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[Michaël Amy, Tema Celeste](#)

May 2002

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Matthew Marks Gallery / Swiss Institute - Contemporary Art, New York

A Horse with No Name, Ugo Rondinone's recent show at Matthew Marks-held in conjunction with an exhibition at the Swiss Institute-used different media to convey its message of alienation.

A semi-circular, rainbow-colored fluorescent sign at the top of the gallery's facade spelled out the exhibition's title, borrowed from the classic Neil Young folk-rock song about heroin addiction. Inside the gallery, three life-sized fiberglass sculptures depicted motley, overweight clowns in various semi-conscious states, either reclining or sitting upon the floor. Rondinone's polychrome figures were cast from life, painted with funny faces, and partially clad in either feathers and furs, or an ensemble seemingly of sackcloth and mud.

The presence of these circus fools introduced a significant dose of grotesquerie into the installation, which also included two walls covered with elaborately arranged shards of mirrored glass, reflecting the viewer, the clowns, and the space they share.

Loudspeakers incorporated into these walls emitted melancholic piano music, over which an intensely inane dialogue between a man and a woman looped endlessly. Dripping with condescension and bitterness, the conversation began and ended with the never answered question, "What do you want?" Although the imagery, media, and strategies employed by Rondinone are indebted to the work of Bruce Nauman, the Swiss artist achieved a more ethereal sense of desolation.

In *LOWLAND LULLABY*, at the Swiss Institute, Rondinone presented a stage comprising one hundred shiny stainless steel panels, overlaid with white undulating wave patterns printed over a black ground and mounted on top of short wooden supports.

Incorporated into the bases were forty loudspeakers, which amplified the recorded voice of beat poet John Giorno, reading his poem "There Was a Bad Tree." Rondinone also integrated a sculpture by Swiss artist Urs Fischer into the installation, placing it onstage. Fischer's drawings depicting, among other things, a headless blue female nude, a ship, and abstract biomorphic forms were displayed around the platform.

Once again, Rondinone has brought together contextually ambiguous imagery, texts, and sound, creating an evocatively dysfunctional atmosphere. As Giorno wrote, "The leaves gave off a foul smell, and the flowers had a bitter stink."



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