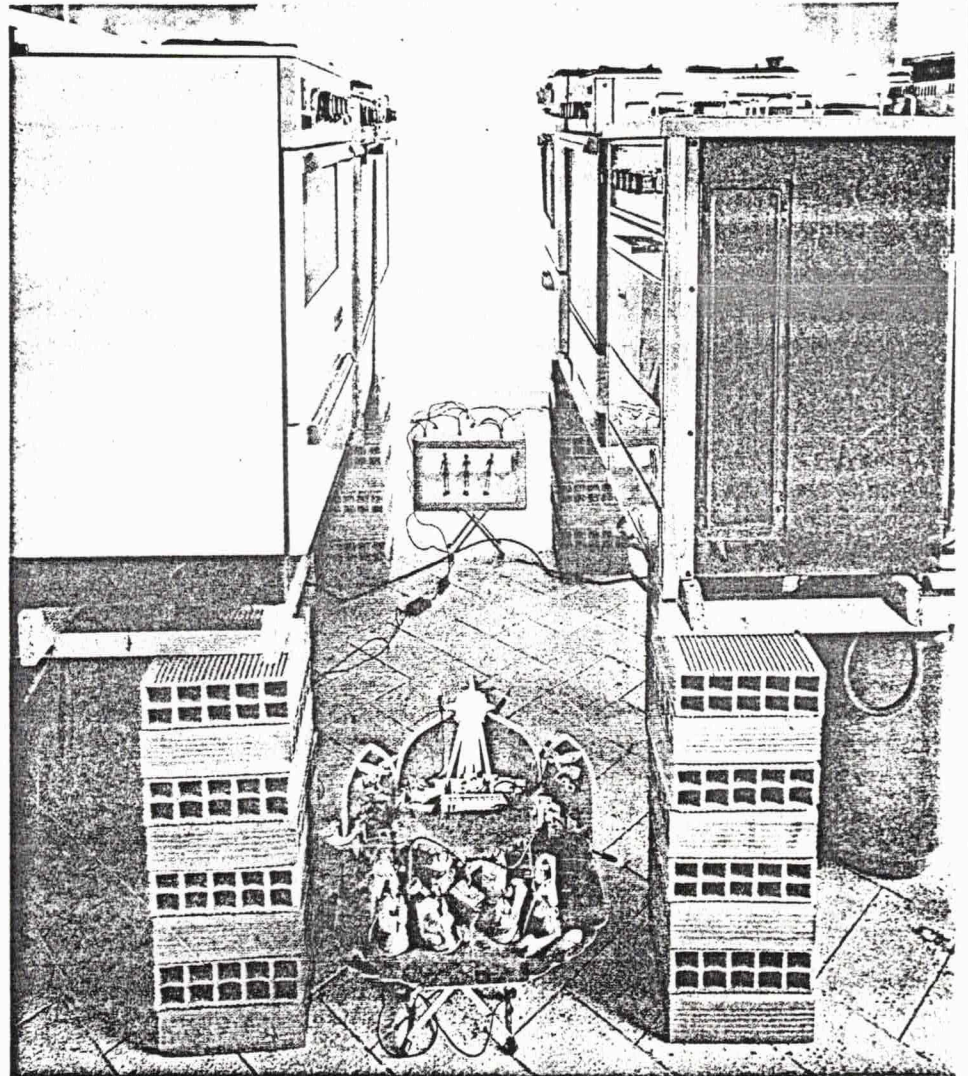


present site is impossible because of its location next to the Botanical Gardens. Following its affiliation with Monash University, ACCA proposed an expansion on a neighboring parkland depot, which was immediately blocked by the Melbourne City Council. Melbourne's stalled City Square redevelopment included no mention of contemporary culture beyond a theater for productions like "Phantom of the Opera." Although ACCA has already developed plans for an Institute of Contemporary Art, Melbourne has an infinite capacity to postpone initiatives. The extension to Heide has provided a MoMA for Melbourne, but the absence of a center for contemporary art remains obvious.

If one incommensurable in the rearrangement of Melbourne's galleries is money, another is the role of major universities. Melbourne, Monash, and RMIT wish to play expanded roles in the city's cultural life and, compared with state government, all three are wealthy. Although media speculation has centered on the Treasury building and the vast railways' offices in Spencer Street, the former's small rooms are untouchable because of heritage listings and the latter is in poor shape. Each university would like to expand its contemporary art spaces: the University of Melbourne possibly onto the derelict Carlton United Brewery site at the city fringe; Monash through its links with ACCA and the maintenance of the highly successful Malthouse theater complex; RMIT through a new complex built on the old Storey Hall gallery.

There is a chance to develop, through the renovation of Melbourne's city square or at the city fringe, an Institute for Contemporary Art. However, an exhibition space for experimental art in the city, complementing Maudie Palmer's expansion at Heide, will require the co-



Ai miei amici, installation by Liliana Mori and Bernhard Rudiger, 1993, Studio Sergio Casoli, Milan.

operation of government, universities and private benefaction. The new MoMA at Heide starts with considerable advantages—expansive gallery space and massive goodwill from the community—for the fulfilment of its responsibility to a wide, nonspecialist audience. Melbourne's art community is unlikely to cooperate immediately in the development of a similarly visionary center for contemporary art.

CHARLES GREEN

Italy Cleans Up

A government beheaded by its magistrates, industry protected by politicians, an appalling public deficit entirely produced by abuse of office and theft—this is the Italy stripped bare by the investigation known as *Mani Pulite* (Clean Hands). While some expect either a surreptitious or an explicit government takeover, the majority longs for a brighter future,

placing hope in a complete renewal of power.

In the Italian art world, *tangentopoli* (the corrupt element) has profoundly affected the microclimate of this test tube environment. Above all, it has fed the art world with its money, strengthening private collectorship, and consequently the galleries; it has created a core of support around the Socialist Party, the only party that has shown interest in contemporary art, particularly the policies of Gianni De Michelis. It has assisted in sponsoring exhibitions;

it has probably raised auction prices, recycling the capital of illegal gain.

Now the money has run out. One tangible consequence of this in the art field is that collectors are doubly frightened by possible tax investigations exposing their wealth and by the progressive devaluation resulting from political instability. Reduced activity of the major industries—practically all involved in the scandal—has caused a rapid decrease in sponsorship. And the government has cut spending in a sector it considers to be of minor importance, even halving the budget of Italy's only internationally respected institution, the Venice Biennale.

In this atmosphere, it is hardly surprising that the optimism characterizing the Italian art world up until 1990 has completely disintegrated: some auction houses that flourished in the eighties have now either closed or quite drastically reduced their activities. Many galleries have opted for a sort of sabbatical leave, reducing the organization of their shows to the barest minimum. Others have been transformed into "foundations," in an attempt to redefine the traditional role of the art gallery, and at the same time conveniently avoiding tax investigations.

Though, on the positive side, the feeling that something new is happening seems to be fueling unexpected excitement. At the Pecci Museum in Prato, the change of directors from Amnon Barzel to Ida Panicelli has been like a breath of fresh air, especially the opening up of the center to more contemporary art forms, such as music and theater. At a conference in Bologna last February, some banks indicated their interest in initiating a concrete acquisition policy of contemporary art, in line with what has been going in other countries for many years.

As for the art dealers, at the recent *Sindacato Nazionale Mercanti d'Arte* conference in Siena a proposal was made to abolish all hindrances that have so far prevented the emergence of an

untainted art market in Italy. Chairman Enzo Cannaviello declared, among other positive ideas, that auctioneers should begin by making public the prices of all works—a move long overdue.

Another effect of the current climate of "moral revival" is that many new galleries are opening, despite an immediate impulse to close up shop. Again, Milan seems to have taken the lead. Emi Fontana has opened a gallery there showing only women in its first season. Paolo Vitolo has moved his gallery from Rome to Milan, courageously determined to show art that is cerebral, immaterial—and unsaleable. And Patrizia Brusarosco has invested great energy in the space Viafarini, organizing exhibitions, debates, and compiling a databank on young, lesser known artists throughout Italy.

A fresher air is also evident in a number of recent exhibitions in Milan, such as the cool edginess of a group show held at the Mudima Foundation in January by members of Studio Azzurro, the best known video artists in Italy. A provocative meeting between local issues and fiery

individualism was brought about by Bernhard Rudiger and Liliana Moro in dual solo exhibitions at Sergio Casoli's gallery. Rudiger invaded the gallery with old gas stoves, gas rings lit and flaming; Moro made an exacting "commentary" on Italian home life using two lighted paper nativity scenes, signifying the domestic environment as sweet, insidious, and devastating. On this topic, mention should be made of Cesare Pietromusti's solo show at Maria Colao's Primo Piano Gallery in Rome, consisting entirely of books about multiculturalism.

However the air is stale and unclean in the world of art criticism and its subtle systems of power. No valid means of information has effectively dethroned *Flash Art* from its monopoly, which is negative simply because it is a monopoly. There is Germano Celant, with his band of followers galvanized by international credibility, still dominating the most important initiatives. Then there are those bureaucrats who are the directors of the few state or regional museums for contemporary art, having gained their positions

through the outmoded state selection processes which completely disregard current cultural perspectives.

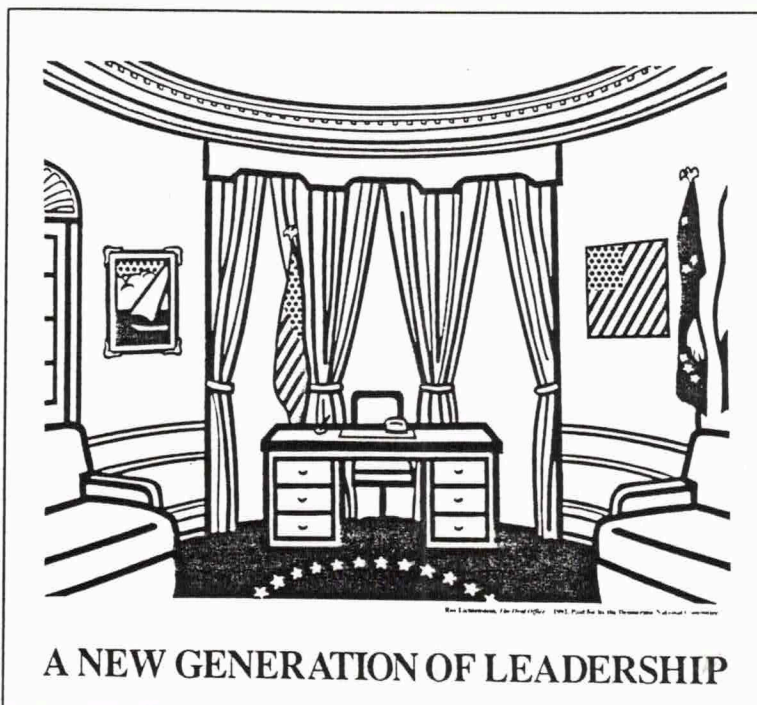
All this demonstrates the immense short-sightedness of the Italian scene: nothing has been learnt from the cultural policies of other European nations like France, Britain, or Germany. The significance of such a circumstance for Italy's international profile in the art world has been completely ignored.

ANGELA VETTESE

(Translated by Judith Blackall)

Cicerone with a Saxophone

Another passing of the torch, another generation of Americans. A new generation? A younger generation of middle-aged America? America's collective spirit has been buoyed by the election to the oval office of William Jefferson Clinton. In the brief interval since his



Roy Lichtenstein:
The Oval Office, 1992,
offset litho poster,
33 by 38 inches.
Courtesy Ronald
Feldman Fine Arts,
New York.
Photo D. James Dee.
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