



Narcisse Tordoir, *Unos á Otros*, 2009, digital print and mixed media on canvas, 55½ x 41¼". Museum Dhont-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium.

horses, while the fifth plays the bull, teased with a lance by the so-called picadors. Goya turned this childish game into a satire: Today's executioner can be tomorrow's victim. With this etching as a model, Tordoir invited his son and some of his son's friends to pose for *tableaux vivants*, which he documented in photographs and on film. Some of the photos were later overpainted by the artist; others formed the basis for drawings and large-scale paintings. The resulting exhibition was diverse in its subjects and eclectic in style, but, like the original etching, it managed to display an overall feeling of uncanny vitality and moral reformation.

The show at the CC Mechelen, "The Way of the World," was broader in scope. With thematically grouped works and through a range of media, Tordoir proved that his vision of the world remains sharper than ever. "Words," one of the chapters in the show, consisted of documents, photos, a couple of canvases, and a free newspaper. Like one big puzzle, the ensemble showed how Tordoir operates by interpreting historical artworks in a radical, often cynical way, in this case making his own version of Allan Kaprow's 1962 environment *Words*. A feigned conversation between Tordoir and Kaprow published in *The Way of the World* is hilariously perceptive. The American artist asks his Belgian colleague if "for you artistic activity is not about a final product? It is not about making more art?" Tordoir's laconic answer: "No, the art world is omnipresent today and it markets its products. I prefer to see painting as a way of working." "The Way of the World" was therefore less an exhibition than a project—not just a display of work in a museum but, in tandem with the book, a demonstration and explication of Tordoir's ironic way of looking at and depicting his own version of art history.

—Jos van den Bergh

ROME

Terry Adkins

AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME

Terry Adkins's "Meteor Stream," the culmination of a ten-year cycle on abolitionist John Brown, opened on the 150th anniversary of Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry—his legendary attempt to seize a government arsenal and initiate a slave revolt, the failure of which led to his hanging. From the John Brown House, in Akron, Ohio, the exhibition sequence moved across the United States via places associated with Brown's life. In each location, Adkins collaborated with members of the local community and incorporated newly found objects into the installations, referencing the influence of context and time—and hence the element of serendipity—on the judgment of actions, the writing of history. Indeed, wouldn't this deeply religious nineteenth-century folk hero be seen as a fundamentalist terrorist today?

The gallery space was the container for healing recitals in which the artist inhabited Brown's spirit to reconstruct, and commemorate, the account. The first of two rooms evoked both chapel and tomb with a symmetrical arrangement of sculpture, drawings, and artifacts. On a stand framed by an apselike window was a book posing as the Bible: It

contained a famous 1881 speech by Frederick Douglass, proclaiming Brown a martyr to the cause of liberty. An ecclesiastical vestment dangled over a casketlike glass case, which contained four suspended layers of delicate white starfish, echoing the heavens and the flight of birds—or freed souls—out of a tree in the nearby video *Roost*, 2001, in which Adkins embodies Brown's ghost standing on the banks of Lake Alice, in Gainesville, Florida, where the artist imagined the revolt, if successful, would have claimed victory. Another video projected from the same altarlike monitor, *Apis Mellifera*, 1999, was a triptych with a buzzing image of hiving bees—*bees* was the code word for the Harpers Ferry mission—framed by those of the mouths of two men, one white and one black. Propped like regimented soldiers in racks on either side of the room were twenty-two replicas of the spears used in the insurrection, representing the number of men who took part.

Loud and clear in the next room were two giant black-and-white banners proclaiming A MAN WAS LYNCHED YESTERDAY, replicas of one that hung outside the headquarters of the NAACP in New York in the 1930s. These two exclamation marks intensified the visceral sensation created by shamanistic objects such as *Tupelo*, 2009, a shrunken black head teetering atop a tenuous pole, and *Redeemer*, 2009, a tiny drum from which hangs a small white parachute filled with black rooster feathers. Two deceptively inconsequential-looking documents on the wall bore equally foreboding messages: a proclamation warning people away from the scene of the execution and a statement in Brown's handwriting predicting that only bloodshed would wash away the "crimes of this guilty land."

The exhibition (or, as Adkins calls it, the recital) amounted to a multilayered testimonial—as intuitive and precise as it was gut-wrenching and informative—that compressed time and integrated historical events and otherworldly meanings. Even the setting, the American Academy in Rome, evoked the importance of happenstance in historical narrative: Among other uncanny coincidences, the architect of the building, Charles McKim, was the son of abolitionists who attended Brown's execution and aided his widow in claiming his body and giving him a proper burial.

To conclude the exhibition, the charismatic artist led a powerful evangelistic performance of music, song, and spoken word involving musicians and writers from the American Academy. Serving as a cathartic coda to the entire project cycle, this "Hiving Bee" finally laid Brown's restless soul, if not his legacy, to rest.

—Cathryn Drake

STOCKHOLM

Tomás Saraceno

BONNIERS KONSTHALL

The physicist Freeman Dyson, professor emeritus at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, reasons that since biology is our era's dominant science, "the dominant art form should be the design of genomes to create new varieties of animals and plants." His view has a basis in the ever-increasing relevance and credibility of interdisciplinary

Terry Adkins, *Meteor Stream—Recital in Four Dominions—After John Brown, Recital View*, 2009, mixed media, dimensions variable.

