



Photograph documenting Derek Lardelli's daylong tattoo performance, 2007; at SoFA.

flask, suspended in the center of that chamber, was revealed as the source of the phosphorescence. The trajectory ended at the gallery entrance with a large, clear acrylic star moving along a pole that cantilevered it off the wall. Green images of a musical score and of patches of green coagulate were projected through it. The lights came on again and the cycle recommenced after a short interval.

Aside from the sheer physicality of the experience, Zorio appeared intent on addressing what it means for an artist to use a loaded symbol like the star. The psychedelic rendition of the socialist anthem tweaked the star as a political symbol for revolution. Can the Left still wear a beret with a red star, or has such

gear simply become a fashion statement? Is the cosmology of the star also just part of a collective optical illusion fueled by strobe lights and new age "smoke and mirrors"? While there is measured skepticism at the root of Zorio's installation, the journey through this work restored a viewer's faith in the power of this archetype. Zorio provided proof that it is both an empty vessel and a springboard for the imagination.

—John O'Brien

CHRISTCHURCH, N.Z.

Derek Lardelli at SoFA

Derek Lardelli, whose daylong performative exhibition was staged at the University of Canterbury's School of Fine Arts Gallery in April, is an internationally celebrated *ta moko* artist (face and body tattooist, for want of a more precisely descriptive Maori-to-English translation) as well as a noted sculptor, choreographer, composer and designer.

For this show Lardelli presided over a multisensory and culturally reverberant living tableau. From dawn to dusk SoFA Gallery was filled with compelling sights,

seductive sounds and arousing smells. The event included two disrobed men in the process of receiving full body *mokos* (tattoos) from Lardelli and an apprentice—a live video of this activity was projected onto a mammoth gallery wall. Elsewhere in the space, contemporary Maori weavers (whose practice is ceremonially and esthetically related to *ta moko*) bent assiduously over their work. A cappella choral music (Maori lyrics set to *Pakeha* melodies) filled the space while platters of native foods were served to participants and visitors alike.

Larger-than-life-size images of fully tattooed male bodies (photographed from the back) hung as banners from upright floor stands. Spotlighted here and there throughout the low-lit exhibition space, these photos of contraposto figures evoked a classical timelessness commonly attributed to Roman deity statuary. Living tattooed figures—some of whom were depicted in the heroically scaled photographs—strolled (in the flesh) silently among the audience or stood upon a simple riser and spoke (in Maori and English) about the personal, collective and historical significance of the patterns tracing the

volumes of their naked bodies.

The casually spontaneous atmosphere, created by the low-key conversational buzz of the free-flowing social event, was familial and inviting—a tonic to the forbidding exclusiveness and opacity often encountered in high-art performance. The audience came and went throughout the day—some returning for repeated viewings of a work in progress.

This exhibition fit comfortably in the burgeoning subgenre of contemporary social sculpture. Coined in the 1970s to describe Joseph Beuys's public actions and lectures, the term social sculpture has broadened in definition to include interdisciplinary work by artists such as Christine Hill (Volksboutique), Vanessa Beecroft (live figurative tableaux) and Rirkrit Tiravanija (public cooking and dining). Lardelli's brand of social sculpture—consisting of retrieved, reconstructed and reinvented Maori tribal (creative) practice—aspires, like most of its kind, to bridge a perceived divide between art and life. Where Lardelli's event diverges from social sculpture of the last century is in its effective summoning of a pedigree and communal spirit that predate the divorce of art and life.

—Roger Boyce

Walker

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Burdened by Good Intentions (2004), features explicit role reversals: the slaves on the plantation seize power and proceed exactly as would their white counterparts, complete with a search for white escapees, interracial sex and the lynching of the black heroine's white lover.

Walker's resistance to the stark dichotomy of victim/oppressor is on display throughout the show, nowhere more than in the rather scathing 1998 text piece from which the exhibition takes its title. Occupying an entire room, it addresses itself to a presumably white reader with the salutation "Dear you hypocritical fucking Twerp." The text, which looks like it's been written on an old manual typewriter, uses the litany "My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love" to engage an insidious aspect of the slave system. Illicit sexual ties, whether violently imposed or quasi consensual, the introduction of mixed-race progeny into the largely closed system of plantation life, as well as the intimacy that resulted from the proximity in which slaves and masters lived their lives, served to undermine the supposedly absolute distinctions between the two classes.

This complexity may explain the violent reactions Walker has often encountered. Even more than the adoption of racial stereotypes, the aspect of her work that draws particular censure is the sexual, and often deliberately obscene, nature of so much of her imagery. The recurring presence of dancing figures inspired by Josephine Baker or the "Hottentot Venus," as well as the obsession with child abuse, bestiality, onanism, erotically charged breast-feeding and the promiscuous discharge of bodily fluids suggests that unnatural, taboo and degrading sex acts are at the center of Walker's vision of racism. Nor is it clear that sex here is simply a matter of the exploitation of the weak by the powerful. Sex also seems to operate as a counter to the otherwise clear lines of authority, hobbling the master and disrupting plantation life.

In a perceptive essay written in the catalogue for Walker's contribution to the 2002 São Paulo Bienal, Robert Hobbs points to the centrality of abjection to Walker's vision.³ Abjection, as defined by Julia Kristeva, is essentially a form of border-crossing in which taboo materials like dirt, hair, excrement, dead animals, menstrual blood and rotting food and taboo subjects like castration and dismemberment serve as a means of breaking down the prescribed order of polite society.⁴ In Walker's work, sex serves as an agent of mixing, disrupting order and creating impurities through a willful breaching of established boundaries. In the end, Walker seems to be saying, slavery, and the racism that is its ongoing legacy, deforms all that it touches, victim and victimizer alike. It creates a set of distorted identities that depend on each other for their continued existence. As a result, though the stereotypes which Walker parlays may not reflect "real" people, that fact does nothing to abridge their power. □

1. Quoted in Thomas McEvilley, "Primitivism in the Works of an Emancipated Negress," in Philippe Vergne, ed., *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love*, Walker Art Center, 2007, p. 57.

2. Quoted in Robert Hobbs, "Kara Walker: Slavery! Slavery!," exhibition catalogue for the 25th International Bienal of São Paulo, 2002, p. 17.

3. Hobbs, *ibid.*

4. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press, 1982.

"Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love" opened at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis [Feb. 17-May 13], and appeared at the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris [June 20-Sept. 9]. It arrives this month at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York [Oct. 11, 2007-Feb. 3, 2008], and travels to the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles [Feb. 17-May 11, 2008]. A show of new work is at Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York [Oct. 20-Nov. 21]. "Kara Walker on the Occasion of Margaret Garner," consisting of 42 new prints, appears at the New York State Theater, Lincoln Center [Sept. 6-Nov. 18].

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