

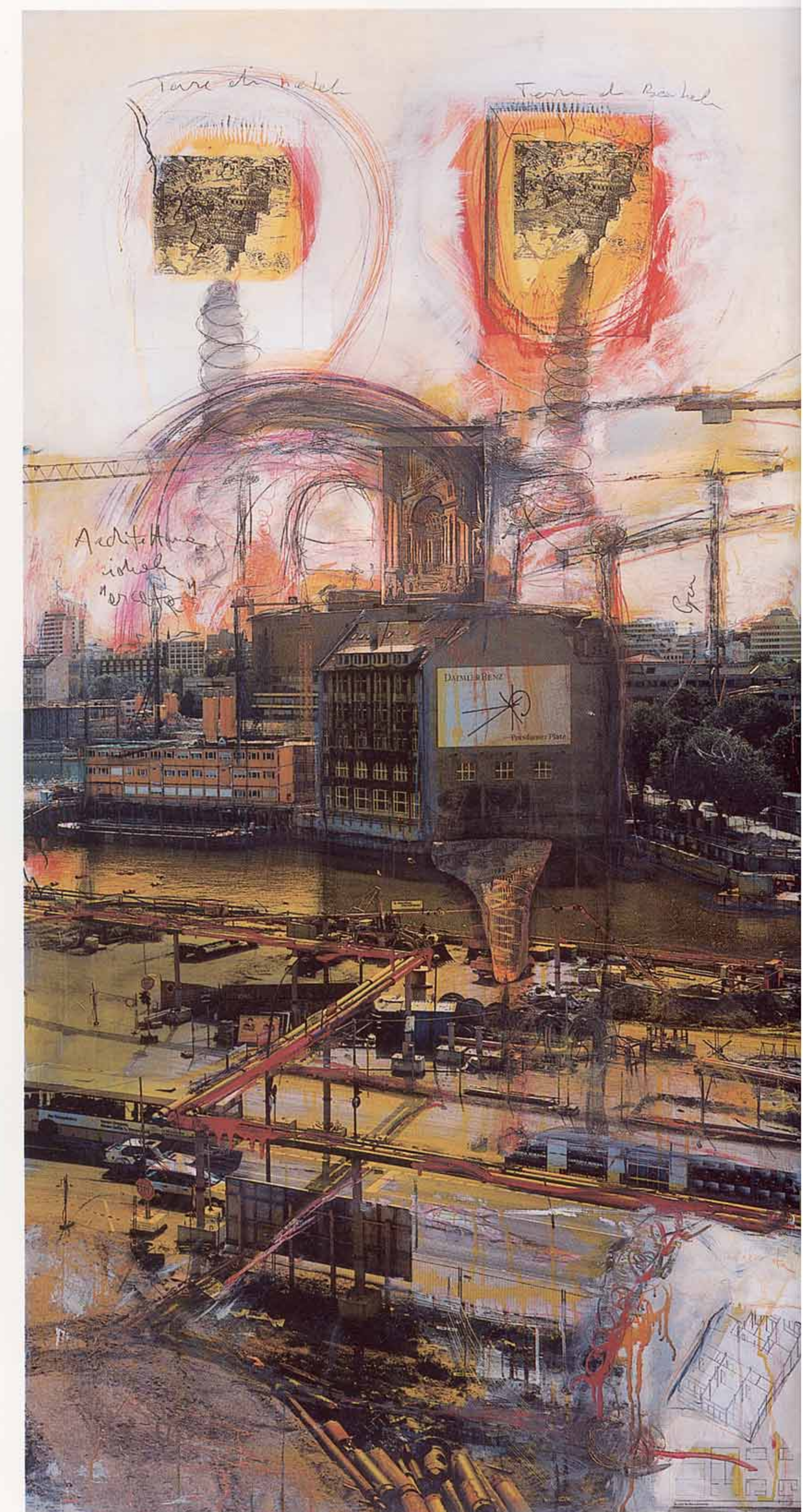
„Hörsturz Friedrichstraße“, 1996  
81 x 36 x 15 cm  
Interaktives Objekt: Foto, Parabolmikrofon, Anrufbeantworter, Lichtschranke, Walkman,  
Audiotape mit Namen von Aktiengesellschaften, Plexiglas







„Bunker. Berlin-Mitte“, 1997  
120 x 140 cm  
Fotocollage und Mischtechnik auf Holz



„Phönix aus der Asche“, 1997  
190 x 110 cm  
Fotocollage und Mischtechnik auf Holz



## Biographie

1961 geboren in Neapel, Italien  
1975–80 Gymnasium – Fachrichtung Elektronik  
1980–82 Studium der Ökonomie und Politik an der Universität für  
Wirtschaft und Handel, Neapel  
1988–91 Studium der Philosophie und Kunstwissenschaft an der  
Technischen Universität Berlin  
seit 1982 freischaffender Künstler

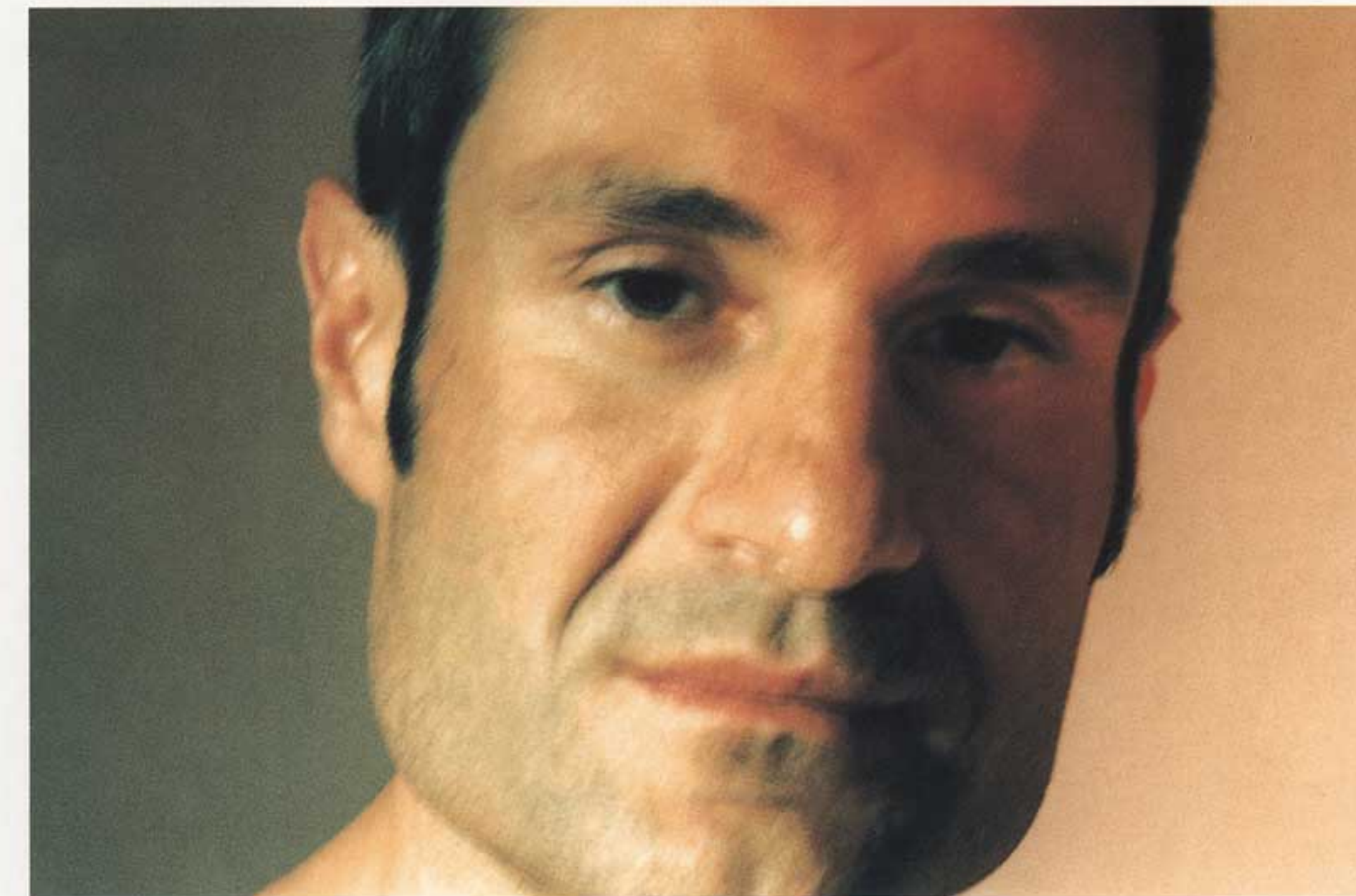
Costantino Ciervo lebt und arbeitet seit 1984 in Berlin.

Seit 1995 wird der Künstler exklusiv durch die  
Galerie FINE ART RAFAEL VOSTELL vertreten.

Ausstellungen und Ausstellungsbeiträge (Auswahl)  
EA = Einzelausstellung

1984 „Itineranze“, Einzelausstellung in der Sala del  
Chiostrò della Madonna Dell'Arco, Neapel  
1986 „Italienische Woche“, Ausstellung in der „Etagé“, Berlin  
1988 „Die schwarze Serie“, Galerie Vorstadt, Basel  
1991 „Installationen“, Einzelausstellung, Fürbringer Neun, Berlin  
1992 „Rosa, Rosae“, Fürbringer Neun, Berlin  
„Domestic Art“, Pettineo (ME)  
„Bandbreite“, B.B.K., Berlin  
„Uno per Uno“, Castelfranco Veneto (TV)  
1993 Ausstellung, Galerie Studio 25, Mailand  
„Vivisection“, Fürbringer Neun, Berlin  
„Deterritoriale“, XLV Biennale di Venezia, Venedig  
„La presenza della virtualità arte come Pre-“, „Dummies“,  
Zusammenarbeit mit O. Kiefer, ex biscottificio,  
Sarzana (SP)  
„Wo ist die italienische Linke?“, Werkschau 1, Triptychon,  
AEG-Gelände, Künstlerförderung Senatsverwaltung Berlin

1994 „Conrad“, Kunstmesse Bologna, Zusammenarbeit  
mit O. Kiefer, Förderkoje des Instituts für Deutsche Kultur  
„Preludio 3“, Galerie Studio 25, Mailand  
„Vendesi“, Villa Malaparte, gemeinsames Projekt  
mit O. Kiefer, Capri, Napoli  
„Oniscus Murarius“, Zusammenarbeit mit O. Kiefer,  
KunstWerke, Berlin  
„Perpetuum Mobile“, „Il terzo escluso“,  
gemeinsame Arbeit mit O. Kiefer,  
X. Biennale di S. Martino di Lupari (TV)  
1995 „Standpunkte“, FINE ART RAFAEL VOSTELL, Berlin  
„Zeichnung 2“, Galerie Klaus Fischer, Berlin  
„Terra Nera“, Palazzo del Comune di Milo, Milo (CT)  
„GmbH Complessità“, FINE ART RAFAEL VOSTELL, Berlin (EA)  
„Art Cologne '95“  
1996 „Liebe und Tod“, FINE ART RAFAEL VOSTELL, Berlin  
„The Modern City in Europe“, Museum of Contemporary Art,  
Tokyo in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Centre Georges Pompidou,  
Paris. Die Einladung wurde aus finanziellen Gründen  
kurzfristig zurückgezogen.  
„Lichtblicke“ Gemeinschaftsausstellung des  
Landesverbands Berliner Galerien e.V., Marstall, Berlin  
„Stadt“, Raab Galerie, Berlin  
„Missing Links“, Galerie Klaus Fischer, Berlin  
„Partie 4“-Internationales Kunstforum DREWEN,  
Atelierhof Muthesius, Brandenburg  
„Cluster Images“, 2. Werkleitz Biennale, Dessau  
„Files“, Bunker in Berlin-Mitte  
„Art Cologne '96“  
„Displacement“, Galerie Wyspa, Danzig  
1997 „Dolce Vita“, 3. Italienische Festwochen, Berlin  
„Zeitskulptur“, Oberösterreichische Landesgalerie Linz  
„Cogito ergo sunt“, FINE ART RAFAEL VOSTELL, Berlin (EA)  
„1. Maisalon Köpenick“, Altstadt Köpenick  
„Universarte“ Bologna, Italien  
„Forum“, Forum Bildender Künstler, Essen



Costantino Ciervo







## Cogito

*„I think there is no need for a title. Things are so complex that whenever possible we should meet them without a title. Every title leads in a specific direction and almost always prevents us from altering course. But that does not mean we shall reject concepts, for we may resist as much as we will, but our insights, our perception remain conceptually bound.“*

Cogito by René Descartes originated modern rationalism. And yet Descartes' rationalism in particular is characterised by metaphysics. It was not until the French philosophers of the Enlightenment that the Cartesian programme was turned against its originator in a new study of Locke and Newton. Where Descartes still saw 'fables of the world', the Encyclopaedists sought their salvation in the most conceivably complete description of the world, thus creating the so-called sciences. The God of Newton is not the God of Descartes, the res extensa also includes the res cogitans and Cartesian dualism resolves into nothing. But all thought contrary to Descartes still continues to refer to him.

In his novel 'Rayuela', Julio Cortazar puts the following words into the mouth of his character Oliviera: *„So you can see how today the Cogito, that piece of human endeavour par excellence, is situated in a somewhat vague region, between electro-magnetism and chemistry, and probably it differs less than we once thought from the northern lights or a photo with infra-red rays. That's is where your Cogito is vanishing to, part of the dizzying flow of force and its stages - known, inter alia in the year 1950, as electro impulses, molecules, atoms, neutrons, protons, potirons, micro buttons, radioactive isotopes, minute particles of stuff, cosmic rays: Words, words, words, Hamlet, Act Two, I believe.“*

And the works by Costantino Ciervo are a response to this way of thinking. They are also a form of archaeological process. Many different voices, forms and gestures appear in this process, both literally and metaphorically. The picture of reality can no longer be captured in a coherent image, but in many, partly incoherent pictorial elements forming a medium. It is necessary to refer to a medium, because each individual work by Costantino Ciervo is composed of elements which appear contradictory. In this sense: *„Archaeology: a comparative analysis, which is not destined to reduce the differences in discourse and to outline the unity they amount to, but to divide their variability into different forms. The effect of the archaeological comparison is not unifying, but multiplying.“* (Michel Foucault: The Archaeology of Knowledge).

## Ergo

Costantino Ciervo „Cogito ergo sunt“, 1997

Photo-installation: a photo, six photographic roll tapes with shots of the hands and the navel of a child, seven large seven segment indicators, a monitor, wooden letters, a video-player, a video cassette with shots of architecture and a text about politics and science written by the artist, a computer with relay drive, a power pack, plexiglass.

Technical realisation is one thing, but this technical realisation has been preceded by a particular way of thinking. This is not only true of the work by Costantino Ciervo itself, but also of what it depicts. By making associations between text, picture and photo, the artist mediates between these individual elements. Six photo tapes cut through the elegant architecture of the accomodation at 205 Friedrichstraße, built by Oswald Matthias Ungers. The passing tapes depict the hands and the stomach of a child. These are a recollection of the cherubs of the late Renaissance, whilst the building by O. M. Ungers points to villas by Andrea Palladio. Both references are reproductions. However, the architecture *„appears more favourably from the car, photographed, filmed, in the prototype: as long as it is not reality surrounding, but facing us - strange, picture-like, present only aesthetically and statistically. The inhabitants and the users are even less present, only in the abstract, in „new building“ as well: the main idea of which, that forms emerge from functions, is only possible to fulfil on the level of abstraction.“* These are the words of Helmut Färber in his book 'Building Art and Film - from the History of Seeing' (1977). The degree of abstraction has increased, in quality and in quantity. This increase is and will continue to be virulent in Berlin, and it is potentiated even more by computer generated design. Costantino Ciervo destroys this abstraction by intervening in the image. The image becomes a metaphor and this metaphor is Berlin; the interface of two spheres, of neo-liberalism in the west and classical neo-capitalism in the east. Architecture offers a reflection of this, because it is essentially the architecture of the coming capitals and of the present capital.

## Sunt

*„They are. Different voices fashion the text. There is no longer an authorial narrator, just as there is no subject. The subject is a fiction, reality is multi-layered.“*

The duality of the Cartesian system, visible in the difference made between body and spirit, has been retained in the duality of the digital age. Two states, 0 and 1, form the basis of this system. In his work 'Cogito ergo sunt', Costantino Ciervo refers to this by translating a text into the digital code. Each individual letter from the line of text at the bottom of the work is represented by a chain of digits in the upper section.

In „The Twelve Commandments of Cyberspace“, Thomas Mandel and Gerard van der Leun wrote: *„In April 1969, Steve Crocker from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) sent an announcement to the other members of his Network Working Group (NWG). This group played a key role in the development of the Net. Crocker's document (which is now referred to as RFC No. 3) sketches basic rules for the exchange of information and ideas concerning this network, from which, 'the Net' then developed in less than three decades.“* RFC may be translated as „request for comment“. Works of art - particularly those by Costantino Ciervo - are also requests for comment. They are a statement as a specific reaction to a situation and they demand a reaction from the viewer; with unlimited access and the greatest possible freedom of thought and speech, as RFC No. 3 had already formulated.

Three hundred years after René Descartes' attempt to assure himself of his own existence, the Vienna philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, shortly before the end of his life, made a second attempt to achieve certainty. The following comment may be found in number 204 of his notes, which were published under the title „On Certainty“: *„But the argumentation, the justification of the evidence comes to an end: but it is not that end which makes certain sentences immediately appear true to us, that is, a form of seeing on our part, but it is our actions which form the basis to the linguistic game.“*

Politically motivated art and artistic provocation are not exactly focal points in the general reception of art and public debate concerning art during the late nineties. In this sense, one might refer to Costantino Ciervo as an outmoded artist, one who is by no means modern; for Ciervo's works combine an artistic conception with political and philosophical observations. He confronts the viewer with relevant and existential questions by means of the directness of his pictures and his more complex collages, so challenging us to make our own comment. Ciervo not only resists the mainstream with his works, he is also a thoroughly irritating artist. Despite our fascination, his deconstructivist stroll through different media and disciplines also evokes uncertainty. Thus „Sudden Loss of Hearing, Friedrichstraße“ becomes a bugging operation; highly sensitive parabolic microphones record every motion and sound in the room. At the same time, a quiet, monotonous voice infiltrates us with the names of share companies. The interactive object's confusion of voices, which begins when the viewer passes a sensor, is superimposed by use of a wire spiral distorting the words; a background noise which both stimulates and irritates the sensitive nerves of our acoustic and optical perception. In his choice of artistic means and form, Ciervo makes use of modern technologies and finds new metaphors and symbols within a field of tension situated between tradition and the present, yet with a firm eye upon the future.

Works from the early 90s - such as, for example, the contribution to the XLV Biennial in Venice, „Senza titolo“ (1992), a spatial installation made up of 64 metal components, 64 objectives with 64 TTL seven segment indicators and electronic wires - are still very marked by formal-logical, aesthetic conception and research. In his present-day installations and objects, the new media - whether video or computer - function primarily as image carriers for a necessary conception centring on aspects of content. As a chronicler of his times, Ciervo captures images of the present day in photographs or videos, thus placing his works in a social context and in an artistic tradition which, combined with the use of electronic and digital technology, makes them into - in Walter Benjamin's words - *„evidence in the historical process“*.

In the photo-installation „You Scratch my Back...“, the artist takes a snapshot of the largest building site in the world at present, Potsdamer Platz, and mounts a mechanical construction before the background of the highly complicated logistics involved in this highly technological building site. This construction - with its cogs, a simple chain and a rough metal pipe - resembles a Kafkaesque fossil from the early era of industrialisation. At a time in which PR strategists flatter building sites, making them into „show sites“, Ciervo presents us Potsdamer Platz like a gaping wound, and so enables us to visualise the high-tech isolation of a future cyberspace. The metal pipe moves horizontally across the picture from left to right - between Daimler Benz and Sony. The rhythmical, regular movement of the pipe seems to make the protagonists approach each other, to alternate with each other at the centre. The Philharmonic Hall with the chamber music hall in the background, appears captive in the clutch of this ghost-like duet. The effect of the organic and irrational elements of design in Scharoun's architecture, of the „Weinhaus Huth“ from the Gründerzeit on the left and the rudiments of the neo-baroque „Hotel Esplanade“ on the right hand side is to evoke a Trias of transitoriness: the latter are reduced to the function of an advertising surface for the future building contractors. In this installation, Ciervo reveals his view of the future, questioning it by means of a confrontation between past and present in both the content of the picture and the formal components of the installation - the interactive installation „Cogito ergo sunt“, on the other hand, initiates a debate on present, existing conditions. The artist dissects the components of the social status quo which are visualised in the architecture of the square and the smooth facades by the Cologne architect O. M. Ungers. The image of the building appears fragmented; severed by vertical roll tapes on which photographs of children's hands playing with their navels move through the cold front of glass and marble. In this way, the artist questions the associations with vitality and emotion which he himself has made. The surface, like a membrane, requires the protection of a plexiglass hood; under it the colour of the skin is distorted by the digital processing of the photos - a pale shimmer to the point of death. With this simultaneous use of different creative means and diametric symbolism, Ciervo points to the complicated interaction between ratio and physis which is the foundation to Descartes „Cogito, ergo sum“. But here the phenotype of man - as is usual in Ciervo's work - only appears as a fragment, it is superimposed or it only appears infinitely small in the face of overpowering buildings and global centralisation.

The principle of serialising goes hand in hand with fragmentation; and it is taken up by Ciervo as a component of form in other installations. Beside the vertical arrangement of the elements, fragments of man or of gods appear, destroyed or superimposed by scaffolding. The struggle between the spirit and matter, which is still raging in the sequences taken from the Pergamon altar in „I lost my centre“, seems to have been extinguished in „After the Fall“: a cloned spirit in cloned heads. Even today, our awareness has not granted us an overall and consequently humane insight. We do not face up to the struggle with the gods, but exchange it for a dollar or for shares in those world concerns whose names ripple across the screen in bands of text. Water in which two men's hands are washing flows loudly and without interruption into the droll fountain consisting of chairs with monitors as seats. Under the monitors, which we associate with a pair of eyes, we find the insides of a television set. The electric wires and diodes replace the nerve fibres and synapses of the human brain, pointing to the brain-chip technology which researchers are using to work on the future replacement of the cerebrum by intelligent machines; the third evolution. In this context, the seven TTL seven segment indicators which click away a bright red binary code, 0 and 1, to themselves on the roof of „Cogito ergo sunt“ lose the harmlessness of the logical statement, true or false.

Michaela Nolte



Nachwort:

In den neuen Arbeiten Costantino Ciervos zeigen sich einmal mehr seine Innovationskraft, aber auch seine künstlerische Sensibilität auf dem Gebiet medialer und interaktiver Kunst. In diesem Zusammenhang freue ich mich, daß es uns gelungen ist, als erste Berliner Galerie begleitend zu dieser Katalogpublikation eine CD-ROM zu realisieren, die in der Vermittlung und Dokumentation von Medienkunst einen zukunftsweisenden Beitrag leistet. Mein besonderer Dank für die gute Zusammenarbeit gilt Herrn Dr.-Ing. Klaus Rebenburg vom PRZ der Technischen Universität Berlin sowie Marek Claaßen und Eva Liebendörfer von Claaßen & Friends und dem Bundesverband Deutscher Galerien e.V., ohne deren Hilfe dieses Novum nicht zustande gekommen wäre. Für die freundliche Unterstützung danke ich weiterhin der Deutschen Telekom und Hewlett Packard.

*Rafael Vostell*



## *Impressum*

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