



SLAD

curated by Mary Jones and Janice Krasnow

Emphasizes the engagement of the Unconscious, its linguistic structure and its occasional slips into conscious behavior as a darkly comic taskmaster of our daily actions. We are asked to consider the possibility of "the accident" as a metaphor for art - that odd state of mind which allows accidents to happen and have meaning.



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February 13 - March 15, 1997

Artists: Jean Blackburn, Jeanne Dunning, Rochelle Feinstein, Allen Ruppersberg, Jim Shaw, Thomas Trosch and Lisa Yuskavage

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At the Freud Museum in London, the "Freudian slip" is explained by this example:

A man walking down the street runs into a friend. His conscious reaction is to say: "Oh, hi. I'm so glad to see you." But he actually has mixed feelings about his friend--unconsciously, he is also sad to see him. So despite his conscious intentions, his remark comes out: "Oh, hi. I'm so *slad* to see *you*."

If we imagine the Unconscious to be "structured like a language" (Lacan), then it seems the Unconscious often speaks the language of irony, slapstick and farce, a spontaneous gesture of creative wackiness that stands behind conscious creation and sticks out its tongue.

We've dubbed this action "Slad," as in "to Slad," "to make a Slad" or the question, "What was the meaning of that Slad?" Slad has its beginnings in Freud's "Mistake Book" (*The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, 1901) where, to name these mistakes, slips, accidents and mis-speakings, he coins the German, *Fehlleistung*, a kind of oxymoron with the double sense of "faulty achievement" or "faulty accomplishment." His English translator then skewed the neologism by coming up with the almost-Greek term *parapraxis*, carrying the idea of "incorrect practice."

But there's a further shade of meaning that might be forcing its way through. Given the example from the Freud Museum, it would appear that a Slad is not so much a faulty or incorrect action, as an action that is even more revealing, more truthful, than the doer consciously intended.

Freud himself touched on this when he concluded *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* with the thought that almost all mistakes and chance "can be traced back to incompletely suppressed psychical material which, although pushed away by consciousness, has nevertheless not been robbed of all capacity for expressing itself."

This push by the mind to express itself--all of itself-- somehow, some way, regardless of "social and moral restrictions" could be taken as a form of natural poetry...an inherent artistry against all odds, regardless of whether the product is a "Slad" or a work of "art."

The work shown here emphasizes this engagement of the Unconscious as a darkly comic taskmaster, and considers the possibility of "the accident" as a metaphor for art--that odd state of mind which allows accidents to happen and have meaning.

meaning.

The piece by ALLEN RUPPERSBERG, "Brain," seems to examine consciousness in its rigid, Slad-defensive state, girdled in the impossible effort to bar any kind of unforeseen event. Consciousness here wants to propel itself back and forth in an obsessive bounce of its own projected visions, projection given a literal nod by the use of old projector screens. This effort to gain omnipotent control is doomed, however, which might be why the "mirror" images don't face one another.

In a way, JIM SHAW takes an opposite approach by using images drawn from dreams, when the conscious mind is off-guard. In his "Dream Objects," a credit card is scraped across a striped painting until the motion forms a blurred grid. This was a dream event which Shaw (then deeply in the red) re-enacted upon awakening. Maybe the process hints at the inexact boundaries of consciousness. And as Freud touched upon (and Breton went on about), there's the suggestion that dream life may be constant and coincident with waking life, another kind of reality which periodically breaks through.

ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN's "Someone Else's Past" and "Something For Everyone" examine the quirky path of meaning as it turns to become its opposite. Try as one might to hide it, the personal becomes impersonal and affection can be read as boorish demand when, for instance, the phrase "Love, Paul" turns the signature of a love letter's closing into a childish insistence for that particular emotion.

The viewer stumbles into seeing what isn't really there in JEANNE DUNNING's "Long Hole" where it's "now you don't see it, now you do." Here, the familiar becomes all too familiar and the image of a curled hand doesn't stand a chance against a more anal reading of the piece, which asserts itself almost against the conscious wishes of artist and viewer.

The appearance of uncontrolled images and unclaimed, exaggerated sex fantasies might also be central to the work of LISA YUSKAVAGE. "Helga" is a portrait-like rendition of a Wyeth-esque beauty who gets stuck with a questionable sexual subtext; the high-level technique can't help but paint a low-level conception. There are mixed messages in these images which seem to have overpowered the censor and made their presence felt.

JEAN BLACKBURN's piece is riddled with cross-purposes, as well. Obsessively drilled and poked into, what once had been a table with place settings is transformed into something disturbingly different, the familiar literally deconstructed until its function, if any, is unknowable. The piece is like a conversation: intimate, rolling over in ambiguities, and filled with holes.

Finally, the possible meanings of chance and circumstance are somewhat happier in "Musical Comedy Medley #1" by THOMAS TROSCH, who offers up a series of uninhibited happy accidents and gladly found language from the poetry of Broadway musical comedy. It's Lorenz Hart, not Freud, who could be celebrated here. Then again, it was Hart who wrote: "If it hurts, that's love."

At some point in each of these pieces, at some level, the artist willingly opens him or herself to allow a series of Slads, creating work that is only partially "controlled" by conscious process. This is different from the type of "slip" that sometimes occurs, when we place the banana peel on the floor while knowing full well we're in for a fall. The "faux Slad" actually serves as a defense against the surprise, uncertainty and possible humiliation of a real upset. Like a Slad, the work of art can disquiet and confuse the artist, before it is placed before the public, offered up to others for multiple interpretations.

And last: to stretch it further, condensed in the single event of the Slad are many themes of Modern and Postmodern thought: memory as fiction, conscious thinking as merely one mode of mind, the central place of the subjective, the blurred boundaries between "normal"/neurotic and serious/absurd, the insistence on meaning, the importance of the random and inessential...and, perhaps, the equivalent nature of mind and art.

Mary Jones and Janice Krasnow
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