

## BRENDAN FERNANDES BROOKLYN, NY

...ssfully crosses conceptual craft and  
...age. His recent show savvily mixes  
...d mordant political commentary, and  
...ome American flags assembled from  
...ts, an ex-military tricycle pulling a  
...decommissioned M60 machine gun,  
...of industrial metal, an American flag  
...ted fragments of other countries' flags,  
...zed "scarf" [Judi Rotenberg Gallery;  
...October 12, 2008]. While Cole knitted  
...pecially-ordered spun bronze using two  
...the delicate beauty of the metal fibers  
...possible to simultaneously uphold the  
...tation of permanence. The mounted  
...ome sort of twisted monument. What's  
...ulations in the state of Massachusetts  
...s availability for sale. Cole's basic idea  
...found: a visceral declaration of the  
...hip between the military-industrial  
...oated and powerful under Bush II than  
...decades, and the privileged daily life of  
...frican, who still enjoys one of the high-  
...ds in the world.

...erates on multiple levels: the juxtaposi-  
...everyday objects with deeply disturb-  
...military gear—culled from U.S. army  
...related outlets—leads us from initial  
...eper insights. Take, for example, Cole's  
...able, handmade baby clothes. While  
...eful details such as swaths hand-knit  
...lwar and adorable booties and hoods,  
...abricated from the yellow bulletproof  
...r army-issue camouflage. This clothing  
...ulous heights of yuppie protectionism  
...suggests some actual use value in  
...ica's Most Vulnerable. It is as if Cole  
...into the unconscious fantasies of para-  
...bureaucrats.

The bronze-colored stars and stripes of *Bullet Flag*, 2008, were produced by alternating the matte and sheen surfaces of actual discharged bullet fragments. The carefully arranged, twisted metal pieces yield a compelling, tactile, undulating surface. The work pays direct homage to Jasper Johns, whose monochrome drawn and painted flags were recently featured in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition, *Gray*, as well as the artistic tradition of political statements that enlist the flag, from Faith Ringgold to Hans Haacke. This weighty piece also evokes George Bataille's famous remark on Manet's *Olympia*: "...the silence that emanates from her, like that of a sunken ship." *Bullet Flag* is a stark critique of the hypocrisy of our government's spread of "democracy" abroad through violent occupation while it turns a blind eye to the ongoing violence raging in our own inner cities. The piece suggests the inherent relationship between violent scapegoating and nationalist cohesion in general. More poetic is the study for Cole's major in-process flag installation, *Flags of the World*, 2007, whose production and intended scale—two stories high—are documented in the gallery by a video. The study features an American flag sewn with gray thread out of bits of red, blue, and white fabric from a set of 192 "Flags of the World." Eviscerated, fragments of the other 191 national flags are strewn underneath the U.S. flag, scattered across the floor, and piled in a cloth bin. Haphazardly thrown in, a pair of large scissors carries the point home. The installation speaks to both the American dream of a multicultural melting pot and the nightmare of imperialist wars fostered in its name, which have destroyed the social fabric of other nations. The large-scale piece will be a spectacular critical statement wherever it is exhibited.

—Karen Kurczynski

In Brendan Fernandes' work, slight alterations and unexpected juxtapositions deceptively make familiar consumer objects and easily recognizable African souvenirs oddly unsettling. In his first solo show in New York, five identical, life-size, plastic deer decoys share the storefront gallery space with a camouflage tent. Painted on the main wall, white Masai spears create a fence pattern on an army green background [Momena Art; May 30—June 30, 2008].

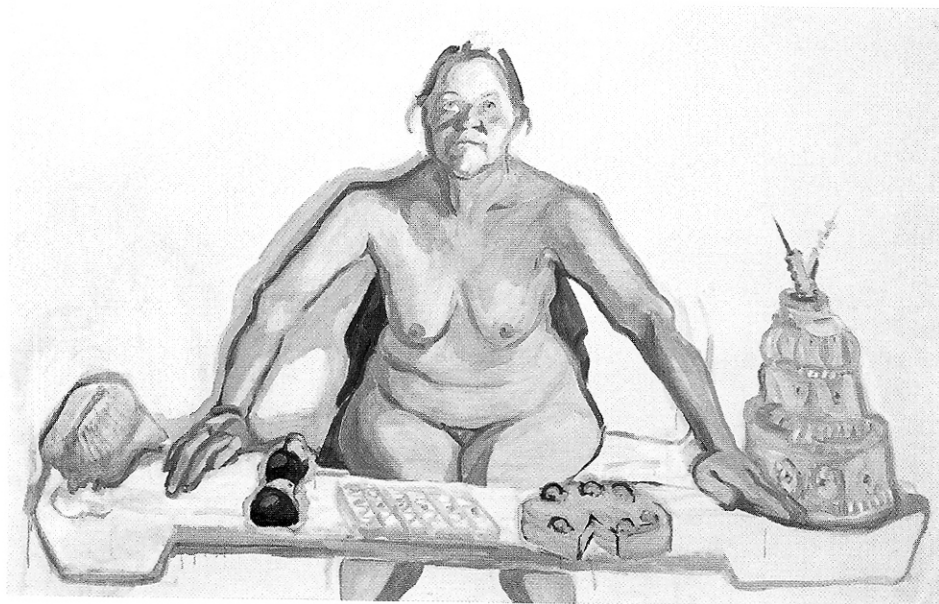
Fernandes' work tackles cultural authenticity and relates to his own unique background. Born in Kenya of Indian heritage, the artist immigrated to Canada in the 1990s and has lived in New York since 2006. In addition, this exhibition obliquely contributes to the current debate over the effects on globalization in the cultural sphere. It poses the question: is globalization enriching our understanding of other cultures or is it diluting substantial traditions in order to make them palatable to outsiders?

In his essay "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue," Fredric Jameson posits that globalization inextricably links culture and economics, leading to the paradoxical pairing of a celebration of difference with the standardization of culture. In essence, globalization has reduced culture to an economic transaction. Fernandes' work cleverly reacts to this interplay between consumer culture and creative traditions.

The prefabricated deer decoys on view are unremarkable in their uniformity—with one exception: each animal sports a white African mask over its face. These masks were cast by the artist from souvenirs brought back from Kenya. By duplicating the masks without replicating their painted patterns that signify "African-ness," Fernandes is drawing attention to the negation of purpose of contemporary African masks, which are now produced as souvenirs rather than functional objects. Furthermore, the decoys are specifically modeled on North American deer, and their adornment with "African"

RIGHT: Dave Cole, *Baseball Study #6*, 2008, mixed media with M67 fragmentation grenade, 8 x 10 x 5 inches (courtesy of the artist and Judi Rotenberg Gallery, Boston; [hittingmachine.com](http://hittingmachine.com)); Brendan Fernandes, view of exhibition *New Work* at Momena Art, Brooklyn, 2008 (courtesy of the artist)

Future Anterior



## MARIA LASSNIG CINCINNATI

masks references the interplay of cultures resulting from contemporary migration and displacement.

The small camouflage tent—meant to conceal hunters—is pitched toward the back of the gallery. A television set is nestled in a blind covering one of its apertures; it plays footage of a crackling fire that Fernandes has made by superimposing a video of a blazing Yule log over a static documentary photograph of the controlled burning of confiscated ivory in Kenya, part of the government's 1989 campaign against poaching. This dramatic political act signifies a moment in recent history when Kenya sought to make a statement on the international stage.

Evenly spaced, the wall-painted minimalist spear shapes simultaneously reference and challenge the illusion of safety conveyed by white picket fences in small towns across North America, while offering a sharp contrast to the nomadicism of the Masai. By using the spear—which, to many North Americans, combines stereotypes of exoticism and barbarity—to build the symbol of American stability, Fernandes also suggests that many cultures influence American and Canadian identity in nuanced ways.

Paired with the installation's relative sparsity, the work's complexity translates into an exceptionally strong New York debut by the young artist. From a visual standpoint, the work is easily accessible. Conceptually, it is much more abstruse, compelling in its referential density and interpretative potential. Unlike much so-called contemporary political art, Fernandes' work is neither didactic nor obvious. Shirking the statement of a specific opinion, Fernandes alludes to many different effects of globalization, encouraging viewers to think for themselves.

—Jeanne Gerrity

Equal measures of vigor and disgust inform Maria Lassnig's powerful paintings. So much so, in fact, that when the raw background colors drop away in some of her later works, which a leavening of sorrow softens, the viewer is likely to wonder what this witty but relentless artist is up to now.

She is investigating her subject of predilection, the human condition, which she sees fraught with troubles that lightening may, at best, only briefly relieve. While Lassnig's work has long been known to Europeans, particularly in her own country, Austria, her belated first U.S. solo exhibition comes in the wake of a sixty-year career [Contemporary Arts Center; September 27, 2008—January 11, 2009].

Lassnig wields a wicked brush. Her broad strokes may appear somewhat slapdash, although they are anything but. She knows exactly what her work is about: peeling off pretense to reveal what is sometimes the ugly stuff beneath. Wit and rapier observation inflect her project, directed at herself and the world. She calls her self-portraits "body awareness paintings." In the startling *You or Me*, 2005, the figure holds one gun to her head and another pointed so directly at the viewer that one almost sees down the barrel. In the wryly amusing *Madonna of the Pastries*, 2002, an unclothed woman sits behind a tray of temptations, her body its own comment on what those temptations can bring. Austrians, of course, are faced from birth with pastries hard to deny.

The CAC has seen fit to post a warning at the entrance to the show: "Maria Lassnig's depictions of the human body are unsparingly candid, and their intensity may be challenging for some visitors." That is to say, she treats private parts as public. But, more distressing than unabashed nudity is the relentless direness of her vision. Dreadful things may be going on in *Bugbear*, 2001, and *Don Juan d'Austria*, 2001, involving a naked man and naked child. The dreadful things may refer to

Austrian politics, but the horror is open to personal interpretation.

Lassnig was born in 1919. Refreshingly, most of her works on view were made since 2000. As a result, the show shirks the predictable retrospective form, presenting ground current work that shows no signs of being hobbled by the artist's advancing age. But this is also the continuation of a long career. As a result, the inclusion of several of her short animated films, almost entirely from the early 1970s is a welcome addition. In them, the artist's wit moves full steam ahead, including pseudo-autobiographical remarks on several occasions, including palmistry. To her dismay, she learns from a palm reader that her heart line is not connected to her head line. She receives the surprising news that her sexual life will not be hers until she's seventy, which was then in her future.

CAC Director Raphaela Platow is responsible for the show's coming to Cincinnati after its initial presentation at the Serpentine Gallery in London. It is installed on the floors of Zaha Hadid's CAC building, looking out into spaces that are not always hospitable to art. The strength of Lassnig's work is equal to that of the idiosyncratically defined galleries. Lassnig's unframed, dynamic paintings need room to be seen on their own, without fighting one another—a feat handily accomplished in this installation. The overall vision is tumultuous but on the mark.

—Jan

ABOVE: Maria Lassnig, *Madonna of the Pastries*, 2002, oil on canvas, 150 x 200 cm (courtesy of the artist)