

OBJECTS ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR



and severed left forearm only enhance a hauntingly personal installation that readily suggests the continued influence of artists like Kienholz and Beuys. Stationed in Russia as an aircraft radio operator during World War II, Beuys had been no stranger to trauma, and he often recounted his own dramatic experience of being shot down near the Crimean front. Although immediately rescued by Luftwaffe search commandos and transported to a German field hospital, he later embellished the story by claiming that roaming Tatar tribesmen had nursed him back to health by wrapping his body in fat and felt, a powerful, if invented, myth of resurrection. Müller's own creative engagement of personal trauma, though therapeutic and hardly surprising, bewildered friends and critics alike. "People were shocked to see how far I went with that, with all the darkness you could imagine. . . . I think there is something under the surface. I was burning to do something like that. . . . It was a reflection of my traumatic accident, but it was also to test how much can I do with one hand."

Working increasingly with the help of assistants, Müller began to rethink his creative approach. He increasingly created drawings and three-dimensional objects made from cardboard or paper, reigniting a passion that reached back to his earliest days as a technical draftsman, illustrator, and graphic designer in Germany. Delicate paper sculptures, like *Coat Survivor* (1999, fig. 26) and his red and white *Preludes* (2010), are subtly scored and richly colored, with surface textures ranging from brushed metal to raw concrete to whitewashed stone. They hover on the wall like forgotten garments, enveloping imaginary bodies that have long since disappeared. Beautiful and monumental, they hug their phantom bodies like sacred shelters, exuding a spiritual power and ritual transcendence that invoke the spirit of Joseph Beuys. The human body, simultaneously strong and vulnerable, had been an element in Müller's work since his earliest performances, but it now returned with a new urgency. Reaching back into his considerable oeuvre, Müller quietly transitioned from large-scale, site-specific installations to lighter, two-dimensional works that intricately engage color, line, and abstraction.

You can't solely survive on installation pieces. It kills you. . . . It becomes uncharming, too rough and harsh. You become like an entrepreneur, too much collaboration. You have to go back in your shell. You have to reflect . . . because it balances you. I often see that in artists who have this talent to make spectacular installations, but who also have the talent of doing these sketches and drawings. You need to exercise your fingers, to refine the technique.



Fig. 26. *Coat Survivor*, 1999

space, where paper is laid over paper or sheets are matched edge to edge atop their paperboard backing. These paper-to-paper "mating" acts are almost imperceptible at first glance, and the viewer may have to squint a bit to discern the seams where the papers meet.

Müller's aesthetics of the edge can be tricky. The border of a three-dimensional expanse expresses its two-dimensional property: the edge acts, in effect, as a line or a line segment. In Müller's concise, quiet paper compositions from the 2000s, the edge is where the drama is. Some of these collaged "sketches," as Müller calls them, use ordinary store-bought manila folders that he "enamels" with a surface of, for example, black oil pastel. He then affixes those planes of treated paper to a ground of white or colored board. Simple enough—indeed, quite minimal in technique and execution—but the folders' die-cut rounded corners and the declivity of their tab cuts serve as major visual drama, analogous to an unanticipated key shift in a Haydn string quartet or a coloratura trill from a bel canto aria in a Mozart opera.

In other works, Müller may underscore a charcoal-gray plane of paper with an amber-colored paper substrate that extends perhaps no more than a sixteenth of an inch beyond the surface paper's edge, evoking what Müller describes as a "halo effect"—a vibrant nimbus of color that "levitates" the paper layer atop it and jolts the viewer's mind and eye with sudden evidence of nearly hidden—and nearly intrusive—vitality. And that visual interruption is so physically slight that it might not show up clearly in a printed reproduction of the object, yet it is electrifying to anyone who sees it up close and personal, perceiving it for the object that it truly is. Müller subtly but insistently engages and manipulates the work's materiality. Often the sheets are lightly scored with grooves that he "draws" into the surface using the side of a screwdriver blade; the effect is scarcely visible at a quick glance, but it imparts passages of textural definition that course across certain areas of the picture plane—and not across other areas. Sometimes you have to look hard to discover these marks, but they impart a definite drama and eventfulness to the final work.

Despite the centrality of these flat works in Müller's art during the last eight years or so, he also works three-dimensionally, using expanses of construction paper that hang loosely off the wall as relief forms and in an ongoing body of volumetric paperboard constructions. The recent paperboard constructions, especially, strike the eye as careful, formal études, or meditations, on composition, materiality, and color—visually



Oxid Yellow, 2007
Oxid Yellow, 2007
Oxid Yellow, 2007



Palacio de Memoria: Four Bowls, 2000



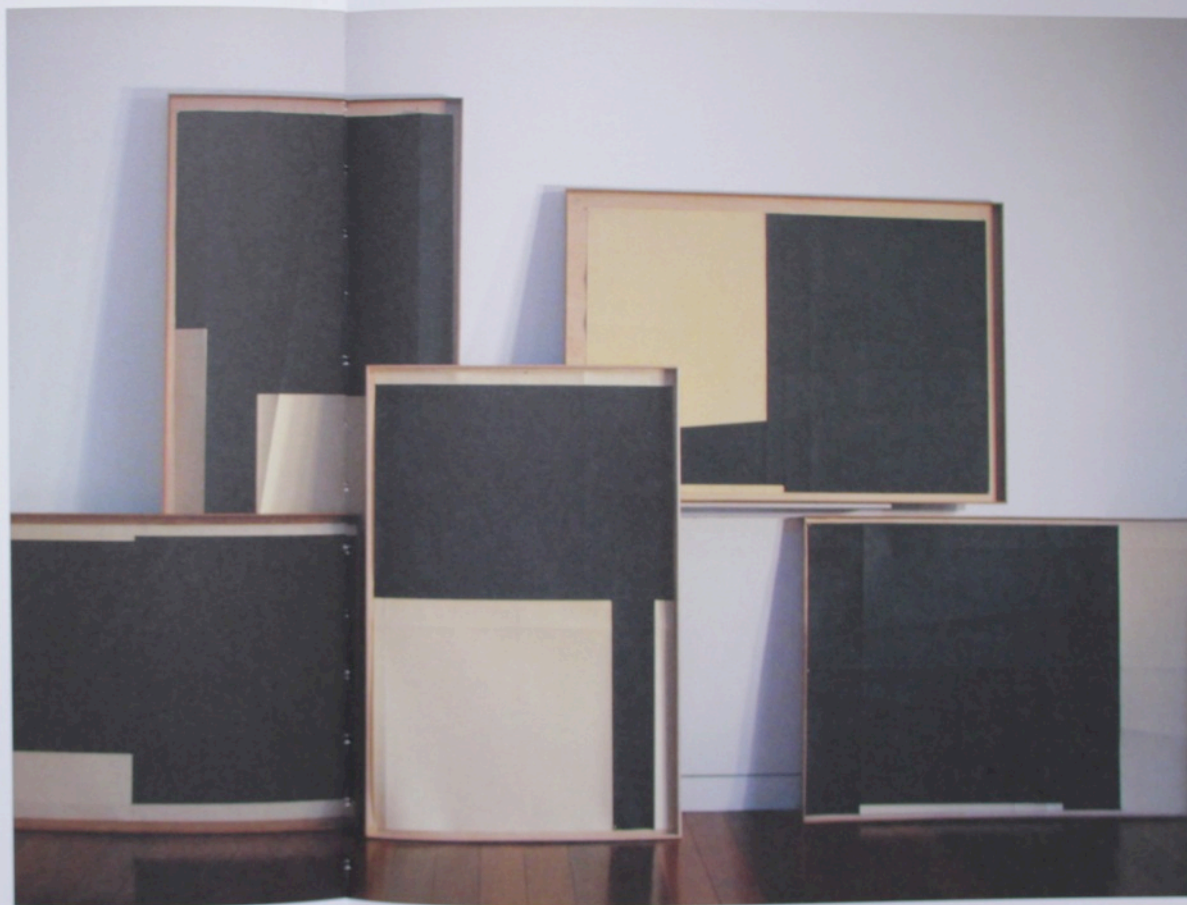
Palacio de Memoria: Five Bowls, 2002



Hidden Cache: Surplus, 2008



Hidden Cache: Past/Present, 2008



Installation at Federal Reserve Bank, Los Angeles, CA



Repercussion 4: Palacio de Memoria, 2011



Repercussion 1: Palacio de Memoria, 2011



Red Prelude, 2009-11



Red Prelude, 2009



Red Prelude, 2009



Mike Kattani Gallery, Münster, Germany



Red Coat, 2006