

INTERNATIONAL BOOGIE-WOOGIE IX

Angela features with Slugs & (Illustration)



Amsterdam was special. After working, sometimes Angela would stop, asking: "Why?" So Arthur would reply: "When stops arrive." He was very concerned with the matter. Any wonder some architects were inspired. Afterwards, watching silently, Angela withdrew, saying: "Anachronisms will surely abound." We surely agreed.

*Peter Hutchinson
2000*

Peter Hutchinson: International Boogie-Woogie IX, 2000, 30 by 40 inches. All works this article color photographs.

Images of Elsewhere

BY CARTER RATCLIFF

With "International Boogie-Woogie," the title of a recent series of photo pieces, Peter Hutchinson makes two allusions—one formal-historical, the other biographical. The formal-historical allusion is to Piet Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*, a painting he made in 1942-43, soon after his wartime flight from London to New York. Accenting a gridwork of yellow stripes with rectangular touches of red, white and blue, Mondrian pays homage to the streets and jittery traffic of Manhattan. Building his grids with snapshots taken on his travels, Hutchinson shows us streets, buildings and waterways in New York City, the villages of New England, Rome, Milan, Amsterdam and elsewhere. Untroubled by traffic, these images are filled with daylight and the sort of quiet one expects only late at night.

The "International" of "International Boogie-Woogie" refers to Hutchinson's border-crossing life as an artist. Born and raised in England, he earned a BFA at the University of Illinois in 1960. During the mid-'60s, he showed quirkily geometric canvases in New York. By decade's end, he had set out for distant places, where he performed actions with esthetic intent and thus joined in the decade's collective effort to redefine art. Like the outdoor works of fellow Brits Richard Long and Hamish

Fulton, Hutchinson's early photo pieces displace a venerable landscape tradition from canvas to real space. Early last summer, the Lance Fung Gallery showed documentation of his early pieces, alongside the new "International Boogie-Woogie" and "Botanical" series.

Slipping beneath the waters off Tobago, in 1969, Hutchinson threaded five calabashes on a rope anchored to a bed of coral. The following year he climbed Parícutin, a Mexican volcano, and distributed 450 pounds of bread along its acridly steaming rim. Returning to Parícutin in 1971, he exchanged bread for apples, arranging dozens of them in a massive triangle on the lava field at the volcano's foot. Perishing quickly, Hutchinson's materials were too fugitive to leave any traces. While Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer were building Earthworks, Hutchinson was doing performance pieces at the scale of landscape—or the sky. For three minutes, in 1970, he concentrated on a cloud and made it disappear. Anyway, that is what a series of six snapshots purports to show. His early, ephemeral works are known to us now as photographic documents with captions. That they could only be known to us this way makes these documents crucial, even primary, and qualifies Hutchinson as one of the inventors of photo-based Conceptual art.

Smithson, Dennis Oppenheim, Douglas Huebler, Vito Acconci and any



Transmutations, 2000, 30 by 40 inches. All images courtesy Lance Fung Gallery, New York.

Two of Peter Hutchinson's newest photo series, documenting architecture and flowers, were recently seen in New York. Shown with examples of his earlier conceptual pieces, they evoked the artist's peripatetic life.

number of others made documentary images in the late 1960s and early '70s. In their works, scruffy shades of snapshot gray predominate. Though he too made black-and-white pictures, Hutchinson often used color. Thus we know that the apples of *Apple Triangle* were startlingly yellow against the lush black of the lava, and that the bread scattered at the edge of the volcanic crater developed a coating of weirdly luminous mold. In Hutchinson's new works, color and light are more intense than ever.

Assembled in row upon uneven row in the "International Boogie-Woogie" pieces, the snapshots have an unexpected radiance. This comes, I think, from juxtapositions that strengthen the already heavily saturated colors of the images. Where a patch of blue sky is not blue enough, Hutchinson fills it in with a Day-Glo yellow marker. This seems at first the most desperate of expedients, and then you begin to see how smoothly this garish hue harmonizes with its surroundings. In his recent work, Hutchinson is after the overwhelming clarity delivered by utterly focused contemplation, and he often achieves it. Though this exhibition, his first in four years, was called "Dreamscapes," it had more to do with trance than with dream.

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Paricutin Volcano Project, 1970, 30 by 40 inches.

Hutchinson

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In 1994 the Provincetown Arts Press published *Dissolving Clouds*, a selection of the stories, memoirs, art-critical thoughts and uncategorizable speculations that Hutchinson has set down on paper over the years. Smithson's prose grinds away at his themes, much as entropy—his favorite theme—grinds everything down to undifferentiated matter. Hutchinson's prose wanders, as he has been doing for more than four decades. Meandering through a landscape, his language—like his imagery—focuses on particulars. Or cherishes them with enraptured intensity. Improvised grids give a fragile order to his pictures. To guide his words, Hutchinson sometimes keys them to a readymade sequence: the alphabet, the days of the week, the months of the year, all of which have provided frameworks for photographic pieces. For the "International Boogie-Woogie" series, he set up patterns of alliteration.

The initial letters "a," "w" and "s," in that order, regulate the caption of *International Boogie-Woogie IX* (2000), which begins: "Amsterdam was special. After walking, sometimes Angelo would stop, asking 'Why?'. . ." Several divagations later, the caption ends: "Angelo withdrew, saying, 'Anachronisms will surely abound.' We surely agree." Despite its rigidity, this sequence of letters leaves narrative possibilities wide open—so open, in fact, that coherence can only be local, as a thought or an image establishes a tenuous connection with another nearby. A comparable tenuousness weaves the details of Hutchinson's pictures into a web that reweaves itself as you notice fresh congruencies of form, color and mood.

When he is not on the road or in the air, Hutchinson tends his garden in Provincetown, Mass., a vocation he commemorates with the close-up flowers that fill his "Botanical" series. Here, organic forms play the part taken by architecture in the "International Boogie-Woogie" pieces. The suggestion, perhaps, is that buildings, no less than plants, are organic forms—that they are alive and will perish, like their inhabitants or, for that matter, the apples



Calabash breaking up against the coral, off Tobago.

Peter Hutchinson
1969

Floating Calabash, 1969,
14 1/2 by 16 1/2 inches.

and calabashes of Hutchinson's early works. His devotion to particulars requires him to move, incessantly, from one to the next. Entranced by a detail, he is haunted by endless possibilities for entrancement elsewhere. So he moves on, and his art records his restlessness. It records, as well, his sense of the life in all that ever caught his attention, if only for the time it takes to snap a shutter.

Peter Hutchinson's exhibition appeared at Lance Fung Gallery, New York [May 9-June 8]. Works from his "Botanical," "International Boogie-Woogie" and "Landscape" series were on view at Galerie Bugdahn und Kainer, Düsseldorf [May 17-July 13].

Author: Carter Ratcliff is a poet and art critic living in New York. His most recent book is *Out of the Box: The Reinvention of Art, 1965-1975* (Allworth Press). A selection of his essays, *The Figure of the Artist*, will be published next year by Cambridge University Press.

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