

Art in America

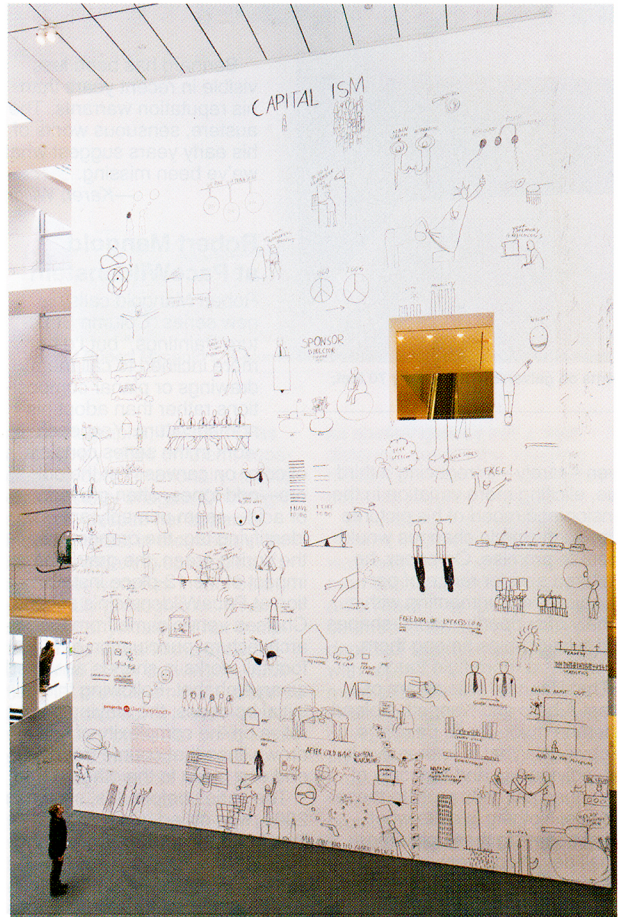
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by Brian Boucher

Dan Perjovschi at the Museum of Modern Art

Romanian artist Dan Perjovschi brought his “indoor graffiti” to the 110-foot-high atrium wall at the Museum of Modern Art this spring and summer. Dozens of very funny and bitingly satirical line drawings in black permanent marker constituted “WHAT HAPPENED TO US?,” the artist’s lovingly acid commentary on politics, religion, global warming, art and culture. While Perjovschi has done similar projects elsewhere, this one seemed aimed at an American audience: with the uppercase title, the last word reads as either “us” or “U.S.” As documented in two engaging videos on MOMA’s Web site, he created the work during public hours, making the project a performance as much as a wall drawing/installation. But the work is so appealing that despite the artist’s skeptical take on capitalism it’s hard not to envision his witty imagery on T-shirts and postcards.

A number of images skewer militarism (antiwar protest sign makers, take note). In one drawing, the Q in IRAQ is a hamster wheel for a tiny soldier. In another, a timeline of alternating periods of war and peace reveals an underground cache of oil beneath each war. A thought bubble coming from a handgun shows that it dreams of being a tank. Another tank is outfitted with a solar panel, a link to a related theme of global warming. At an ice cream stand with a grinning sales-



Dan Perjovschi’s wall drawing “WHAT HAPPENED TO US?,” 2007, 110 feet high; at the Museum of Modern Art.

man, the word “ice” is X’d out. A before-and-after image shows a man’s armpits getting sweater.

On a related note, Perjovschi lampoons religiosity, sometimes with military imagery. Over the caption “beliefs” are arranged a church steeple, a minaret and an upright rifle barrel. A man says in greeting a woman in a smothering burka. “You look wonderful today.”

In Bucharest, where he lives, Perjovschi contributes drawings to the alternative newspaper 22, named for the date of Nicolae Ceausescu’s fall from power. With his wife, Lia, Perjovschi founded and maintains an independent contemporary art archive, and his work has been widely exhibited internationally, so his comments on the art world, the media, and on official and unofficial culture come from an informed and perhaps self-consciously implicated position. (In one drawing, two mirror-image dancers are labeled “mainstream” and “alternative,”

and mercenary museums and artists are joyously speared.) Having grown up under authoritarian communism, Perjovschi seems wryly sympathetic in his view of an America in thrall to concentrated executive power and runaway capitalism. In the cover image for a newsprint publication accompanying the show, a man peers through an American flag as though the stripes were slats in a window blind.

Perjovschi here views late capitalism, perhaps the American value par excellence, with a wary eye. A peace sign labeled 1967 gives way to the Mercedes logo, labeled 2007. In descending order of size, icons identify “my house, my car, my credit card, me”; the latter is a nearly invisible dot. Under the label “capital” appears a lone figure; under “ism” swells a mob. A man at an ATM looks over his shoulder to ask the surveillance camera, “Do you remember my PIN?”