

# ARTFORUM

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Pat Hearn and Julia Scher at Art Frankfurt, 1992.

**PAT HEARN AND COLIN DE LAND** were never professionals. Instead, Hearn, who ran a contemporary art gallery that opened in 1983 and whose last show was in 2001, and de Land, whose gallery American Fine Arts, Co., ran from 1984 to 2003, were explorers. Pat Hearn Fine Art was the most elegant gallery in the most bombed-out zone of the pre-

gentrified East Village; de Land's American Fine Arts later followed Hearn onto Wooster Street in South SoHo; and in February 1995, Hearn's was one of three galleries to open in then-deserted West Chelsea. But more than pioneers of real estate, they were cosmonauts of the art world and the world of art. They both labored tirelessly to ferret out work that would complement their dark sides, objects that would match their underlying perversity. We could fantasize that de Land figured the melancholic temperament, that with his subversive streak and the gloomy conceptual installations he favored he was very much born under the sign of Saturn; while Hearn, with her sharpness and modish visuals, embodied the sanguine temperament, ruled by Jupiter, vernal, sociable, playful, and fiery; and that the little span of Belgian-blocked street between them on Wooster was charged in the pulls of their opposing orbits. Their offerings suggested to me Bataille's accursed share—excess and loss, in a personal, singular, and more emotional way. In the beginning, at least, de Land had an odd grasp of vulnerability, and when he discussed almost any idea, he gave it an extra fold that made it an avant-garde one. Sometimes every sentence was a surprise. Later on, he used that understanding to be more manipulative, as Hearn had always used her seductiveness. She had important applications for her glamour, which she combined with a deep grasp of the various schools of postwar art and a clever way of editing the new work she found so that it appeared like extensions of those traditions. De Land's refusal to be "professional" in the regular way figured a kind of poetic or, more accurately, poet-like disaffection with industry, like Byron defending the Luddites in the House of Lords, or Ruskin inveighing against the "furnace and the forge."



Colin de Land and Christian Nagel at the booth shared by Galerie Christian Nagel and American Fine Arts, Co., Gramercy International Art Fair, New York, 1996.

This past summer, the Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College opened “The Conditions of Being Art: Pat Hearn Gallery and American Fine Arts, Co. (1983–2004).” Organized by Jeannine Tang, Ann E. Butler, and Lia Gangitano, the compendious show contains a wide range of archival materials, in addition to pieces by forty-six artists affiliated with both galleries. As I walked through the exhibition, I kept wondering: How do these works seem to viewers who had no experience of the galleries when they were extant? One’s own memory seems like an inescapable collaborator in the show. The memories were many. At Hearn’s we first encountered Philip Taaffe’s eerie wallpapers and Renée Green’s presciently postcolonial tableaux. At de Land’s, you could walk into one of Mark Dion’s first Museums of Demoralized Natural History, catch one of John Waters’s wallows in debased Americana, or castigate institutional curation with Andrea Fraser. A few times, to fill a gap in the schedule, de Land even concocted fictitious artists—one of whom (birthed in collaboration with Richard Prince) was named, teasingly, John Dogg.

**I KNEW THEM BOTH**, de Land somewhat better, but I won't pretend that I *really* knew them. From early on, though, for me and many others, their galleries were important. In retrospect—through these old eyes, as Alexander Woollcott used to say—it was a grand time. Idealistic. There was the sense that one's lived reality really mattered in art. Contra postmodernism, the things that were important felt genuine. Was it just youth? I don't think so. I think it was largely the spark that de Land and Hearn somehow struck. They were a buffer against the reality of commerce, endlessly and hopelessly trying to evade the dumbing-down of art that the marketplace demands, through one doomed strategy after another.

It was the money thing that sank them in the end. They were shrewd, but never all-business enough to stay afloat in the shark-infested sea. Their foremost aim was simply to find ways to pay for the things that mattered. But despite cofounding the Gramercy International Art Fair in 1994—which soon became the Armory Show—and even, to some extent, setting the stage for the international art market, with its proliferation of presumably unmissable art fairs, they never became true capitalists. They weren't sublimated enough; they didn't condescend to be part of the great pyramid scheme. Their story was one of trying to put the desublimated pleasure of faux cruelty up against the very real cruelty of capitalism. And capitalism was always more brutal, and would always win.

One felt melancholy about them even before their eerily, almost Shakespeareanly synchronized endings—Hearn succumbed to liver cancer in 2000 and de Land died, also of cancer, in 2003—maybe because there was some whiff of ruin that prefigured the tragedies, or just because one knew they'd never find quite what they were looking for. Behind the bleeding edge, there'd always been a sweetness, a naive hopefulness. They added to the world's supply of good things. Nearing the DarkGate, de Land became obsessed with clocks, as though he were trying to keep their Ixion's wheels rolling until the last half-second tick. The two of them were both too much of their time and too singular in themselves for us to expect to see their likes again.

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# BOOKFORUM



Clockwise, from left: Pat Hearn in Renée Green's installation *Taste Venue*, 1994, Pat Hearn Gallery, New York.

**THE CONDITIONS OF BEING ART: PAT HEARN GALLERY & AMERICAN FINE ARTS, CO.** (CCS Bard/Dancing Foxes Press, \$40) tracks the careers of the charismatic and influential gallerists Pat Hearn and Colin de Land, an art-world power couple who transformed the New York gallery scene in the 1980s and '90s before both succumbed to cancer. (Hearn died in 2000 at forty-five; de Land passed away in 2003 at forty-seven.) This text-heavy catalogue accompanies a show at Bard's Center for Curatorial Studies, where the works of more than forty artists are spread across eighteen galleries, along with documentation from the gallerists' archives. The book's ten essays thoughtfully consider these two distinct but linked careers, both marked by an uncommon engagement with artists: Exhibition cocurator Lia Gangitano writes movingly of Hearn's "businesslike spiri-

tuality," while Diedrich Diederichsen remarks on de Land's "existential sincerity." On the surface, the thematic coherence of their artist rosters is hard to parse. Hearn's ran the gamut from now-lauded painters like George Condo and Mary Heilmann to provocateurs as divergent as photographer Mark Morrisroe and the unclassifiable Lutz Bacher; de Land's included the seemingly unmarketable institutional critique of Andrea Fraser and Art Club 2000. The throughline is the couple's hands-on dedication to building an artist-centric network within, and alongside, thriving commercial spaces.

—LISA DARMS