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In a career spanning more than 50 years, Newman has become known for revealing his subjects' inner lives as much as their outer appearances. Considered the inventor of the "environmental portrait," he shows his subjects in their own milieus. In the 1940s New York art world, this now-popular approach constituted a revolutionary departure—away from traditional portraiture in a controlled studio setting, making room for spontaneity, accident, and interpretation.

Newman's picture of Igor Stravinsky lurking behind his grand piano, one of his first images, was among those on display. Though originally rejected by *Life* magazine's then-art director Alexei Brodovich, it was to become one of the world's most iconic depictions of the composer. Marcel Duchamp is shot in front of a curvaceous chair, while Miró is shown in Mallorca, where he lived. Isamu Noguchi is shown surrounded by the organic shapes of one of his designs. A blurry Francis Bacon crouches beneath a raw lightbulb. Woody Allen turns up in a crumpled bed. With a combination of compositional variety and earnestness, portraits of some of the world's most distinguished creators reveal the talent that has made Newman himself an icon.

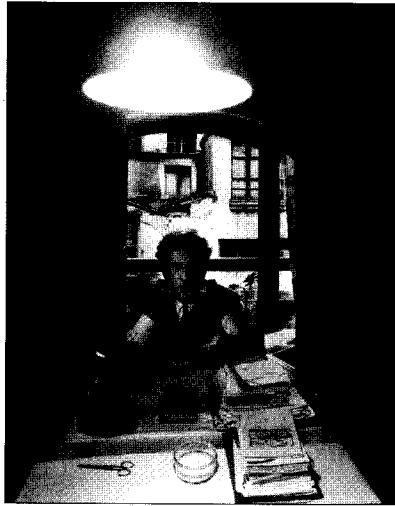
—Laurie Hurwitz-Attias

**Saskia Olde Wolbers**

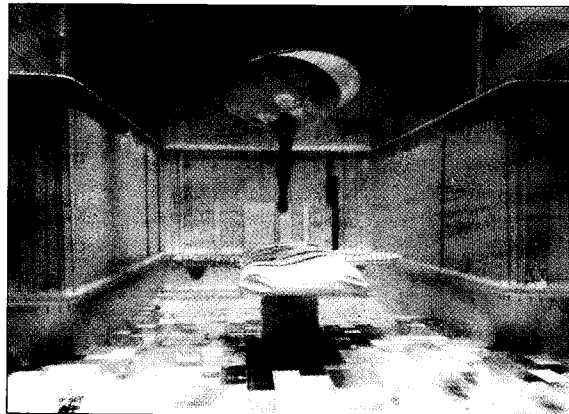
**BÜRO FRIEDRICH**  
*Berlin*

Even if you walk into a screening of *Placebo* (2002) halfway through the short DVD, its exquisite slickness impresses. Initially, this black-and-white work seems digitally rendered. But actually it shows slow-motion shots of white paint flowing through miniature wire-frame constructions. The paint's surface tension stretches it across the frames into sleek planes that then appear to melt away—first in small sections, then in large expanses, revealing again the metallic wire skeletons. From a purely esthetic standpoint, the piece is highly seductive.

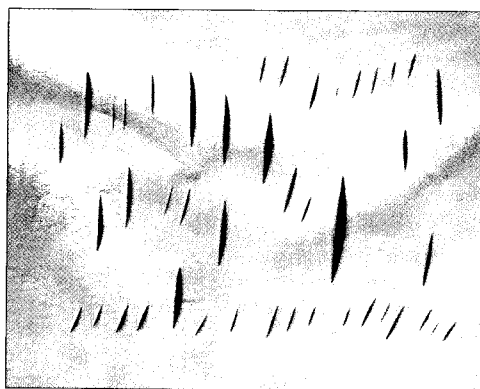
But it gets even better when you watch from the beginning, because then the video's voice-over operates at full narrative force. Devoid of all emotion, a woman calmly recounts her personal tragedy. Working as a nurse, she had started an affair with a doctor colleague who was later revealed to be only a white-coated impostor. When she confronts him, he crashes the car in which they are traveling. Only then do we realize that she is



Arnold Newman, *Jean Cocteau*, 1960, silver gelatin print, 14" x 11".  
Hôtel de Sully.



Saskia Olde Wolbers, *Placebo*, 2002, DVD still, dimensions variable.  
Büro Friedrich.



Lucio Fontana, *Concetto Spaziale, Attese*, 1959, waterpaint on canvas, 29 1/2" x 37 3/4".  
de Pury & Luxembourg.

telling the story from her paralysis-ward bed. Equally paralyzed, he lies one cot over. And that arrangement reveals another unsettling fact: her lover has no family. He had invented a wife as well as a medical profession, to conceal from her his utterly hollow life.

As a short story, this would be powerful stuff. But in combination with the imagery Wolbers created, it was mesmerizing. Evoking the patient's intermittent consciousness, small sets—an operating room, for example—emerge and then disappear within the paint-infused constructions. Sometimes the imagery synchs up with the story and sometimes it's more abstract, and its vivid visuals play off the woman's monotone. In this work Wolbers has managed a pitch-perfect melding of words and images, transcending the too-common tendency of today's video to be either eye candy or failed attempts at cinema writ small.

—Marc Spiegler

**Lucio Fontana**

**DE PURY & LUXEMBOURG**  
*Zürich*

Lucio Fontana, who was born in Argentina, lived in Rome, and died in 1968, filled the best of his work with slashes and holes, creating art out of acts usually considered destructive. Of these, the strongest works are the paintings with slits, which are simple, strange, and daring.

In the large *Nr. 11* (1965), for instance, the bright red of a mahogany frame contrasts with a rich red pictorial surface. From a distance, the line in the middle appears to be made by a brushstroke; only from up close is the cut surface visible. At close range, the canvas seems to fold inward to form an almond shape, widest at the center, suggesting a crucifixion.

Holes are round in other paintings. In *Nr. 38* (1966), for instance, an egg-shaped form is scratched on a green canvas filled with vertical columns of circular holes; it hung in front of a second canvas. Holes made on the back panel result in a discomfiting and damaged appearance.

Five lopsided, roundish bronze sculptures (all 1959–60) formed a group of enormous strength. These "figures" appeared ancient, as if they had floated up from the ocean's depth. Two of the featureless figures have slitlike "mouths," made by rough-hewn knife strokes. The works attested to Fontana's ability to bring the material surface to life with an elegant economy of means.

—Judith Trepp

