



Costantino Ciervo: Detail of "Project: Education/Breeding," 2000-01, Plexiglas, photograph, hammers, computer, wiring, 27 by 11 by 11 inches; at Janos Gat.

their identity. The work is clearly meant to warn of the dangers of breeding based upon genetic research. Its German context can't help but remind us of the Nazis' so-called improvement of society by categorizing genetic inheritance. Ciervo asks us to consider the implications of such thought now, when genetic engineering is becoming increasingly widespread and acceptable. No wonder there was something ominous about the sound of the beating hammers.

—Jonathan Goodman

## Costantino Ciervo at Janos Gat

Trained in electronics in high school, Italian-born, Berlin-based Costantino Ciervo often creates kinetic assemblages that examine how capitalist society is supporting an increasingly narrow sense of self, one hemmed in by impartial, overwhelmingly impersonal money transactions. In *After the Fall*, a work from 1997 that was not in this show, a large facsimile of a dollar bill hangs on the wall, above two chairs with video monitors placed where the seats should be. The monitors show the artist washing his hands, with the names of big Wall Street firms superimposed on the image. Written on the dollar bill, in red letters, is the following warning: "Sin also consists of

becoming conscious of the negative in things without doing anything against them." This political caveat spells out Ciervo's position quite clearly: if we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem.

Since he began showing in 1991, Ciervo's art has become more technically complex in its attempts to parody the streamlined efficiency of the market. In this, his first exhibition in the U.S., he presented "Project: Education/Breeding," an installation that focused on the dangers of genetic engineering. For the project, Ciervo photographed the left hand of every pupil in a first-grade class of a German elementary school. Here, 10 of these pictures were enclosed in 10 wall-mounted Plexiglas boxes. In each box, four mechanically controlled wooden stamps hammered the letters "C," "T," "G" and "A"—the letters stand for the basic components of the DNA sequence—against the photo of a child's hand. Rather than test the children for their actual DNA composite, Ciervo programmed the hammers to strike randomly.

In simulating the genetic coding of young children, "Project: Education/Breeding" contrasts their innocence with an impersonal scientific investigation of

# Art in America

OCTOBER 2001



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Cover: Shirin Neshat, *Passage* (detail), 2001, 35mm film transferred to DVD, single-screen installation, 11½-minute loop. Production still Larry Barns. Photo courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York. See article beginning on page 136.

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