

Hans Haacke
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September 21, 1989

Alan Blum, M.D.
DOC Tobacco Archive and
International Resource Center
5510 Greenbriar, Suite 235
Houston, Texas 77005

Dear Dr. Blum:

Thank you for your letter of September 14, and the interesting material that accompanied it.

I had heard about your organization through Doug Minkler.

Under separate cover, I am sending you the catalogue of an exhibition I had at The New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York in 1986. It provides a rather extensive overview of my work until then.

Of special interest to you should be the piece "Les must de Rembrandt", which outlines the connection between the South African Rembrandt Group in the context of apartheid and the Rothmans empire of tobacco and luxury goods. There is also passing reference to the partnership between Rembrandt and Philip Morris.

The background information to the piece has been updated for a new catalogue that was published this year for an exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. A significant development since 1986 is the introduction of Rembrandt shares on the Swiss stock exchanges. They are traded there under the name Compagnie Financière Richmond. If you are interested in the French text, I would be glad to send it to you.

Since Philip Morris is active in sponsoring art events, it has always interested me to learn more about it. If you or other members of DOC have a file on the company that exceeds the information included in the material you sent me, I would appreciate your sharing it with me.

So far I have not produced a work especially addressing Philip Morris's role in the art/health/politics triangle. But that could change.

Sincerely yours,


Hans Haacke

An Artist's Giant Gibe At Helms

By ROBERTA SMITH

One of the sculptures to be seen this weekend targets Senator Jesse Helms, whose opposition to Federal financing of artworks he considers obscene has earned him notoriety on the art scene. The sculpture is "Helmsboro Country," an object in the shape of a monumental flip-top box of cigarettes, which is on view at the John Weber Gallery in New York through tomorrow.

The work also takes aim at the Philip Morris Companies, a New York-based corporation that is a prominent supporter of the arts and that employs in subsidiary companies 3,900 people in Mr. Helms's home state of North Carolina.

"Helmsboro Country" is the work of Hans Haacke, a German-born artist who has lived in this country since 1965 and who is well known here as a perpetrator of what might be called investigative political art. The flip-top box and five-and-a-half-foot-long cigarettes, which seem to have casually spilled from its open lid, hold center stage at Mr. Haacke's exhibition.

At first glance, "Helmsboro Country" exudes the product-oriented cheer of Pop Art. The graphics silk-screened onto both the cigarette box and its contents all look distinctly Marlboro-like and familiar, but the messages they deliver are not.

The boldly lettered "Helmsboro" appears on the package where the cigarette's brand name should be and a portrait of Mr. Helms has replaced the "P.M. Inc." medallion. Each cigarette is ringed by the words "Philip Morris Funds Jesse Helms" and has affixed to it a copy of the Bill of Rights, a reference to a recent Philip Morris advertising campaign that offered to send a copy of the document to anyone who requested one.

In the enlarged fine print along the sides of the cigarette box — areas usually reserved for the Surgeon General's warning about cigarettes and cancer — there is a statement from Mr. Helms taken from the Congressional Record of Sept. 28, 1989.

Referring to a statement made in 1981 by a representative of Philip Morris, Frank Saunders, concerning the impact of the National Endowment for the Arts' "stamp of approval" on corporate decisions about cultural financing, Mr. Helms concluded: "That means that artists can get corporate money if they can get respectability — even if it's undeserved — from the National Endowment for the Arts. And that is what this is all about. It is an issue of soaking the taxpayer to fund the homosexual pornography of Robert Mapplethorpe, who



The New York Times/Neal Boenzi

"Helmsboro Country," by Hans Haacke, at John Weber Gallery.

A sculptor offers a cigarette box with a political point.

died of AIDS while spending the last years of his life promoting homosexuality.

In addition to these words, the box has a 1980 quotation from George Weissman, the former chairman of Philip Morris: "Let's be clear about one thing. Our fundamental interest in the arts is self-interest. There are immediate and pragmatic benefits to be derived as business entities."

Mr. Weissman, who is now chairman of Lincoln Center, said in a recent telephone interview: "I don't know if I exactly said that. However, I have said that it is in the self-interest of businesses to support the arts because it makes for a better community in which they operate. The arts improve the quality of life for everybody."

In a telephone interview the other day, Mr. Haacke, who is 53 years old and lives in New York City, said: "I have a particular interest in corporations that give themselves a cultural aura and are in other areas suspect. Philip Morris presents itself in New York as the lover of culture while it turns out that if you look behind the scenes, it is also a prime

funder of Jesse Helms, someone who is very hostile to the arts. He is also someone who is probably the most homophobic Senator we have at the moment."

The artist said he hoped the juxtaposition of information in "Helmsboro Country" would embarrass Mr. Helms in his home state and Philip Morris in New York, where the company has supported such recent exhibitions as "Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism" at the Museum of Modern Art, "The Latin-American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920-1970" at the Brooklyn Museum and "Treasures From the Fitzwilliam Museum" at the National Academy of Design. Philip Morris has also been a major sponsor of the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave festival.

Mr. Haacke said that in the course of research for his work, he had turned to the Philip Morris Companies' "Corporate Contributions 1988 Yearend Comparative Summary."

There, he said, he found a listing for a \$20,000 contribution from the company to the Jesse Helms Citizenship Center in Wingate, N.C., which he had never heard of. He telephoned The News and Observer of Raleigh for further information, prompting the newspaper to start its own investigation. The result was a News and Observer article on April 11, which reported that Philip Morris's contribution to the Helms Center had been \$200,000, not \$20,000, and that the center was also being supported by a number of local businesses.

As for Philip Morris's support of Mr. Helms, Mr. Weissman said: "We also support the Bill of Rights, which gives everyone the right to speak even though we don't always agree with what they say. I don't think the two are connected."

Mr. Helms's office did not return phone calls regarding Mr. Haacke's sculpture.

The director of corporate communications at Philip Morris, Alice McGillion, said in a telephone interview yesterday: "We work with Jesse Helms on some things that are clearly related to our business side. He doesn't represent our viewpoint on other issues."

Sculptures From Blankets

Continued From Page B1

in several years.

With pieces small and large, Mr. Grooms takes the viewer on a whirlwind tour of almost the entire world. The itinerary includes the artist's own home on the range (invaded by a friendly bear) in Wyoming and the fabled Alhambra in Seville. It glides past sundry celebrities, from Joe DiMaggio at bat in Yankee Stadium to several views of Salvador Dali in Spain, and on to Frida Kahlo in a cuckoo clock.

The stop at Muscle Beach, played out in a series of pint-sized figures in painted wood, is not so great. But not to be missed is "Red's Square," a wall-sized relief of Moscow's center stage that includes Mikhail and Raisa Gorbachev surveying regiments of Soviet soldiers, dancers and jets while Lenin is shown spinning in his mausoleum. It is a characteristic Grooms extravaganza in exceptionally condensed and clear-cut form.

Half a block to the east, at the Marlan Goodman gallery (24 West 57th Street, through April 28), Richard Deacon's work strikes a considerably more contemplative note. For all their unity, the restrained yet eccentric forms by this English sculptor range easily between opposites of technique and material, of engineering and organic growth. The show's tour de force is an untitled work made of squares of copper pounded and stapled onto an armature of medium-density fiberboard.

At once armored and quilted, this cleft and bulbous form rises like a ponderous cloud of smoke or a fulminating version of Brinnhilde's helmet. Equally impressive is the aforementioned welded plastic work, a large, transparent volume whose many seams conjure up the tailor's craft (suggesting both dummy and garment), but also evoke a large bubble of seawater suspended on dry land.

Dennis Adams

The quietness of "Street Vanities," Dennis Adams's austere exhibition at Kent Fine Art (41 East 57th Street, through May 5), is the sinister kind, laced with a mixture of danger, death and corporate grandiosity. Mr. Adams uses the generic Minimalism of industrial design to political purpose, touching on current events as he goes, doing a lot with a little.

In such works as "Cash Window III (Martyr's Funeral, Bucharest)," he encloses large, back-lit photographs of corpses in coffins in clean, well-fortified teller's windows. Banking supersedes mourning, these works seem to say, and on all fronts fluorescent light tubes chill the air and double as jailer's bars. It is not by chance that in peering around the works' corners at the photographs within, the viewer assumes a compromised, surreptitious position.

In "Terminus (Noriega's Destroyed Bunker, Panama City)," four tightly spaced bus shelters become cells or holding pens, even before one recognizes the bombed-out building sandwiched between the structures and the wall.

John Chamberlain

At the Dia Art Foundation (548 West 22d Street, through June 18), the liberties that John Chamberlain contends with seem at first considerably more esthetic. But in his linear low-lying "Gondola" works, a little-known series from the early 1980's, this sculptor continues to nudge at the presumptions of taste and beauty and, by implication, class and value.

After more than 20 years of prominence, Mr. Chamberlain still uses carefully chosen fragments of old car bodies, bent and rusted, to which he sometimes adds paint. But instead of the characteristic compressed voluminousness of form, these works are extended and spare and different from every angle. The colors and compositional effects on one side are rarely borne out on the other.

They are also rougher than ever, thanks to the long and short, horizontal,

back to a time when blankness was the latest thing. It's hard to say if the conversion to metal improves these works, but they are certainly better than the artist's pretentious lead-and-steel reliefs that line the gallery's walls.

Joel Fisher

Joel Fisher, a Post-Minimalist with a flair for the eccentric, emerged in the early 1970's, sharing with many of his contemporaries a marked disdain for the industrial fabrication of Minimalism. His first sculptures were either delicate wall pieces made of strands of hair gathered from friends, or layered pieces of rough handmade paper. Lately the artist has been known for his bronze sculptures whose unpredictable profiles are derived from random outlines that crop up among the tiny fibers dotting the surfaces of his handmade paper.

Mr. Fisher's current exhibition at the Farideh Cadot gallery (470 Broome Street, through May 31) describes the slow transition between these two phases with 10 works the artist made while living in London between 1978 and 1982. The strange little drawings are here, as are works in steel, limestone and rope that mimic their motifs.

Less familiar are "Drip," a hanging plaster piece of balloon-like extension, and "Corner," a small irregular pentagon of brass rods that awkwardly clings to adjacent walls. The exhibition also includes, an environmental work that has never been shown in the United States: it is a tall meandering wall and it, too, started out as a few tiny threads on a sheet of handmade paper.

Meg Webster

Meg Webster's brand of Post-Minimalism takes simplified forms back to nature and also in the direction of human use, an approach that can yield a mesmerizing balance of absolute purity and potentially intricate



The New York Times/Fred R. Conrad

Stuffed animals constitute Mike Kelley's "Fruit of Thy Loins" at Metro Pictures.

social ritual. Her exhibition at the Barbara Gladstone gallery (99 Greene Street, through April 28) makes this clearer than ever before.

The show's centerpiece is a large and well-packed ball of earth whose moss-covered surface is made possible by its handsome glass, steel and wood enclosure — a cage and display case that are also a life-support system. In addition, the artist has designed an accommodating copper plinth to lie on and a pair of complementary beeswax enclosures to stand in (they give every sound a sonorous pitch). In a downstairs gallery, a

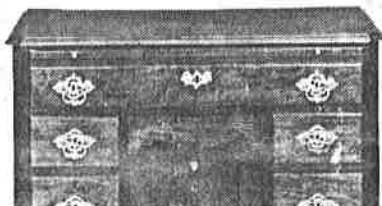
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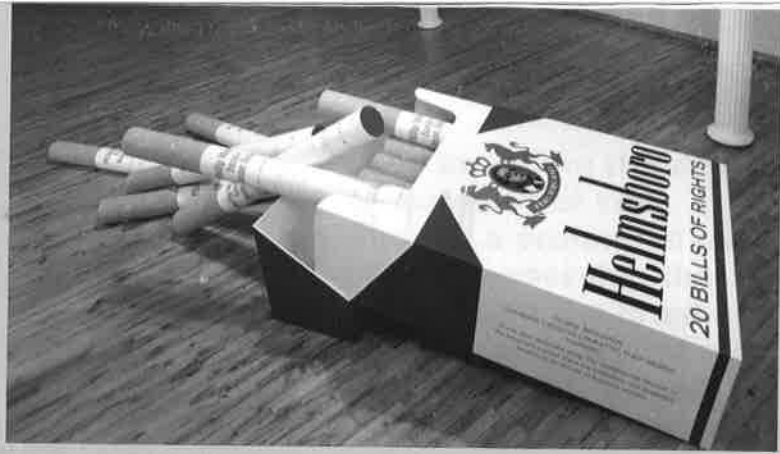
...point, self-censorship is
... since it is cheap, self-
... require a large bureaucracy
... is more effective than legal
... the fearful individuals, trying to
... able, anxiously elaborate the cate-
... is likely to be prohibited. Best of all,
... ship occurs privately, without conten-
... unpleasant public struggles.

... is no question that a serious degree of
... censorship is already taking place. Acting on
... distorted definitions of obscenity, many artists
... and writers are simply deciding not to apply for
... NEA grants because they believe their work can-
... not be funded. Or they expand the scope of the
... regulation: one writer I know who signed the
... “loyalty oath” now wonders if her promise to
... avoid producing obscene work would be in effect
... forever or just for the duration of her NEH
... fellowship. Arts administrators and curators face
... similar decisions: curator Dana Friis-Hansen of
... MIT’s List Gallery (on Helms’s investigatory list
... for suspicion of having exhibited work with sexual
... content) remarks, “Now we would not consid-
... er trying to fund [controversial and difficult art]
... through the NEA.”¹² Others decide that sexual
... topics are too risky altogether.

Artists and artists’ organizations have re-
sponded vigorously to attacks on the NEA
by lobbying, rallying and protesting these
assaults. Artists must mount an equally aggres-
sive effort to educate their own community about
what obscenity is and what this new regulation
means. A long-term goal, of course, includes
defeating any regulation controlling the content
of NEA- or NEH-funded work (an effort recently
given an unexpected boost by the Bush Adminis-
tration’s support for removal of restrictions of
federal grant recipients [see “Front Page”]).¹³
But in the short term, it is imperative to mini-
mize the damage caused by the existing regula-
tion, to publicize and to insist on strict Miller
definitions of obscenity and to unveil current
loose definitions of obscenity for what they are:
right-wing pressure tactics that have no legal
status or force.

The NEA must join in this effort, too, by
issuing clear guidelines about what is and is not
obscene. A simple paragraph of explanation
would go far in clarifying the distorted belief
that any depiction of specific sexual acts, includ-
ing homosexuality and homoeroticism, is obscene
and therefore prohibited.

Arts organizations can afford to take even
more vigorous steps to educate their members.
They can start by providing very specific infor-
mation about obscenity and the new NEA regula-
tion. Groups must take the initiative and prepare
NEA panelists with hypothetical scenarios they
may encounter in this (art and) sex panic, along
with appropriate responses. Basically, organiza-
tions must communicate the message that the
ban on “obscene art” has no meaning; to act as if
it does is a capitulation to Jesse Helms, not any
legal requirement. Similar scenarios and instruc-
tions need to be given to prospective NEA grant
a



Hans Haacke: Helmsboro, 1990, mixed mediums; at the John Weber Gallery.

Haacke's Helmsboro

Since the celebrated cancellation of his 1971 Guggenheim exhibition due to the work's "extra-esthetic" nature, one of Hans Haacke's enduring themes has been the machinations of the "consciousness industry." With unflagging zeal, he exposes the marriage of convenience forged between art institutions and corporate philanthropists, demonstrating how recipient institutions are willing to overlook such peccadilloes as commerce with South Africa or environmental irresponsibility in exchange for solid financial support. Now, Haacke's most recent exhibition reveals that a third and potentially disruptive partner has insinuated himself into this cozy relationship.

The centerpiece of this exhibition is a huge, Oldenburghesque cigarette pack knocked on its back so that a copy of the Bill of Rights (as a promotional gambit, facsimiles of that document were distributed by the corporation on the occasion of the bill's 200th anniversary). On the sides of the package the surgeon general's warning has been replaced by a pair of statements, one by a Philip Morris spokesman noting that his employer's interest in the arts is purely pragmatic and one by Helms vilifying the NEA for its support of the "homosexual pornography" of Robert Mapplethorpe.

The peculiarities of this alliance are suggested by a series of departures from the usual Marlboro package. The inscription "Philip Morris Funds Jesse Helms" wraps around each cigarette just above a copy of the Bill of Rights (as a promotional gambit, facsimiles of that document were distributed by the corporation on the occasion of the bill's 200th anniversary). On the sides of the package the surgeon general's warning has been replaced by a pair of statements, one by a Philip Morris spokesman noting that his employer's interest in the arts is purely pragmatic and one by Helms vilifying the NEA for its support of the "homosexual pornography" of Robert Mapplethorpe.

Ironies multiply with the inclusion in the show of two other pieces devoted to Philip Morris. A pair of collages included in MOMA's recent "Picasso and Braque" exhibition (underwritten by Philip Morris) are re-created here, their newsprint sections replaced by patches cut from press releases, news stories and campaign-contribution lists—evidence of the social costs of cigarette addiction and the tobacco company's cultural activities.

Together this trio of works reveals a dense network of logical inconsistencies. Philip Morris salutes the Bill of Rights while the tobacco industry's most powerful friend works to undermine the First Amendment. Jesse Helms dismisses the moral argument against cigarette advertising and tobacco-price supports on the grounds of economic liberty while he invokes Christian morality as the justification for his attack on artistic liberty. The art establishment, meanwhile, finds itself caught in a web of its own making. Museums have long been willing to accept their corporate supporters' unsavory extra-artistic entanglements as a necessary evil (a news story excerpted in one of the Haacke pieces quotes a well-known corporate consultant as saying, "Without question tobacco is harmful. But until the Government makes it illegal, I don't think it's unethical to accept money from them"). Now these art institutions are forced to recognize that accepting money from Philip Morris indirectly associates them with Helms's attacks on the art world. Perhaps it was once possible to maintain a pose of neutrality based on the supposed separation of the worlds of politics and art, but now Helms has made their interrelationship undeniable.

In the long run, Helms may be doing the art world a service. It is becoming increasingly clear what is at stake when art institutions allow themselves to be used for the purposes of others. Another of Haacke's new pieces involves documentation of his contribution to an exhibition in Graz, Austria, last year, which redirected public attention to the events of the Anschluss, through a series of temporary installations created at sites of political significance during the Nazi years [see "Artworld," Dec. '88]. This highly inflammatory exhibition (Haacke's installation was in fact firebombed by neo-Nazis near the end of the show) was funded by the province, the city of Graz and the Austrian government. What, one wonders, are the chances that such a show might receive government or corporate funding in Jesse Helms's America?

In an interview in the Nov. '85 *New Art Examiner*, Haacke noted, "The more the interests of cultural institutions and business become entwined, the less culture can play an emancipatory, cognitive, and critical role. Such a link will eventually lead the public to believe that business and culture are natural allies and that a questioning of corporate interests and conduct undermines art as well. Art is reduced to serving as a social pacifier." Nothing in the current scenario seems likely to prove him wrong.

—Eleanor Heartney

Author: Eleanor Heartney is a free-lance critic based in New York.