

ARTEFORUM

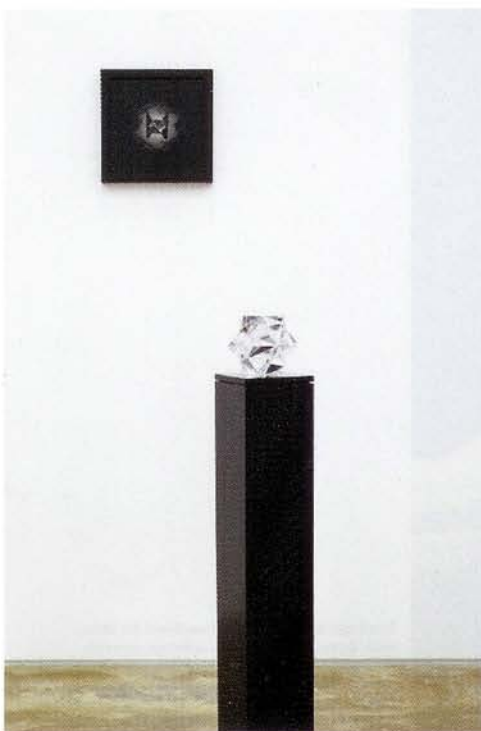
JANUARY 2006

First Takes
10 New Artists

Winter Preview
50 Shows Worldwide

Rosemarie
Trockel

INTERNATIONAL



Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Lisa Tan, "Letters from Dr. Bamberger" (detail), 2002-, framed documents, 9 1/4 x 6 3/4". Lisa Tan, *A Kiss for Fredrik Nilsen and His Documentation of That Kiss (With Subsequent Generations)* (detail), 2005, paper, lipstick, ink-jet print, Cibachrome prints, 13 x 28", 20 x 35", 28 x 43". Lisa Tan, *Ellsworth Kelly*, 2004, engraved card, acrylic, lacquer, and wood, 8 1/2 x 10 1/2 x 38". This page: Lisa Tan, *Untitled (Broken Baccarat)*, 2005. Installation view, Harris Lieberman Gallery, 2005. Photo: Tom Powell Imaging.

First Take

CHRISTIAN RATTEMAYER ON LISA TAN

TERMS OFTEN USED to describe interactions between lovers—*tenderness, flirtatiousness, intimacy, longing, desire, even ecstasy*—may also be aptly applied to the bonds between Lisa Tan and the subjects (and objects) of her artistic affections. Relationships are at the heart of this New York-based artist's practice. Some of Tan's works originate in encounters with other people, while others engage the artist's emotional connection to an idea or experience; all are conceptual, and many are aesthetically spare, even minimal, but they possess considerable elegance and style nonetheless. They encompass simple gestures, documentation, charts, and appropriations that, despite their visual economy, somehow never look overly "designed," thanks to the sincere, even romantic sensibilities they evince. At the same time, by combining an acute sense of respect and generosity with an analytical interest in what might be termed the formal characteristics of feelings—the "weight" of appreciation, for example, or the temporal dimensions of desire—Tan manages to situate her emotional connection with her subjects at the center of her practice while avoiding the diaristic, the sentimental, and the naive. If relational aesthetics is about the sociology of human interactions, then Tan's aesthetics of relationships is about the economy of human intimacy a romantic conceptualism grounded in the investigation of emotional drives.

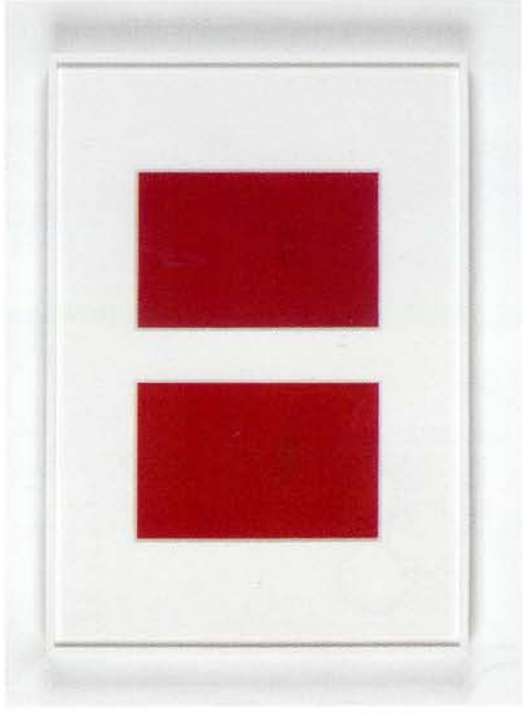
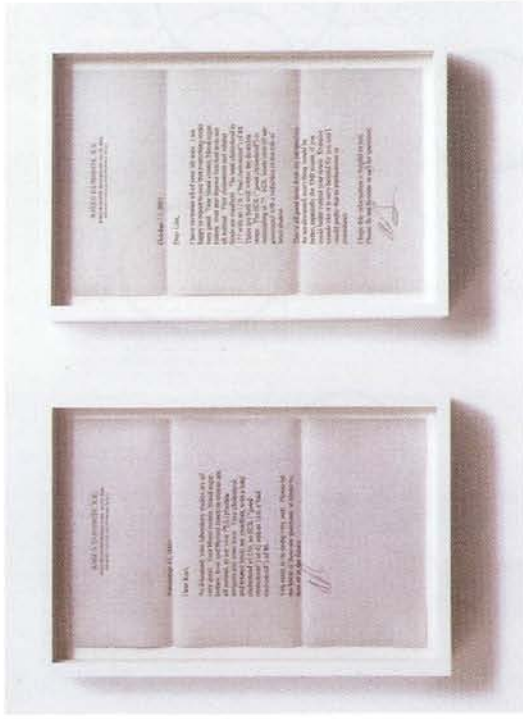
Representative of Tan's approach is the sculptural work *Ellsworth Kelly*, 2004, which she produced after the titular artist invited her to join him and two friends

for dinner at a restaurant in Venice, California. She thanked Kelly by sending him a set of ninety engraved calling cards, retaining ten for herself. The sculpture derived from this gesture consists of a black lacquered wooden plinth that supports a single card, displayed in a clear acrylic case. Enshrining and literally elevating the card and the name it bears, the work transforms the encounter between the two artists into both an homage and a contemplation of the anxiety of influence, formalizing their fleeting intimacy as well as the inevitable resumption of the distance between them. In *A Kiss for Fredrik Nilsen and His Documentation of That Kiss (With Subsequent Generations)*, 2005, Tan turns her attention to another aspect of her life as an artist, foregrounding her flirtatious relationship with the photographer who documents her work. She had Nilsen take a picture of a lipstick kiss on red paper and then had the resulting picture rephotographed for two more "generations," until the image became too faint to see.

But Tan's inquiries extend beyond the realm of her profession. For her ongoing series "Letters from Dr. Bamberger," 2002-, for instance, Tan frames the letters she and her successive partners receive after their annual examinations by her doctor, thus highlighting her concern for the well-being of herself and her lovers. In other works, she maps journeys both real and imaginary, focusing not on her relationships with others but on solitary longing and desires. For *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, 2004, she planned a single trip to see almost every work by Hieronymus Bosch on public display anywhere in the world. Originating in London and concluding in New York, the meticulous intercontinental itinerary comprises 124 days of travel. The work takes the form of an eight-foot-long white-on-black chart; the trip itself, never consummated, remains an unfulfilled possibility—and is perhaps all the more satisfying for that. For "Seven Year Itch—The Touring Club Italiano Rubbings," 2004-, Tan, then in her seventh year as a Los Angeles resident, gained access privileges to the Getty Research Institute. There, she spent nights imagining global escapades with the help of the library's extensive collection of travel books, giving form to her obsession by making rubbings of the covers of a set of Touring Club Italiano guides. And in an ongoing series provisionally titled "One Night Stand," 2005-, Tan delivers on the potential of the previous work by traveling to select foreign cities for one night and returning home the next morning, documenting this voluntary self-displacement only in writing. While her texts remain strictly concerned with surface description, Tan seeks rare moments of spatiotemporal collapse—those confluences of jet lag, solitude, and the comfort of an environment at once totally foreign and strangely embracing—that constitute a kind of waking dream state and that she terms "*petit morts*," in a deliberate evocation of the French expression for sexual climax.

In her most recent work, *Untitled (Broken Baccarat)*, 2005, Tan thwarts the expectation of "appropriate" behavior in response to an act of gift-giving: After receiving a Baccarat crystal *objet* as a present, she attempted to break it by throwing it out the window of her second-story apartment. When it merely sustained minor fractures, she photographed it, only to discover that its complex refractions could not be adequately rendered on film. Seemingly indestructible yet unrepresentable, the glass knickknack becomes a stand-in for the initial act of kindness, which, although invisible, is nonetheless "present." The oeuvres of Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Bas Jan Ader (whose increasing influence bespeaks a kind of romantic turn in the historiography of Conceptualism) are clear precedents for Tan's practice, even as she stakes out her own territory with the compelling and formally canny approach embodied in works like *Untitled (Broken Baccarat)*. Her work introduces a timely sense of personal emotional investment at a moment when sentiment is being rediscovered in the histories of Conceptual art. □

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