

cady noland

Michèle Cone: Practically every piece I have seen of yours in group shows or in your one-person shows projects a sense of violence, via signs of confinement – enclosures, gates, boxes, or the aftermath of accident, murder, fighting, boxing, or as in your recent cut-out and pop-up pieces – bullet holes.

Cady Noland: Violence used to be part of life in America and had a positive reputation. Apparently, at least according to Lewis Coser who was writing about the transition of sociology in relation to violence, at a certain point violence used to describe sociology in a very positive way. There was a kind of righteousness about violence – the break with England, fighting for our rights, the Boston Tea Party. Now, in our culture as it is, there is one official social norm – and acts of violence, expressions of dissatisfaction are framed in an atomized view as being "abnormal."

Cone: There are clear references to extreme cases of violence in the United States, Lincoln and Booth, Kennedy and Oswald, Patricia Hearst, etc. . . .

Noland: In the United States at present we don't have a "language of dissension." You might say people visit their frustrations on other individuals and that acts as a type of "safety valve" to "have steam let off." People may complain about "all of the violence there is today," but if there weren't these more individual forms of venting, there would more likely be rioters or committees expressing dissatisfaction in a more collective way. Violence has always been around. The seeming randomness of it now actually indicates the lack of political organization representing different interests. "Inalienable rights"

become something so inane that they break down into men believing that they have the right to be superior to women (there's someone lower on the ladder than they) so if a woman won't dare them any more they have a right to murder them. It's called the peace in the feud. In this fashion, hostility and envy are vented without threatening the structures of society. MC: In some of your pieces – like Celebrity Trash – which spill over the floor, the violence is implied in the "trashing" gesture, whereas in your two-dimensional works, the violence is connoted by the title or the historic reference or simply by a word like "Texas."

Noland: When I was making Celebrity Trash I was reading The Globe and The Star and saw that what is done is that you consume all of these celebrities each week, then you turn them into trash. This trashing helps to dampen people's anger over their situation or their own place in the hierarchy of importance. The word "Texas" has a kind of cultural capital. It is shorthand for Kennedy's assassination and for a certain time in the 1960s. Speaking on a financial level, it's interesting how once a certain amount of capital has been invested in a rock group, for example, certain recordings can be dressed up or recontextualized opportunistically to take advantage of a new "trend" or something new it can be attached to. It can be squeezed like a lemon, but it becomes almost an organic thing and it gets revived and squeezed again. I read in a trashy novel once something which implied that the deaths of certain rock stars might have meant more capital for record company and that there are speculations that a few deaths might have been "arranged."

Cone: In the Lincoln pieces with images and writings on sheets of metal, the text you chose, the photographs of Lincoln's clothes, the deathbed without Lincoln in it, muffle the violent subject matter. Your violence is muted. It is not as expressionistic and loud.

Noland: It does not threaten anyone. There is a method in my work which has taken a pathological trend. From the

point at which I was making work out of objects I became interested in how, actually, under which circumstances people treat other people like objects. I became interested in psychopaths in particular, because they objectify people in order to manipulate them. By extension they represent the extreme embodiment of a culture's proclivities; so psychopathic behavior provides useful highlighted models to use in search of cultural norms. As does celebrity . . . I remember reading several interviews with Paul Newman where he talks about being treated like an object. Strangers want to walk up to him and prod him, vent feelings on him and knock on his surface to find out "who's home." When I think about celebrity that way I often think about Allan McCollum's surrogates, particularly the black and white plaster pictures.

Cone: How do you tie together psychopathic behavior with the way you work?

Noland: The way I put my work together is a type of inventiveness that is almost the kind of hostile throwaway you encounter often in horror films. In Texas Chainsaw Massacre, those people who do meatpacking in some backwater ingrown town, they murder, slaughter and butcher people the way they would animals. They take the body of a person and whack him onto a meat hook on the wall, and somebody else they fold into a square and smash him into a freezer. It's an extreme case of treating people like objects, and it has this throwaway inventiveness.

Cone: Like a gag?

Noland: An adolescent walks down the street with a couple of friends eating an ice cream cone and suddenly smashes it into the coin return slot of a pay phone. It's a nihilistic, negative, gratuitous thing, not functional. It does not facilitate anything, yet it's a pleasure to make the thing function in this other way. I like using objects in the original sense, letting objects be what they are.

Cone: But you are attracted to objects which have a lot of cultural meaning packed in them?

Noland: Yes, but I also like anonymous kinds of things. To treat objects like objects is to do something to them – which is not to say necessarily to transform them – which implies a kind of ascendancy or positive motion forward. This would be a modern movement. What I'm describing is not postmodern either, though. That implies a kind of faith in various styles.

Cone: Still, even anonymous kinds of things are made of certain materials with definite associations. Like the metal of your walkers connotes coldness, even coldbloodedness, when it is thought about in the context of violence that your work deals with.

Noland: About the metal: the use of it is sometimes hierarchical – to use chrome one place and galvanized aluminum in another is to describe relative relationships to it. The coolness might infer dissociation, but the mirror effect in some places is to draw you back in after the dissociation.

Cone: So in effect you do not agree with Alain Robbe-Grillet, saying "Now the world is neither meaningful nor absurd, it just is," nor with Baudrillard's apocalyptic nihilism. You'd rather say the world is full of signs whose meanings are transient, changing and relative?

Noland: The co-option of Baudrillard into art lingo seems so lame. If you have to ask, "emptied of meaning" for whom? What happened to the notion of relativity? This refracted concept of a society was what Emile Durkheim first traced as a model and which Weber later disputed and redirected by addressing relativity: Even if there is one set of goals within a society deemed desirable to obtain – there is certain to be differentiated access to it for different groups within that society; and where one group may be positively directed with institutionally and constitutionally easy access to those goals, another group

may have to try to attain those goals through other channels, in ways which are actually "against the law." To dream up a society in which all things have been emptied of meaning is to aver in the end that there exist no class distinctions in that class – an irresponsible representation.

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