

Armando Morales

CLAUDE BERNARD

Paris

The central work in this show of recent paintings by Nicaragua native Armando Morales depicted a tropical forest with suffocating foliage bathed in a soft, silvery-gray light. The rough texture of the impasto gives the landscape—a place Morales once described as filled with the odor of cloves—an otherworldly quality.

In addition to several other interpretations of the Amazon forest, Morales paints bathers—from generously curved nudes dipping into ponds to neo-classical visions of the three graces. Fleishy nymphs in various states of undress hide in the forest or hold mirrors up to their idealized faces. These Arcadian beauties call to mind artists ranging from Giotto and Rubens to Degas and de Chirico.

In many ways, the paintings also summon up Balthus (though they are less erotically charged)—in the young women's sensuality, the simplicity of their forms, in their sense of melancholy, and in the geometry of the compositions.

Nowhere is this truer than in the strange series depicting a train station as an empty arcade. Nude women and young girls seem frozen in time as they dance, linger, jump rope, or wait, sometimes accompanied by horses, goats, or bicycles. Whimsical, nonsensical, unsettling, these images eerily portray an overpowering stillness.

—Laurie Attias

"Le Corps Mutant"

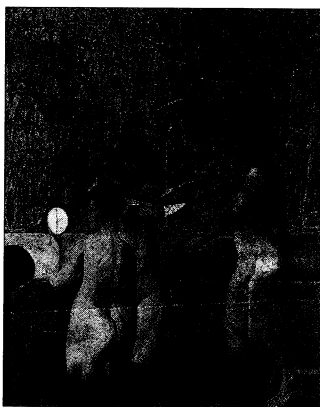
ENRICO NAVARRA

Paris

The fascinating group exhibition "Le Corps Mutant" (The Mutating Body) explored the human figure as a tabula rasa, a raw artistic material to be sculpted, transformed, reshaped, and reprogrammed. Touching on art, fashion, music, and film, the show included stills from *The Fly*, by David Cronenberg, and an elastic dress by Azzedine Alaïa, a garment that hugs the body like a second skin.

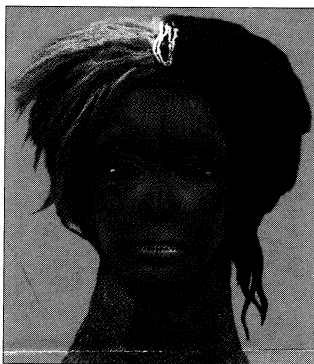
Photography was the preferred medium. Images of performance-artist duo Eva & Adele featured the heterosexual couple and self-proclaimed hermaphrodite twins—ubiquitous at art openings—sporting shaved heads and in identical dress, to confuse gender boundaries.

In photos from 1993 by Nick Knight, radical French artist Orlan lies on an operating table, undergoing plastic surgery. Part of a ten-year project, she underwent successive operations in an effort to mold her face into a composite likeness of five mythic women, including Botticelli's Venus and Leonardo's Mona Lisa. She has even had a surgeon add subcutaneous implants that resemble horns (in the style of Mona Lisa's bumpy fore-



Armando Morales,
Trois baigneuses
(Three Bathers),
1999, oil on canvas,
65" x 52".

Claude Bernard.



Orlan,
Self-Hybridization,
from "African Series,"
1998, Cibachrome,
59" x 39 1/4".

Enrico Navarra.



Ilse Bing, *Quatre Balayeurs* (Four Sweepers), 1947, vintage gelatin-silver print, 10" x 7 1/2".

Galerie zur Stockeregg.

head). Whether Orlan's work is seen as a humanistic statement of liberation or as an exaggerated version of commonplace transformations (bodybuilding, tattoos, dieting, piercing) that reveal our adherence to tyrannical social standards, it is nonetheless terrifying to look at.

—Laurie Attias

Ilse Bing

GALERIE ZUR STOCKEREGG
Zurich

Essentially unknown outside photography circles, Ilse Bing, once dubbed the "Queen of the Leica," ran with the Paris avant-garde of the 1930s. In the 1920s, she fled her native Frankfurt and its bourgeois environs for France, where her discovery of the small, portable Leica camera allowed her to cruise the city's streets in search of subjects. These photographs document her artistic love affair with urbanity—in Paris mostly, but also in Frankfurt and New York. Yet they are not like the metropolitan images of Alfred Stieglitz, whose prints transformed Manhattan into a sort of metallic Mount Olympus.

Instead, Bing captures scenes from a middle distance—close enough to feel the emotions, but far enough away to make the photo's borders seem like a proscenium arch. In *Quatre Balayeurs* (Four Sweepers) from 1947, for example, a lone street sweeper works away, while three colleagues lollygag on their way out of the frame, brooms held casually vertical at their sides, resembling fresh baguettes. Likewise with *Avenue de Moine at Night, Paris* (1932), a deserted nightscape where tree branches stripped by winter loom above a bleak sidewalk. It is a picture fraught with portent, just waiting for a lone character to walk into the frame.

But Bing also brought to life the city's inanimate occupants. In the 1937 *Dächer und Saint Sulpice, Paris* (Roofs and Saint Sulpice, Paris), the city's rooftops stretch across the bottom half of the image, voluminous and ribbed like some section of a large animal's spine. More theatrical, two empty metal chairs dominate the foreground of *Chairs in Rain, Champs-Élysées, Paris* (1931), angled slightly away from each other as if they were lovers in an awkward public quarrel. Across the muddy promenade, a dozen chairs stand in orderly rows, a Greek chorus bearing witness. Bing walked away from photography in 1959, pursuing other arts until her death in 1998, but she still deserves greater renown than she commands, if only for her sharp eye and soft touch. —Marc Spiegler

Alejandra Padilla

DIANA LOWENSTEIN FINE ARTS
Buenos Aires

Born in 1961 in the northwest Argentine province of Tucumán, Alejandra Padilla worked as a model for some time before focusing on art. Vestiges of the fash-