

## Washington, DC

### Kendall Buster

Fusebox

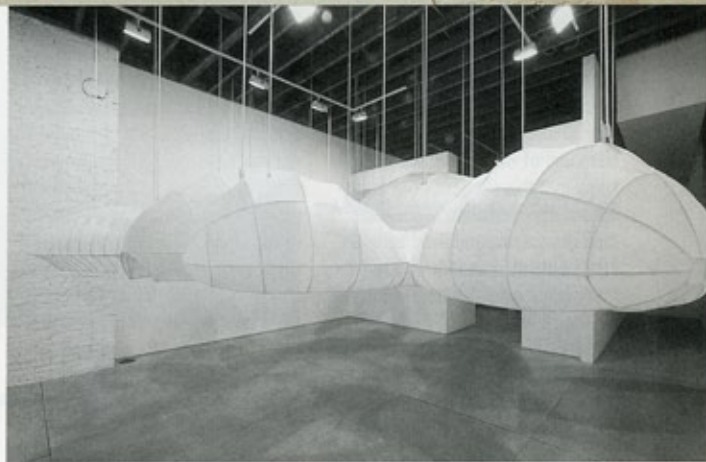
### Ernesto Neto

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

While Kendall Buster and Ernesto Neto explore the same subject matter—space, the body, biological process—their works create entirely different sculptural terrains. The titles of their simultaneous Washington installations encapsulated their individual approaches to an identical theme—the joining of two distinct forms or entities. Neto's choice of the rather old-fashioned *Wooing* sensually embodies the dance of courtship, the full roundness of the sound mimicking a seduction that culminates in fusion. Buster's *Parabiosis*, on the other hand, stifles romance with the clinical vocabulary of science, taking a physiologically

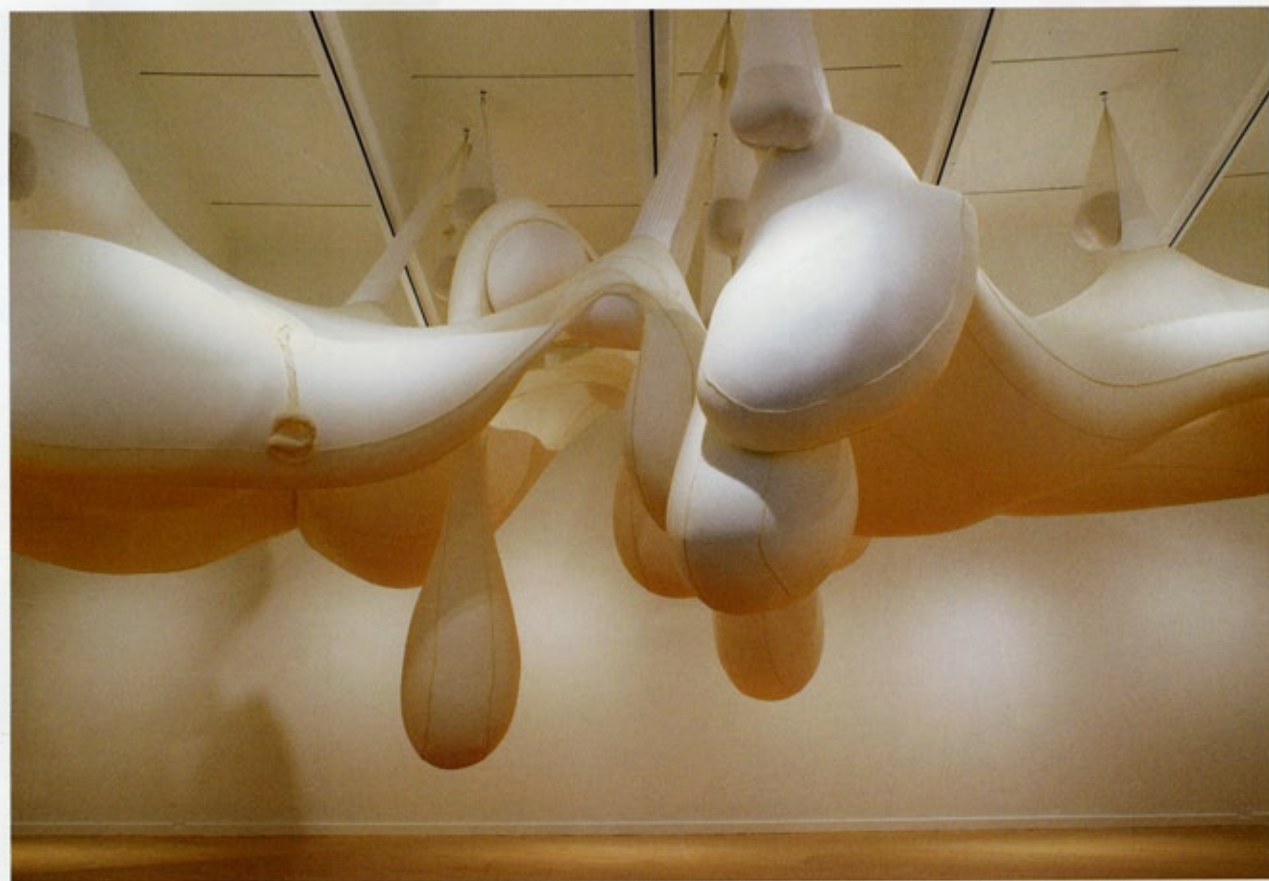
analytical approach to the same union of organisms. These new installations resembled each other in more than subject matter—both works, somewhat unique departures for the artists, hovered over the edge of the object/environment divide.

Neto's otherworldly landscapes take viewers on an odyssey into an imaginative realm that is both without and within the human body. His is a strange world in which the microscopic looms large and the internal opens its secrets to physical exploration. Some kind of physical law still applies however, commanded by a system of weights and balances that relies on and yet defies gravity. When we enter Neto's biomorphic universe, we ideally leave rationality behind and give the senses free range to experience and associate. Because his installations, playful



though they are, require a commitment from the viewer to suspend hard-edged reality and enter into the spirit of participation, they work best when they mask their surroundings and establish their own organic walls and voids. Like the cozy nests children make from

**Above and detail: Kendall Buster, *Parabiosis*, 2002. Steel, electrical cable, fasteners, drafting paper, and sizing, approximately 15.5 x 17 ft.**



blankets, pillows, and sheets, Neto's signature pantyhose-like fabric does not merely construct forms, it establishes a private place of fantasy. Sheltered from the everyday business of existence, viewers know that this skin, however transparent and permeable, protects their daydreams and reveries and keeps outside demands at bay.

Complete escapism requires total illusion, a vision so fully realized that it converts detached spectators into willing collaborators, complicit in the suspension of normality. Ironically, such immersion may be harder to achieve in three-dimensional space than in the pages of a book or in a film. Because they exist in the real world of the gallery space and not just in the mind, Neto's installations, unlike his sci-fi inspiration *2001: A Space Odyssey*, must first subvert the actual, erasing their contextual frame. Half-measures won't do,

and yet *Wooing* gave only half a vision. Hung from the ceiling of a gallery, the two penetrating forms created a canopy of stuffed, sagging volumes and stretched, springy fiber but left the regulation walls and floors exposed, an ever-present and intrusive reality check. Additionally, the major part of *Wooing* hovered just beyond reach, coyly keeping its attractions on visual rather than physical terms. Only one form dropped far enough down to force physical engagement between body and organism. For all the inventiveness of their configuration, the drooping stalactites never quite made their own space, never quite left the parameters of the everyday world in which they appeared as suspended objects. Viewers were entertained, momentarily distracted but never fully embraced, never transported beyond themselves into an imaginative union.

Buster took the notion of parabiosis beyond the literal joining of forms, extending it to include a structural conjunction of the architectural and the biological and a fusion of space and object. Her installation achieved physical engagement, provoking a corporeal as well as intellectual consideration of the ways that spaces control, contain, shelter, and frame the human body. Constructed of paper stretched on steel frames, *Parabiosis* hung at eye level—a futuristic urban skyline crossed with a fossil of the biomorphic past that filled the immediate horizon and pushed against the surrounding walls. With the perimeter almost completely blocked, viewers were forced to stoop, almost bending in half, and step under the structure. Once inside, any awkwardness of motion was forgotten in the thrill of discovery: for what appeared to be a hollow

**Ernesto Neto, *The Dangerous Logic of Wooing*, 2002. Polyamide, rice, and Styrofoam pellets, installation view.**

external shell from the outside unfolded into a succession of surprising and complex interior chambers.

Created at a surreal three-quarters scale, *Parabiosis* reflected the lessons of large Renaissance and Baroque architectural models. Mounted on waist-high platforms, this type of model opens up to welcome the body, giving a sense of spatial effect and movement through a building. Hunched over within Buster's installation, heads and shoulders completely engulfed in the structure, viewers progressed through a series of different "pavilions"—a "cathedral" complete with barrel-vaulted nave, crossing, and oculus; a corrugated "apartment block"; and a Crystal

Palace/stadium configuration—each with its own character: some rigidly architectonic, others softer and irregular. The play was not simply interior versus exterior: certain areas opened to the ceiling, allowing the viewer's head to surface as if from under water for a survey from above while the body remained encased below.

In *Parabiosis*, Buster created a rare sculptural hybrid that can be experienced as both object and space. One incarnation of the form was incomplete without the other. And the experience outlasted mere entertainment: whether burrowing through the chambers and their succession of vistas, squeezing between wall and sculpture, or simply sitting beneath the sheltering canopy, viewers could not help but question the paradigms of the full-scale built environment—how it does and does not relate to the human body as architectural form—and wonder whether biological growth patterns and processes might have some important lessons for the way we build. Intentionally or not, Buster achieved a suspension of reality that offers insights for the real world.

—Twylene Moyer

#### San Francisco

Nick Bertoni and Laetitia Sonami

New Langton Arts

Bags hold many things, especially metaphors and cultural attachments. In the interactive exhibition "Bags," object and association are brought to life via digital and mechanical modes. Nick Bertoni and his Tinkers Workshop of East Bay youths constructed machines that reside within the bags, setting off motion and meaning. Integral to the sculptures is an audio component created by Laetitia Sonami. The tracks include specific noises—sighing, rustling, voices, snapping—that amplify the objects' movements, as well as tightly edited ambient noise and excerpts from street interviews. The result is a total environment

in which bags rule the world but remain empowered by human presence. The variety of sacks and satchels testifies to their ubiquity and importance in everyday life, but the specific choices of both bag and sound fill them with wit and socio-political implications.

Case in point: two office chairs, each seating a briefcase, one hardtop black, one leather. The attachés open and close rapid-fire,

preferences: Louis Vuitton and Gucci, the latter edited and repeated down to a series of sonorous sneezes, rendering consumerism comedic. Similarly, *Food Bags* carries the weighty implication of global commerce. Empty burlap rice, potato, and coffee sacks lie flat or crumpled, while others shake and hop upon viewer activation—akin to the dance of supply and demand on the world stage.



Nick Bertoni and Laetitia Sonami, *Alligator Purse*, 2002. Alligator bag, pedestal, pneumatics, and speaker, 61 x 41 x 21 in.

emitting a sound not unlike distant machine guns—those of big business? There are voices, but it is unclear if they come from within or from the neighboring *Alligator Purse* (all works 2002), whose faux hide and snapping golden jaws menace. Here, we listen to an elderly woman prattling on about her purse and

Directly opposite is *Cabinet of Loners*, a cold metal and glass vitrine displaying rarefied evening bags. A silver and gold clutch opens and shuts as if to yield a pearl; feather and beaded purses lie limp, revealing their limited capacity and purely ornamental decadence. In the same vein, the eponymous purse in *Chanel* sits

atop a pedestal around which cluster several low-budget vinyl shoulder bags. Each groundling is filled with a blue light that intermittently emits a TV-like glow, inciting nervous chattering and sighing from above.

A large black garbage bag is suscituated by a hose attached to a medical ventilator. Hissing and listing, *Breathing Bag* roams the floor tethered to its lifeline. Nearby is a stack of random medical machines and a mess of old-fashioned doctors' bags. One opens, and a metal arm emerges bearing an apple, while an ambient heart-beat thumps throughout the galleries. A statement on the multi-valent miracles of modern medicine? Similarly clever is *Crawler*, a handicapped golf bag that hobbles along on its stand as if on crutches. Next to it, *Backpack*, with a child's name in black marker, drags itself around, suggesting the unwieldy weight of today's elementary-school workload.

In many of the installations it is clear which motions are triggered and which are hardwired, but not so for all. And the ambiguity between action and reaction adds complexity to the works, reminding us that while we may create things, they often take on a life of their own whose meaning and effects are way beyond our control.

—Laura Richard Janku

#### Middletown, Connecticut

Yannis Ziogas

Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery, Wesleyan University

In Yannis Ziogas's "Ballads," toy-like intimacy vaults across vast spaces in a wonderfully whimsical manner, marrying the homespun, acrobatic tinkering of Alexander Calder to the visual clackety-clack of Paul Klee's *Twittering Machine* and playing it out across the venturesome cosmos of a *Star Wars* epic. There is something cinematic about this site-specific installation and something decidedly epic. There are four "Ballads"—*The Ballad of Lost Sight*; *The Ballad of the Forgotten Tree*; *The Ballad*