



Tobias Rehberger/MATRIX 180

Sunny-side up

August 29 - November 14, 1999

**University of California
Berkeley Art Museum**

Tobias Rehberger/MATRIX 180

“I am very interested in the idea of having multiple perspectives on a piece. Asking how can or will the art object be dealt with by the viewer. An amazing thing in art is that the creation of an artwork always happens within the viewer.” Tobias Rehberger

German conceptual artist Tobias Rehberger has employed a wide variety of mediums to explore his interests. He first used plants—the chosen medium for his MATRIX exhibition—last summer in an installation entitled *Within view of seeing (perspectives and the Prouvé)* at Manifesta 2 in Luxembourg. He explained that his choice was meant to test the limited control humankind can exert on nature. The reaction plants could elicit from the viewer also interested Rehberger. When faced with something so familiar in an unfamiliar context, the viewer is forced to call upon unaccustomed skills for approaching art. How visitors interact with this art is a personal choice: Do they want to just look—a standard action/reaction—or are they willing to chance a more physical interaction—in this case, literally picking part of the installation? This element of choice inspired the title of Rehberger’s project at the UC Berkeley Art Museum: *Sunny-side up*. As the artist explains, **“It expresses the way I like to look at art. Viewers have a choice about how they want to see something. They choose their perspective much the same way as they choose their eggs: sunny-side up or down.”**¹

Rehberger is redefining artistic production by taking a diminished role in its realization and moving increasingly toward using other people’s suggestions.² As Martin Pesch wrote in *Frieze*, “Rehberger is not an artist intent on his own particular mode of expression, but rather a person who, through his art, wants to understand more about the structures and relations in which he works.”³ The distance between the artist and his subject or product is a fundamental issue, as is apparent in several past projects: the museum attendants at the Städtisches Museum Abteiberg in Mönchengladbach knitted sweaters from patterns created by Rehberger; the guards at the 1997 Venice Biennale wore underwear designed by the artist; and artisans in Cameroon were hired to build classic European Modernist chairs according to his sketches.



Rehberger ensures an expanded, perhaps even universal interpretation by asking others to participate in his creations. He subverts notions of authorship and creative genius. Moreover, Rehberger knows that subtle changes to received structures of our cultural environment engender visually poetic resonances.⁴ He cleverly plays with the familiar and the known to reactivate public interest in things previously deemed banal: furniture, public architecture, underwear, and food.

Tobias Rehberger is part of a group of young, predominantly male artists engaged in redefining the roles of artist, curator, and spectator in contemporary art. Rehberger, Jorge Pardo, and Rirkrit Tiravanija all create conceptual works that combine function with aesthetics and rely on viewer participation. The artist needs the public to activate the object or installation. Pardo designed tables, chairs, and lamps for museum visitors’ use in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen cafe in Rotterdam. Tiravanija has cooked curry for guests at several of his openings. And at the Portikus Museum in Frankfurt Rehberger asked visitors to the two shows that preceded his own for their suggestions on how to improve their museum experience. These projects challenge not only the viewer, by encouraging what had previously been seen as a transgression—touching, sitting on, and even eating works of art—but also the curator. Tiravanija is not there to cook every day; the recipe is left for the curator to remake. For *Sunny-side up*, Rehberger sent a basic architectural rendering and a list of desired plants. My colleagues and I were then responsible for such atypical curatorial duties as contracting engineers, collaborating with gardeners, and soliciting growers. In this way, Rehberger is able to include the curator in the revelation and education inherent in his project.

For *Sunny-side up*, Tobias Rehberger has designed three fried-egg-shaped planters for the terraces of the UC Berkeley Art Museum. These nontraditional gardens form small, semiprivate spaces in which visitors can gather, sit or

Tobias Rehberger, *Within view of seeing (perspectives and the Prouvé)*, 1998, installation view, Manifesta 2, Luxembourg. Photo: Roman Mensing



recline on beds of grass, snack on fruits, vegetables, and herbs planned by the artist to create delectable combinations, and smell flowers. Various high-growing plants—bamboo, corn, and sunflowers—shield participants from view. Rehberger is creating areas of private space (the planters) in a larger public space (the balconies of the museum). The sense of privacy, however, can also be deceptive. As viewers ascend the terraces to engage with different planters, they will be able to see into those on lower levels. The artist is posing questions regarding ownership of space. Knowing that the museum is a public institution supported by private funds, he asks both how public and how private is the space of the museum. As a means of testing these perhaps arbitrary constructs, he encourages people to experience basic human needs usually fulfilled in private in the public space of the institution. Thus people witness each other’s satisfaction. The effort toward reestablishing a physical and visceral connection between people is particularly relevant now as the impact of technology is often privileging virtual over physical interaction.

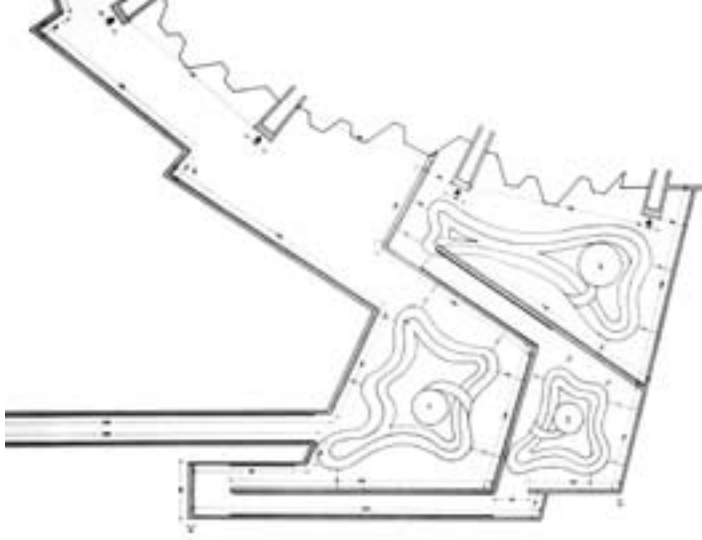
Central to *Sunny-side up* is the notion of expanding and altering perspectives. The design of the planters reflects the austere geometry of the museum; as with the building what viewers are able to see alters dramatically as they shift the position of their bodies. Furthermore, the planters are placed on the terraces, normally unused spaces of the museum. So, the artist is attempting to fill a “blackhole” with human contact. Rehberger intends the viewer to experience a gap that forces a decision about what perspective one *wants* to take on the installation; another sensation will arise from standing in front of the installation and not really being sure what one *can* or *cannot* do. Questions posed by this project can inform how one approaches any artwork, as well as facilitate a shift in the way that people see and think about the hierarchies of culture: What is the relationship between plants as landscape and plants as art?

Tobias Rehberger, *Peué Seé e Faágck Sunday Paáe*, installation view, Kölnischer Kunstverein. Courtesy of neugerriemschneider, Berlin.



Rehberger's use of chance—an element that pervades the installation, from the successful growth of the plants to the interactions of people inside of the planters—of course has art-historical precedents dating back to Dada and Surrealism. Chance was formalized as an art medium in the late 1960s and 1970s with Allan Kaprow's Happenings, in which he assembled all the elements—people, objects, music, and text—and the resulting creation happened at will, as well as with John Cage's works made in relation to consulting the I-Ching. The development of installation and conceptual art, also in the 1960s, introduced the use of many alternative materials. In the "land (or earth) art" movement, soil, vegetation, and landscape were employed in an attempt to renew art's relationship to nature. Rehberger, in contrast, is more interested in imposing a decorative and functional order. His project also references abstract painting since, when seen from above, the planters create fields of abstract color. But he states that it is the overlapping play of perspectives that interests him more than the painterly effects. Rehberger employs familiar means and methods in spite of, rather than because of, the historical associations. They are utilized as yet another tool toward his ultimate goal: transformation—of the eye, the mind, and the consciousness of perception itself.

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson
Phyllis Wattis MATRIX Curator



Tobias Rehberger was born June 2, 1966, in Esslingen, Germany. Rehberger studied with Thomas Bayrle and Martin Kippenberger at the Academy of Fine Art, Frankfurt, where he received a Masters of Fine Art. Currently the artist lives in Frankfurt and Berlin, Germany. Tobias Rehberger/MATRIX 180 *Sunny-side up* is his first one-person museum exhibition in North America.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

1999
"Holiday-Weekend-Leisure Time-Wombs," Galerie Micheline Sz wajcer, Antwerp, Belgium
"Fragments of Their Pleasant Spaces (In My Fashionable Version)," Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt, Germany
"Standard Rad, Ltd.," Transmission Gallery, Glasgow, Scotland
"Night prowler," De Vleeshal, Middelburg, The Netherlands

1998
Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland
Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden
"Roommade," Office Tower Manhattan Center, Brussels, Belgium
"Waiting Room—also?" Intervention 13, Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany

1997
"Brancusi," neugerriemschneider, Berlin, Germany
Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, NY
Galerie Tre, Stockholm, Sweden

1996
"Peué Seé e Faágck Sunday Paée," Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, Germany
"Suggestions from the Visitors of the Shows #74 and #75," Portikus, Frankfurt, Germany

1995
"Canceled Projects," Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany
"Nine Sculptures," Produzentengalerie, Raum für Kunst, Hamburg, Germany
"Wo Man is Gout Loogy Luckie," Hammelehle + Ahrens, Stuttgart, Germany

Selected Group Exhibitions

1999
"Les Deux Saules Pleurers/Cube Without a Corner-Apparatus," Kunst-Werke, Berlin, Germany
"amAzonas Artbooks," Villa Minimo, Hannover, Germany
"Ain't Ordinarily So," curated by Daniel Birnbaum, Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York, NY
"Who, if not we?" curated by Yilmaz Dziewior, Elizabeth Cherry Contemporary Art, Tucson, AZ
"Further Fantasy," curated by Francesco Bonami, Galleria Giò Marconi, Italy

Architectural rendering of *Sunny-side up* on the museum terraces



1998
"Dad's Art," neugerriemschneider, Berlin, Germany
"Fuori Uso '98," Associazione Culturale Arte Nova, Pescara, Italy
"Art for Parliamentary Buildings," Deutscher Bundestag, Berlin, Germany
"Art on paper on the runway," Guggenheim Museum, Berlin, Germany
"Atmosphäre (ARKIPELAG)," Stockholm, Sweden
"Manifesta 2," Luxembourg
"Round About Waves," curated by Adam Szymczyk, Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, Poland

1997
"Art..Work. . From the Collection," Southwest LB, Stuttgart, Germany
"Heaven," P.S.I., New York, NY
"Beyond the Auratic Object," Philomene Magers, Cologne, Germany
"Time Out," Kunsthalle, Nürnberg, Germany
"Truce: Echoes of Art in an Age of Endless Conclusions," Site Santa Fe, Santa Fe, NM
"Assuming Positions," Institute of Contemporary Art, London, United Kingdom
"Future-Present-Past," Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
"Rooms with a View: Environments for Video," Guggenheim Museum, SoHo, NY

Selected Bibliography

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Buchloh, Benjamin. "Sculpture Projects in Münster," *Artforum*, September 1997, pp. 115-117.
Codrington, Andrea. "Public Eye: Furniture in Art," *The New York Times*, January 15, 1998, p. F2.
Decter, Joshua. "Tobias Rehberger," *Artforum*, February 1998, pp. 93-94.
Dziewior, Yilmaz. "Openings: Tobias Rehberger," *Artforum*, January 1997, pp. 74-75.
Freedman, Carl. "Things in Proportion," *Frieze*, March/April 1997, pp. 66-69.
Haye, Christian. "Plays well with others...[Part Two]," *Dutch*, Spring 1999.
Hixson, Kathryn. "Tobias Rehberger," *New Art Examiner*, March 1998, p. 55.
Lind, Maria. "Space after culture and experience space," *Parkett* 54, 1999, pp. 186-190.
"Manifesta 2 - In Photographs," *Kunstforum*, October-November 1998, pp. 316-353.
Pesch, Martin. "Tobias Rehberger," *Frieze*, July-August 1996, pp. 69-70.
Philips, Christopher. "Art for an Unfinished City," *Art in America*, January 1999, pp. 62-69.
Posca, Claudia. "Manifesta in Luxembourg," *Kunstforum*, October-November 1998, pp. 311-315.
Schneider, Christiane. "Ouverture: Tobias Rehberger," *Flash Art*, Summer 1997, p. 129.
Smith, Roberta. "Stephen Prina & Tobias Rehberger," *The New York Times*, August 7, 1998, p. E36.
Smolik, Noemi. "Tobias Rehberger," *Kunstforum*, July-August 1999, pp. 399-400.

Selected Bibliography by Tobias Rehberger

Tobias Rehberger, *Sunny-side up*, 1999, installation in progress. Photo: Ben Blackwell



Rehberger, Tobias. "A Thousand Words," *Artforum*, November 1998, pp. 100-101.

PLEASE NOTE:

Tobias Rehberger will give an artist's talk on Sunday, August 29, 1999, at 3 p.m.

Lawrence Weschler will present a lecture, "The Perception of Wonder, The Wonder of Perception," on Thursday, September 17, 1999, at 7 p.m.

Work in MATRIX

Sunny-side up, 1999. Wood planters and assorted plants. Courtesy of neugerriemschneider, Berlin, and Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York.

The curator would like to acknowledge the extraordinary work of Stephanie Cannizzo, Curatorial Assistant, on the project coordination, and Barney Bailey, Collections Manager, on the exhibition design. Their efforts, along with those of Christopher Jacobson, were essential to the successful realization of this project.

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cover: Bamboo grove, Bamboo Giant, Aptos, California
above: Corn growing for *Sunny-side up*, College of Natural Resources, UC Berkeley. Photo: Ben Blackwell

¹ Conversation between Tobias Rehberger and the author in the artist's office in Frankfurt, June 15, 1999.

² Christiane Schneider, "Ouverture: Tobias Rehberger," *Flash Art*, Summer 1997, p. 129.

³ Martin Pesch, "Tobias Rehberger," *Frieze*, July-August 1996, p. 69.

⁴ Joshua Decter, "Tobias Rehberger," *Artforum*, February 1998, p. 93.