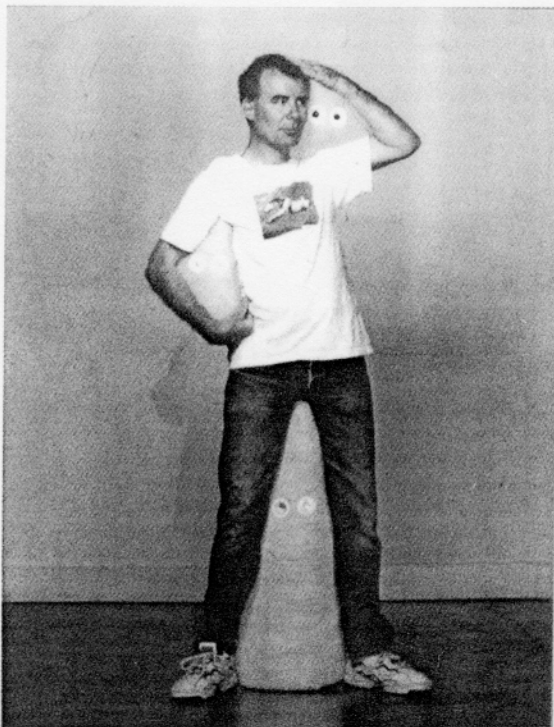


**MICHAEL ARATA: ME AND MY SHADOW;
POST • LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA**

Michael Arata's solo show at Post in Los Angeles works to explore the idea of customized spatial units, or as Arata likes to call them, "pet spaces." With a combination of self-made photographs and taped-together catalogs, Arata builds off of previous work, this time including himself in his own work as a sort of prop. Instead of emphasizing the actual subjects in his images (people), he alternatively focuses on the empty spaces between their arms and legs.



Michael Arata, ME AND MY SHADOW

His concern with the ambiguities of empty space are manifested in his handcrafted tendency to reduce specially chosen spaces, and designate them as pets, even garnishing them with fabricated eyes. While his methodology for identifying these spaces is rather simplistic, his solutions should by no means be judged as lacking sophistication. Rather, they recall previous attempts in the history of artists to overcome the distinctions of space, particularly between foreground and background; between formed space and space at large; between inside and outside; between up and down. In fact, Arata's configurations would probably do just as well slanted on their sides, or upside down, as they do right side up. However, his studies do not focus so much on depth of space problems, or spatial positioning, as they do on the personalization of space. From his perspective, each spatial unit is as important as the next. In accord with these assumptions, each is correctly fixed with its own color, and its own binoculars. In this way, he makes a deliberate point of making sure we do not miss the space between someone's legs or arms.

I find it curious that Arata, who is usually absent from his own work, this time includes himself in "the mess." In the self-portraits he gives us a series of poses that reflect friendly discomfort. Despite the awkward position of his body in these photos, we are never made to feel that he has somehow lost control of his space, or the situation. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. No matter how disorganized or compulsively foolish he may seem, Arata comes across as very polished, deliberate, and well prepared. Rather than trying to build up his public image by gaining viewership favor, his photos only mildly acknowledge their own existence. Instead he opts for his usual routine of fun and games. Whether individuals like or dislike his antics is obviously very low on his list of priorities.

How viewers respond to Arata's visual messages usually depends on the depth of wit (or lack thereof) they see in his work. Usually, the work is daring and difficult to categorize. This particular body is no different. For critics, passing off his earlier work as too goofy or lacking in substance, this show substantiates his almost ten year direction of screwing with rainbows, throw rugs, and pocket pets. He is systematic, aggressive, universal, and appealing to those who understand the absurdities of nature, and the complexities of a good laugh.

Ron Delegge
Skokie, Illinois
2000

POLLOCK; SONY SCREENING ROOM • DIRECTOR: ED HARRIS

This film about the artist, Jackson Pollock, belongs to Ed Harris. The actor was both the director and protagonist and occupies a great deal of the 122 minutes that the film runs either alone or center stage.

The screenplay was written by Barbara Turner and Susan L Emshwiller. According to Helen Harrison, the director of the Pollock/Krasner Center in Springs, Long Island, many people made suggestions and changes were made to the script, but all were finalized by Harris. Turner's screenplay was based on the book by Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith published in 1989, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, over 800 pages. Although initially criticized by art historians, it won the Nobel Prize for biography. For one thing, 300 pages at the start researched Pollock's family history starting with his great-grandparents, adding information never covered before. It goes on to an in-depth study of the artist's early life in the West as well as detailed chapters on the influences of key artists, Orozco, Siqueiros, the Indian Sand painters, and Thomas Hart Benton who became a mentor and shared a similar nature that attracted Pollock.

Claiming this comprehensive book as the source is somewhat of a misnomer. What is omitted is the fact that a great many of the events had been documented long before its publication. The second, and more important distinction is that Harris' film is not a survey but is limited to only 15 years of Pollock's artistic life—from 1941 to the time of his death in 1956 when he was 46 years old. After opening with a scene of a fan asking for an autograph when the artist was featured in *Life* magazine in 1949, the film, structured episodically, flashes back to Pollock in a drunken stupor. It cuts to Lee Krasner (Marcia Gay Harden) visiting Pollock's studio in 1941. It reveals their