

A CHAT WITH THE ARTIST

The Mind Behind a 'Spotless Mind'

By **MORGAN FALCONER**

For an artist who has never exhibited in America before, Pierre Bismuth is receiving quite a welcome. On Thursday, an exhibit of photographs by the Brussels-based, French conceptual artist will open at Team Gallery in SoHo. Two other exhibitions of his work opened over the weekend at Mary Boone's gal-

leries in Chelsea and Midtown.

Not only that, Mr. Bismuth has already received one of America's highest accolades: In 2005, he won a screenplay-writing Oscar for contributing the idea that gave birth to the film "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind." Mr. Bismuth simply mentioned the idea one day to his friend, the director Michel Gondry. Mr. Gondry

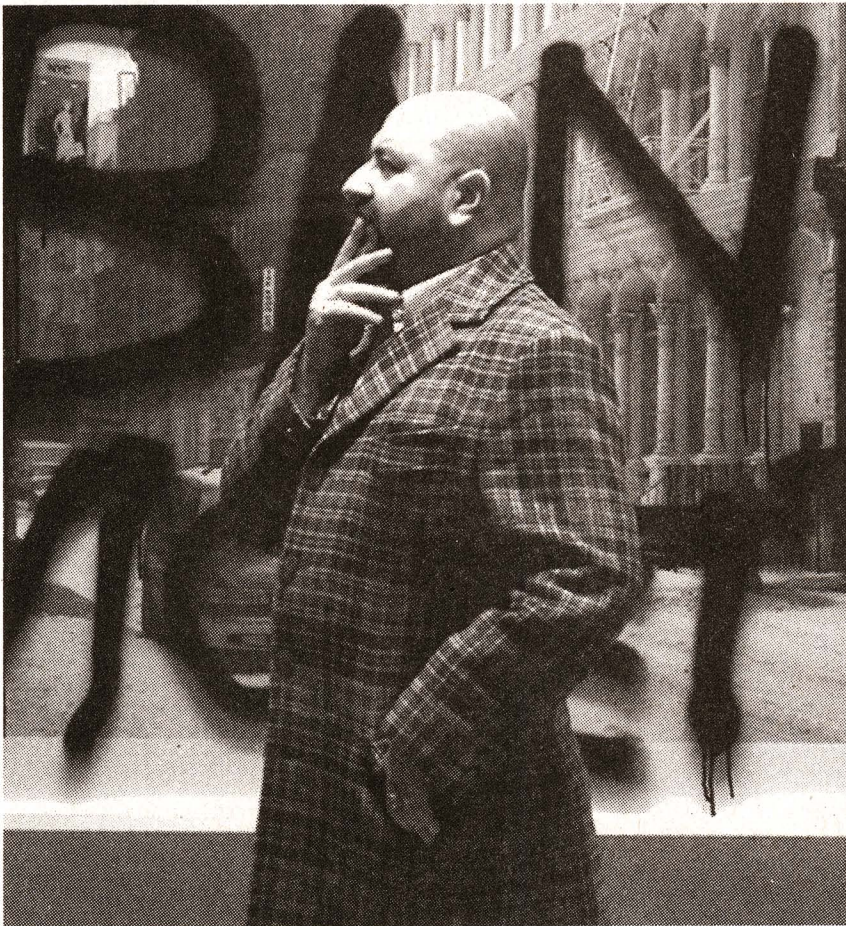
paid him for the rights to the story, Charlie Kaufman turned it into the award-winning screenplay, and all three men split the screenwriting credit.

His experiences with Hollywood have made an impact on his work. His installation in Mary Boone's Chelsea space is a wry meditation on the inflation of art and fame. It consists of vast enlargements of the advertisements for the exhibition that appear this month in the magazines *Artforum* and *Art in America*. The largest two reach 18 feet up to the rafters.

The advertisements are monochromatic plates of color with the details of the exhibition beneath. "Usually the advert in the magazine presents the work in the show," Mr. Bismuth said, "but it's the other way around here. I wanted to use the page of magazine as a surface to do the work. It ends up being a very minimal piece, and it does reference minimalism, but it's also a kind of monument to the market — it's ironical, critical."

The theme of art and celebrity continues in a video installation at Boone's Midtown gallery, "Following the right hand of..." which takes the form of an altered version of John Huston's 1961 film "The Misfits," which starred Marilyn Monroe

Please see **BISMUTH**, page 14



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A MUSING Pierre Bismuth at Mary Boone Gallery on Fifth Avenue.

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A Spotless Mind?

BISMUTH from page 9 and Clark Gable. Whenever Monroe appears onscreen, a black line follows her hand gestures as if she were drawing in space, so that as the movie unfolds so the screen is gradually occluded, just as, Mr. Bismuth suggests, the aura of the artiste, the auteur, the artist star, occludes the substance of the work they produce.

Over a career lasting more than a decade Mr. Bismuth has played with all kinds of cultural forms. "I think most of my work is about a kind of vandalism, about a kind of creative destruction," he said. That certainly seems true in the series "One man's masterpiece is another man's mess," which will be

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on view at Team. The work consists of his photographs of the smashed surfaces of empty slide transparencies, which produce surprisingly dramatic images of webs and vortexes.

In "Most Wanted Men," showing at Boone's Midtown gallery, the vandalism is literal. "It's based on a series of pictures of graffiti," he said. Color photographs depict the names of artists, like Ed Ruscha and Jorge Pardo, that Mr. Bismuth has surreptitiously sprayed on the walls of very ordinary suburban streets in Brussels. "It was ironical, about how those names be-

come nothing when they're removed from their usual context, when they're so far from the market and the art world.

"I wanted to do the series in New York," he added, "because I had all these images in my mind of graffiti on the subway, but it doesn't exist in the city so much anymore. The place is so clean because they're extremely strict. Anyone caught painting graffiti gets an automatic 36 hours in jail."

So he found another way to create a similar effect, emblazoning the graffiti across tourists' pictures of the city. "Well," he said with a laugh, "I didn't want to ruin my time in New York."

Mr. Bismuth will be staying in New York until June, and has taken up temporary lodgings in Lower Manhattan with his wife, an art historian and curator. On a recent evening, as he was preparing for all three shows, he sipped red wine and smoked his way through a pack of Parliaments. Mr. Bismuth, who is now in his 40s, initially trained as a graphic designer and only became interested in fine art when he was studying in Berlin in his mid-20s. He didn't have his first exhibition until several years later, but is now a significant presence on the European art scene. Nevertheless, he confessed that he was a little worried about the reception of the shows. He feels new to America, he said, unsure of the nation's taste. He remembered that the first generation of Conceptual artists, figures from the 1960s that he still admires, such as Lawrence Weiner and Robert Barry, found their first receptive audience in Europe. Was there an omen in that?

Conceptual artists aren't meant to win Oscars, and that may explain why relations between Messrs. Bismuth and Kaufman became tense after the Academy Awards ceremony. Mr. Bismuth wasn't silent about the fact that he had contributed the idea, which seemed to antagonize Mr. Kaufman more. "It was clear he just didn't want to talk to me," Mr. Bismuth said.

Not to worry. The New York art world will.

Mary Boone until April 28 (541 W. 24th St. and 745 Fifth Ave., 212-752-2929);

Team Gallery, Thursday until April 28 (83 Grand St., between Wooster and Greene streets, 212-279-9219).