

is covered in a wood grain pattern and tied either efficiently or precariously above a viewer's head, is just functional enough to support a Jack-In-The Box cup. The mysterious *Taco Stand* that looks like a modern reduction of a shoji screen stands ready to serve carnitas and turn a modest profit—in another dimension, maybe. *Amt für Außen Dienst* (Office of External Affairs) bears its own name in German only, painted hastily on a piece of paper. This wooden structure piled against the gallery wall is like a readymade dilapidated shed that one might buy unassembled in a box from IKEA. Kōnitz offers example after example of almost useful objects she might have made a different sort of career out of selling. But the pieces refuse, through their obvious disconnects, to vouchsafe their own efficacy. Each work presents a cognitive lapse, a nearly delusional experience. But is it the manufacturer or the potential consumers who suffers this derangement?

Placed among the sculptures are phony birds pressed into long wax columns. They are the well-coordinated, slightly askew accessory for the larger pieces. Everything in this line has been done in a natural style, "natural," that is, functioning in its grand polyvalence: as the more magical side of those landmark cases nature vs. reason and natural vs. synthetic. In fact, all of the materials are as basic as the forms: wood, paper, bamboo, a little paint, some white Styrofoam. Their simplicity suggests that these objects could be models, sketches for things that may function in some other perceptual realm. But their presence in the gallery, each affirming the others with its consistency, supports the claim that these masses are complete, absences and all. Yes, mad genius may be an overstatement: surprising, clever, and inspired are the more tempered terms that fit Alice Kōnitz.

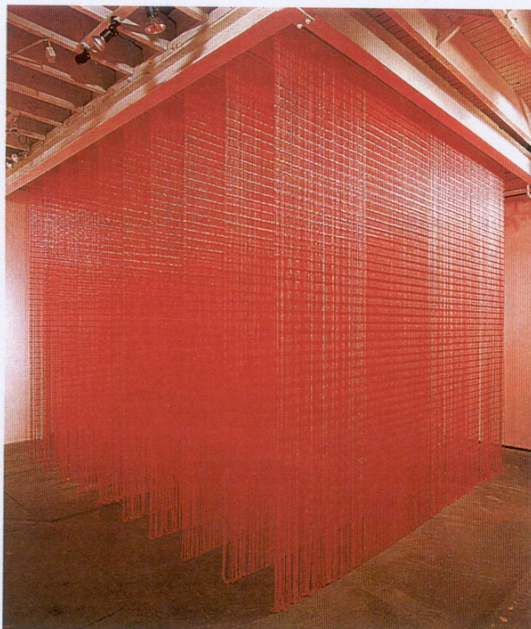
MALIK GAINES

## DANI MARTI

FIRST DRAFT GALLERY, SYDNEY  
DECEMBER 7 - 23, 2000

Everybody knows the old saw about imitation being the sincerest form of flattery. Yet a host of earlier critics missed the mimetic boat during the appropriationist phase of postmodern art practice. In fact, borrowing became an official and original strategy. And nobody did it better than the Australians.

Of course, to cynical eyes a whole lot of antipodean appropriationists looked like clever second-hand shoppers. In their defense, a host of the "original" local smart set looked like



Dani Marti, "Looking for Felix," 2000, installation detail.  
Courtesy the artist.

nothing so much as prêt-à-porter importers. All of which inspired a friend of mine to hazard in a magazine review that he suspected the winning artist of getting hold of the latest international magazines a little ahead of the rest of us.

Meanwhile, artist Dani Marti has spelled out his sincere intentions in the title of his latest exhibition, "Looking for Felix," a show ostensibly about his relationship with the work of the late

Cuban-born American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Marti's sincerity makes me think that the work is allegorically linked to Warhol's celebrity screen prints (rather than a mere appropriation, that is). In these works, Warhol was explicit about capturing the reflected glow of his subjects or making their star power somehow his own. And in 2001, the prints can be read as memento mori as the stars themselves have died (Andy, Elvis, Jackie, Marilyn, Natalie) or have horribly faded (Mick, David, Yves). Felix Gonzales-Torres, on the other hand, may be dead, but his star is definitely rising.

In "Looking for Felix," Marti filled the gallery with streams of red beads hanging floor-to-ceiling, along with three speakers playing *cante jondo* songs from his native Spain. Gonzalez-Torres did a series of autobiographically based bead works—*Untitled (Golden Shower)*, *Untitled (Chemo)*, *Untitled (Water)*, to name just three. Marti's work is most similar to the latter work, which was rendered in blue beads symbolizing the water separating Gonzalez-Torres from his country of birth. But his red beads represent the sanguine fluid separating him from his natural home—he is the HIV+ son of a Catholic mother.

What ultimately distinguishes Marti's work from Gonzalez-Torres's is the audacious volume. While the latter's beaded barriers were rendered in the single strands often found in the doorways of Latino households, Marti's beads fill the entire atmosphere of the gallery, so dense as to tinge the gallery walls a womb-like pink. The viewer must walk through three streams of beads to enter the space, only to be then invited to walk through ten more showers of beads running at right angles in the rear chamber of the gallery.

The tactility of the installation easily overtakes the intellectualizing. Walking through the beads is pure sensation, the plastic spheres like silk or champagne cascading over one's skin. With this, the allegorical impulse turns romantic and sexual, toward *Scheherazade* or *Sacher-Masoch*. And at that point the work becomes distinctly performative and interactive, Marti's imitation taking on an element of the haute-est male flattery: drag.

SIMON REES