Artweek

Light ■ Jane Fisher ■ Ester Hernandez ■ Guillermo Bert ■ D. E. May

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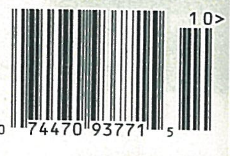

Artweek

Pieter de Hooch, *Woman with Children in an Interior,* ca. 1658-60, oil on canvas, 26-5/8" x 21-13/16". (Photo courtesy of The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.) page 12

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Cover: Stephanie Anne Johnson, detail of *A Bouquet,* 1995, steel rods, boxes, light bulbs, 7' x 6' x 2'. page 13

GOTTLIEB FOUNDATION GRANTS

The GOTTLIEB Foundation has been making direct grants to mature painters, sculptors, and printmakers since 1976. We do this through two grant programs which are entirely separate. Each program has its own application form, rules, and procedures.

Our annual grant program is called the **Individual Support Grant,** which this year will award $20,000 each to ten individual artists. This program is intended to help artists who have been creating mature art for at least twenty years and are in current financial need.

Requests for applications must be submitted in writing by the individual who will apply. Completed applications must be received bearing a postmark dated no later than December 15.

Recipients of last year's Individual Support Grants are:
William A. Childress, Rafael Ferrer, George Herms,
Patricia Johanson, Gary Lang, Georgia Marsh,
John M. Miller, Forrest W. Myers, Chrysanne Stathacos
and Michael Zwack.

For artists who have current financial needs as a result of an emergency situation, we offer an **Emergency Grant.** This program offers one-time help to artists affected by catastrophic events such as fire, flood or emergency medical need. These grants are available only to those individuals who do not have the resources to meet these needs. Eligible artists must show an involvement of at least ten years in a mature phase of his or her art.

These programs extend Adolph and Esther Gottlieb's legacy of giving to and sharing with colleagues in times of need. We recognize that there are more artists in need than we can help in any one year, but if you don't apply you deny yourself a chance that might make life easier and provide recognition for life-long dedication from one artist to another.

You can get applications or more information by writing to us:

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Peripheral Vision

Meredith Tromble

On the Fourth of July I soused some mushrooms in marinade, floated a soup plate on top, then looked around for something to weight this impromptu press. As I gently settled a handsome striped rock onto the plate, forcing the mushrooms more firmly into their bath, I noticed the moment when the rock and plate touched. If I threw the rock at the plate, the contact certainly would have broken it. We would say that the rock broke the plate, but of course it is not the rock which is destructive but the force of its speed.

Not too long before, I'd had a conversation with my friend Diane about the racing forms we call datebooks. "I've got to slow down," she said, and I automatically nodded my head. It is a modern commonplace that the pace of life is accelerating. But is life really "speedier" today? The "speed limit" on the highway was 70 miles per hour when I was a child; the signs say 65 now. I'm not breathing more quickly or sleeping more rapidly than my grandmother. I spend less time on food preparation than she did and more time on vacations. The question buzzed around my mind this summer like a gnat: what, exactly, makes the experience of the "frenetic pace of contemporary life?"

Perhaps, I speculated after seeing *Dromology: Ecstasies of Speed*, curated by Marcia Tanner at New Langton Arts in San Francisco, we mean we're spending more time in our cars. Billed as an exploration of "our culture's love affair with speed, our obsession with instantaneity and our frenetic quest to conquer time," *Dromology* was dominated by works that referred to cars and driving. Only two pieces, *Press #5- Rosebud* by Anya Gallaccio and *Tree Time* by Bruce Cannon, lacked vehicular references.

Tree Time, the slowest of the show's many moving pieces, was also one of its high points. Cannon, with the assistance of Paul Stout, animated a dead tree, articulating its joints with electronics and robotics. When activated by the presence of gallery visitors, the tree made almost imperceptible movements, approximating the speed with which it moved when it was alive. *Tree Time* communicated, in a memorable and slightly ghoulish way, that the experience of "speed" is relative.

Gallaccio also referred to biological time, pressing 300 dead red rosebuds between layers of glass to make her *memento mori*. Speed, however relative, is a sign of life.

Among the auto-related works, one piece offered text about inhibitions embroidered on race car seat belts. Although the concept of rhyming psychological with physical restraints had a certain elegance, the material art seemed immaterial to the idea, offering no developments. One subgroup of works worked with imagery made from moving vehicles. As a group, these pieces evoked more ennui than ecstasy. Another subgroup relied on taped engine noises for animation. Seen solo, any one of these pieces—which were quite varied in form—would have seemed intriguing. Viewing several of them together, however, one noticed that engine sounds were stimulating in exactly the same, limited way whether they emanated from a video or a stack of tires.

More evocative was Lewis deSoto's *Traveler*. In its quiet phase, *Traveler* appeared to be a toy truck abandoned in a baby's crib. But when movements around the piece triggered a sensor, the toy revved into action. The engine cranked up a miniature roar, the wheels turned, the truck charged forward—only to bang against the crib rail. The bars of the crib bounced it back, the wheels took another purchase on the mattress and it came again, ricocheting futilely around the crib until, like a child whose tantrum peaks, precipitating collapse, it fell silent.

The frenzy of the aroused truck rattled the crib—for a few minutes I wondered if *Traveler* would bounce across the floor—but the balance of forces was precise, and the bars held. This deceptively direct arrangement of two objects was transformed into a hardworking metaphor. At one level, the truck stood in for a baby; recalling with uncanny effect a cranky juvenile shaking the bars of his prison. The growls of the engine seemed a perfectly reasonable analog for the howls of a toddler. At another level, the truck was Sisyphus, perpetually beginning again a fruitless effort. At the most essential level, the truck was simply a body—any moving body possessed by an urge to keep moving—beating helplessly against the prison of time. The innocence suggested by the childish objects imparted an extra wallop to the message; *Traveler* was also not without a certain sardonic humor.

Using the motion/emotion of the truck/body meeting its limits, deSoto united the exhibition's themes of biological and technological time. In a videotaped contribution to a panel discussion about the show, Cannon articulated his own thoughts about how the two themes relate to each other. "Speed is scary and fun," he said, " because we are anchored in our flesh. If we can't live longer, maybe we can live more. We are preoccupied by fear of death. We speed to squeeze in more events as a way to live longer."

Two things struck me about Cannon's statement. Speed is a fleshy experience. Riding a roller coaster is for the skin and weight of a body, not for the eyes. When the world streaks by, high-speed travelers are pushed into their bodies. That might explain why, in general, the works in *Dromology* that were aural and kinesthetic seemed more to the point than those which inclined to the conceptual and visual.

What he had to say about squeezing in more events in an effort to get more out of life also rang true. Faced with this realization, I think one customarily deplores the craving for activity. But in many ways it seems like a reasonable response, and it's not just a twentieth century reaction. It was the Roman statesman Cato who said, "Don't gather rust." Fear of death, after all, is the most reasonable fear we can suffer.

A clue to a middle path surfaced in Akiko Busch's new book, *Design for Sports*. She was discussing that arena of distilled lust for speed, televised sports. "By instituting such technologies as 'shot clocks' which demand an offensive attempt within a time limit," she says, "sports organizations can speed up the action to meet fans' changing demands. Yet increased speed can also negatively impact fan interest ... in Ping-Pong ... 3-second rallies gave fans little time to get involved in a point." Perhaps the right question is not "can I do more" or "should I do less" but "am I involved?"

The panel discussion Tanner organized for *Dromology* sparkled. She invited five speakers: an architect, an artist, a computer programmer, a cultural historian and a motorcycle racer, Tom Griffith, introduced as "a man who lives for speed." Although each person had something informative and amusing to say, Griffith—who once won an 1,100 mile, 11.5 hour road race by three minutes—grounded the discussion in this essential level of involved attention. He exuded a kind of confident calm quite unlike the traditional cartoon depiction of a mad racer. "Taking small steps is how you live to be an old racer," he said, telling the story of his marathon ride. "Every second counts; the [center] line is always changing. Riding is fluid, like poetry or dance."

Griffith showed video of his ride—video shot through the handlebars, tracking his field of vision as he rode. White line and asphalt, the most minimal of landscapes, rolled by, charged with a soundtrack of engine whine. As I followed that line, I thought about what it means to move quickly, as if every second counts, yet maintain balance and even feel that you are dancing. Just as there is a speed at which the rock and the plate can co-exist, there must be a speed where we can enjoy our beepers and cars and the rest of our lives, too.

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