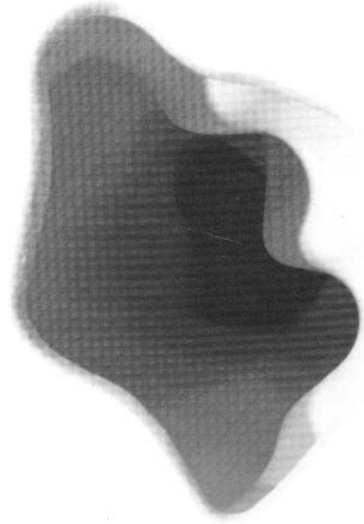


front and back cover
Untitled, 1998, installation detail
plaster figurine, 3.5"x 3.5"x 8.5"

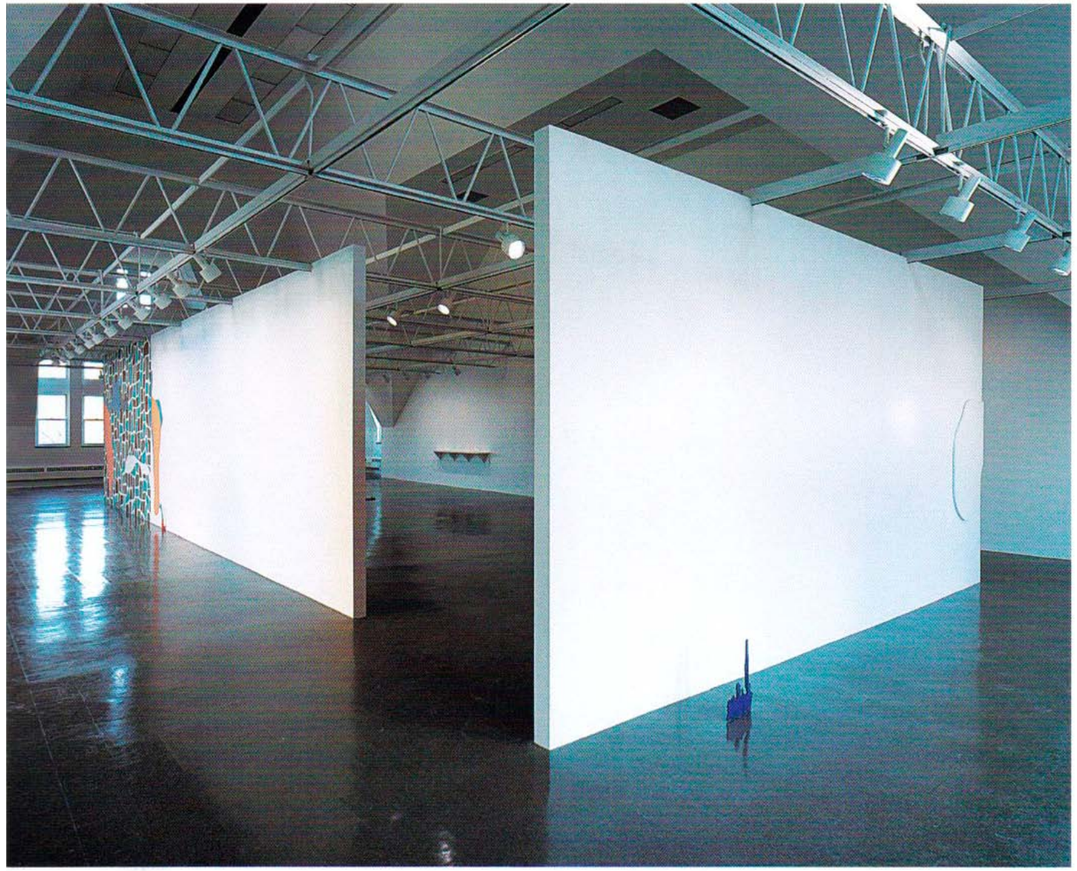
Arturo Herrera

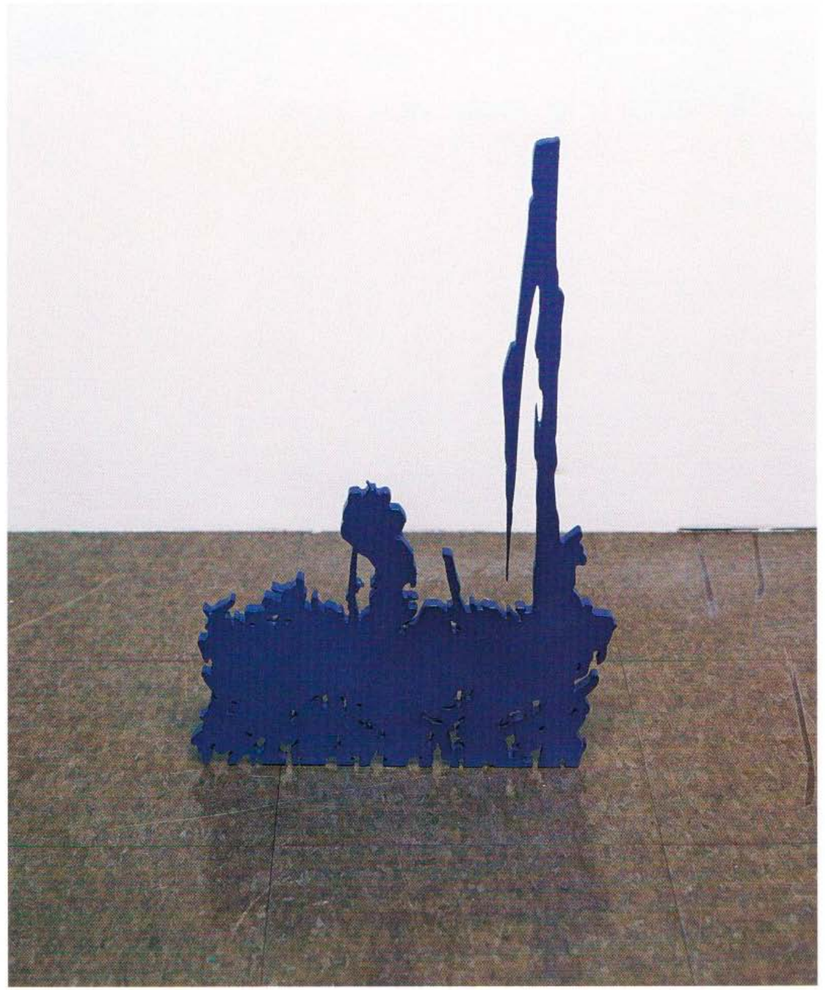
January 11–February 22, 1998

The Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago

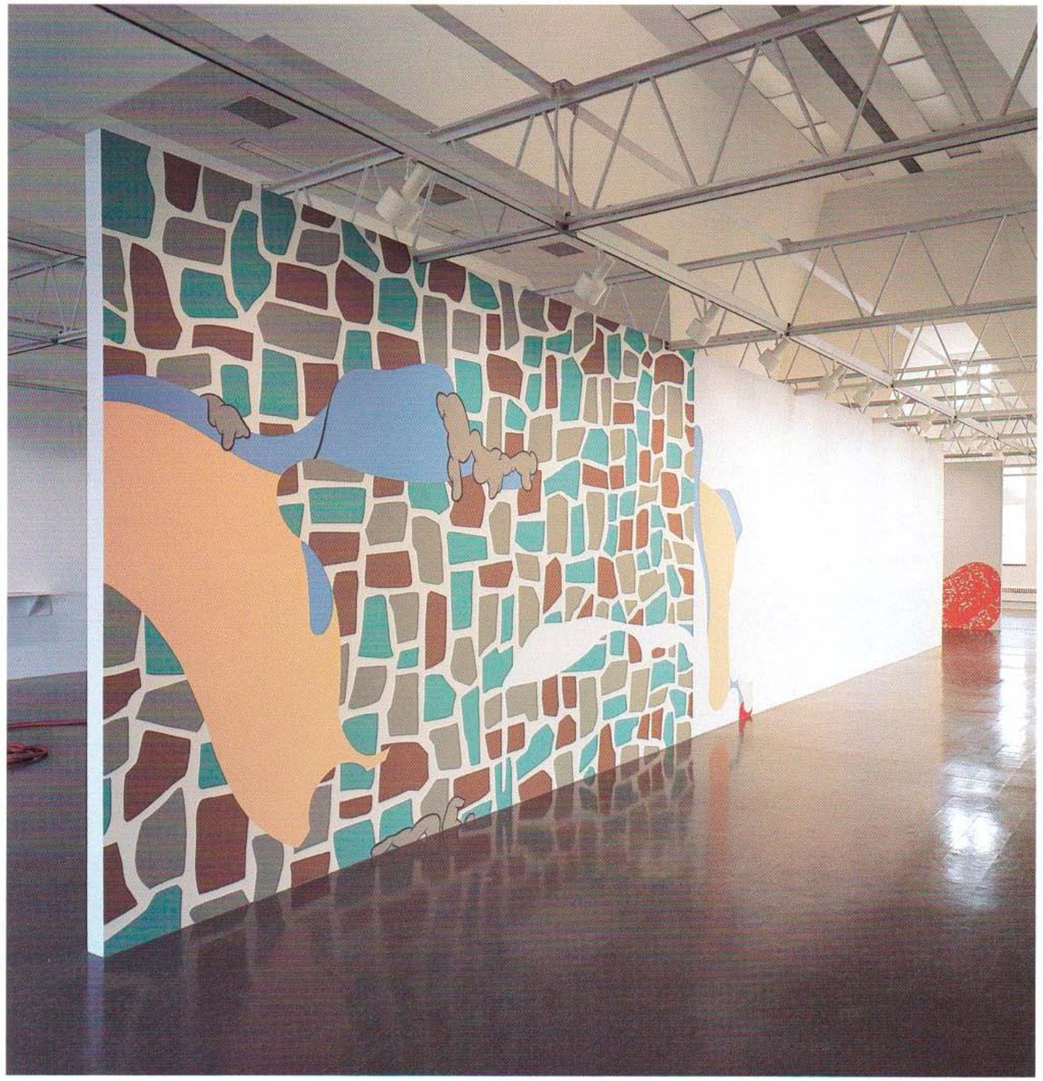
Forty Winks, 1998
wall painting
latex paint, 10' x 20'

Untitled, 1998
wall-mounted sculpture
enamel on MDF, 48" x 32" x .75"

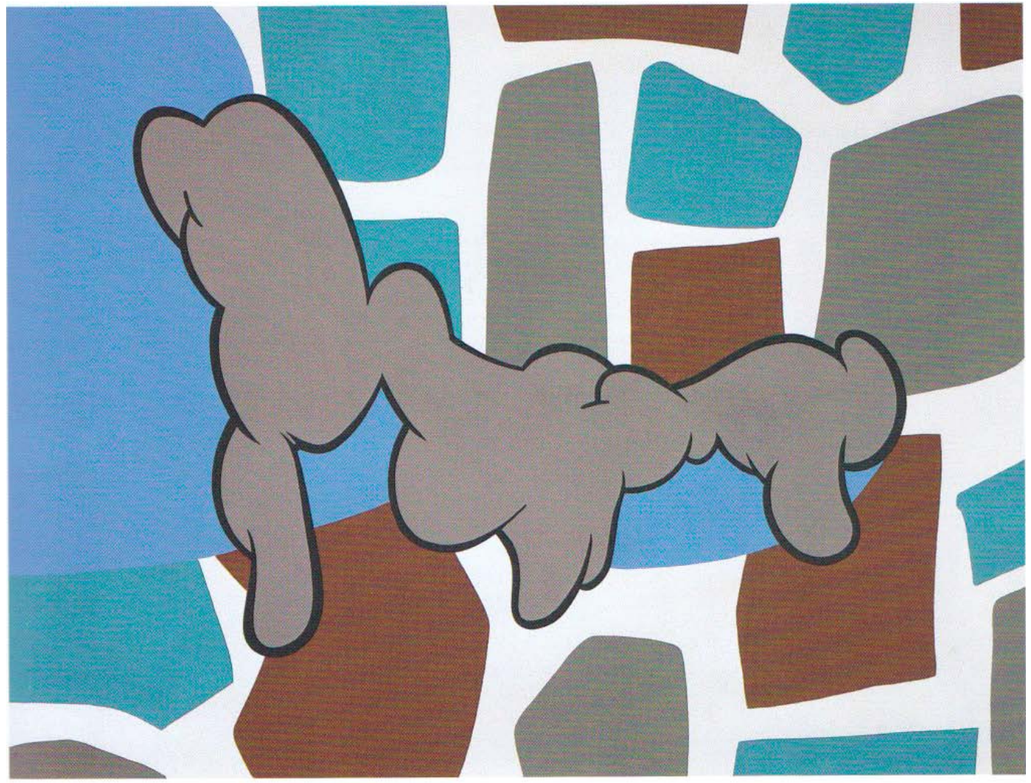


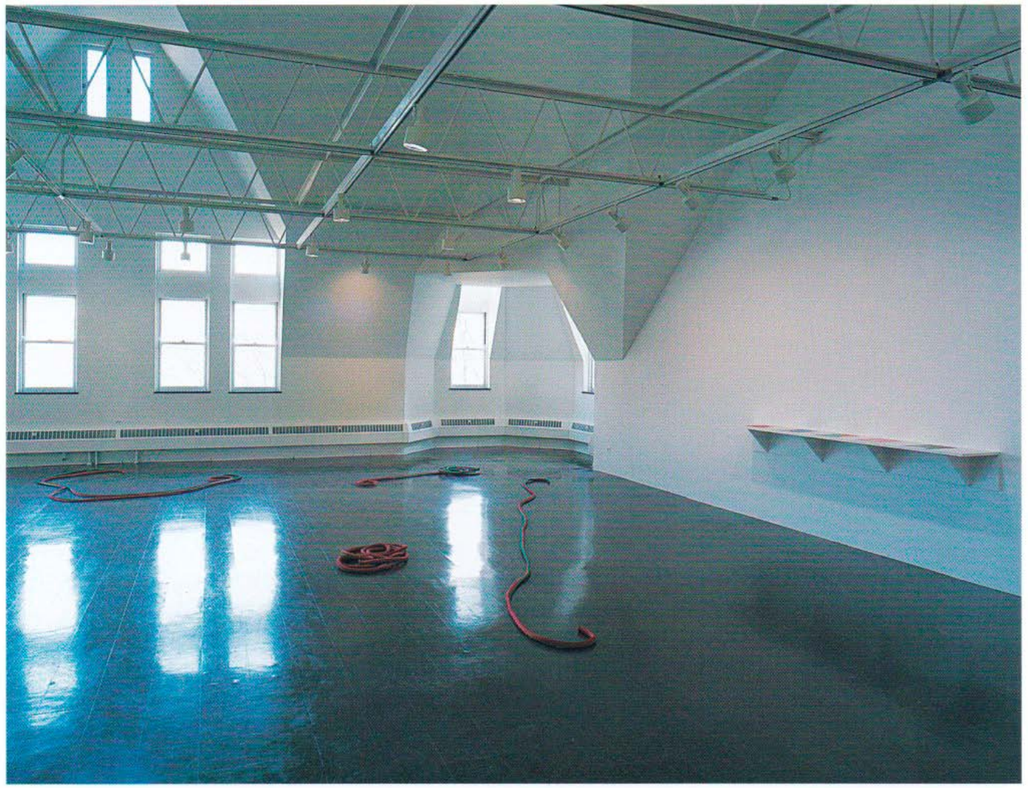


***Untitled*, 1998**
enamel on wood, 16"x10"x.25"



Untitled, 1998
wall installation (mural and plaster figurines)
latex paint and plaster, 10'x 48'





Untitled, 1998
extruded rubber, variable dimensions

Acknowledgements

It is with great pride that The Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago presents the work of Arturo Herrera. The Society has always championed ideas in art, a predisposition which has led to an ongoing interest in conceptual and minimalist practices. It is in Herrera's work that we are given the privilege of seeing these practices configured to signify the unconscious as it is manifested in the world adults construct for children.

Collage is central to Herrera's artistic practice. Over the past two years, while developing his exhibition for The Renaissance Society, Herrera produced approximately 50 collages. We are extremely grateful to The Art Institute of Chicago for their enthusiasm in exhibiting this body of work. Between the subliminal, minimal aesthetic he chose for his exhibition at The Society and the more direct, overtly disturbing quality of his collages, Herrera's investigation into the unconscious can now be appreciated in its entirety. At The Renaissance Society, thanks are extended to Hamza Walker, Director of Education; Lori Bartman, Director of Development; Patricia Scott, Office Manager/Bookkeeper; Scott Short, Preparator and Registrar; Michael Bobendrier, Noelle Delage, and Lisa Meyerowitz, Work/Study Assistants. At The Art Institute of Chicago my thanks are extended to James N. Wood, Director and President; Douglas Druick, Prince Trust Curator of Prints and Drawings, Searle Curator of European Painting; Mark Pascale, Assistant Curator of Prints and Drawings; Raymond Hernández-Durán, MacArthur Fellow in the Department of Prints and Drawings; and Mary Solt, Museum Registrar.

The Renaissance Society's portion of this exhibition has been made possible through generous support from Carlos and Rosa de la Cruz, The Lannan Foundation, and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Additional support has been received from The CityArts Program of The Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, a municipal agency; The Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; and our membership. Indirect support has been received from the Institute of Museum Services, a federal agency offering general operating support to the nation's museums.

I would especially like to acknowledge Lewis and Susan Manilow for their generous support of this publication. This catalogue has also been made possible by The Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation, The Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation, and the Getty Grant Program. Their support is crucial to our ability to document and contextualize the art of our time. The Society is particularly indebted to Maria Tatar and Neville Wakefield whose essays bring a wealth of invaluable insights to Herrera's work. This publication was designed by Philip Soo; Jean Fulton provided careful editorial assistance; and Tom van Eynde photographed the installation at The Society. We thank them for their tireless patience. I would also like to thank Brent Sikkema and Michael Jenkins of Wooster Gardens for their cooperation in this project.

Finally, our thanks to Arturo Herrera, whose work is beautiful both intellectually and visually. In an age when amusement parks tend to focus increasingly on ever greater ways to whirl and twirl the body, the psyche has become a neglected stepchild. Thanks to Herrera, the amusement park has found its psychological equivalent in an installation that attends to the forbidden wish.

Susanne Ghez
Director

***Untitled*, 1997**
silver gelatin print, 16"x 20"

Mix Not Match Not

NEVILLE WAKEFIELD

It is a photograph of nothing much, a sliver of forest, a bucolic scene from the edge of town. The image is neither spectacular nor banal. Taken from a park near the artist's home in Chicago, it might be a beatific homage to a natural order that fringes the city: to the purloined pleasure of the stroll, the reflective poetics of the promenade, perhaps a lost paradise of innocent pleasures once conducted in public spaces. It is a beautifully printed photograph. The grisaille tones of the silver gelatin stand in stark contrast to the Fischer-Price palette of the exhibition's surrounding works. Coming upon this untitled work is like finding an Anselm Adams print hanging casually at a Toys-R-Us. But the flare of reflected light that opens the middle ground of the image into the blind of an unseen horizon suggests a natural order tainted by artificiality. The familiarity that this photograph presumes is short-circuited, as if the medium, tantalized by its own suggestion of meaning, has become Narcissus, absorbed in its capacity for self-reflection. Photo and forest are synonymous, a labyrinthine architecture of shadows and reflected realities. Both play with the symbolic currency of light and darkness for which Herrera's untitled image merely equivocates a rate of exchange. To this uncertain maze of possibilities and vanishing paths, Herrera adds and intensifies the reflective chicanery. As it turns out, in order to create this image, Herrera held a mirror to the camera, refracting the bright gape of the horizon line into the camera's internal mirror. We are positioned literally in the jaws of dilemma—caught between the pictorial and symbolic, an abstract grimace of blazing light and closing darkness.

Perhaps it is the context. This untitled image is after all the sole representational statement in the abstracted landscape of Herrera's installation. One's view of the photograph is often partial, occluded by a billowing abstract wall drawing to one side and an enigmatically punctured white plane to the other. The image, which promises the only moment of representational traction within the carefully choreographed ambiguity, insists on sliding away. Like the space beyond the tree line, these obstructed views keep the photograph in a state of suspended suggestion, shuttling constantly between itself and its surroundings, glimpsed but not seen. Its behavior might be that of Alice's looking-glass—a sink into which reflections are poured only to repool on the other side.

Herrera's forest marks a symbolic division, the serration of nature from nurture, the transitional space between the urban and the sylvan, the conscious and unconscious. The rational light of the cosmos fails to penetrate, leaving in its absence a darker, phobic space. Yet it is both closed and open at the same time. The forest on which it is based exists as an infinitely repeatable fragment whose totality can never be fully perceived. We enter its space aware of the anxiety of penetrating deeper and deeper into a limitless world—its mystery indefinitely prolonged beyond the veil of tree trunks, leaves, and nightmare greens. The view beyond is withheld and our perception of the forest as a psycho-physical space is based on an act of anthropomorphizing. The photograph is grafted onto the imagination where its reach is quickly extended into the psyche. The forest reverts back to an oneiric space, pivoting on an invisible line between daydream and nightmare.

NEVILLE WAKEFIELD

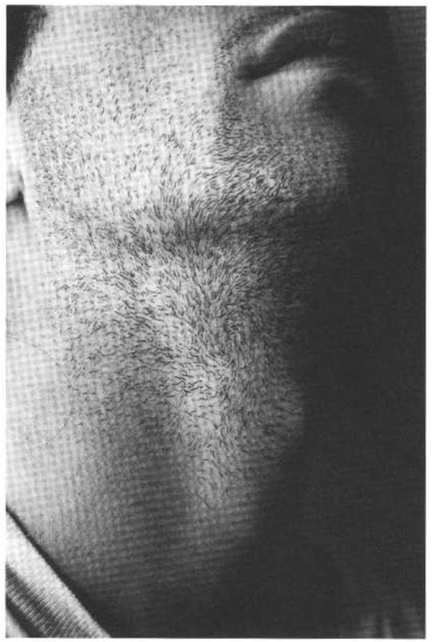
As a conceptual hinge, Herrera's use of photography is one element in what Michel Foucault describes as a heterotopic environment, a space capable of accommodating shifting senses of place and time. "Fragments of a large number of orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry. . . . [In] such a state, things are 'laid,' 'placed,' 'arranged' in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a common locus beneath them. . . Heterotopias are disturbing probably because they secretly undermine language."[1] Like Foucault's heterotopia, everything in Herrera's installation is contingent and relational. Nothing is given. Elements as disparate as site-specific wall paintings, free-standing cutouts, prints, photographs and floor-strewn ready-mades are brought together in a single, unstable space in which fear of disorientation and loss come again as giddy pleasure. Order is fragmented into a series of actions and arrangements that refuse narrative closure. Overwhelmed by the wealth of interpretative possibility, we have nowhere to turn but ourselves, no judgments to trust but those that are wholly contingent on our own presence as viewers.

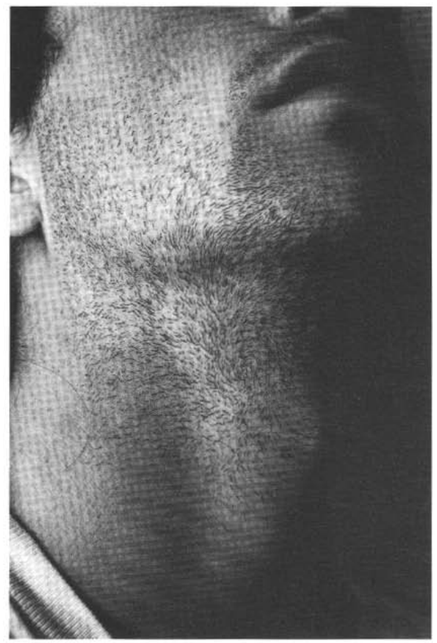
As to when the formal becomes the psychological, Herrera refuses to answer on our behalf. By placing this photograph in a predominately abstract installation, Herrera subverts the power of photography to signify reality in a psychologically uncomplicated manner. The photograph in this sense stands in for much of Herrera's work. All of Herrera's photographic works—the dispersions, the tight close-up of a razor-stubbled chin and jaw, or the pair of unidentified orifices—are seductively ambiguous. The paired cavities in an untitled photograph from 1996 might be nostrils separated by the overexposed bridge of the septum. Openings to the body, like those to the mind, become reversible constructs as these dark voids signify unidentified interior spaces leading to senses that forever remain a mystery. This image belongs to an established vocabulary of cropped, "accidental" biomorphic forms, which is a recurring feature of Herrera's work.

In a previous site-specific wall painting, *Tale,* a carnival of bulbous interconnected protuberances perform an unbridled scatological dance whose associations range from the angelic to kitsch, from putti to party balloon-twisting. The enclosed arabesques of the wall paintings sometimes evoke the surrealist origins of American Action Painting—like Arshile Gorky put through a blender. The mutant cartoon forms hover around the edges of recognition without ever quite coming within its grasp. The torrent of undulating shape culminates in an uncontained proliferation, as if Herrera has eviscerated the cuddly pleasures of cartoon innocence to find signifiers of thwarted sexual tension, a deliciously wry comment on the Freudian vulgarization that finds a penis in ever protuberance and a vagina in every cavity. The body of *Forty Winks*, a tangerine-flecked thought bubble that slowly ascends across a free-standing wall, might be a fragment excised from the dream of an REM sleeper to which the title perhaps refers. The violence with which it abruptly terminates suggests a scale unbounded by the cozy dimensions of the wall on which it is drawn. Shifting easily between the micro and macro, it could represent a carcinogenic dye portrait or the spill of a giant incendiary dream, in which case, the bubbly forms may be the benign outpourings of a child asleep, dreaming a bodily recollection, a polymorphic world of amniotic comfort.

The trail of abstraction in Herrera's work leads not to the palace of Platonic wisdom but back to the body of the beholder—a site we know to be as culturally inscribed by Walt Disney as it is by Sigmund Freud. Any attempt to politicize the sacred domain of childhood threatens to introduce perversity where happiness and fantasy once reigned. Innocence, supposedly the sacrosanct domain of the child,

1. Quoted in Brain McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 44. See also Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" Diacritics 16 No. 1 (1986)





The Circular Ruins, 1995
silver gelatin prints, 4" x 6" each

***Untitled*, 1998**
silkscreen on paper, 40"x 55"

is here repackaged as the temptation of the adult, a temptation reiterated in the fleshy apple/eraser readymade. The sculpture is a charming but nonetheless potent symbol of the fall from grace and expulsion from paradise, calling forth our culpability and complicity as adults in the fantasy of a childhood Eden. The child in Herrera's garden of innocence, however, is the guilt-free adult looking back at himself in a cycle of narcissism that allows him to nostalgically appropriate the "natural disposition" of the child in order to conceal his fall from grace. Having feasted on the apple, the adult recreates it ad infinitum in bright nursery colors, as if to erase the impression of his own indulgence. Children become the pretext and means for self-gratification within the spectacle of the adult dream.

However, when the illusion that ties the adult vision to the fabricated utopia of the childish imagination is severed without warning, we might find Donald Duck's beak in Cinderella's spleen or Jiminy Cricket's head up Pluto's ass. In Herrera's fantasyland, distinctions between child and adult, animal and human, as well as animal and animal are elided. Collage permits, if not invites, such "unnatural" combinations, producing a monstrosity born of nature gone awry. Herrera exposes nature as the space of differentiation, the space between the imagination of the child and that of the adult, the space between genders and species, between people and things. It is precisely this government of natural law that prevents the grafting of the vulgar, phallic red nose onto the nook of a one-armed chair. Animal traits in comics may provide the characters with a façade of innocence, but in Herrera's cosmology they speak of the never-ending state of undifferentiated becoming—the refusal to indulge in the stable subject positions that segregate the production of meaning from the consumption of meaning.

2. Marquis de Sade
The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings
(New York: Random House, 1966), p. 56

3. Leviticus XIX: 19

Tampering with the laws of nature in this sense becomes a Sadean exercise. In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, de Sade's most extended description of the orgiastic universe, the taboo of boundary—that between brother and sister, parent and child—is systematically transgressed. In a passage that might read as a description of the exhibition's larger, more complex wall installation, de Sade writes; "All will be higgledy-piggledy, all will wallow on the flagstones, on the earth, and, like animals, will interchange, will mix, will commit incest, adultery and sodomy."[2] Biomorphic painting, popular culture, biology, mute space, conceptual practice, erotogenic zones and functions are the syllables comprising Herrera's vocabulary. Collage, which is mixture once removed, goes against nature, hybridizing reality in defiance of the laws of segregation, violating Leviticus' Biblical injunction, "Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with diverse kind; thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed; neither shall a garment mingled of linen and wool come upon thee."[3] Herrera exploits the impossible. Only here, in the boundless aesthetic space of experience, can the strictures of the world be truly unraveled. Only here can a smile become a grimace, an inviting cavity a Disney projection, childhood play adult perversion.

For all their Spartan economy, Herrera's installations are highly operatic. Herrera shares with artists as diverse as James Lee Byars, Felix Gonzales Torres, and Gabriel Orozco a sense of the reduced gesture or intervention calibrated in terms of deflection rather than effect. Discrete elements and objects effect subtle indiscretions, shifting the psycho-spatial pressures of the environment barometrically—in ways that can be felt before they are seen. This absence of identifiable content initially makes for an opacity at odds with the precisionist choreography of placement and the careful mapping of visual incident. What was initially mistaken for austerity now reads as formal impurity—rampant and contagious. The different elements cross-pollinate and the residue of Sadean transgression lingers in the metalanguage of the installation. At few points can a

single work be isolated from the psychic charge of its neighbors. This sets up a series of checks and contaminations between different works and different media. Just as Herrera's cropping of biomorphic forms is a radical introduction of absence, the finely orchestrated placement of the objects delivers the viewer to the spaces in between—liminal areas in which the behavior and misbehavior of fragments provide a metaphor for subjectivity held not in the resolved state of being but of becoming. In the face of such continuous dislocation, a relational wholeness cannot be maintained and the mirror Herrera holds to subjectivity offers no singular reflection.

According to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic model, the self is never indigenous in the sense of belonging to basic instincts or biological needs, but always a function of a reflected other. He describes the system of abstract differentiation as belonging to the "mirror phase," a phase that occurs twice during the child's development, first when the child becomes aware of his or her own image in the mirror, and later with the acquisition of language. The child's initial experience of the self is open-ended, exploratory and unfocused, corresponding to the polymorphously perverse stage of its sexual development. But at the moment of self-recognition—the first mirror phase—the child recuperates the totality of his or her body in an image to gradually become conscious of him- or herself as an entity separated from the surrounding world—from the continuity between the child, the maternal breast, and its own excrement. The narcissistic fascination with the image is due to what Lacan terms "prematurity of birth" or "primordial discord" and becomes a compensatory device for the actual disunity and incoherence of the self experienced by the child:

> The mirror stage is interesting in that it manifests the affective dynamism by which the subject originally identifies himself with the Gestalt of his own body: in relation to the still very profound lack of coordination of his own motility, it represents an ideal unity, a salutary imago; it is invested with all the original distress resulting from the child's interorganic and relational discordance.[4]

Herrera's art is an invitation to reexperience a relational discordance. No single element, position or view is capable of restoring the reflective totality of language or image. Lacking the drama that would facilitate a spatial identification of the self in relation to its reflection, Herrera's installation follows the boundaries of inside and outside while observing neither. The fragmented phantasm of the pre-narcissistic or "morselated body" is thus constituted as a reflection that never takes form: the extruded eraser makes sense only in the cross-sectional view which its uncut form withholds; collage suggests a continuation the blade denies; the multiple reflections of the photograph offer neither fear nor reassurance but only the indeterminate area of the in-between. In this limbo, Herrera collapses fear and anxiety, leading us from the illusory Eden of differentiation into the darker spaces of the polymorphously perverse where no harm is done in denying aesthetic revelations their certainty. •

4. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* trans. Alan Sheridan, (Tavistock: 1977), p. 12

***Untitled*, 1998**
extruded rubber, 1"x 20'x 1" each

***Untitled*, 1998**
collage, 9"x12"

Arturo Herrera's Fabulous Monsters

MARIA TATAR

Every evening, Mrs. Darling of James Barrie's *Peter Pan* engages in the supremely maternal activity of tidying up her children's minds. An orthodox Freudian *avant la lettre*, she polices the consciousness of the children and engages the process of repression to banish naughty thoughts and evil passions.

> It is the nightly custom of every good mother after her children are asleep to rummage in their minds and put things straight for next morning, repacking into their proper places the many articles that have wandered during the day. If you could keep awake (but of course you can't) you would see your own mother doing this, and you would find it interesting to watch her. It is quite like tidying up drawers. You would see her on her knees, I expect, lingering humorously over some of your contents. . . When you wake in the morning, the naughtiness and evil passions with which you went to bed have been folded up small and placed at the bottom of your mind; and on the top, beautifully aired, are spread out your prettier thoughts, ready for you to put on.[1]

Adults are forever trying to tidy up after children, to secure order, beauty, and purity where there is anarchy, clutter, and dirt. But in our passionate desire to civilize the child and to tame its unruly urges, we seldom stop to consider the mind of the child as a source of undomesticated inventive energy. Entry into the world of law, order, sublimation, and subordination has always implied loss (a fall from grace, loss of innocence, expulsion from paradise), yet we rarely make the effort to scrutinize the disorderly space of the child's imagination without simultaneously undertaking the effort to clean it up.

Walter Benjamin, who loathed the tidy false consciousness of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie and would have especially detested Mrs. Darling's efforts, made it a life project to reclaim the "messiness" of the child's imagination and to validate its creative energy, cognitive power, and revolutionary vector. By contrast to Barrie's Mrs. Darling, he believed that the child's bureau drawers (in this case the *real* bureau drawers rather than the metaphorical ones of the mind) must become "arsenal and zoo, crime museum and crypt." For Benjamin, "'to tidy up' would be to demolish an edifice full of prickly chestnuts that are spiky clubs, tin foil that is hoarded silver, bricks that are coffins, cacti that are totem poles, and copper pennies that are shields."[2] The child invests the found objects of everyday life with a symbolic value that stands in no relation whatsoever to bourgeois use-value. More important, the treasures hoarded in drawers are randomly drawn together to constitute a unique collection that serves as the point of departure for engaging in play, in an associative game where the child brings the power of imagination to bear on the world of material and matter.

Cultural debris, without monetary worth and lacking use-value, fascinates children. Children take what has been discarded and, as Benjamin further observes, "bring together, in the artifacts produced in play, materials of widely differing kinds in a new intuitive relationship."[3] In a creative act of mimesis, the child establishes startling new relationships and

1. J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan* (New York: Signet, 1987), pp. 5–6.

2. "One Way Street," in Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: NLB, 1979), p. 74.

3. Ibid., p. 53.

fosters a cognitive mode that has not hardened into the predictable paths of adult thinking. Through the art of improvisation, the unforeseen materializes, and the child, rather than expressing itself through things, expresses things through itself.[4]

"Stay within the lines!" is one of the first imperatives issued to children testing their creative power with crayons and coloring books, those first artistic tools put into children's hands. After looking at Arturo Herrera's collages, it is with more than a touch of mortification that parents will recall the intense pride felt while observing the growing compliance of a child with that imperative. A glance at Herrera's collages reveals just why it is so difficult for parents to part with those early coloring books, the ones that once seemed to reflect lack of skill and coordination but now suddenly reveal creative impulses, unimpeded by the rule dictated by adults.

To look at Herrera's collages is to open a door into our childhood memories, to recall how the starkly outlined figures of coloring books invited us to engage with them by applying the crayon and trying to stay within the lines, connect the dots, or cut along the lines. But Herrera does not merely try to invoke nostalgia for the innocent pleasures of childhood. What we see in the collages is also the transgressive energy of the adult artist at work, engaged in an act of creative improvisation that releases new possibilities as it plays with cultural debris. There is Snow White, her signature coiffure superimposed on one of those mice (from Disney's *Cinderella*?), with Peter Rabbit superimposed, in turn, on her neck. Is she part of the bait or has she too been caught in the trap? Is that Thumper superimposed on a bird's nest resting on branches that look eerily like drumsticks? What is in that hollow log being inspected by a duck outfitted in a sailor suit and monitored by the ghostly presence of a colossal Beatrix Potter rabbit? Who can fail to be disturbed by the disorderly force of these scenes, by their resolute resistance to romanticizing the image repertoire of childhood memories and by their insistence on making a mess of even that tidiest of Disney's cinematic creations: Snow White?

While the transgressive energy of Herrera's collages is of a different order from that of the child, it uncannily captures both the disruptive and creative forces that we have all witnessed in children at play. "If they are fit and well," the poet Paul Valéry observed, "children are absolute *monsters* of activity. . . tearing up, breaking up, building, they're always at it."[5] Rather than accepting the given meaning of things and embracing the directives issued by adults for constructive behavior, the "fit and well" child will lay hold of objects, tear them apart, dismantle them, and put them in new, unexpected relationships and contexts. For that child, the logic of an axe as an extension of Snow White's arm is self-evident, the smile of Goofy that constitutes a boy's torso remains splendidly unproblematic, and the airplane propeller emerging from Geppetto's neck is quite anatomically correct.

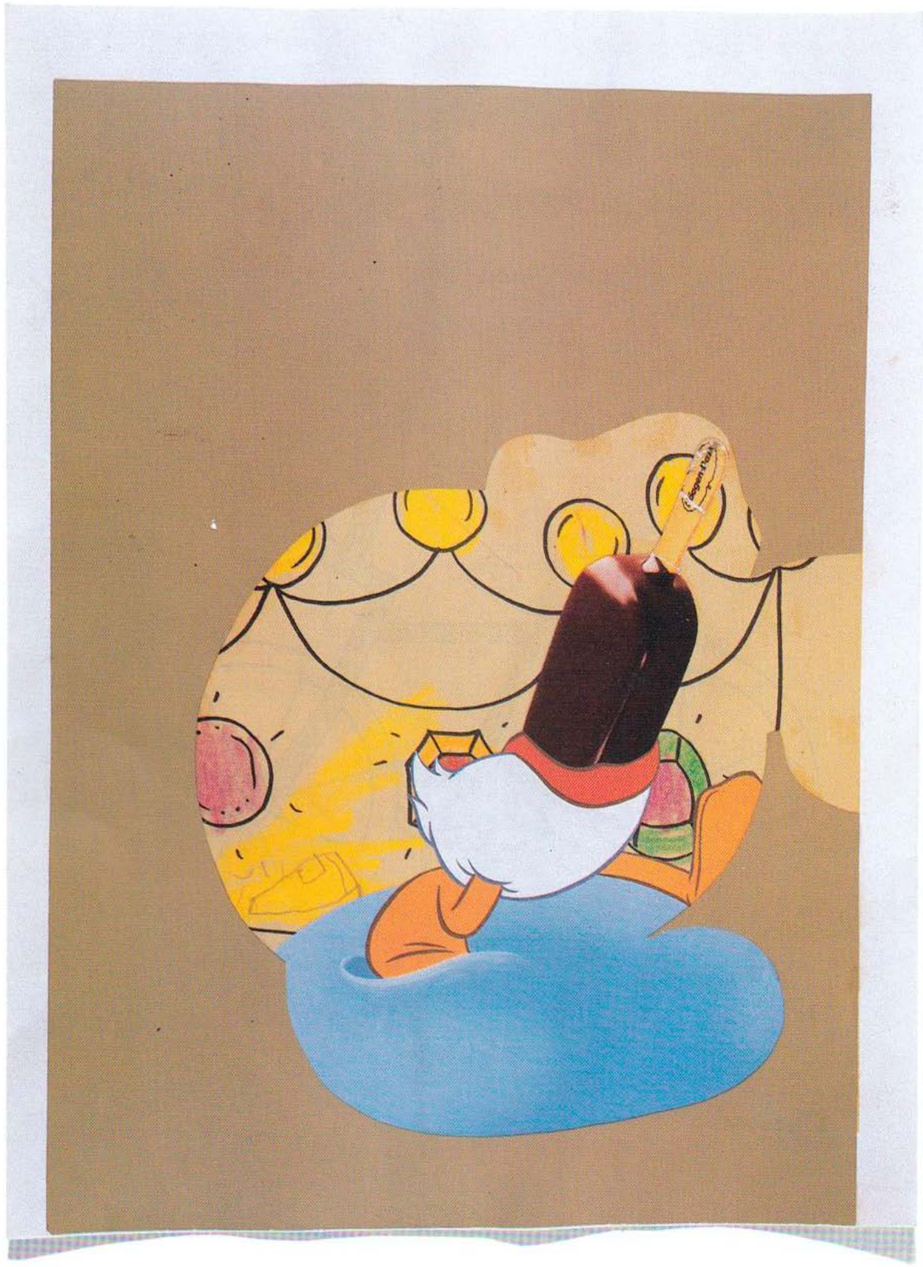
Nothing is what it seems to be in Herrera's collages. The constituent elements of each collage may be embedded in our childhood memories, but they are de-familiarized in a manner that renders them disturbingly uncanny. Unlike Holbein's *Ambassadors*, a painting that undermines what it displays (the notion of wordly wealth as plenitude) by "staining" the canvas with a skull, Herrera's work subverts as it displays, scattering stains in every corner of each work. Nothing fits and virtually everything "sticks out" from the surface to create what Slavoj Zizek has called phallic details, arresting visual elements that unsettle the entire composition.[6] These suspicious details challenge our interpretive faculties, turning us into detectives confronted with one sinister scene

4. On this point, see Hans-Thies Lehmann, "An Interrupted Performance: On Walter Benjamin's Idea of Children's Theatre," in *"With the Sharpened Axe of Reason": Approaches to Walter Benjamin*, ed. Gerhard Fischer (Oxford: Berg, 1996), p.189.

5. Paul Valéry, *Idée Fixe*, trans. David Paul (New York: Pantheon, 1965), p. 36.

6. Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1991), p. 91.

***Untitled*, 1998**
collage, 9"x12"



***Untitled*, 1998**
collage, 9"x12"

after another. We are compelled to study traces, to decipher codes, to unravel mysteries, to discover and uncover meaning at the site of each collage's anarchic violence.

In Herrera's collages, phallic details not only run riot, they are also literalized in a startling way. The collages may represent the work of a bricoleur with the inventive genius of the child's mind, but they are, as even a cursory look reveals, emphatically adult in their representational matter. A lackluster coloring book Santa Claus faces a pert housewife, apron tied with a perfect bow, shapely legs shod in spikey high heels. Superimposed on the two, connecting them in a weirdly eroticized way, appears the proboscis of Dumbo, topped by a two-tone phallic shape pointed toward a doughnut-shaped blue streak. A coloring book picture with the caption "This Sly Goat Finds a Yo-Yo Chewy" positions a monumental blue phallic shape on the goat's buttocks, superimposes Dumbo's trunk on the phallus, and balances a headless cartoon boy between the elephant's trunks and Huey's webbed feet. We are clearly no longer in the realm of child's play.

And yet everywhere we see an uncanny juxtaposition of innocence and experience, a conjunction of naive wonder with cynical wisdom that disables our interpretive confidence even as its redoubles our visual efforts. Who can forget the chipper goodwill of Snow White's woodland friends, who wash the dishes, fold the linen, and sweep the floor of that messiest of cinematic households known as the cottage of the seven dwarfs? Herrera reproduces their wide-eyed innocence, but this time not in the presence of Snow White but in the face of a red screen, pulsing with sexual energy and vitality. Confronted with one of those visual enigmas in which we see either figure or ground (rabbit or duck) but never both at the same time, we move back and forth with unnerving facility between those unaffected woodland creatures—suddenly invested with sly sexual precocity—and that throbbing red screen—suddenly endowed with the purity of an artless abstraction. The same effect can be found in a collage displaying the tip of Goofy's nose, sailing through the waters. At once innocent and obscene, it pulsates with erotic energy yet also seems quietly surreal.

It was Freud who reminded us that a disposition to "perversions of every kind" is a "general and fundamental human characteristic." Because children have not yet cultivated a sense of shame, disgust, and morality, they are more inclined to indulge the polymorphous perversity that is "innately present" in all of us.[7] In this sense, then, Herrera's collages can be seen, despite their appeal to adult sensibilities, as resolutely rooted in the world of childhood experience, playfully representing the sensuality of the material world yet unencumbered by the sense of shame that infects visual pleasure with a feeling of disgust.

If Herrera harnesses both the messy subversive energy of the child and the shameless erotic élan of the child-like adult to unsettle the images in our collective cultural archive, he also self-consciously aligns himself with artistic practices that aim to deform and exaggerate the real rather than to reproduce it. Embracing the grotesque realism endorsed by the Russian critic Mikhal Bakhtin, Herrera de-centers bodies, representing them as inflated, distorted, collapsed, fragmented, bulging, swollen, and protruding. What is at stake in grotesque realism is not the classical image of the self-contained, impermeable, unblemished, and perfected human body, but an image of the "impure corporeal bulk with its orifices (mouth, flared nostrils, anus) yawning wide and its lower regions (belly, legs, feet, buttocks and genitals) given priority over its upper regions (head, 'spirit,' reason)."[8] One look at Herrera's purple hippopotamus, missing its hind legs but with a second, white cartoon mask on its snout, and we know that we are in the realm of the carnivalesque, a world turned not only upside down but also inside out and backwards.

7. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Avon, 1962), pp. 87–88.

8. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), p.9.

Among the most arresting of all the collages is the one displaying a knee encased in the waist of a boy's half-torso, with legs marching across the composition. That conflation of body parts is superimposed on an elongated phallic shape, a reminder that that knee may indeed be what we thought it was in the first place. In another collage, a baker is engulfed by a hybrid, indeterminate body mass of gray, blue, pink, and white, criss-crossed by brown rope. Is this Dumbo or his mother, trussed by the cords of captors? The captive may not be able to topple the baker, but engulfs him nonetheless. As we move from the orderly regularity of the checkerboard linoleum floor and from the loaves of bread neatly lining the baker's shelves to the messy scandal of the gargantuan figures in embrace and to the discolored pieces of scotch tape masking the tears on the page, it becomes impossible to find a point of orientation. The compositional field is completely decentered, creating in the viewer a perpetual hermeneutic crisis.

Who can look at Grumpy, ensconced in the fragment of an armchair, without feeling similarly unsettled, this time by the conflation of the simulated and the real? The defiant gaze on the dwarf's face is splendidly overdetermined: he is at once uncomfortable, irritated, and ill at ease, anxiously trapped in the real comforts of a false home. A fragment torn from the cultural imaginary, Grumpy has become more material and authentic than the armchair displaying him. Like Disneyland, which, to cite Jean Baudrillard, is presented as imaginary, "in order to make us believe that the rest is real," Grumpy, a figure torn out of the image repertoire of contemporary culture, represents an imaginary that has become our reality.[9] "Consider the United States," Roland Barthes entreats us, "where everything is transformed into images: only images exist and are produced and consumed."[10] Grumpy, endowed with an astonishing degree of affective energy, has become a part of our reality, endowing us with all the discomfort written across his face.

Like the cartoon characters that invade reality in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* Herrera's collages use the cultural imaginary to make their way into our consciousness, turning the surreal into the real. In one of the collages, a figure in a white coat appears stunned by the sight of something that is missing from the unframed page on which he appears. Only a shadow cast on the white coat gives body to that terrifying presence outside the collage. We experience the same kind of shock when the surreal imprints its shadow on our bodies. Perhaps the threat of the real is as terrifying for this surreal figure as the terror of the surreal is for us, the real witnesses to his anguish.

In *Through the Looking-Glass*, the now mythical Alice is presented to the unicorn as an exotic creature:

> "What—is—this?" he said at last.
> "This is a child!" Haigha replied eagerly, coming in front of Alice to introduce her. . . .
> "We only found it today. It's as large as life, and twice as natural!"
> "I always thought they were fabulous monsters!" said the Unicorn."[11]

Larger than life and twice as real, the brain children of Herrera's imagination introduce us to fabulous monsters that relentlessly inspire both wonder and dread. •

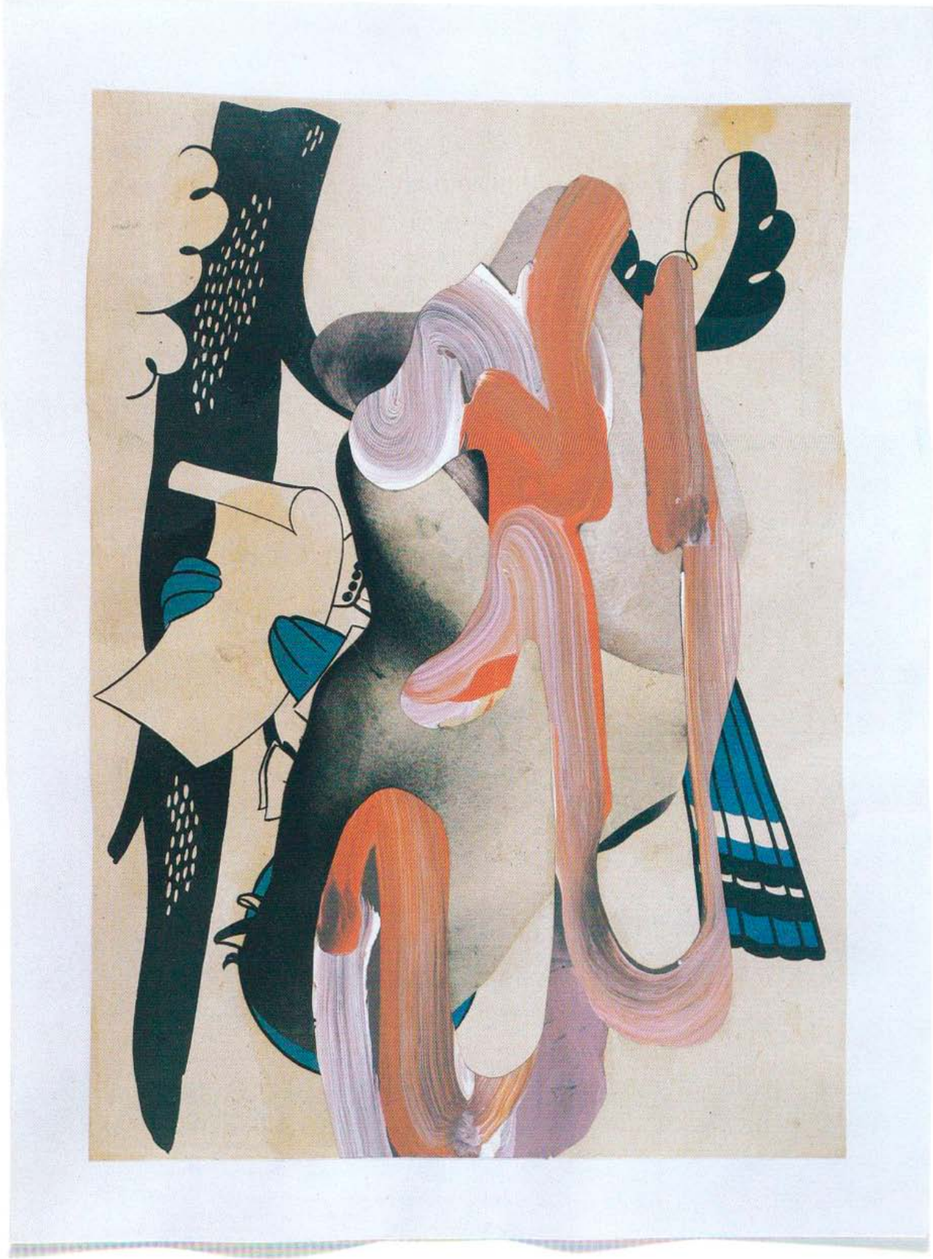
9. Jean Baudrillard, "From *Simulations*," in *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, ed. Antony Easthope and Kate McGowan (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992), p. 205.

10. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), p. 118.

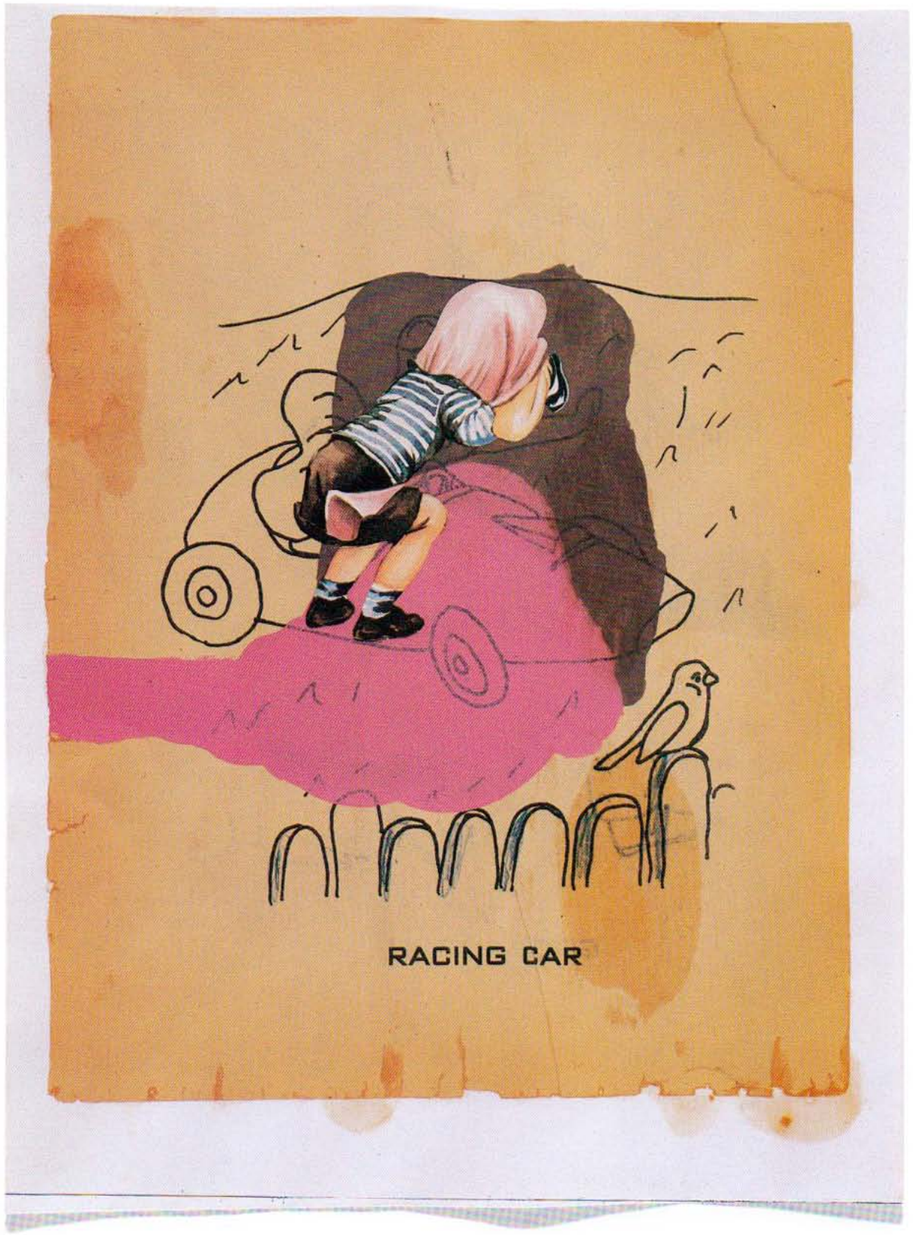
11. Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, ed. Donald J. Gray, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1992), p. 175.

***Untitled*, 1998**
collage, 9"x12"

Untitled, 1998
collage, 9"x12"



Untitled, 1998
collage, 9"x12"



***Untitled*, 1998**
collage, 9"x12"

Arturo Herrera

Education

1992 MFA, University of Illinois at Chicago, Illinois
1982 BFA, University of Tulsa, Oklahoma

Solo Exhibitions

1998 The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts
The Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
Wooster Gardens, New York, New York
1996 Gahlberg Gallery, College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, Illinois
University Club, Chicago, Illinois
Revolution Gallery, Ferndale, Michigan
1995 Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois
Hermetic Gallery, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
1994 MWMWM Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
1993 The Center for Contemporary Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico
MWMWM Gallery, Chicago, Illinois

Selected Group Exhibitions

1998 "Arturo Herrera and Kara Walker," Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, United Kingdom
1997 "Twister," Real Art Ways, Hartford, Connecticut
"Prep," Gallery 16, San Francisco, California
1996 "Untitled," Gallery 312, Chicago, Illinois
"Arturo Herrera and Carla Preiss," Thread Waxing Space, New York, New York
all girls/ACUD, Berlin, Germany
"Moving in," Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
"Clarity," NIU Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
"Plane Speak," Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, Illinois
1995 "Crystal Blue Persuasion," Feature, New York, New York
"Fine," TBA Exhibition Space, Chicago, Illinois
"Radius," 213 Institute Place, Chicago, Illinois
"Some Late 20th Century Abstraction," LACE, Los Angeles, California
1994 "The Uncomfortable Show," Ten in One Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
"Arturo Herrera and Steven Rotter," PS 122, New York, New York
"Sparkalepsy," Feature, New York, New York
"Amenities," Layton Gallery, Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design, Wisconsin
"Selections Spring '94: The Sick Rose," The Drawing Center, New York, New York
"More Famous Artists," Sotheby's Inc., Chicago, Illinois
"Chicago Billboards Project," School of Art and Design, University of Illinois at Chicago
1993 "Abstract Chicago," Klein Art Works, Chicago, Illinois
"Beck, Herrera, Killam, Pranger, Roberts," MWMWM Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
1992 "Not Working in L.A.," Nomadic Site, Los Angeles, California
"Flamesart," Gallery 400, Chicago, Illinois

Awards

1998 ArtPace, San Antonio, Texas (1999–2000 residency)
The Pollock-Krasner Foundation Inc., New York, New York
1997 Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, New York, New York
The Marie Walsh Sharpe Art Foundation, New York, New York
1996 Visual Arts Fellowship, Illinois Arts Council, Chicago, Illinois
1995 Art Matters, Inc., New York
CAAP Grant, Department of Cultural Affairs, Chicago, Illinois
SA Grant, Illinois Arts Council, Chicago, Illinois

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McKenna, Max. "U.S. Artist Q & A, Arturo Herrera," *The Art Newspaper*, April, p. 48
Patner, Andrew. "Arturo Herrera," *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 29
1996 Alexander, Randy. "Hero," *New Art Examiner*, May, p. 54
Birbragher, Francine. "Body of Works," *Art Nexus*, April, pp. 105–107
Hixson, Kathryn. "Clarity," *New Art Examiner*, May, pp. 42–43
1995 Hixson, Kathryn. "Arturo Herrera at Randolph Street Gallery," *Flash Art*, October, p. 111
1994 Bulka, Michael. "Arturo Herrera at MWMWM," *New Art Examiner*, summer, pp. 50–51
Cotter, Holland. "The Joys of Childhood Re-examined," *The New York Times*, March 25, p. 30
McCraken, David. "Blank Check," *Chicago Tribune*, March 4, p. 66
Schleifer, Kristen Brooke. "Trial by Fire," *New Art Examiner*, May, pp. 23–27
1993 Beecher, Carla. "Reaching the City of Chicago," *Illinois Quarterly*, January, pp. 24–27
1991 Buczinsky, Teresa. "Profiles I at Randolph Street Gallery," *New Art Examiner*, April, pp. 34–35

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