

10.11.01 SWISS INSTITUTE WANTS TO PLAY

"The [Swiss Institute](#) is in no way a showcase of Swiss culture," says

Marc-Olivier Wahler, when I ask him what's Swiss about the New York exhibition space and arts organization. In response, the affable young curator hired last October to reinvigorate the institute's program gives me a quizzical look, as if my question were incomprehensible. "If that were true, it would be boring, and I wouldn't be here."



Marc-Olivier Wahler.

For Wahler, Switzerland is as much a metaphor as an actual country. "Switzerland is not a nation. It's an attitude of self-effacement, of stealth," he insists. "It's invisible, but once you see it, it becomes spectacular." Ironically, that may also be an apt description of his curatorial style. The cofounder of the Center for Contemporary Art in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, Wahler has emerged recently with a reputation for playful curatorial concepts. "Under Pressure," one of Wahler's first efforts for the institute in January 2001, dealt with, according to Wahler, "the tenuous moment before any given situation explodes into chaos." It featured such artists as Takashi Murakami and

Martin Creed, one of this year's Turner Prize nominees, exploring the elusive but suddenly suggestive idea.

At times, Wahler's ideas are too playful for certain institutions. Recently, he proposed that the Swiss Army Brass Band play renditions of techno music while marching down the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's spiraling ramp. The museum turned down offer. The organizers of this year's Downtown Arts Festival, however, accepted a proposal to have Hell's Angels style bikers rev their engines and spin their wheels on the asphalt to create a drawing in skid marks on a popular gallery street. The performance was held at this year's Chelsea Art Walk Day on September 8 and will be replayed in Miami during the Art Basel Fair in December and in January 2002 with Swiss artist Lori Hersberger.

Reena Jana



Swiss Institute

Contemporary Art

38 St Marks Place
New York, NY 10003

+1 (212) 925-2035
info@swissinstitute.net

swissinstitute.net
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