheimdienst am nächsten), Künstlerhaus, Berlin

Milhemer Freiheit und interessante Bilder aus Deutschland, Galerie Paul Maenz, Cologne

1984

Kunstlandschaft in der Bundesrepublik heute, Kunstverein, Hamburg

Fünf Bildhauer, Museum Folkwang, Essen

Im Mittelpunkt Kunst, Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster

1985

Förg, Herold, Kiecol, Meuser, Mucha, Galerie Peter Pakesch, Vienna (catalogue)

Wäscheleine verkehrtrum, with Martin Kippenberger, Galerie Petersen, Berlin

1986

Können wir vielleicht mal unsere Mutter wiederhaben!, with Werner Büttner and Albert Oehlen, Kunstverein, Hamburg; *What about having our mother back!*, Institute of Contemporary Art, London (catalogue)

1987

Skulptur Projekte Münster, Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster

Room Enough – Sammlung Schürmann, Suermondt-Ludwig Museum, Aachen (catalogue)

Similio-Dissimilia, Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf; *Walach Art Gallery*, Columbia University, New York (catalogue)

Braken Neon, Steirischer Herbst 87, Forum Stadtpark, Graz; Galerie Christoph Dürr, Munich; Galerie Sylvana Lorenz, Paris

1988

Georg Herold, Joseph Beuys, Martin Kippenberger, Sigmar Polke, Luhring, Augustine & Hodes Gallery, New York

Ansichten, Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster

Binationale/The Binational, Deutsche/Amerikanische Kunst der späten 80er Jahre, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Minneapolis Institute of Fine Arts; Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (catalogue)

1989

The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago (catalogue)

What is Contemporary Art?, Rooseum, Malmö, Sweden (catalogue)

Neue Figuration – Deutsche Malerei 1960–88, Kunstmuseum, Düsseldorf; Kunsthalle Schirn, Frankfurt (catalogue); *Refigured Painting: The German Image 1960–88*, The Toledo Museum of Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Williams College Museum, Williamstown, Massachusetts (catalogue)

Bilderstreit, Widerspruch, Einheit und Fragment in der Kunst seit 1960, Museum Ludwig (in den Räumlichkeiten der Kölner Messe), Cologne (catalogue)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archei, Michael. "Werner Büttner, Georg Herold and Albert Oehlen at the ICA." *Artscribe*, no. 62 (March/April 1987): 73–74.

Avgikos, Jan. "Gift of the Artist." *Artscribe*, no. 79 (January/February 1990): 88.

Balthaus, Fritz. "Dingens." *Die Tageszeitung taz*, December 14, 1988.

Beck, Ernest. "Georg Herold at Kunsthalle Zurich." *Artnews* 88, no. 4 (April 1989): 224.

Catoir, Barbara. "Being an Artist is not a Goal: Georg Herold Interviewed by Barbara Catoir." *Artscribe*, no. 57 (April/May 1986): 48–50.

Dickhoff, Wilfried. "Members Only." *Artforum* 26, no. 5 (January 1988): 107–8.

Ellis, Stephen. "The Boys in the Bande." *Art in America* 76, no. 12 (December 1988): 110–25, 167–69.

Graw, Isabelle. "Atlantisches Bündnis." *Wolkenkratzer Art Journal*, no. 1 (January/February 1988): 36–43.

Graw, Isabelle. "Ein Ausflug in Marktbeherrschte Zonen." *Artis*, November 1988.

Hoffmann, Justin. "Georg Herold at Christoph Dürr Kunstraum, Munich." *Artscribe*, no. 69 (May 1988): 86.

Koether, Jutta. "Sculptures: Koury/Wingate." *Artscribe*, no. 69 (May 1988): 76.

Krebs, Edith. "Georg Herold at Kunsthalle, Zurich." *NOEMA*, no. 22 (1989).

Malsch, Friedemann. "Die Ziegelbilder." *Kunstforum* (April/May 1989).

Malsch, Friedemann. "Georg Herold 1:1 at Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster." *Kunstforum* 87 (January/February 1987): 334–35.

Malsch, Friedemann. "Nothing's Final—The Sculptural Principle—Flight into Mania: Thoughts on the Roles of Form and Material in Georg Herold's Work." *Parkett*, no. 15 (1988): 32–34.

Neff, Eileen. "Georg Herold at Lawrence Oliver Gallery, Philadelphia." *Artforum* 28, no. 25 (January 1990): 145–46.

Plagens, Peter. "German Exchange." *Art in America* 77, no. 4 (April 1989): 42–49.

Renton, Andrew. "Georg Herold at Karsten Schubert/Interim Art, London." *Flosh Art*, no. 146 (May/June 1989): 121.

Schutz, Sabine. "Similia/Dissimilia." *Kunstforum* 91 (October/November 1987): 306–9.

Schwendenwien, Jude. "Sculpture at Koury/Wingate." *Artnews* 87, no. 6 (Summer 1988): 193.

Smith, Roberta. "Art That Doesn't Care Too Much About Its Looks." *New York Times*, January 22, 1989.

CHECKLIST

Bracken

1985

mixed media with underwear and wire
14 x 14 x 10 in. (35.6 x 35.6 x 25.4 cm)

Collection of Kathleen and Roland Augustine, New York

Platon

1985

acrylic on canvas
19¹¹/₁₆ x 24 in. (50 x 61 cm)

Courtesy Luhring Augustine Gallery, New York

Donation of the Year

1986

roof lath, cactus, and bulb
43⁵/₁₆ x 19⁵/₁₆ x 14⁵/₁₆ in. (110 x 49 x 38 cm)

Courtesy Luhring Augustine Gallery, New York

Members Only

1986

wood and cardboard
94¹/₂ x 47¹/₄ x 31¹/₂ in. (240 x 120 x 80 cm)

Collection of Peter Brams Designs Ltd., New York

Mother's Hands

1986
wood and wire
9 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 11 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (25 x 30 x 131 cm)
Courtesy Koury Wingate Gallery, New York

1233

1987
screws and thread on canvas
12 x 16 in. (30.5 x 40.6 cm)
Courtesy Koury Wingate Gallery, New York

1451

1987
nails, thread, and bondex acrylic on canvas
12 x 16 in. (30.5 x 40.6 cm)
Collection of Ealan and Elisabeth Wingate,
New York

2345

1987
buttons, fabric, yarn, and thread on canvas
12 x 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (30.5 x 24.1 cm)
Courtesy Koury Wingate Gallery, New York

3148

1987
buttons, thread, and paint on canvas
10 x 8 in. (25.4 x 20.3 cm)
Courtesy Koury Wingate Gallery, New York

7772

1987
screws, thread, yarn, and bondex acrylic on
canvas
12 x 10 in. (30.5 x 25.4 cm)
Courtesy Koury Wingate Gallery, New York

Evolution Piece

1987
thread, shellac, polyurethane, enamel, and buttons
on canvas
20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm)
Collection of Ealan and Elisabeth Wingate,
New York

German Speaking Mountain

1987
galvanized fabric on wire
11 x 30 x 20 in. (27.9 x 76.2 x 50.8 cm)
Collection of the artist

Untitled

1987
paint, glue, buttons, and thread on canvas
13 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (34.9 x 27.3 cm)
Private collection, Los Angeles

Untitled

1987
buttons, thread, and shellac on canvas
24 x 18 in. (61 x 45.7 cm)
Private collection, Los Angeles

Bauhaus

1988
metal, acrylic, and thread on canvas
9 x 12 in. (22.9 x 30.5 cm)
Collection of Joseph Kosuth and Cornelia Lauf,
New York

Electrification

1988
wood, metal, extension cord, screws, staples,
plastic, and Nivea cream
234 x 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ in., 220 in. (594.4 x 3.8 x 3.8 cm,
558.8 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Koury Wingate Gallery,
New York

Galipoli

1988
ink, nails, thread, and acrylic on canvas
48 x 24 in. (121.9 x 61 cm)
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Gerald S. Fineberg,
Boston

G.O.E.L.R.O. (illustrated)

1988
wood, wire, electrical cord, electrical outlet,
tape, staples, and picture hooks
110 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 86 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (280 x 220 cm)
Collection of Diego Cortez, New York
Photo courtesy Koury Wingate Gallery, New York

Museo

1988
mixed media on twelve canvases; cotton over
chipboard
43 x 68 x 63 in. (109.2 x 172.7 x 160 cm)
Collection of Fundación San Germán, San Germán,
Puerto Rico

Screws behind Glass

1988
screws, masonite, wood, and glass
29 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 21 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (74.9 x 54.9 x 12.1 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Koury Wingate
Gallery, New York

Spitale Konstrucktion

1988
roof lath, bricks, and screws
45 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 32 $\frac{11}{16}$ in. (114.5 x 83 cm)
Collection of Peter Brams, New York

Untitled

1988
button, shellac, and paint on canvas
11 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 10 in. (29.8 x 25.4 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Koury Wingate Gallery,
New York

Untitled

1988
button, thread, shellac, and paint on canvas
12 x 9 in. (30.5 x 22.9 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Koury Wingate Gallery,
New York

The Bow (illustrated)

1989
bricks on linen
96 x 48 x 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (243.8 x 123.8 x 24.8 cm)
Collection of Byron R. Meyer, San Francisco
Photo: Douglas M. Parker Studio, Los Angeles;
courtesy Daniel Weinberg Gallery, Santa Monica

Eiger Nordwand

1989
varnish on underwear over wood
24 x 15 $\frac{5}{16}$ x 5 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (61 x 40.5 x 15 cm)
Private collection, Los Angeles

Framework

1989
shellac and masking tape on copper-electroplated
wood
77 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 104 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (196.9 x 264.8 cm)
Private collection; courtesy Thea Westreich
Associates, New York

Hospitalismus (illustrated)

1989
underwear and wire over wood
15 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 12 x 12 in. (39 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm)
Private collection, New York
Photo: Douglas M. Parker Studio, Los Angeles;
courtesy Galerie Max Hetzler

Pyramide

1989
wood
108 x 144 x 144 in. (274.3 x 365 x 365 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

Untitled

1989
bricks and electroplated copper on linen
107 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 74 x 3 $\frac{15}{16}$ in. (274 x 188 x 10 cm)
Courtesy Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago

Untitled

1989
caviar on canvas
70 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (180 x 129.9 cm)
Private collection, Milwaukee

Pyramide

1990
wood
unassembled: 108 x 5 x 6 in. (274.3 x 11.7 x 15.2 cm)
Promised gift of the artist to the San Francisco
Museum of Modern Art; courtesy Thea Westreich
Associates, New York

Promised (Pyramide)

1990
wood 11/12
unassembled: 108 x 5 x 6 in. (274.3 x 11.7 x 15.2 cm)
Courtesy Thea Westreich Associates, New York

Untitled

1990
bricks and caviar on canvas
94 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 67 in. (240 x 170 cm)
Courtesy Luhning Augustine Hetzler, Santa
Monica, California

Untitled

1990
caviar and lacquer on canvas
78 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 110 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (200 x 280 cm)
Courtesy Luhning Augustine Hetzler, Santa
Monica, California

Untitled

1990
electroplated bricks on canvas
102 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 82 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (260 x 210 cm)
Courtesy Luhning Augustine Hetzler, Santa
Monica, California

Untitled

1990
bricks on red velvet
141 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 94 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (360 x 240 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Koury Wingate Gallery,
New York

Untitled (illustrated, not in exhibition)

1990
bricks on red velvet
110 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 86 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (280 x 220 cm)
Courtesy Galerie Max Hetzler, Cologne

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NEW WORK

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