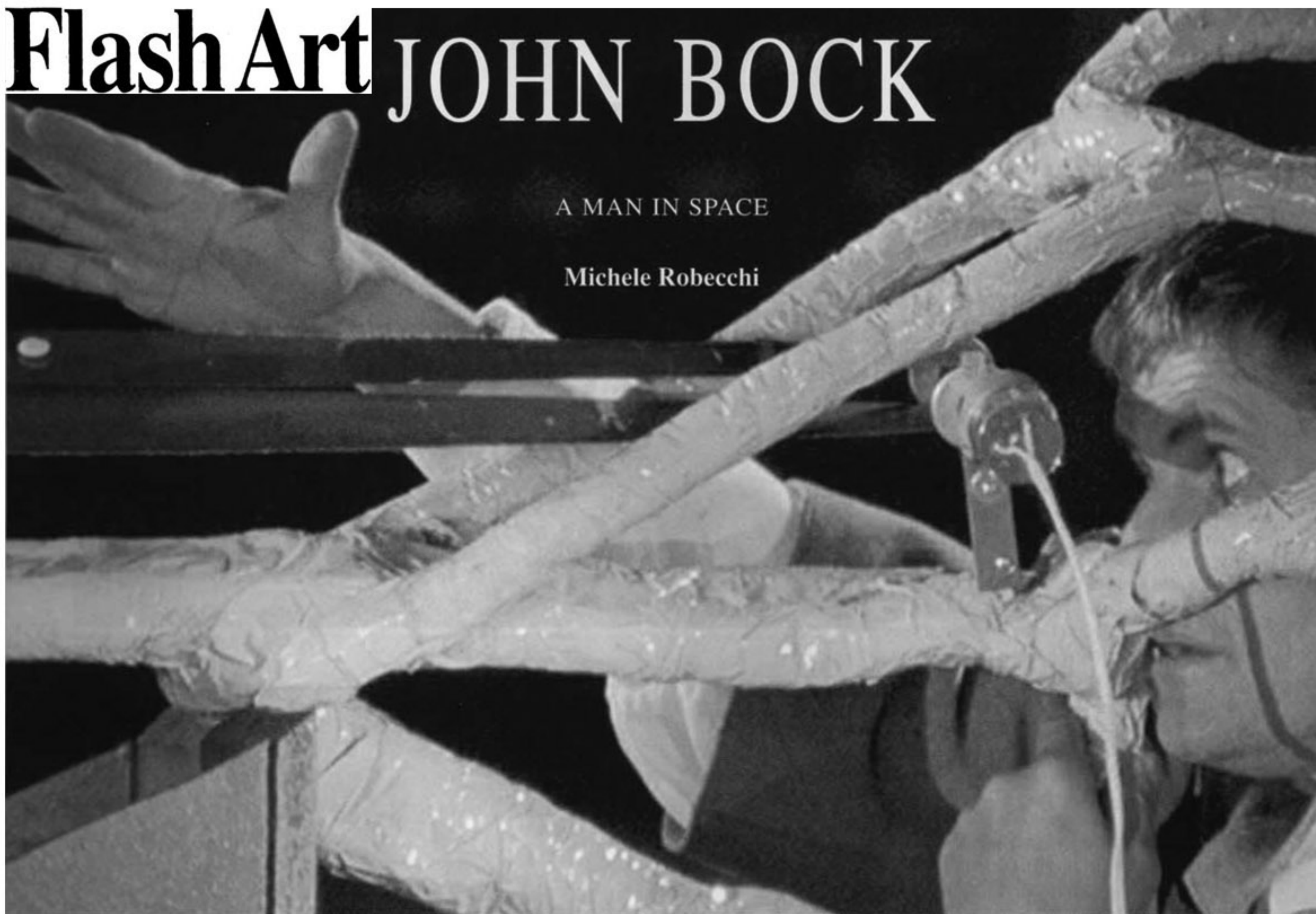


Flash Art JOHN BOCK

A MAN IN SPACE

Michele Robecchi



MICHELE ROBECCHI: *There seems to be a lot of confusion in your work.*

John Bock: I like the idea of connecting different objects and materials in a collage. And although I try to give clues to the audience, the presence of the objects can make things quite complicated. For example, in one space the smell is very strong, and then in the next room there are just white walls. There is obviously a connection between the two spaces, but the audience has to discover it for themselves.

MR: *Do you think that this confusion mirrors your own inner confusion, or is it just fabricated for the audience?*

JB: When people say that I'm confused, I'm always very surprised. I don't think my objects express that kind of confusion. I have decided that I want to work with these materials. My goal is not to make confusion but to give a direction to the viewer so that he/she can feel, smell, or eat something in a different way. In my early works I made a few cakes, and the public had to taste them, but I wasn't interested in causing confusion. I just wanted to create a different way to see art. I don't think I'm confused. I use objects. I change

them. I connect speech to the objects in a fusion.

MR: *So how does it work? Do you first have a concept in mind and then pick up objects that can convey it, or do you collect objects and build concepts around them?*

JB: When I'm invited to do a show I come a bit earlier and hang out, visiting second-hand markets and buying stuff, and then I build the piece. I like to establish a connection between the work and the country I am in. I like the idea of people being familiar with the objects I use. I try to work with objects that activate different memories, domestic memories — you know, kitchen machinery, textile objects and stuff like that. I also look for spaces in a museum that are not planned for exhibiting art, like storage rooms and so on. I try to transport the museum space into an action field. [pause] Is it the right answer to your question?

MR: *Yes. [laughs] How was the show in New York with Bendix Harms?*

JB: I invited him to make a show at Anton Kern Gallery. I'm very happy. He is as well.

MR: *Was this idea of inviting another artist to*

show with you a consequence of your exhibition "Klütterkammer" at the ICA in London last September?

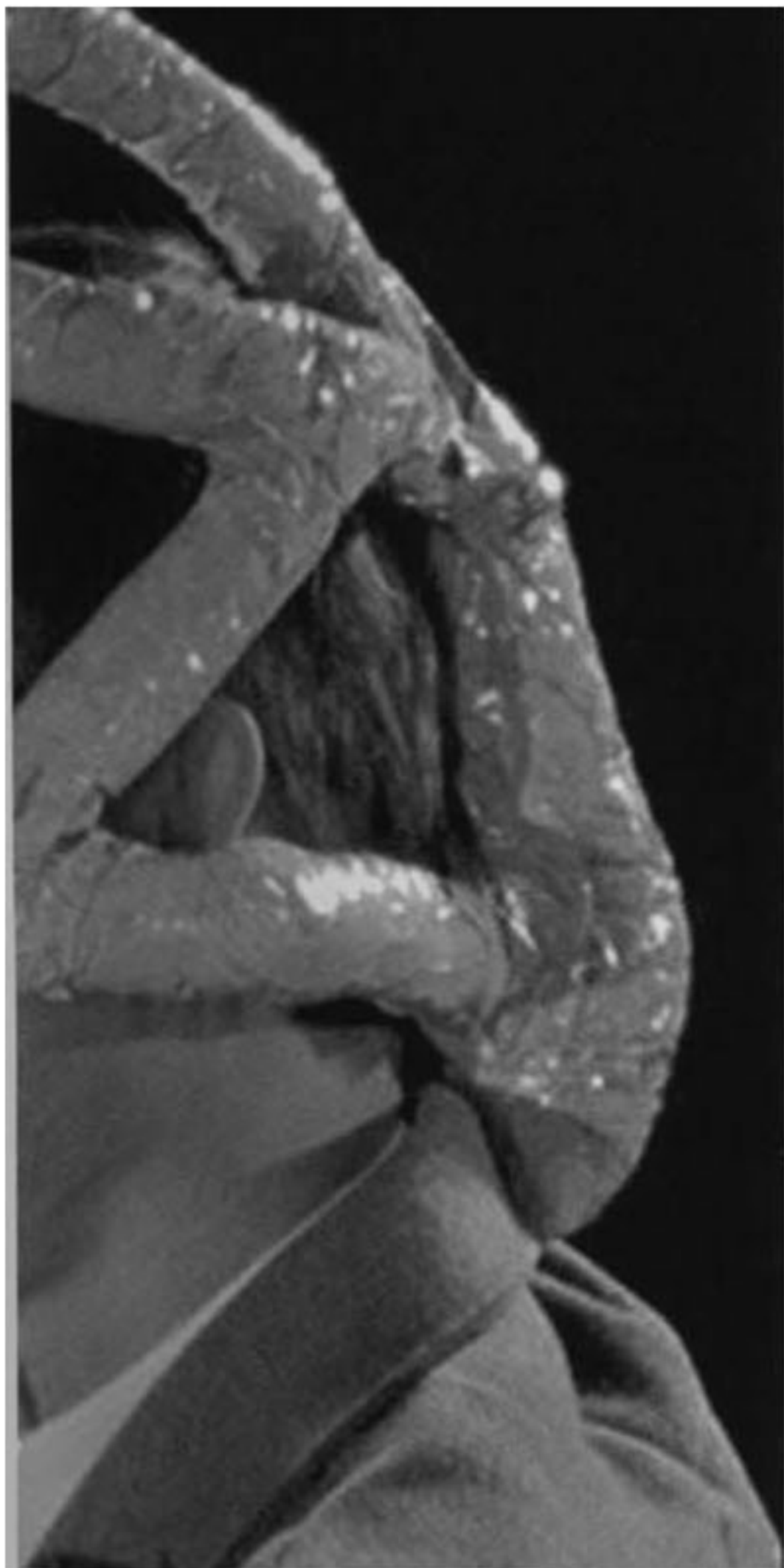
JB: That was different. Bendix was in it, and so were other artists and friends of mine, like Ascan Pinkemelle and Marc Aschenbrenner.

MR: *Right. But I was wondering if the show at the ICA was the starting point of this idea of doing collaborative works.*

JB: It goes back a long way. My idea for New York was just to invite a friend to do an exhibition with me. It's not really a special context, as London was. It's different. I find it quite normal to invite a friend to do a show with me. And when the gallery or the curator says it's fine, then there we go. There's no special concept or anything like that behind it. To have artists inviting other artists wasn't my idea. It was Jens Hoffmann's. And I liked it.

MR: *Tell me about Meechfieber.*

JB: I wanted to do a 16mm movie. The Carnegie International invited me, and it was co-produced with the Fondazione Nicola Trussardi. In a way, *Meechfieber* is a continuation of a video I made previously,



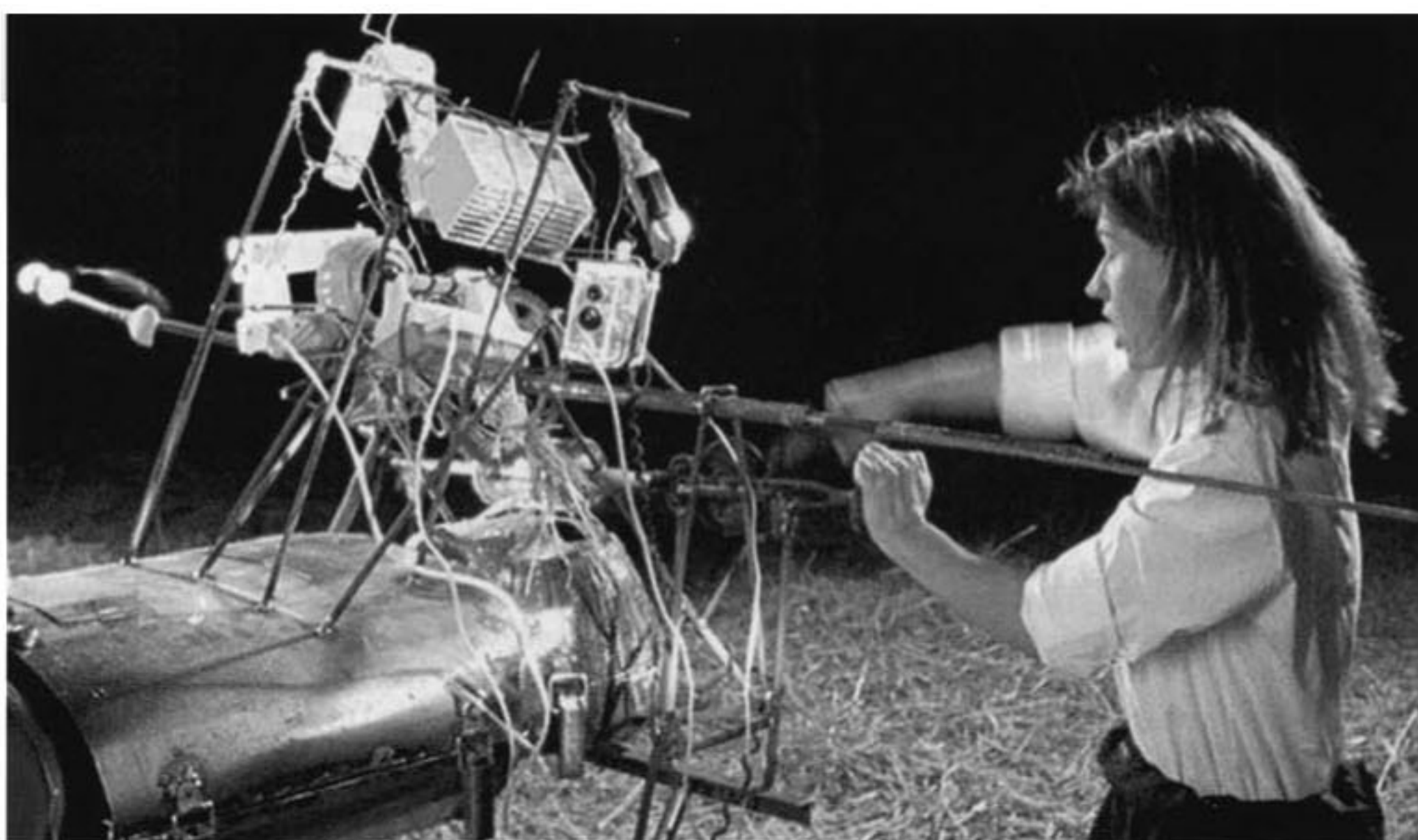
called *Astronaut*. *Astronaut* is about an astronaut who wants to fly around the universe but gets ill. It ends very bitterly. The same astronaut appears again in *Meechfieber*. He can't do anything with his body because he's so sick. And then he makes up his mind to transform his body into the universe so that he can walk around. But it's his mind that can do this. Eventually he falls out in pieces, and then the real transformation happens. He can change his body and fly through the universe. He never falls down. And then he falls in love.

MR: When did you pick up the idea of the astronaut?

JB: Very early. I did my first astronaut very early.

MR: So is it the figure of the astronaut as an explorer that interests you?

JB: More the idea of a man in space, really. A little man in space. I also like the instruments related to it, the technology, the darkness. The universe I designed for the astronaut is completely black — there are no stars. It's really a bad, bad, bad space.



It's like a backstage. It also represents a utopian dimension.

MR: *Something mystical.*

JB: Yes. There's nothing practical that you can do in that kind of dimension, but you can think. In a circle. You know that John Carpenter movie, *Dark Star*? We have spaceships

All images on this and the opposite page: *Meechfieber*, 2004. 16mm film still, 37 mins. Courtesy Klosterfelde, Berlin and Anton Kern, New York. Co-commissioned and co-produced by Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, Milan and Carnegie International 2004/05, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.



From left: *Eichenpfahl 40 cm rein da* (Oak tree 40 cm inside), 2004. Video still. Courtesy Anton Kern Gallery, New York; *Erdmann*, 2002. Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, Monchengladbach. Video still, 18 mins. Camera: Knut Klaffen. Editing: Marc Aschenbrenner. Courtesy Klosterfelde, Berlin and Anton Kern, New York.

that disappear. Like in *Alien*. Or *Outland*.

MR: Do you think the audience can easily relate to your concepts?

JB: You mean if they understand them?

MR: Yes. Do you feel like they leave the show with a fair idea of what you are trying to say?

JB: They try to understand it, and when they stop thinking about it they realize the sense of it. It's very clear. They first have to understand the language. They have to realize that the language I'm using is not made of words but art. Art is a language. You can tell something with objects, actions and paintings.

MR: I've read a bit about the film, and there seems to be an emphasis on the figure of the country girl, as if you were doing some kind of social investigation of the German countryside.

JB: This is only one side of the film. I was more influenced by science fiction. It comes more from American science fiction.

MR: You heard the story about Stanley Kubrick being the actual author of the American moon landing in 1969?

JB: Yes, I heard it.

MR: What do you think?

JB: I like the idea. It's an outstanding video.

MR: Is your artistic career as you expected it to be when you were a student?

JB: No. It's really different. I didn't know I'd have to send so many faxes and emails.

MR: And do so many interviews.

JB: I like interviews. I like to talk about my art. I don't like the managing side. Faxes and faxes. The strategies. The security. But in the end...

MR: You enjoy the freedom.

JB: Oh, I don't have so much freedom. I work in a space in between. As my work usually does not conform to the security rules of museums, sometimes I have problems.

MR: What was the idea behind *Gast*?

JB: It was very simple. I had to do a show at Martin Klosterfelde Gallery. It was very cold, and I saw my rabbit at home eating, and I thought, well, dear rabbit, if you cost me so much in food you have to bring home the bacon! So I decided to do a movie with him. It was very funny. We filmed it in five days and there were a few objects at home. It was very easy and nice to work with my rabbit. He liked it a lot. I just wanted to do a movie with a rabbit.

MR: You don't feel ambivalent about using living animals for your work?

JB: No, using animals can be really interesting.

MR: Right. But you know how some people

can react to these things. They can get, uh...

JB: Angry?

MR: Right. Overprotective.

JB: Oh, no! It's just a video. When you see the rabbit you can tell he's having a lot of fun. He crawls, he jumps around, he plays with objects. He eats carrots. He lives in my apartment. He walks free. He's not in a cage. He definitely likes being a film star.

MR: And the unpredictability of the rabbit's behavior was of use to you?

JB: Yes, definitely. I was very surprised by the way he used my objects, but because I know he is greedy for carrots I could use this for the action.

MR: Do you think objects have a proper life?

JB: A life? No. You mean my objects?

MR: Yes.

JB: Oh yes, mine do! [laughs]

MR: I wasn't literally referring to life or death, but to their ability to communicate once they're left in the gallery.

JB: Yes, I hope they do. It's good to see the objects and the video together, though the video is not documentation of the action because the action might be 45 minutes long while the video lasts only three minutes. I just show different parts that I feel are important. When you transfer the action to video, you have to focus on the video as a different medium with different meanings. It has to be fast, more informational, more flowing. The action is really different in a video.



MR: I noticed a few similarities between you and Bruce Nauman. Take for instance Nauman's Performance Corridor. You could experience that work on three different levels: there was the performance of the artist, documented in a video; the two walls, exhibited as a sculptural piece; and the open invitation to the viewer to walk between them as well, repeating somehow Nauman's performance.

JB: Yes, I like the work. ■

Michele Robecchi is a contributing editor at *Flash Art*.

John Bock was born in Gribbohm, Germany, in 1965. He lives and works in Berlin.

Selected solo shows: 2004: Michael Neff, Frankfurt; Fondazione Trussardi, Stazione Centrale, Milan; Anton Kern, New York; ICA, London; Klosterfelde, Berlin; 2003: Giò Marconi, Milan; Arken Museum of Modern Art, Skovvej (DK); 2002: Meyer Kainer, Vienna; 2001: Regen Projects, Los Angeles; Anton Kern, New York; Sadie Coles, London.

Selected group shows: 2004: "Body Display," Secession, Vienna; Carnegie International, Pittsburgh; Manifesta 5, San Sebastián (ES); 2002: Documenta 11, Kassel; "Do It," Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, San Angel, Mexico; "Penetration," Marianne Boesky, New York; 2001: "Hypermental," Kunsthalle, Hamburg; "New Settlements," Contemporary Art Center, Copenhagen; Yokohama Triennial; Magazin 3, Stockholm.

From top: Klütterkammer, 2004. Installation view (detail) at ICA, London. Photo: Marcus Leith; Alice Cooper, 2001. Video still, 5 mins. Camera: Knut Klafen. Editing: Marc Aschenbrenner. Courtesy Klosterfelde, Berlin and Anton Kern, New York; Zero-0,1, 2003. Video still, 11 mins. Courtesy Giò Marconi, Milan.

