

GENEVA

Didier Rittener

ATTITUDES—ESPACE D'ARTS CONTEMPORAINS

Even before entering the main exhibition hall, visitors encountered stark white letters in thick profusion on the blackened walls: BLACK SPECK, LIQUID CENTER, RALENTIR LES IMAGES (slow down the images), LES CONTOURS DU FOU SONT NETS (the contours of the madman are sharp), LA MEMBRANE DU RÉEL (the membrane of the real), WILDERNESS. And then, like the inscription on the portal to the underworld in some classical legend, one last message was written in an ornate script on the entrance door: DISPARAÎTRE ICI (vanish here). The memory of these words continued to accompany us as we plunged into a visual universe in which nearly every bit of both the preexisting and the specially constructed walls of the gallery was covered with images and texts—more than four hundred square meters' worth.

Didier Rittener developed this extensive installation in a complex process that was in part a collaboration with poet and artist Carla Demierre. The title, *Storm Breeder*, refers to the supernatural tale "Peter Rugg, the Missing Man," by the nineteenth-century American writer William Austin: "The storm never meets him. It follows him." The viewer, too, seemed to be followed by these ornamental structures and images from a collective unconscious that had been unleashed to wild effect. The two lesbians from Courbet's *Le sommeil*, the landscape of Botticelli's *Venus* (its shell empty, as if it had devoured its figure), the sublime mountain landscape of Caspar David Friedrich in which the sea of fog has swallowed up the wanderer, were juxtaposed with Frank Stella's jagged lines. In the middle of it all stood a rational signpost of modernism, a metal grid construction that appeared to have become detached from the surface of a Mondrian. Finally, at the vanishing point of this dreamlike succession of images, one wall of the last room in the exhibition featured a white rectangle that stood out against its black background: a gap fleetingly filled by projected images of lectures and film screenings.

Rittener constructed his panorama using graphite on A4 tracing paper. The originals were scanned, reworked on the computer, then printed out and pasted on the walls in rows. He uses this technique to break up larger surfaces into a visible pattern, as if our stream of consciousness could be imagined as a conglomeration of pixels. "The contours of the madman are sharp": The cave Rittener constructed is no



longer merely a late-modernist landscape of quotations. Here a storm of images is brewing.

Rittener's restriction of his palette to black and white is more than a gesture pointing backward from this data cave to antiquity; it not only creates a sense of temporal distance but also denies this cornucopia of images the spectacular quality it might otherwise have. Text and images unite, as if unproblematically, on a single plane. The interior surfaces of the building become readable, like some enormous placard filled with information: Each viewer decides for himself whether to read in a linear fashion or in unpredictable leaps.

DISPARAÎTRE ICI: These words appeared one last time beside the exit, half concealed by the sliding door, and all at once it was no longer clear whether we weren't beginning to disappear ourselves as we made our way from this crazy world of sharp contours out into workaday reality and streets that only vaguely reminded us of Geneva.

—Hans Rudolf Reust

Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.