LUCA BUVOLI

ANTON VIDOKLE

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DIANNA FRID

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A MAZE OF COMPLICITY

YYZ

ARTISTS' OUTLET

TORONTO

March - April, 1996

ANTON VIDOKLE

LUCA BUVOLI
ANTON VIDOKLE

Order and
things . . .

BEHIND THE MASK
Synopsis
bisection is about to uncover
Nat-a-Superhero's secret identity,
as if the basic of truth were to
be uncon-cealment!
In a flashback, Nat-a-
Superhero revisits the
moments-years before—
when he has assembled
his costume out of his
form clothing and
of his and
things
found
around
My old CAPE was PUNCTURED
with STARS and STRIPES
glove
left
glove
and another left
glove

COSTUME
this costume
was also starting
to look like a
PHANTOM LIMB
it was becoming
SENSITIVE, NERVOUS
ALMOST
TALKATIVE
where the
thing
apparently
felt
and
Nothing
B. FRID
85
65
25
16

D. FRID.

Brave Things

BY LAURA U. MARKS

Luca Buvoli, Dianna Frid, and Anton Vidokle all make objects that seem fragile and unassuming, but that are brave in their self-contained way. You have to stand close to these objects but not look at them directly; a sidelong, non-penetrating kind of gaze is what will afford the most companionship from them. A mutual respect is required, for these are not works that give up their secrets easily. Stand next to them and breathe in synchrony, and you will begin to feel their sweet intensity.

Manual labor, and sewing in particular, is important to all these works. They sometimes witness their makers' determination to push this new medium as far as possible (Dianna's self-taught use of a variety of stitches in defiance of a tradition of careful craft). They sometimes flaunt their tenuousness (Luca's erratically sewn collages). They sometimes suggest gamely the taking on of a new skill (Anton's yards of basting). There is a conscious will here to redefine what counts as art. The importance of craft is not trumpeted as in '70s feminist work, nor slyly appropriated as in the works of '80s artists, often male, who turned self-importantly to knitting and crocheting; it is simple, in the modest, domestic terms of everyday sewing and mending. Whether the results are competent or willfully awkward, embodied here is labor; and time used in the careful assembly of these objects; and also touch, the makers' hands working the surface of fabric and paper until they acquire a tactile density.

This embrace of a traditionally feminine task coincides with surveying the detritus of a recently past heroic age. Anton takes images of astronauts from old Soviet dictionaries, already dated in their bulky space suits, and glazes them in tents of translucent fabric. The same astronauts have been seen floating in Dianna's collages, embroidered with seaweed, lost explorers struggling in an element that is certainly not the one they were designed for. And in Luca's installations built around comic book heroes, the superhero is conspicuous by his absence: the tiny, impossibly muscular men that stood for a good part of this century are gently eclipsed by doubt, always just beyond the frame of the image, crying, "We must occupy the space of the story!" Casualties of the end of the cold war and the age of nationalist certainty, cosmonauts and superheroes float in uncertain space, gasping, undone.

And in the place of these foundered ideas, what tender marvels begin to trace their new routes. In Anton's sculptures, the crystalline ideas of Renaissance perspective are recreated "soft" in forms friendlier to relativity and simple uncertainty — made of smooth, polyester fabric, they seem ready to bend around new ideas, while within themselves they still carry the ghosts of old certainties. In the past, Dianna has sent out flotillas of embroidered tortillas or tiny soft bells; now she floats out a drift of words, materially solid but lingering and evocative as smells. And on the trails of the superheroes a murmur of protests, worded with determined vagueness, witnesses the engendering of a new person, not even an anti-hero but whatever can survive in the vast windy gap left by the larger-than-life men. Like the life that survives after great destruction, the new thoughts are small, modest — but tenacious.

These brave objects are heavy, despite their apparent delicacy: they are dense, with the work that has gone into their production, with the histories they encapsulate and eclipse. Their energy is centripetal. I trust objects like these, objects that know more than they show. They are suspicious of seeing too much, of depending on the sense of sight with its seeming neutrality and ability to own the vistas that it sweeps. In another work of Dianna's, the hot air balloon of an earlier age of eager exploration now bears along a crew of dried kelp; their bulbous, headlike roots do not gaze to the distant horizon but keep their own counsel, hold within themselves a different kind of wisdom. This odd craft could be a metaphor for the exploration these artists are carrying out, one not of the possibilities of vision but the gradual, invisible knowledge of things. "Lay Down Your Gaze!" Duca exhorts, and indeed the knowledge of these works is not the result of vision but of sensory coexistence, with the eyes half-shielded.

These oddly assembled objects, with their quaint images borrowed from an earlier age, recall the Surrealists' collages of unlikely cohabitants. But the Surrealists' confidence that their strange meetings would produce fundamental truths (about the disposition of the unconscious, say) is not characteristic of these explorations. These brave things do not try to predict the results of their inmixing; they wait with a modesty that may be the most hopeful attribute of our new state.

Luca Buvoli

Born in Brescia (Italy). Lives and works in New York. His ongoing installation project called "Not-a-Superhero" loosely refers to the format of comic books, animated movies, action figures, signs. Recent solo exhibitions include the Santa Monica Museum of Art, CA; John Weber Gallery, NY; ACME, Santa Monica; and AC Project Room, NY.

Dianna Frid

Born in Mexico City. Lives and works in Vancouver and New York. Her mixed media projects and bookworks have been exhibited in Mexico, Canada, Chicago, and recently at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York.

Laura U. Marks

Born in Baltimore, MD. Grew up in Missassauga (Ontario). Lives in Los Angeles. She writes about visual and media arts for numerous publications in Canada, Europe and the U.S. This year she is a fellow in the School of Critical Studies at California Institute of the Arts.

Anton Vidokle

Born in Moscow. Lives in New York. He is currently working on a series of sculptures and installations titled "Order & things..." His work has been exhibited in the U.S., Canada, and abroad including White Columns, NY; The Bronx Museum, NY; The Wexner Center for Visual Arts, Ohio; the Museum of Fine Arts, Caracas (Venezuela); and, Musée des Arts Decoratifs de Montréal.

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