

## Abjection

The word 'abjection' in an art context – where it has made itself more and more at home over the last fifteen years or so – usually refers to subject matter or materials that people might find disgusting or sickening. Abjection in art, then, is often a challenge to false pomp. This seemed to be the idea of Fabienne Audéoud's and John Russell's slides, when I held them up to the light. They showed paintings done in a lurid, lively, free but slightly weightless brushy style. The style seemed to be about finding a level where there could be some painterly enjoyment but not necessarily any special expressive mystery. The subjects were photos from art books, some from Renaissance art, some from the 1980s and 90s, but mostly from radical performance art events from the 60s and 70s. These images, mostly of extreme, physically torturous goings-on, were treated as if they were part of the art audience's natural cultural horizons, as something familiar. The duo could just do whatever they wanted to them: give them abject joke titles, reverse them, write over them, make them green, crop them arbitrarily. One was Chris Burden (US Happenings artist) having himself shot in the arm; one was Joseph Beuys saluting; one was Gunther Brus (Austrian performance guy) writhing naked before an audience; one was Hannah Wilke (US video artist) naked; and one was Grunewald's Isenheim altarpiece crucifixion. What did Audéoud and Russell really believe in, if not radicalism or expressionism? There's no point in believing in something that will only be incoherent to an audience. On the other hand, something sullied, dirty and tortured-looking is always of interest.



Extract from ART CRAZY NATION  
Matthew Collings 2001



Fabienne Audéoud and John Russell,  
Crucifixion (after Grunewald's Isenheim Altarpiece, 1515), 2000

## Revolution

A lot of angry-sounding words about what a real revolution might be were painted across Audéoud and Russell's Grunewald crucifixion scene. Straining to read from the slide – I could make out MEAN, CHOKING, THEIR PISS. It's quite rare to see the word 'revolution' in a context of modern-day painterly painting. And the violence of the

other words was mildly funny too. The whole thing was twisted and unreal, with the main elements – violence, revolution, painting – working together with the painterliness in a way that conspired to show just how far away any kind of revolution is from anything anyone believes in any more.