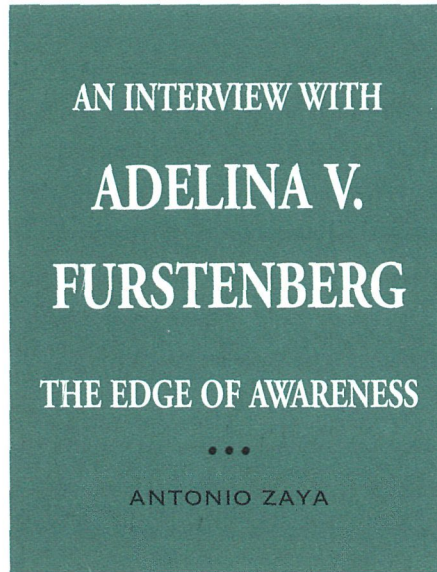


A.Z.: You appear to be divided, on the edge, as it were, of two planes. One the one hand, perhaps because your Armenian origins give you a less mainstream oriented perspective, you work with a group of artists (Joe Ben, Enmadre, Chen Zhen, Kcho, etc.), and support their radical multicultural discourse. On the other hand, you move like a fish in water among celebrities (Vito Acconci, Sol Lewitt, Rauschenberg). Who legitimises whom?

A.V.F.: Clearly all of us are conditioned for life by our origins. I descend from a people that are located at a crossroads between east and west, between the Persians and the Romans, between the Turks and the Byzantines. My Armenian extraction only serves to accentuate my need to move among two worlds, mainly

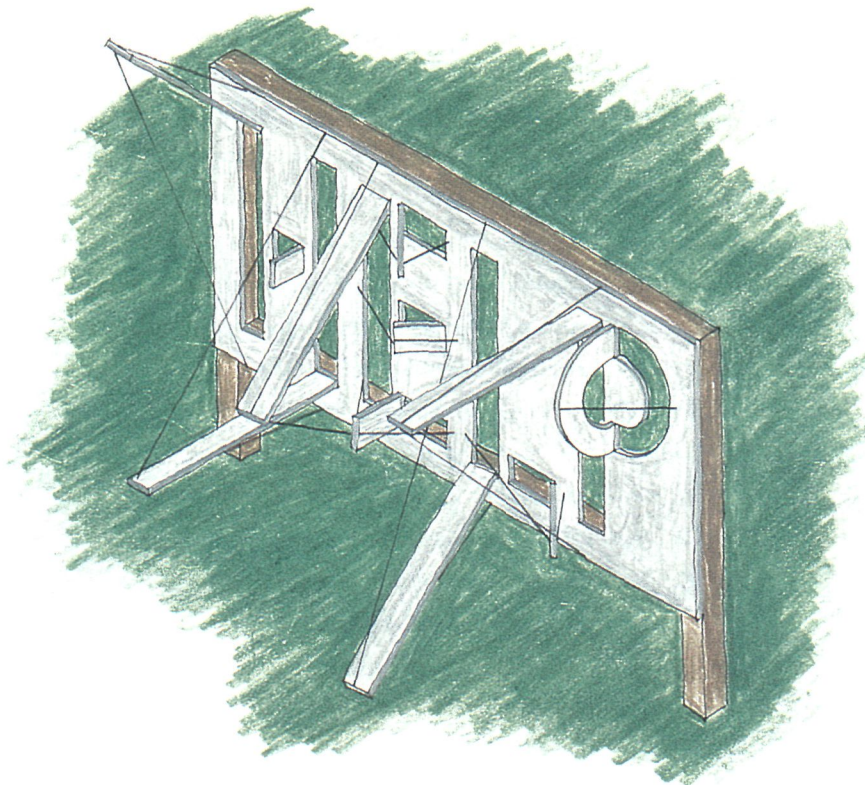


to protect my heart and mind from being invaded, but above all, to allow my identity to breath freely in a land that is after all really no more than a legal domicile for me.

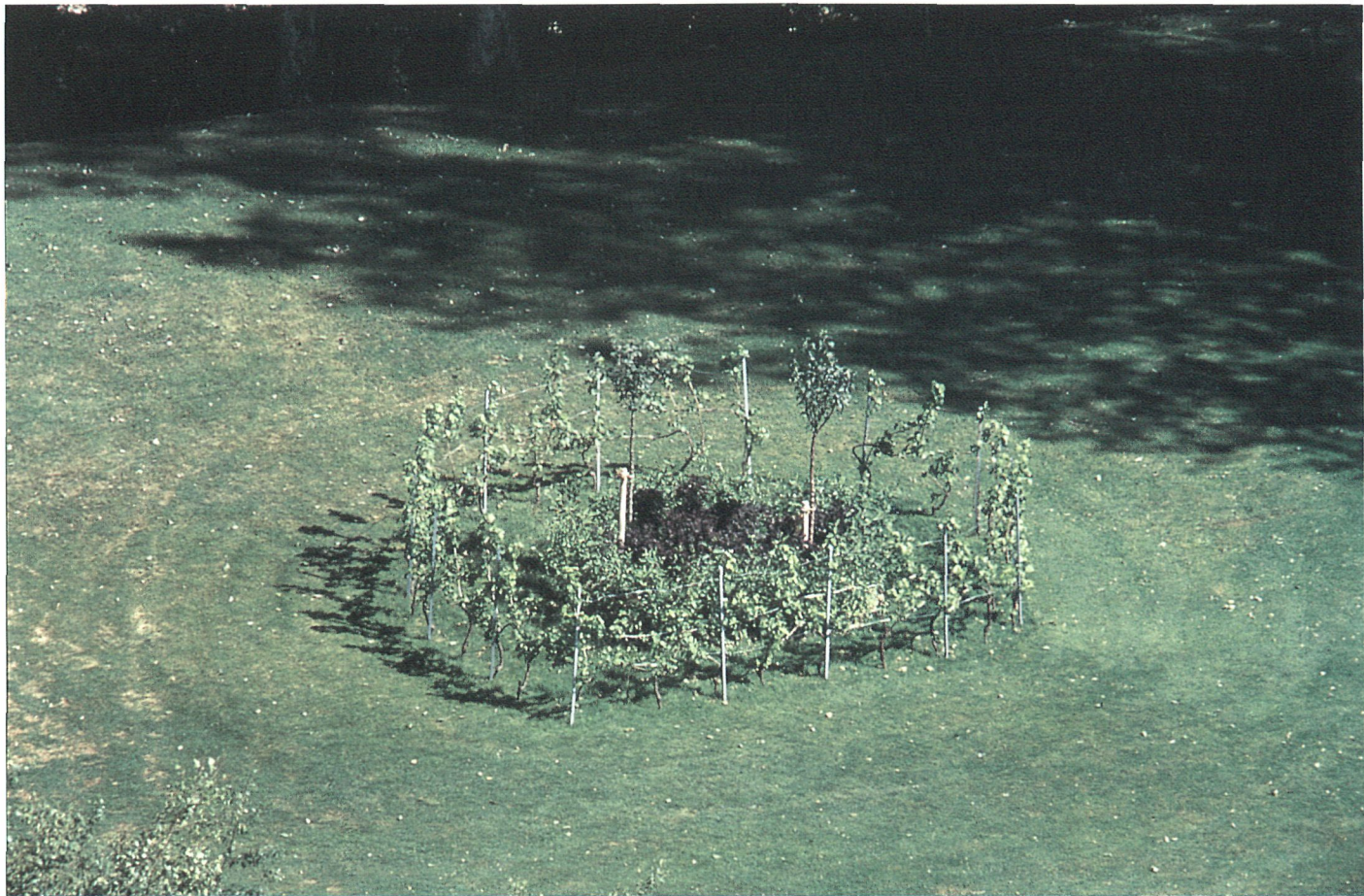
As far as the artists you mentioned, since I make no distinction between

Rauschenberg, Acconci and Sol Lewitt, why should there be one between these three and Joe Ben, Chen Zhen or Enmadre? Though it's true that they belong to different generations and different artistic styles, and that they have different origins and mentalities, nevertheless, and this is not a paradox, they are all really very much alike. They are all full-time artists and as such share the same concerns and the same characteristics that all artists share. In truth, I work with all of them in the same way. What interests me is not their fame, but what they have in common, respecting, of course, their differences.

A.Z.: You also seem split in the sense that you receive support from a number of large international official institutions and private multinational companies, yet



Acconci Studio, *Untitled*, 1993. Billboard, 16.4" x 8.22". Art for the World.



M.C. Perlingueiro, *Open Heart*, 1998. Photo: Georg Rehsteiner. Art for the World.

support views that these same organisations find hard to support.

A.V.F.: I am an enemy of bureaucracy and bureaucracy is my enemy, but, at the same time, it fascinates me. The larger the bureaucracy, the more I'm tempted to get close and play with it, like fire. Sometimes I get burned, but usually I'm able to change my colours, blend in, and work without any major difficulties. In this way, I can open doors and let usher *modern art* into places where it would otherwise never have access.

A.Z.: Is the origin, the geographic origin, of your selection deliberate? You seem to favour the (unfortunately) so-called Third World and developing countries

(Cuba, Brazil, China, Jamaica, Thailand, Nigeria, the Philippines etc.) over the mainstream (Switzerland, Italy, Spain and the United States) where you observe no limits.

A.V.F.: I stopped believing in the mainstream phenomenon several years ago. I should add that for a long time, I actually favoured American, Swiss, and European artists in general, and no one ever said that this was to the detriment of artists from other continents. God knows that artists from South America, Africa and Asia have always been overshadowed by Europe and the United States! Your question would seem to indicate that the situation has been reversed. This is not yet the case. Unfortunately, the

entrenched conservatism of the art world has not yet had its say.

A.Z.: The exhibition's conceptual goal seems to fit like a glove in the case of artists such as Alfredo Jarr, Acconci, Oguibe, Arienti, Kcho, Ríos, Rauschenberg, M.C. Perlingueiro, Teresa Serrano, or Ribenbolm. Others have chosen to enter work that seems more familiar, easier and tired, and removed, if not completely disconnected from, this goal. Would you agree with this comment?

A.V.F.: My artistic goal is to push diversity to the edge of its limits. The greater the difference between language and means of expression, the closer I am





Alfredo Jaar. Art for the World.

to achieving my goal as curator, both in concept and production, especially in an exhibit like *The Edge of Awareness*. It is through diversity that I achieve unity. That is the paradox.

A.Z.: In general, these goals on the one hand underscore the universal nature of the concerns and problems of art in our times, while on the other hand, they seem to be protesting (on the artistic level) the neo-colonisation implicit in economic globalisation. What is your view of this?

A.V.F.: I think there is a universal language common to all non-western artists, and a global language common to

most western artists. Let me explain this. Western artists, especially in the post-conceptual period, have a tendency to attack the form, more than the content, of (art) history. Artists from other places need to attack content. For European artists, the history of art is a vital source of inspiration, and, as we are all well aware, the history of art is constantly changing and evolving. Those from other cultures are aware that their own (art) history has always been more static and repetitive, with only slight modifications. Therefore, it is only natural for them to try to change this state of affairs. Clearly when one touches content, one touches man himself, that is, the universal aspect within us all. Western artists, by their

appropriation of (familiar) forms with the intent of transforming them, present a characteristic focus that is at once local (part of the art system) and global (part of the consumer and communications media society).

Not long ago, it dawned on me that we never fully understood, even at the end of the millennium, and thanks only to the media, that the world is not flat but round. Doesn't that strike you as a odd? How about coining a new term – *Rotundisation*. Isn't it that sexier than *globalisation*?

A.Z.: The link between art and protest, inescapable since Adorno, also seems to be present in some of the exhibition's

more radical proposals. Are you suggesting, along animist or shamanist lines, that art is medicine?

A.V.F.: I will quote Hippocrates, the first ancient Greek doctor whose research reached us: "He who knows that neither justice nor injustice exist, but that they are both encompassed by the same action, will never stray from the field of art".

A.Z.: As president of Art for the World, you seem driven to promote your goal of a multicultural social commitment. What role does ideology play in the art that you promote and support? Does, for instance,

in your opinion, the interest shown by the president of Cuba, Fidel Castro, at the Geneva exhibition, confirm an ideological rearming of art in the face of the common front of thought supported by the neo-liberal proposals of the so-called First World?

A.V.F.: The answer to this is in your earlier questions.

A.Z.: Why Geneva, New York, São Paulo and New Dehli? Why not Lagos, Sarajevo, Havana and Shanghai?

A.V.F.: More and more, the centre is becoming confused with the periphery

and vice-versa. I started the exhibition *The Edge of Awareness* in Europe and the United States with the intention of taking it immediately afterwards to the Southern Hemisphere, to Brazil, and then the Orient and India. More and more, I'm becoming aware of the fact that the west no longer has the ear of art, that westerners are becoming deaf, dumb, and even, I might add, blind. My next project will start in the south and the east and from there it will travel north and west, like Emperor Okwi Enwezor. But this takes us back to your first question about origins and the fundamental experiences of each and every one of us.....



N. Ward, *Amazing Grace*, 1993. Photo: Georg Rehsteiner. Art for the World.



Willie Bester, *Poverty and Racism*, 1998. Art for the World.