

## The "Millennium" Exhibition Debuts at Cast Iron Gallery

Billed as "an intercontinental view of the state of the arts at the dawn of the new millennium," the group exhibition entitled "Millennium" is an ambitious undertaking involving collaborative efforts between artists from Switzerland, Japan, and Spain. Conceived to eventually travel to three parts of the world, the show had its debut at the Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street in Soho from January 18 through February 3.

Along with an audio-visual work jointly created by the participating artists, each of whom recorded approximately four minutes of verbal commentary in his or her native language, the show featured individual works by Christoph Landolt and Peter Buschlen, a team of Swiss sculptors who collaborate under the name of Chris-Pierre Labusch; the Japanese painter Kaname Moriya; and the Spanish painter Angela Falco.

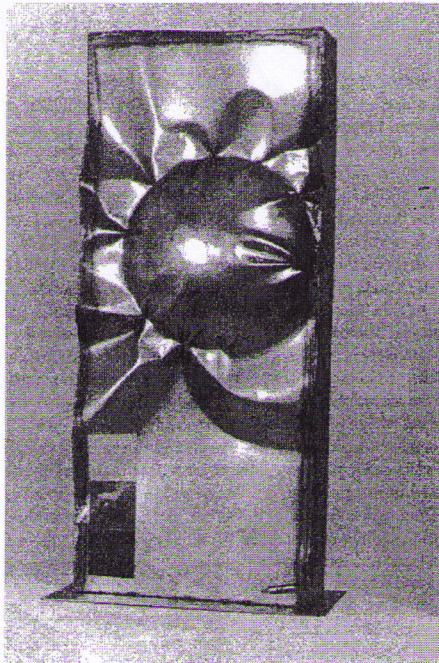
True to its lofty concept, the exhibition did indeed find common links between artists from diverse points of the globe, transcending their linguistic and cultural differences, as they strove to express their reactions, hopes, fears, and visions at the end of one millennium and the beginning of the next.

Chris-Pierre Labusch, regarded as a distinct third entity by the two artists who have been collaborating under that name since 1986, when they met while both working as skilled machine mechanics for the same Swiss company, has embarked on a new aesthetic direction since the team was last seen in a solo exhibition at the Cast Iron Gallery in 1994. At that time, several of their painted steel sculptures featured silhouetted figures in negative space as well as free standing figures in positive space. Like the simplified figures of Ernest Trova, these seemed to symbolize Everyman, as well as the figures of both artists and their joint alter-ego Labusch.

In the team's more recent works, which are primarily painted metal wall reliefs, however, the figure has been replaced by simple circular shapes punched into the material and combined with rectangular areas in bright primary colors.

These more austere geometrical forms are offset by the crumpled and rippled effects that occur in the sheet metal when the large circles are punched into its surface in a single instant after much careful planning and calculation. These subtle striations are set against the inverted or protruding circles and red yellow and blue rectangles to produce visual and tactile contrasts which make these new pieces particularly dynamic.

That each piece is titled and designated to commemorate the date and precise moment of its completion (as in "Red Moment 12.31.1999" or "Yellow Moment 1.1.2000 12:28") adds conceptual



Chris Pierre Labusch, steel and paint

distinguishing the recent sculptures of Chris-Pierre Labusch, a duo who have attracted considerable attention and critical acclaim with many exhibitions in Europe and the U.S.

Kaname Moriya, the painter from Kyoto, Japan, who has also had impressive previous exhibitions at Cast Iron Gallery, combines power and poetry in a peculiarly compelling way. Moriya's medium size abstractions, executed in acrylic and metallic leaf on canvas, are dominated by roughly rectangular central shapes built up in wave-like configurations of thick pigment. These shapes are set against luminous color fields in pale, subtle hues applied in a contrastingly smooth manner. The contrast between the impastoed central form, with its sinuously rhythmical and physically substantial surface enlivened by light-filled flecks of metallic pigment, and the delicately tinted background makes for a lively dialogue of material and the ethereal elements. The overall effect of Moriya's paintings is meditative, their surfaces engaging the eye with their combination of cool, calm, stillness and subtle rhythmic undertones. This combination of seemingly contradictory elements is what gives Moriya's paintings their peculiar, quiet impact, a kind of fire and ice immediacy that creates stirring visual tensions. One is drawn into the painting by its sensual surface, which initially suggests a repose that is gradually quickened with further looking, until the viewer finds him or herself enmeshed in and

undulating silver waves. Moriya is a master of such subtle visual seduction, employing it to draw us into the deeper drama that resides below the surface, the philosophical meanings and mysteries beyond the sensual blandishments of form, color, and texture.

Moriya further enhances the compositions with precise linear elements, often bright red, that serve as piquant spatial accents, as well as with signature seals or "chops" that assert a sense of Japanese identity and relate these highly contemporary paintings, however remotely, to the Zen tradition. Indeed, the paintings of Kaname Moriya effectively carry the powerful simplicity and spiritual clarity of that great tradition into the new millennium.

Angela Falco, an artist from Barcelona, Spain, also makes an important contribution to the "Millennium" exhibition with her large abstract canvases, predominantly in soft gray and silver tones, in which shadowy geometric shapes emerge from staid monochromatic surfaces. Like the late Christopher Wilmart, the artist she most resembles in both her technique and visual vocabulary of personal symbols, Falco manages to make faintly delineated forms allusive agents, suggesting a multitude of complex ideas and emotions. Her shadowy shapes slide in and out of her subtly mottled surfaces, sometimes taking on a *tromp l'oeil* quality, in terms of their spatial illusionism. Ovals and squares recede and advance in space in a manner not unlike Chris-Pierre Labusch's explorations of negative and positive space, albeit enacted illusionistically, rather than with actual bulges and recessions in the surface.

Indeed, Falco's paintings create a phantom realm of subtle formal interactions in which a wide range of subliminal associations are evoked, even while her means of expression remain severely limited. The long, narrow format in which Falco chooses to work seems geared to the proportions of the human body in a manner that lends her paintings an almost anthropomorphic presence. To stand before one of her canvases is tantamount to encountering one's own image in a slightly smoky full-length mirror, yet the imagery that emerges from their grisaille surfaces reflects an inner, rather than outer, reality. In one canvas, an oval form floats above liquid areas of silvery gray washes like the head of a drowning man, in another a series of shadowy shapes emerge like moon-craters from a welter of vertical strokes suggesting falling rain.

Like the other artists in this simultaneously diverse and coherent exhibition, Angela Falco employs simple shapes and metallic tones in a manner at once austere and expressive. However, she handles these elements with her own unique touch to create her own formal poetry.

—Ed McCormack