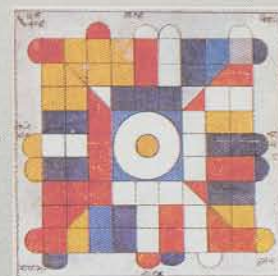


# ARTFORUM

NOVEMBER 2001 \$8.00

I N T E R N A T I O N A L



ARTISTS CURATE  
**GABRIEL OROZCO**

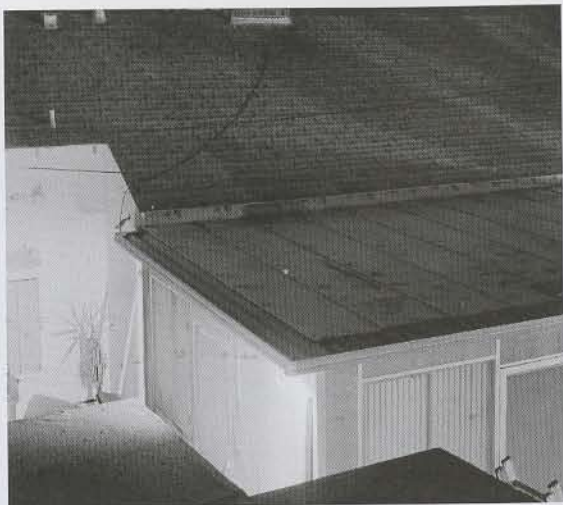
BENJAMIN H.D. BUCHLOH  
**THOMAS HIRSCHHORN**

**READING 9-11-01**

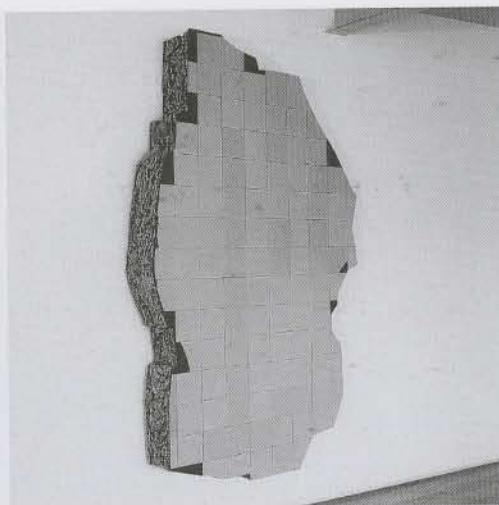


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Amir Zaki, 5918-5, 2001,  
color photograph, 31 1/2 x 37 1/2".



Adriana Varejão, *Ruína de charque—Portugal*  
(Jerked-beef ruin—Portugal), 2001, wood, polyurethane,  
and oil paint, ca. 86 1/2 x 53 1/2 x 11 1/2".

going straight to the heart of the matter. On first glance, one might assume these works to be a calculated assault on high sensibilities, but like much of Carson's output, they simply prod one to get over one's smirks and get on with the act of viewing, of enjoying the bold results of the artist's mastery over both high-art composition and low-budget special effects as well as her fearlessness in the face of kitsch.

—Christopher Miles

## AMIR ZAKI ROBERTS & TILTON

In photographer Amir Zaki's vertiginous, depopulated views, usually long exposures shot at night, velvety dark blue-greens dominate, illuminated by eerie halos of electric light. Rooflines, cornices, garden walls, empty backyards with potted plants and outdoor furniture outline LA residences and the landscapes surrounding or intruding on them. It's as if Julius Shulman abandoned black-and-white to do location stills for *The X Files*.

In his new photographs, Zaki negotiates the chill, even noir aspects of Los Angeleno domesticity. I write "negotiates" (rather than, say, "interrogates") because it's difficult to discern what kind of meaning Zaki thinks his work is producing. Three photographs here were slashed, as were their mounting and framing, and whole sections removed (a horizontal or vertical "middle," a corner that perhaps followed a roof slope). Zaki's decision to crowd the three "cut" works chockablock with ten others in which the

physicality of the photograph and its support is not an issue has disturbing—and, I would guess, unintended—consequences. The excisions do not carry the weight of sculptural concerns; these aren't Gordon Matta-Clark cut pieces done with photographs. If they are corrections of some kind, why would Zaki produce an edition of eight and cut each apart in exactly the same manner—and what is the relation of the "corrected" pieces to the unedited images? It would have been preferable to see fewer pieces with a stronger focus on what motivates this project, on whether and how the approaches produce different kinds of meaning.

Zaki has never denied digitally manipulating his photographs. It's tempting to read his cutting away the print and its support as a return of the repressed real, an insistence on a physicality his medium may not really have. Photographs—shadow and light, eminently reproducible—are simultaneously objects and specters; digitization further complicates the photograph's already complicated thingness. But rather than emphasize the images' physicality, Zaki's cutting seems to trash not only those cleft but, paradoxically, all the photographs, any potential importance of the meaning, along with much of his larger enterprise.

Zaki also showed a DVD piece, *This Video Was Not Supposed to Exist. It Replaces Another One That Committed Suicide* (all works 2001): Huddled near a backyard swimming-pool shed are two preteen girls and a boy of about six, the age Zaki was (an artist's statement tells us) when Ian Curtis, the lead singer of Joy Division, hung himself. Copyright law forbade the exhibition

of a video in which the kids recite a whole album of Joy Division lyrics (Zaki read the words aloud, the kids repeated them, and then the artist digitally removed his voice and the pauses). In the video that is shown, the kids instead explain why they're not reciting Joy Division lyrics. While not entirely successful on its own, when combined with the photographs the digital video suggests that Zaki's interests may not best be served by photography, or by an adherence to any one medium at all. A number of factors—that he offers a video that's a stand-in for another; that he mutilates his photographs; that in the statement accompanying the show he emphasizes Curtis's suicide and wonders whether the kids' recitation of the lyrics' "angst and depression" would be different if they were older—lead me to think that rather than domestic architecture per se, Zaki is interested in the architectonics of sorrow. He is attempting something much more considerable than the "ominous" nightscaping of Todd Hido or Miranda Lichtenstein. His concerns seem to exceed photography, to require additional concepts and media to witness the relations between locale and psychic climates, between palm trees and sunshine and suicide.

—Bruce Hainley

PORTO

## ADRIANA VAREJÃO GALERIA PEDRO OLIVEIRA

The fine color gradations that enliven the apparent chromatic uniformity of Adriana

Varejão's *Ruína de charque—Portugal* (Jerked-beef ruin—Portugal; all works 2001), or the delicate mesh that furrows its surface, might seem to evoke the traditions of Minimalist or monochrome painting. It is thus tempting to discuss the Brazilian artist's work in terms of the history of modernism and the possible significance of its survival. A more attentive look, however, shows us that this is not a strict exercise in abstract painting, but rather the representation of a surface clad in tiles. The painting, when it becomes a duplicate of the wall (or of the floor, as we see in another work in the series, *Ruína de charque—Porto*), creates a direct confrontation with the space that houses it and raises architectural issues, becoming something more like an installation.

In her recent exhibitions "Azulejão" (Big tile) in Rio de Janeiro and "Azulejões" (Big tiles) in São Paulo, Varejão lined the gallery walls with canvases that functioned as enlargements of the panels of a tiled wall. Their motifs were variations on those of traditional Portuguese tile work, which had considerable architectural and religious importance in the era of the colonization of Brazil. In effect, the artist made a new wall and a new space inside the gallery. The same thing happened here with *Parede* (Wall), in which eighteen superimposed canvases of varying sizes gave the illusion of a simple two-dimensional painting on one flat support, thus playing with the function of the wall in an even more complex manner.

In *Jerked-Beef Ruin—Portugal*, the tile-lined space that Varejão's painting evokes is not a virtual space, neutral, separate from the world. It brings to mind concrete situations: a butcher shop, a bar, a kitchen, a bathroom, or a hospital; social space, domestic space, intimate space—spaces in which the body must be contained and protected, just as tiles protect a wall, which in turn defines the structure of a building. The objective would be to keep the body under cover, but Varejão suggests that it is impossible to hide the body. The lateral edge of the painted surfaces takes the form of a large mass of meat that overflows the limits of the painting, squashed between the front surface of the painting and the wall or floor. The work emerges as an immense, monstrous sandwich of meat between two walls, one real, the other painted. The extraordinary presence of this mass of meat is the real point of these works, the moment when our astonishment and our excitement are registered, an intersection of scandal and fascination. What is this meat? Where does it come