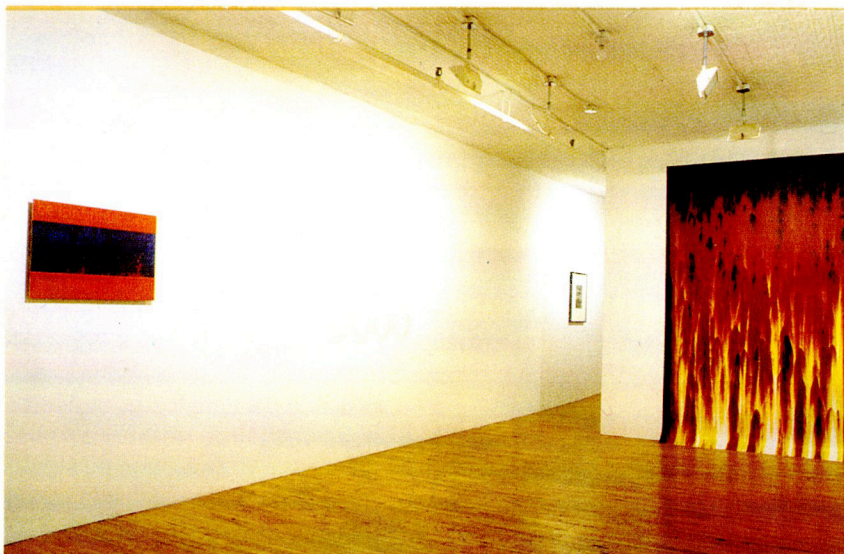
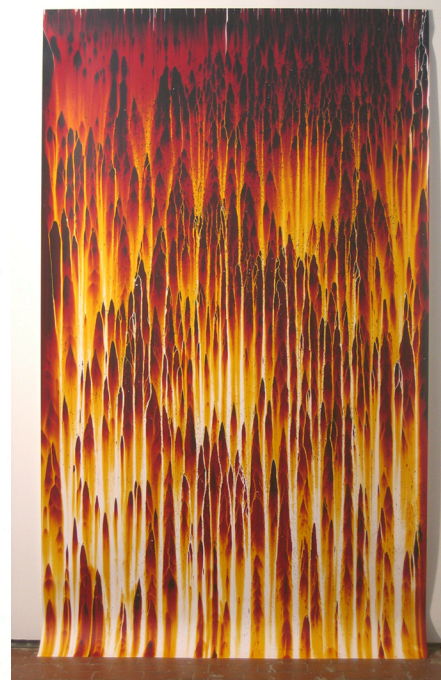




"Terror can only exist if the forces of tragedy are unknown. We know the terror to expect. Hiroshima showed it to us. We are no longer, then in the face of mystery".
Barnett Newman, *The New Sense of Faith*, 1948

Curtis Mitchell
Meltdown, 2003
325 x 182 cm (128 x 72 inches)
carta fotografica, acido
Courtesy of Esso Gallery
Photo: Cathy Carver



The exhibition was originally conceived as a museum traveling show, and related book/catalogue, including some 30 international artists, some with large-scale and ambitious projects, and was supposed to start in Europe, then travel to the US and possibly end in Japan. Over the years, while the initial idea stood firm, the project morphed into various incarnations, with the list of artists and potential exhibition venues changing constantly.

I knew 2005 was going to be a crucial year: on one hand there was the 60th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, on the other the Non-Proliferation Treaty Renew Conference was to be held at the UN during the month of May. There could not have been a better time to open the exhibition in New York.

When I first approached Esso Gallery with the proposal, in the winter 2005, I had reduced the project to a very small show, and would have never dreamt of being able to realize the exhibition we held over the summer.

I was amazed by the enthusiasm with which the gallery responded to the idea and even more excited when we were able to bring the next-door gallery, Lombard-Fried Fine Arts, on board. Once the decision was taken to collaborate on the project, frantic months followed re-visiting the list of the artists and their works. While the show was based on my initial concept, the end-result was very much a team-effort, a process that has been sometimes challenging and demanding, and at the same time enriching and stimulating.

The show brings together a group of 35 international artists of different backgrounds and generations, working with a broad variety of media, in

an interactive dialog on the subject of nuclear threat which is as much of a presence today as it was sixty years ago. It features artists for whom the nuclear narrative has provided inspiration for their entire artistic production in addition to other emerging and established artists who under the current political climate have found a voice and mechanism to express their discontent. From didactic to sublime, this exhibition is meant to provide an awareness platform from where the audience could, in response to a past catastrophic event, understand and react to a present and future danger.

Chris Burden's "Atomic Alphabet", an etching from 1980, in which every letter, from A for Atomic to Z for Zero, names the after-effects of the dropping of atomic bombs, lead the way to Molly Larkey's neo-pop bright green and blue sculpture of an atomic explosion and Japanese Nobuo Nagasawa's installation "Nuclear Cuisine" of oversized Campbell soup cans, a spin-off of the famous Andy Warhol appropriation, each to represent one of the 835 nuclear tests conducted by the US Army during the Cold War. Sculpture was also the medium used by UK-born, currently Brooklyn-based Dominic McGill for his "Love is the Only Shelter", a model of a classic American church with an underground nuclear shelter.

Photography was present with Cuban Carlos Garaicoa's prints of bullet-holes in walls around Havana and Chilean Alfredo Jaar's touching image of a colorful multitude of origami cranes, which became an international symbol of peace, since a 12 years-old Japanese girl, Sadako, who died in 1955 of leukemia due to the effects of radiation to which she had been exposed, was told by her grandfather to make 1000 origami to heal. Although the origami did not save Sadako, she started an international movement which brought awareness to the tragic effects of radiation for generations of Japanese citizens. Italian Francesco Simeti also used photographic medium pairing images of mushroom-clouds with strikingly similar ones of jelly-fish; and so did British John Timberlake with an image from the series "Another Country" in which he recreates 3-D models of British nuclear tests which he then photographs. Peter Kennard, as well from the UK, was represented by three striking images from his portfolio of photomontages (1973-1991) dealing with issues that range from conventional and nuclear war to arms conversion and disarmament.

American Curtis Mitchell used acid liquids on photographic paper, if not straight photography, for his large wall piece from the "Meltdown" series, while Canadian Robert Polidori and Ukrainian-born Taras Polataiko immortalized their trips to Chernobyl, the site, in 1986, of the worst civilian disaster of the nuclear age, with their cameras and video-camera, in their powerful depictions of abandoned homes and class-rooms in the villages near the disaster-site, the so-called "Alienation Zone".

Late American Leon Golub was represented by a powerful anti-war statement: an acrylic on linen from 2001 portraying a man dragging a dead or wounded body under the words "This could be you!" Similar was the message in Chilean Cristóbal Leht's oil on aluminum representing what seemed to be an explosion on a bright orange and blue background featuring the words "Be Marginal, Be a Hero". Other painters in the show were Americans Joy Garnett, with a series of 4 small canvases portraying a forest in fire due to the shock-wave of a nuclear explosion, Marc Handelman with "Flag Dispersion", defined by art critic Holland Cotter as "an explosive abstract painting in red, white, blue and gold" and Lisi Raskin's "Auf Zu" a "fantastic candy-colored painting of a missile control room".

The exhibition ran from June 7th through July 29th, 2005, and was a great success; having received wonderful feed-back both from the general public as well as the specialized press. The objective is now to turn it into a traveling show and take it to various cities throughout the world, as it was the initial plan.

I would like to conclude by thanking all those who made this exhibition possible, starting with the artists who participated in it, particularly those who "stuck" with it and believed in the project for so many years, and the two galleries who offered not only their spaces, but their full support and collaboration and played a pivotal role in transforming an idea into a reality. A special thanks to "Nuclear" Kathleen Sullivan and Marguerite Kahr, as well as Pamela and Janet from the Atomic Mirror, whose enthusiasm and dedication to "the cause" helped me overcome the struggles and moments of frustration encountered over the years. Let's keep up the good work!

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