

gled to reject her proposal politely, invoking the potential disapproval of husbands or mothers, or the risk of disease. Others gingerly pecked her cheek, while one fellow took full advantage, pressing upon the artist a long, sensual embrace. His aggressive pleasure was disconcerting, though hardly blameworthy given the open-ended terms of the experiment.

For "The L.A. Pictures" (2000), Manchot asked ordinary couples at Bergamot Station, on Melrose Avenue and on Hollywood Boulevard to kiss while she photographed them from a short distance. In the photos, one partner is always obscured by the other, who is in turn seen only from behind. But Manchot elicited more than simple public displays of affection. Beneath each picture, a text records the secret desire of the visible partner, who imagines kissing Galileo, Superman, James Baldwin or Meryl Streep, among many others. From the caption, we also learn the reason for each person's fantasy. A certain Alex Porter, for instance, dreams of kissing Michael Jordan because "to him, [Jordan] represented everything perfect." Here the photographer becomes her confessional subject's confidant, while the original couple's intimacy is exploited, one partner reduced to an (unwitting?) surrogate, in some sense marginalized or, possibly, betrayed.

Manchot's most powerful work involves intimacy of a different, even primal sort. In a series of stunning color photographs (over 4 by 6 feet), "Liminal Portraits" (1999-2000), the artist lovingly exposes the vulnerable, naked body of her mother. This

aging, earthy woman appears in full sunlight-monumental against the blue sky, remote mountains, a cityscape or a Ferris wheel. The Rubenesque spectacle of her generous and dimpled flesh challenges the contemporary cult of the slim, youthful body with an image of maturity and maternal plenitude. The trusting model's courage in offering her zaftig, sagging body for contemplation is matched by the daring of her artist-daughter, who confronts in this mortal, corporeal presence her very own origin and, indeed, her destiny. [Melanie Manchot: Love Is a Stranger" travels to the Fotogalerie in der Alten Feuerwache, Mannheim; Stadtische Galerie, Wolfsburg; Art Sway, Hampshire; Cornerhouse, Manchester; and the Hampden Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.]

-Sue Taylor

COLOGNE

Ivan Morley at Frehrking Weisehofer

Ivan Morley's complex, color-saturated paintings are visual extrapolations made within an associative game that starts with history. Born in Burbank, Calif. in the mid-1960s-seemingly a time and place of little history-Morley begins his work by excavating obscure anecdotes from Los Angeles's mid-19th-century frontier past. By painting exploratively on a variety of surfaces, including textured glass, wood panels, batik and dyed canvas, Morley expands the scope of his investigation beyond the literalness of recorded fact into a swirling, hallucinatory mass.

"Lab 2001," the group of seven paintings in this exhibition, recreates an explosion that took place in the 1850s at a site identified on a wall panel as "Bill's Asphaltum-Camphene Lab." Bill, we learn, had luckily stepped out for a drink when the accident occurred. In depicting seven phases of the explosion, the paintings function like animation cels. They stand alone, but can also be experienced as a lightning-quick montage of jumpcuts. Through this approach, Morley avoids the dichotomy between abstract and figurative painting.

In Lab (oil, soap and KY jelly on panel), a clapboard shack on a bed of yellow, red and orange

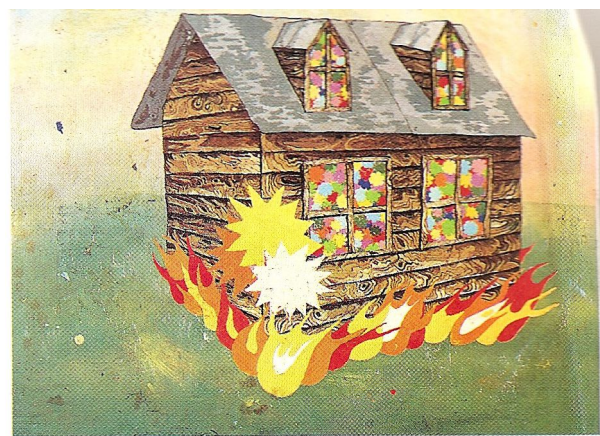
flames floats over a cyclorama backdrop. The explosion hits in many-pointed stars, and pixilated colored glass fills the cabin's windows. Visually akin to amateur commercial signage-especially the hand-painted sheep and cows that adorn carnicefa storefronts in L.A.'s Hispanic neighborhoods-this painting functions as the master shot of the series.

In a second Lab (oil on glass), Morley moves in for a close-up. With color accenting the existing pattern of the translucent textured "privacy glass" it's made on, the painting looks like a gorgeous sea-anemone whose fiery, amorphous heart pulses within a bed of muted blues and earth-tones. In a third Lab (oil and dye on glass), the anemone explodes into a pixilated color field, which Morley achieves by selectively enhancing some textured patterns in the glass and obscuring other portions. The craft deployed is reminiscent of meticulously rendered 19th-century Bavarian glass folk icons. Another painting playfully abstracts the series' elements via embroidered chunks of clapboard and colored dots floating against a dyed green field.

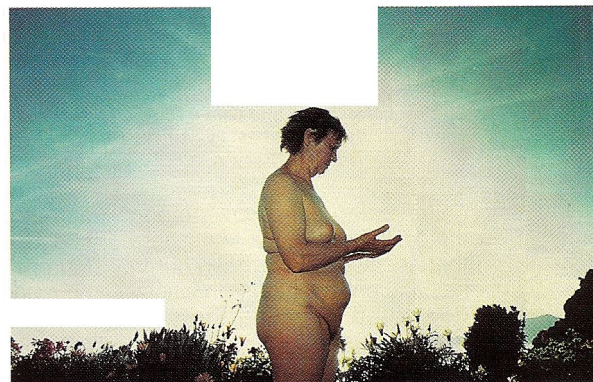
Intellectually adventurous and visually pleasurable, "Lab 2001" dances with the elusiveness of "fact." History, here, serves as a catalyst, but the real story is the way that any truthful look at reality must result in the explosion of "fact" into unsynthesizable categories. -Chris Kraus

Charles Worthen at Gabriele Rivet

That Charles Worthen, an American artist who has been living in Cologne for 10 years, titled this exhibition "Recent Stuff" gives some inkling of the casualness, self-mockery and general humor that characterized the show. The title is also a sly bilingual pun (and wordplay,



Ivan Morley: Lab, 2001, oil, soap and KY Jelly on panel, 30 by 36 inches; at Frehrking Weisehofer.



Melanie Manchot: The Flowerbed, with Open Hands, 1999, C-print, 51 y; by 75 inches; at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art.

too, is typical), since Kunststoff is his material. It's a rubber additive that he heats, sometimes kneads with oil color and shapes into fairly small objects of widely varying nature. Often the sculptures have such distinct personalities that you could think of them as living things, and then the modest size seems endearing.

Occupying the gallery's entry hall were the show's brightest-colored works: a "head," a pod and a stack of balls, each covered with a clownish patchwork of colored squares of Kunststoff reminiscent of Kraft cheese "singles" in their size, shape and limp adhesion. The view down the entry corridor ended with Bobblejoe, a tipsy totem of beach-ball-like spheres of increasing diameter. In a creamy white space, lit with yellowish uplights, these three works were joyous splashes of color in the gray light of a German winter. Equally euphoric were the various characters, in red or Kunststoff's natural off-white, occupying a wall of the

Charles Worthen: Self-Portrait, 2001, plastic, 71 inches high; at Gabriele Rivet.

