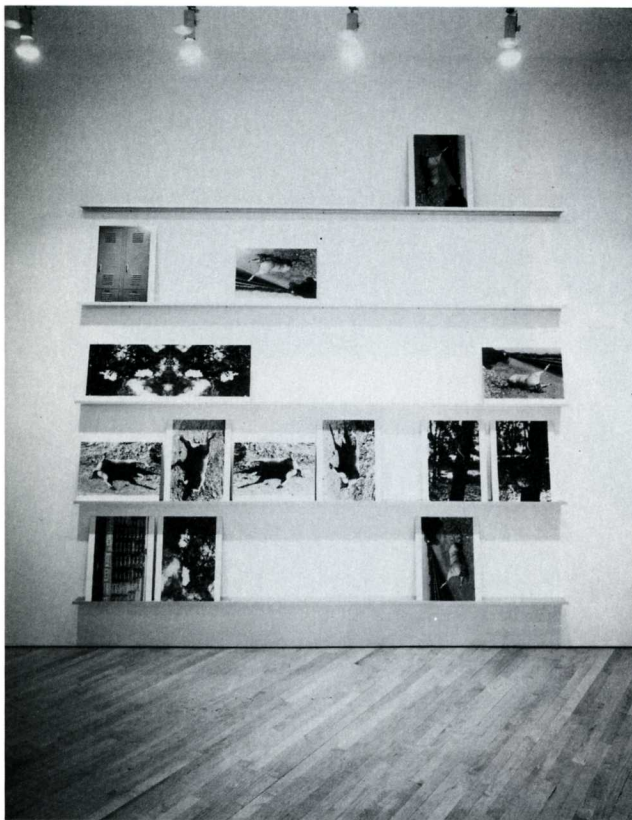
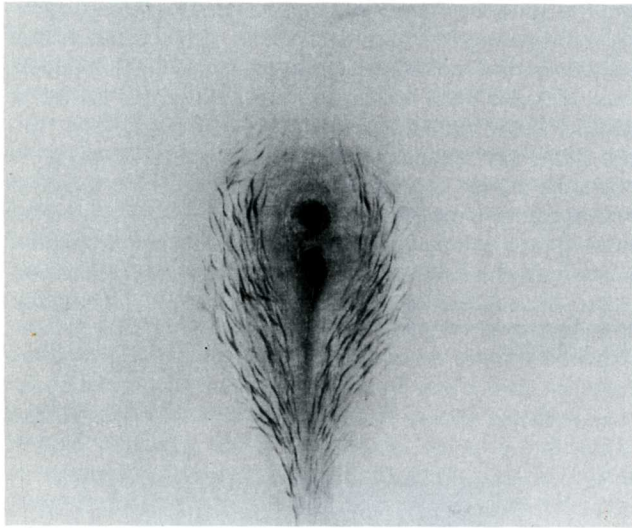


Michael Joaquin Grey at BROOKE ALEXANDER EDITIONS, 23 October–4 December

"Genre: The Conversation Piece" at SPERONE WESTWATER, 7 September–30 October

Mira Schor at HORODNER ROMLEY, 5 October–6 November



There doesn't seem to be a fitting word for picture literacy—like *picturacy*. Everybody is "picturate" in their own way, depending on what pictures they've seen and how they've learned to look at them. There were a number of shows in New York this fall that used multiple images to enunciate very literate picture essays. Joseph Kosuth, Martha Rosler, and Michael Joaquin Grey's new work sequences many images along the gallery walls in sentence and paragraph-like structures. Curator and critic Douglas Blau and artist Mira Schor employ more idiosyncratic grammars to organize and elaborate their sequences. Analogies between pictures and writing underwrite these picto-linguistic practices. They each actively build or curate from a language *within* pictures, a language *between* pictures.

Grey's openended format sequences 16-by-20-inch mounted photographs on a series of long shelves. The images group into loosely related themes oriented around the eternally recurring pair: nature/culture. Images of fruit, for instance, pass through slot machines, agriculture, and commerce, while topographic maps, travel images, and roadkill circumnavigate similar branching analogies. A dreamy rationalism contrasts Grey's work with the pedantry of Rosler and Kosuth's related practices. A blurry rephotographed image from Leni Riefenstahl's pictures of the Nuba people constitute the only appropriated image, and provides a self-conscious editorial spin to this essay of travel pictures.

Blau's "Genre: The Conversation Piece" is divided into three salon-style installations of hundreds of photographs and reproductions. Like his earlier installation "The Naturalist Gathers" (1992), a dense clustering and uniform framing of related imagery diminishes differences between painting, commercial illustration, photojournalism, and film stills, while amplifying characteristics of genre. The imagined, staged, historical, and contemporary easily coexist while the rhetorical potential of imagery floats across different times and practices. Whereas "The Naturalist Gathers" gave a picture of itself, as it were, in the way it catalogued pictures according to subject matter, "The Conversation Piece" is auto-figurative in its relationship to the spectator. It proposes various versions of the spectator as silent auditor.

To converse with a picture, to enter into its fiction, requires a certain loss of boundaries—a suspending of disbelief. Blau's arrangement of closely related fictions allows a viewer to slip from one picture to another without completely recovering those lapsed boundaries. His images of people conversing range from large public assemblies to small conferences, gaming situations, committees, parties, domestic settings, and a solitary phone caller. The act of conversing is a flexible instrument of social bonding. Do these images converse with each other? Except in the case of a Whistler self-portrait, nestled within a cluster of hazy landscapes and figures at leisure, work, or travel, there are almost no figures that return the spectator's gaze. The viewer's role develops as a trans-historic eavesdropper. By not providing any supporting background material, Blau solicits a lively subjective interaction with the narrative possibilities within and between images. He uses the collection as an instrument for his own meta-storytelling.

