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Date: 1965–1985

Editor: Julie Ault

Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985

Alternative Art New York 1965-1985

Julie Ault, Editor



A Cultural Politics Book for the Social Text Collective

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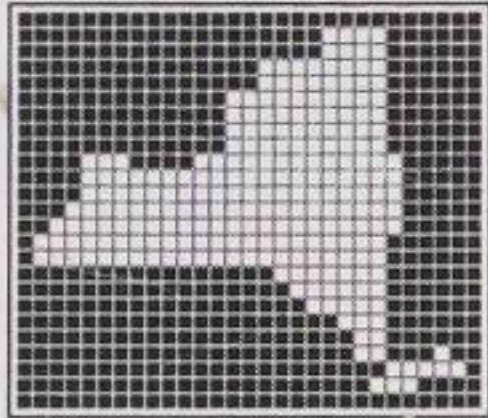
The Drawing Center New York

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This book grew out of an exhibition at The Drawing Center in 1996, *Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement, NYC*, and its accompanying publication, which were supported by the New York State Council on the Arts and the Lannan Foundation.

State of the Arts



NYSCA

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Preface

This book of essays and images is the long-awaited volume extending from the exhibition *Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement, NYC*, shown at The Drawing Center from February 26 through April 6, 1996. It is a great pleasure for the Center to witness the completion of this project, which the Visual Arts Program at the New York State Council on the Arts initiated through a call for proposals.

The intent of this grant opportunity was to encourage New York City's alternative spaces to evaluate and assess the alternative arts movement, their own histories, and the contributions made by other institutions and individuals to the field of contemporary art. Intrigued by the possibility of such a project, The Drawing Center turned to the artist Julie Ault, who conceived of an exhibition that offered an economically and socially contextualized view of alternative practices and structures.

Under Julie's direction, the project soon expanded to an exhibition that ultimately would prompt the publication of two books. The first was an intentionally modest volume that appeared at the time of the exhibition and included a carefully selected group of previously published articles mapping the alternative arts movement through the words of its contemporaneous interpreters—namely, critics. This book of primary sources both paralleled and enriched the visual and textual content of the exhibition.

Comprised of commissioned essays, many by key figures in the movement, this second book, *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985*, takes a directly interpretive

approach, bringing new insight to the project through the benefits of time and critical distance. Both books are invaluable resources, and we are deeply indebted to Julie for her perseverance and vision.

Although the shape of this project has been Julie's creation, I wish to acknowledge Elizabeth Merena of the New York State Council on the Arts for conceiving the initial grant opportunity and for continuing to support this book as it developed into a comprehensive and durable investigation. She wrote a call for proposals that allowed the movement to speak for itself, and the result has been illuminating.

Last but not least, I would like to express our indebtedness to the numerous writers and artists who have contributed to this project. Because of their sustaining praxis—their making of histories—we are able to look back on an extraordinarily provocative and productive period of New York art.

Catherine de Zegher
Director
The Drawing Center

Acknowledgments

I heartily thank the writers, artists, photographers, and organizations whose contributions result in this volume, as well as all those who dug into their archives and retrieved specific information for it. This volume would simply not have seen fruition without support from Martin Beck, Johanna Burton, Susan Cahan, Beth Finch, Elizabeth Merena, Toby Miller, Ann Philbin, Andrew Ross, Brian Wallis, Blair Winn, and Catherine de Zegher. This book is dedicated to Lucy R. Lippard.

J. A.

For the Record

Julie Ault

Books, as repositories and containers of record and histories, are a literally conservative medium.

—J. Abbott Miller¹

Existing documentation of New York City's highly influential alternative art culture of the 1970s and 1980s is ephemeral, and its circulation is restricted. Writing about alternative art spaces and groups has been largely limited to articles for local newspapers, reviews and overviews for art journals, and self-published documents concerning specific organizations. The latter genre usually celebrates a major anniversary, which, for an alternative space that began its life with short-range objectives and a shoestring budget, is often a stunning achievement. Writings of this sort tend to focus on a particular space as unique rather than contextualizing it within a larger field.²

Struck by the fragmentary nature of available information, the few books on the alternative arts arena, and the lack of examination of the underlying philosophies of the field, I began conceptualizing this publication in 1996 while working on an exhibition that shared the same general subject matter.³ The exhibition was the result of an activist grant initiative by the New York State Council on the Arts, which, in a climate of continually diminishing funding, commissioned a project that might revitalize as well as historicize the alternative space field.⁴ A primary goal of this book is to ensure that alternative activities are not written out of the cultural histories of the recent past. Because many alternative initiatives are ad hoc,



Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement, NYC, organized by Julie Ault, 1996. Installation view at The Drawing Center. Courtesy of The Drawing Center.



Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement, NYC, organized by Julie Ault, 1996. Installation view at The Drawing Center. Courtesy of The Drawing Center.

time-based, or anti-institutional, documentation is frequently fugitive. Accessibility is another variable. For some long-defunct entities only a meager paper trail exists—a mention here and there in print. In some cases, material has been saved but remains unorganized due to lack of money, labor, energy, or interest. In still other cases, histories and data have been compiled and packaged. What becomes history is to some degree determined by what is archived.⁵

The traditional methodologies and institutional structures of the art world have been fundamentally challenged in recent decades. During the 1970s and early 1980s, many artist-initiated alternative spaces and group structures were established as constructive responses to the explicit and implied limitations of this commerce-oriented world. Critical efforts to theorize representation as a contested arena and to create venues for self-representation and distribution were generated by and accommodated in these sites. Although some of these organizations struggled unsuccessfully to survive, many that are now defunct were, by definition, strategic and time-based. Other endeavors have retooled their missions and become institutionalized despite their alternative or experimental origins. Some have been incorporated into larger structures. The list of alternative spaces, groups, and organizations that once constituted a vibrant cultural network but that have since closed their doors or dissolved seems to signal the disintegration—perhaps even obsolescence—of an alternative art sphere. It is thus critical to establish written histories of meaningful situations and processes that challenged the status quo of the art system—to conserve them, to move them from memory and inscribe them, and to supply analyses of their economic and political contexts as well as strategies to be modified and improved upon.

The fact that artist-run spaces serve an activist purpose, that they are in themselves an action, situates them as a seminal grass-roots art movement. When the history of art making in the latter half of the twentieth century is written, artist-run spaces will be accorded equal importance with other art movements of this period.⁶

A series of topics relating to histories that derive from alternative and oppositional art culture forms the structure of this book. When I decided to use the word *movement* in the exhibition's title, I regarded it as a tactical device. *Movement* seemed preferable to something less coherent or less influential. Over the course of the project, strategy has evolved into conviction. My conviction, however, is not necessarily shared: "Calling it a movement doesn't make it one," declares Arlene Goldbard in her essay for this volume. She makes a strong case for down-scaling the rhetoric of alternative art culture in "When (Art) Worlds Collide: Institutionalizing the Alternatives," and she assesses how the do-it-yourself attitude of the alternative spaces adapted to the mainstream and what the consequences were in terms of compromising once oppositional strategies.

I have come to believe that the very different activities, ranging from “wanting a slice of the pie” to “wanting nothing less than revolution,” outlined in the chronology of this book do in fact embody a cultural, political, and artistic movement—perhaps not as clear-cut or as unified as one might wish but a consequential movement nonetheless. What constitutes a movement? What distinguishes it from activities and events that, although related, function discretely? A movement implies shared concerns and overlapping agendas; it conjures up social configurations as well as communication and degrees of collaboration between individuals—one thing leading to another, migration of ideas and models, generative social processes. One feature of a movement is interdependency of individuals, groups, organizations, and venues. Another is interconnectedness of principles, agendas, and practices. Cross-referencing individual names, groups, organizations, and the purported missions delineated in the chronology here, as well as in the essays, reveals numerous links indicative of continuity and commitment to cultural democracy. Such cross-referencing also underscores the recurrence of particular agendas and practices.

Use of the terms *alternative*, *marginal*, and *oppositional* have historically been regarded as problematic by participants in the arena because these terms inscribe and promote a hierarchical understanding of the art field as a system. Although it was once consequential, resistance to these classifications seems less pronounced to me now. For the sake of visibility and clarity, I find *alternative* to be useful as a general term because it declares historical and critical relations between the structures thus classified and the then-existing institutions and practices. This book emphasizes the ways alternative enterprises shape and position themselves in relation to that for which they are an alternative: on understanding the relationships and interdependencies between profit and nonprofit sectors of the cultural economy, how “mainstream” and “alternative” determine and influence one another, and how they blend. As Alexis de Tocqueville trenchantly remarked, “Democratic institutions awaken and foster a passion for equality which they can never entirely satisfy.”⁷ Relations between changing conceptions and forms of art practice and the kinds of places and spaces art circulated in, as well as the desire to battle constructively the frustration and disillusionment engendered by the established system for the distribution of art, led to the creation of the alternative sector in the 1970s. Influenced by concerns over accessibility, portability, and low-cost production, alternative strategies for art making, venues, and distribution sites for new forms of art emerged. While some alternative groups created spaces that proposed a counteraesthetic to the white walls and track lighting of the generic gallery, others emulated that formulaic environment in order to legitimate their endeavors. Looking at several examples of spatial models that engendered or embodied notions of “alternative,” Martin Beck, in his essay “Alternative: Space,” considers the

function of spatial environment within the framework of the alternative art economy.

The proliferation of alternative structures through the mid-1980s can also be portrayed as the legacy of cultural and political activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Many founders of alternative art institutions derived their impetus from feminist models of critique and organization. In her essay "On Discourse as Monument: Institutional Spaces and Feminist Problematics," Juli Carson reflects on some of the lasting effects of what she has termed "a shift in the sites of activism from the 'political' space of the physical institution to the 'discursive' space of representation."

In 1969, the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC) effectively articulated a complex agenda of interrelated objectives that radically challenged the system of art production and circulation. Although the coalition lasted fewer than three years, it generated many subgroups and offshoots and, in effect, left a legacy that manifested itself in the art field in several ways. In the scheme of postwar art history, the AWC was characterized by a relatively large and diverse group of participants, many of whom were well-known artists and critics. The group generally sought to counter the disconnection of art from the larger society and from political and economic issues. The AWC issued a set of demands to all major museums in New York and staged somewhat radical demonstrations and events. No art field group evidencing an equivalent base of support, critical stance, or idealism has existed since.

What came out of the temporary collective spirit and politicized climate the AWC embodied? One result was the politicization of many artists, museum professionals, critics, and historians—not only of those directly involved but also of many others, thanks to publicity. Dialogue and negotiation, often confrontational, between artists and museum officials occurred, with various results. Subgroups and offshoots with a variety of purposes and strategies emerged from the AWC. Its activities and attendant publicity were crucial in leading to the founding of such neighborhood museums as the Studio Museum in Harlem, El Museo del Barrio, and the Bronx Museum for the Arts and of art centers committed to articulating identity for groups not usually represented or addressed in the existing major museums. Artists who shared the AWC's convictions sought to control the use and circulation of their work and to improve their general condition by initiating alternative and artist-run spaces, cooperative galleries, and a host of ad hoc activities. In her essay "Biting the Hand: Artist and Museums since 1969," Lucy R. Lippard chronicles collective methods employed by artists to counter exclusionary and elitist practices in contemporary art museums and to ensure their rights to control their work and its distribution.

The desire to change systems of distribution and representation also led to the challenging of various curatorial and institutional practices. Curatorial projects by

artists as well as their efforts to extend their work beyond the studio, to assume control of presentation, or to take their art to the streets were viewed as alternatives to “art as merchandise.” Alternative curating has often sought to challenge the prescribed roles of artist and audience, that is, of producer and consumers. The critic Peter Frank called the 1970s phenomenon of artist-organized exhibitions in unexpected locations “guerrilla gallerizing.” Alternative exhibition strategies that rupture the pretense of neutrality and pose dynamic situations for art potentially challenge the very categorizations and hierarchies by which cultural relations are reproduced. Curating is among other things a political process of inclusion and exclusion. A hierarchy of cultural practices is evident when legitimizing institutions such as museums deem what is worthy of their support and what isn’t. In his essay “Polarity Rules: Looking at Whitney Annuals and Biennials, 1968–2000,” David Deitcher surveys the institution of the Biennial from the modest exhibitions of the early 1960s through the market-driven spectacles of the 1980s and early 1990s. He identifies changes in curatorial approach, in the relationships among the museum, the alternative sector, and the marketplace, and in the criteria used to support cultural policies of exclusion and inclusion.

State and federal funding for the arts was critical to the emergence and development of alternative art structures. Over time, the venues and organizations that composed an alternative sector became entrenched in routines—the result of guidelines for administration and programming imposed by funding agencies. These routines provoked new disillusionment and dissatisfactions among artists, this time with the alternative entities themselves. In “Public Funding and Alternative Spaces,” Brian Wallis charts the symbiotic relationship between public cultural funding and the development of the alternative art sector. He also describes how many alternatives collapsed into their opposites, eventually resembling that which they had originally sought to counter.

The proliferation of alternative spaces and groups was time- and context-based. A convergence of socioeconomic factors fostered cultural production in New York City. These factors included an abundance (some would say an overabundance) of artists; a culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse urban population in flux; the political context of various civil rights and liberation struggles; the availability of affordable residential and commercial rents; a plethora of neglected or underutilized urban sites—spaces and places in transition; an unrestricted public sphere (as compared to the present); the growth of public funding for culture; and the city’s status as a powerful art center.

In the early 1990s Mayor Rudolph Giuliani oversaw the dismantling of the city’s residential rent control and stabilization system. A series of subsequent real estate booms linked to art districts contributed to making space a tremendously precious commodity in Manhattan. Commercial rents were traditionally subject to unregulated increases, but they have virtually skyrocketed in areas such as the



Candace Hill-Montgomery, *General Coldspot Memorials to Indifference in the Year of Our Lord 1981*, 1981. Installation at Art on the Beach. Courtesy of Creative Time. Photograph by Al Sargenti.

East Village, SoHo, and Chelsea as art districts formed. The creation of art districts in addition to the premiere stronghold of Fifty-seventh Street has advanced for three decades. SoHo, once an area of light industry, became an expensive art district with the influx of galleries beginning in 1968. The East Village art scene came and went in the 1980s; as the cultural capital of the area increased, so did rents, and eventually all but a few of the original artist-run commercial galleries relocated or closed. By 1988 the East Village art scene was virtually at an end, as the area gave way to gentrification and luxury building projects. Alan Moore and Jim Cornwell's essay, "Local History: The Art of Battle for Bohemia in New York," takes us on a journey through the margins of the East Village art scene: the artist-organized entities and structures that came before and after gentrification. Moore gives a vivid account of artists' groups and their various interactions with the gentrification process in the area. By the mid-1990s, galleries began their exodus from SoHo to Chelsea, the appealing, relatively low-rent zone comprised of

large warehouse-type spaces ripe for renovation. Artists have also found relatively affordable housing and small gallery spaces in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. SoHo is now dominated by flagship designer stores, makeup studios, and retailers of upscale interior furnishings, thereby transforming the district's mercantile specialization.

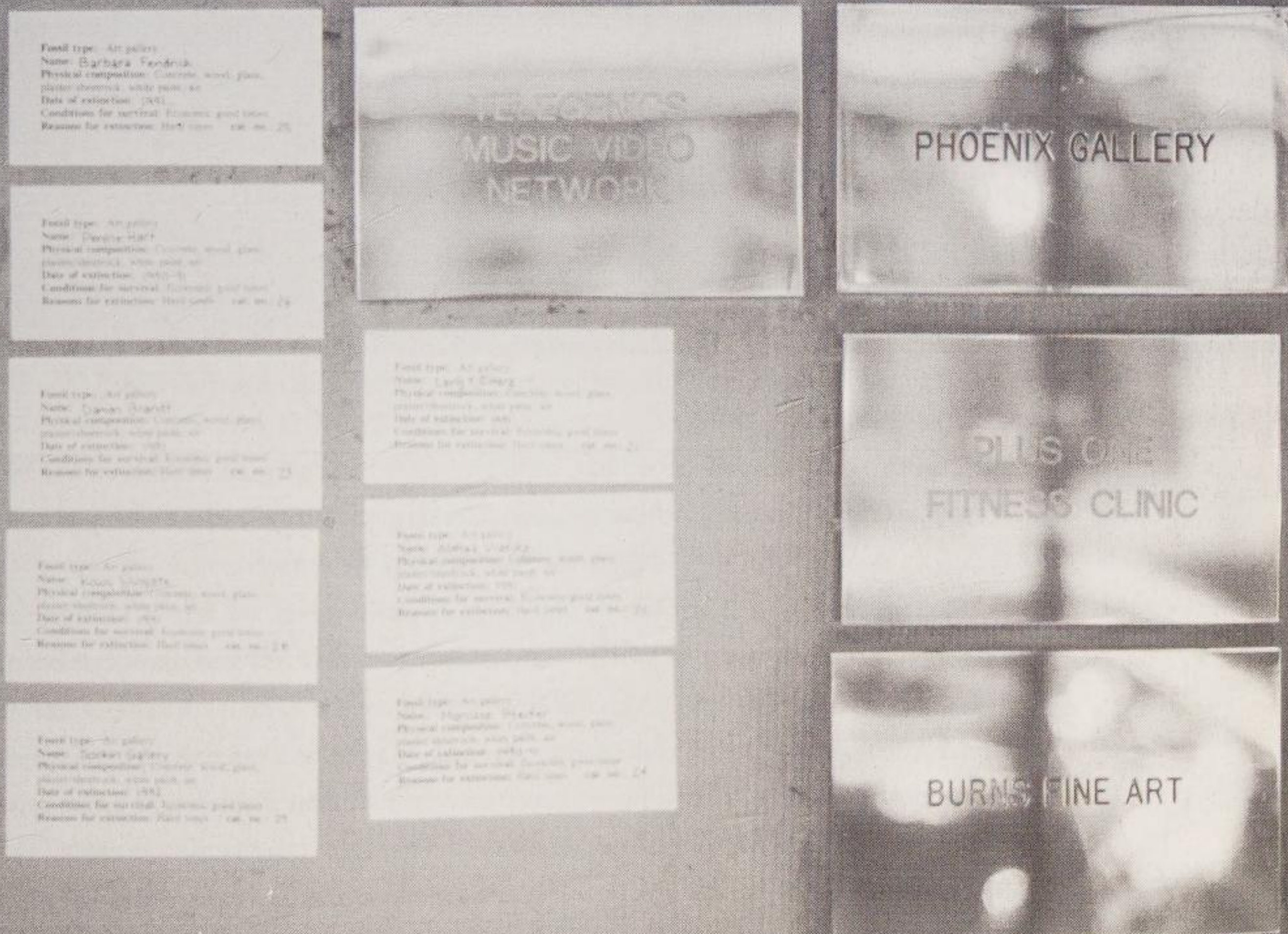
Growth, competition, skyrocketing rents, and eventual exodus are factors built into the creation and demise of commercial art districts in New York City. Once alternatives and nonprofits could fit in here and there, nestled in an existing art area or functioning as their own outposts. Now, affordable physical space has virtually disappeared in the face of the recent real estate-based economy. On a parallel track, the public sphere has been gradually transformed from the not strictly regulated and somewhat democratic to its present incarnation, supported by Mayor Giuliani and epitomized by the transformation of Times Square. In keeping with the general bureaucratization of the use of public space, public art

Fossil type: Art gallery
Name: Whitney Downtown
Physical composition: Concrete, wood, glass,
 plaster/sheetrock, white paint, air
Date of extinction: 1992
Conditions for survival: Economic good times
Reasons for extinction: Hard times **cat. no.:** 1

and community participation have also been institutionalized over the past three decades. In her essay, "Sittings of Public Art: Integration versus Intervention," Miwon Kwon traces the development of models of officially sanctioned art in public places, focusing on controversial commissions in New York City and critically considering the function of the contemporary community-involved public art model.

In 1996 when I began this project, the notion of the alternative was not entirely outmoded. A mere six years later, the term has little currency. Only a vestige of an alternative network remains, although previously an alternative art world flourished in New York City, consisting of venues and voices, practices and projects, agendas and events. The "mainstream" art world and the "alternative" art world together formed the cultural economy explored in this book.

So where have the alternatives gone? What forms have they taken? Is the concept of alternative any longer viable or desired? Characterizing his generation



Lois Nesbitt, *Gallery Labels*, 1992. Courtesy of Lois Nesbitt. Photograph by Lois Nesbitt. Sponsored by Whitney Museum of American Art, Downtown at Federal Reserve Plaza.



John Fekner, *Last Hope*, 1980. South Bronx, New York. Courtesy of John Fekner. Photograph by John Fekner.

(defined, approximately, as those between the ages twenty and thirty-two), Mario Ontiveros, a co-facilitator of the Co-Generate discussions conducted by the National Association of Artists' Organizations (NAAO), wrote:

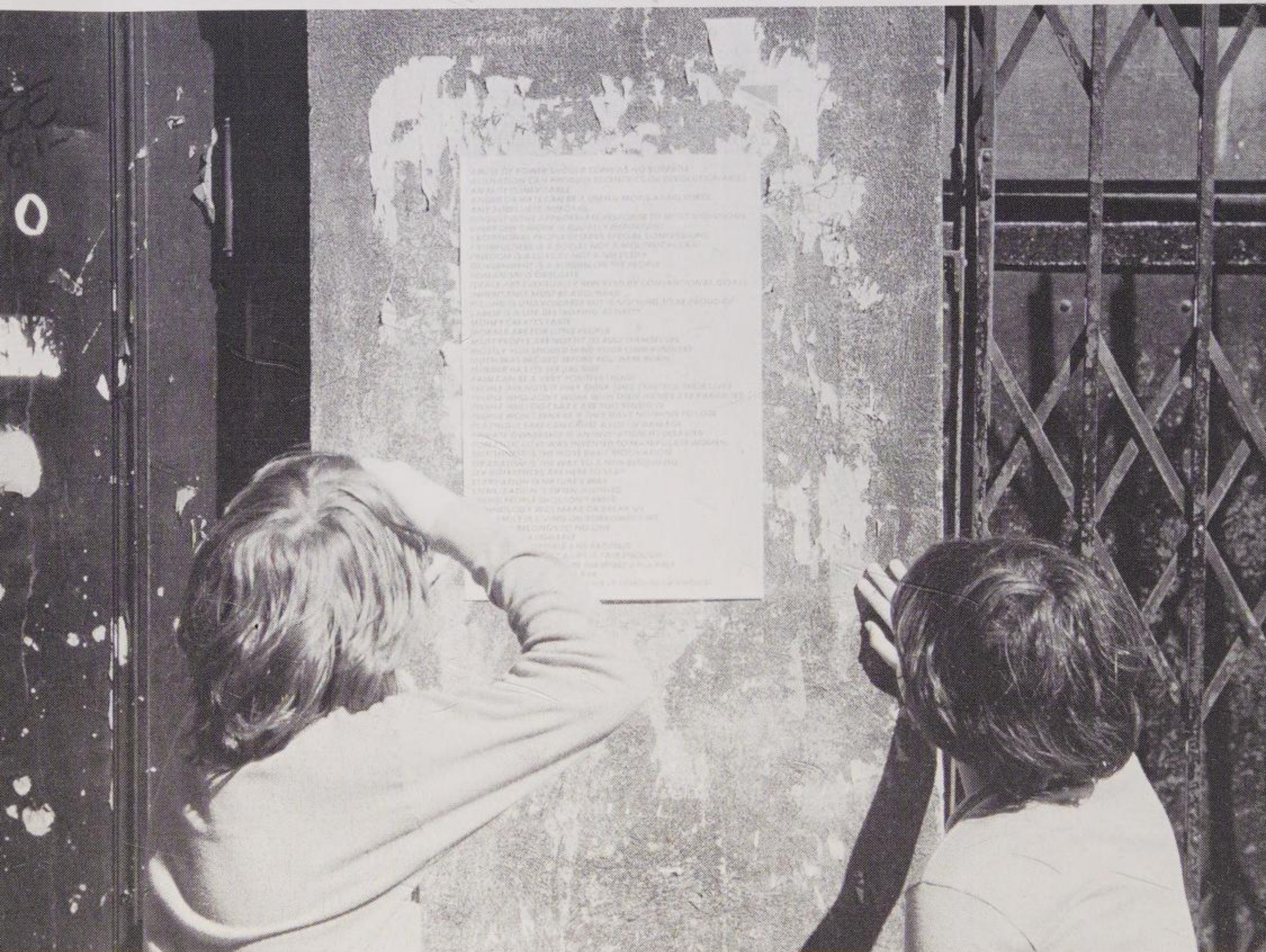
This generation has grown up fully cognizant that there is not and never has been an outside. For many, constructing a different model to “the system” or “the center” was a problematic idea both in theory and practice. Maybe because this current generation did not struggle during the empowerment movement to build the alternative house it will always feel the power imbalance of living under someone else’s roof. Maybe this generation is not seen as fit enough to add on, to say nothing of taking over the lease, because it lacks the necessary common political and social experience. After all, 1968 is not our personal memory—it has been experienced as a document, a moment in history. Thus to maintain that the 1970s grip has disrupted the 1990s flow is not to set up a tendentious binary, you versus us, but to make clear that this generation has never been content to stay idling, to just take up space, or to wait for any inheritance.⁸



Anton Van Dalen, *Stencils for the Lower East Side*, 1980–87. Stencil print. Courtesy of Anton Van Dalen.

Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985 consists of four intermingled layers of information: texts, images, documents, and a chronology of alternative structures. The book recounts and analyzes histories from multiple perspectives. It is informed by my experience of working collaboratively in this very field and is commensurate with its dialogic foundation.⁹ To convey histories, especially those emerging from philosophies of self-representation and cultural civil rights, is a challenge best met by assembling a group of writers who employ different methodologies and styles to investigate their diverse topics with intellectual rigor. One tenet of the alternative arts movement has been the merit of dislodging restrictive categorizations and hierarchies (of mediums, of types of cultural practice, and of identity structures). Bringing together investigatory methods and writing styles that ordinarily are not joined—academic, journalistic, empirical, and hybrids—supports that principle.

The selection of images reproduced in this volume reflects several criteria. One has been to emphasize ephemeral events—protests, meetings, actions, installations, exhibitions, temporary public art. These images, which are all emblematic of social processes and temporal activities, rarely circulate after their initial flash. Another criterion is to show artistic responses to specific political and socioeconomic conditions that figure into the book's subject. I chose still other images to illustrate



Jenny Holzer, *Truisms*, 1977–79. Copyright Jenny Holzer. Courtesy of Jenny Holzer and Cheim & Read Gallery. Photograph by Jenny Holzer.

a point made in a text. I have also employed a visual criterion in the selection process, favoring dynamic images that communicate most effectively.

Reprinted for both their textual and visual contents, selected documents from the paper trails of defunct groups—flyers, communiqués, and press releases—are reproduced here as they were initially circulated to convey the visual strategies of the times when they were made. These form a third layer of information.

The fourth component of the book is a chronology that attempts to clarify the who, what, when, where, how, and why of many alternative structures. Together these entities form the contours of an “alternative arts movement.” Although I have focused on dates of origin, background stories, and stated purposes, where possible I have also noted whether an organization is still active and, if not, at what point it ceased its activities. Many more spaces and groups were founded and formed than are cataloged here. According to one account from 1982, there were then seventy-four alternative spaces in New York City, with many more having opened and already closed.¹⁰



Janet Henry, *Eventually*, 1988. Messages to the Public program. Courtesy of the Public Art Fund. Photograph by Janet Henry.

There was a parallel proliferation of alternative art structures in other cities across the country, but the geographic limit of New York City helped make the massive subject of alternative art culture manageable as a project. It is also my home territory. In order to limit the project's scope temporally, I have focused on roughly the two decades between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s, not arbitrarily but because these were the major growth years of the field. Comparable organizations existed before 1965, and relevant groups and spaces were founded later.

Collaboratives such as Gran Fury, Godzilla, Repo History, and Women's Action Coalition (WAC) formed in the late 1980s and early 1990s around specific issues and questions of identity. Artist-centered venues such as the Thread Waxing Space and the circuit of artist-run galleries in the Williamsburg area of Brooklyn began in the early 1990s. But those are outside the scope of this project.

I have applied a fairly broad definition of "alternative structure," one that considers the roots and missions of organizations claiming to fill a particular kind of void; to counter the status quo of mercantile circuits; to address needs of artists and audiences not addressed elsewhere; or to define themselves as antiestablishment, anti-institutional, experimental, artist-initiated, artist-run, artist-centered, or any combination of the above. This means that some entities commonly thought of as establishment but having alternative beginnings are included.

The following alternative chronicle is the result of a combination of material, intellectual, and subjective factors. Some omissions and disproportionately scanty entries are due to unavailability of information.¹¹ My inclination to represent politicized endeavors has influenced its composition because it was the politics of culture that initially attracted me to the field of art.

Notes

1. J. Abbott Miller, "Designer's Note," in *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space: 25 Years*, ed. Claudia Gould and Valerie Smith (New York: Artists Space, 1998), 15.

2. Reflecting varying amounts of critical perspective, the histories written by "established" organizations often aim at establishing their position for posterity as well as regenerating their communities. This results in self-congratulatory and promotional language in some cases and highly reflective and critical perspectives in others. Many of these published histories are based on interviews with participants and represent multiple perspectives; some also function as memory containers. Usually, they include compilations of information about past programs. A sampling of such anniversary publications includes Elyse Goldberg and Susan Schreiber, eds., *Souvenirs, Documents—20 Years* (New York: P.S. 122, 1999); Gould and Smith, eds., *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space: 25 Years*; Ronald Ehmke with Elizabeth Licata, eds., *Consider the Alternatives: 20 Years of Contemporary Art at Hallwalls* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center, 1996); Brian Goldfarb, John Hatfield, Laura Trippi, and Mimi Young, eds., *Temporarily Possessed: The Semi-Permanent Collection* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995); Lee Morrissey, ed., *The Kitchen Turns Twenty: A Retrospective Anthology* (New York: The Kitchen Center for Video, Music, Dance, Performance, Film and Literature, 1992); Tricia Collins and Richard Milazzo, eds., *An Anthology of Statements Celebrating the Twentieth Anniversary of White Columns New York* (New York: White Columns, 1991); *Taller Alma Boricua, 1969–1989: Reflecting on Twenty Years of the Puerto Rican Workshop* (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 1990); Basement Workshop, *Basement Yearbook 1986* (New York: Basement Work-

shop, 1986); and Robyn Brentano with Mark Savitt, eds., *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street: History, Artists, and Artworks* (New York: New York University Press, 1981).

For an exception to representation of the history of a single institution, see Alan Moore and Marc Miller, eds., *ABC No Rio Dinero: The Story of a Lower East Side Art Gallery* (New York: ABC No Rio with Collaborative Projects, 1985). Although it tells the story of No Rio, this book also documents other nonprofit venues as well as the larger environment of the Lower East Side. See also Jacki Apple, ed., *Alternatives in Retrospect: An Historical Overview, 1969–1975* (New York: New Museum, 1981), an exhibition catalog that treats alternative spaces in context.

Several activist groups self-published their own compendiums as photocopied or inexpensive offset books. These include Jon Hendricks and Jean Toche, *GAAG: The Guerrilla Art Action Group, 1969–1976: A Selection* (New York: Printed Matter, 1978); WAR, *A Documentary: Herstory of Women Artists in Revolution* (New York: WAR, 1971; reprint, Pittsburgh: Women's Interart Center, 1973); and Artworkers' Coalition, *Documents 1* (New York: Artworkers' Coalition, 1969).

3. Exceptions that give account of the larger contexts alternative art activities occurred in and address the underlying philosophies of the field are books by Lucy R. Lippard, *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984) and *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* (New York: New Press, 1995). Lippard covered many endeavors of politically committed artists for journals and newspapers, which were later compiled in these books. Long out of print, *Get the Message?* contains essays most relevant to the subject of this publication. Other books not specifically focused on the alternative arts movement are nonetheless important to the field. See Grant Kestor, ed., *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998); Nina Felshin, ed., *But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995); Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995); Lucy R. Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990); and Arlene Raven, ed., *Art in the Public Interest* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989).

4. The New York State Council on the Arts' Visual Arts Program (VAP) issued a call to seven alternative spaces in New York City for exhibition proposals; the project, selected by peer panel review, would be awarded \$50,000. A letter, dated August 10, 1994, from VAP director Elizabeth Merena and program associate Susan Spencer Crowe, asked for a proposal that would "critically address a particular aspect of the past twenty years' activities in the alternative spaces. The point of view should be historical and must reach beyond the activities that have taken place solely at one organization." It was stipulated that an "outside" curator be hired for the exhibition and that a critical essay be produced. "It is hoped," Merena and Crowe added, "that this call for proposals will generate a serious analysis of the past and provide some plausible insights into the future roles of alternative spaces." Ultimately, two projects were selected: *Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement, NYC*, which I organized for The Drawing Center, and *Counterculture*,

organized by Brian Wallis and Melissa Rachleff for Exit Art, The First World. Both took place February 24–April 6, 1996.

5. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) library contains subject files on many spaces, organizations, groups, and artists. Although extremely useful, the files are fragmentary. The Political Art Documentation/Distribution (PADD) archive is also housed in the MoMA library and is accessible by appointment; it has been tremendously valuable for this book because of its political focus.

6. Roberto Bedoya, “Hardware Stores” in *Manual: Art in General, 1992 and 1993* (New York: Art in General, 1993), 5–6.

7. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), I: 201.

8. Mario Ontiveros, “Under Construction: Conditions, Propositions, and Operations from a Generation of ‘Emerging’ Artists and Arts Administrators,” in *The Co-Generate Project Field Guide 1999–2000* (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Artists’ Organizations, 2000), 10.

9. From 1979 to 1996 I was a member of the artists’ collaborative Group Material, which produced installations and public projects exploring interrelationships between politics and aesthetics. My experiences in Group Material included working with many alternative and nonprofit galleries and with museums and other arts institutions. These experiences and the working methods developed in the group greatly influenced the making of this book.

10. Sally Webster, *A Report: Alternative Spaces and the Crises Threatening Their Survival* (New York: RoseWeb Projects, 1982). Webster breaks down alternative spaces into several types: “experimental visual art exhibition spaces that show work of new unaffiliated artists; special interest exhibition spaces which were formed in response to minority needs or show a particular art form; co-op of artist run galleries; small museums; performance spaces; book arts; inter-disciplinary multi-media; media/video; film; outdoor or environmental art; art in public places; workshops or outreach programs.” The primary threat to the future of alternative spaces cited in the report was the rent increases imposed when existing leases expired.

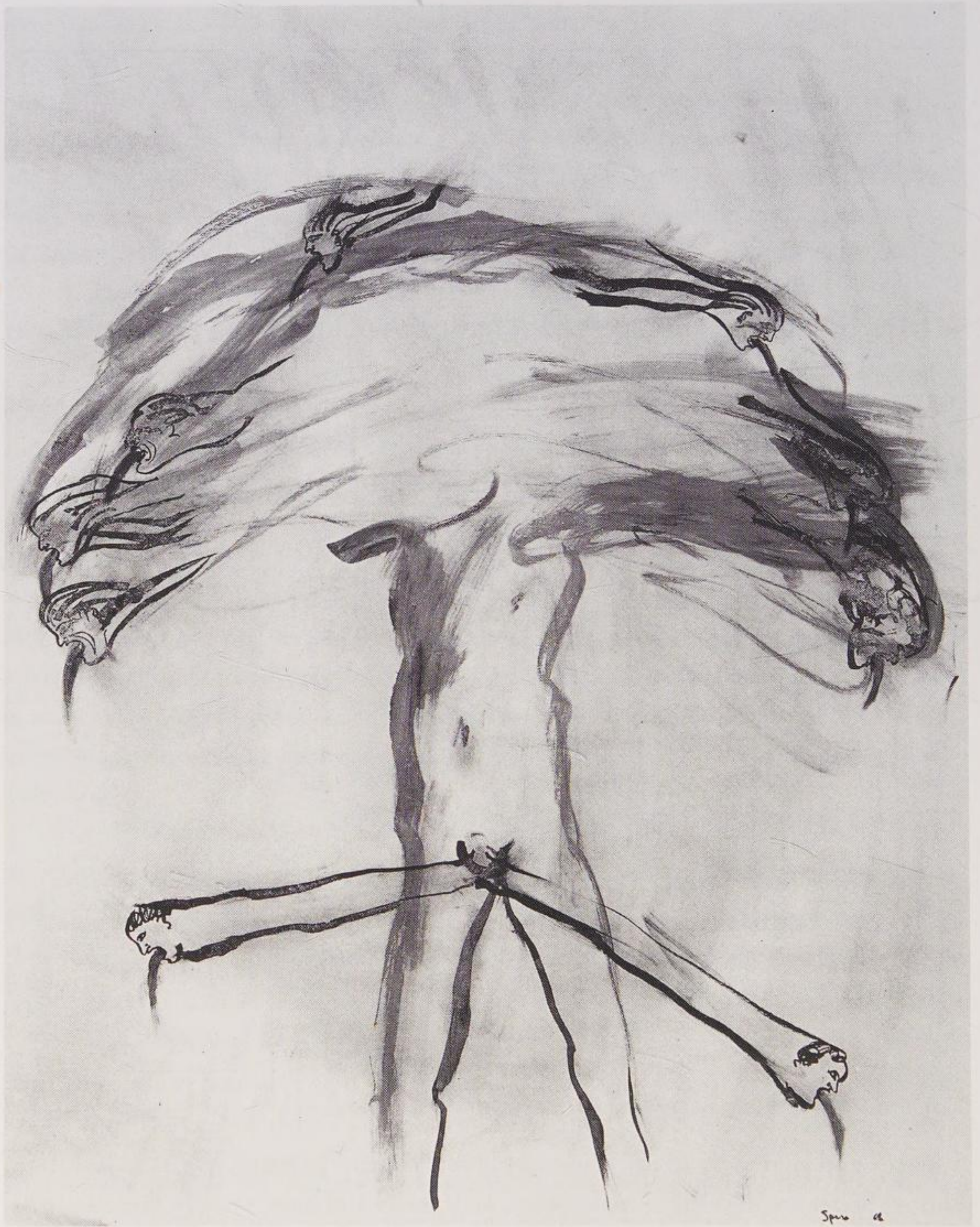
11. I am aware of the insubstantial character of small bits of unchallenged data and self-representations of organizations that rely on grant-speak portrayals, but in some cases that was the only information available to me. When I encountered conflicting information from seemingly reliable sources, I attempted to distinguish what was truly factual and to reconcile discrepancies.

A Chronology of Selected Alternative Structures, Spaces, Artists' Groups, and Organizations in New York City, 1965–85

Julie Ault

Artists and Writers Protest against the War in Vietnam, 1965

Artists and Writers Protest against the War in Vietnam, also known as Artists Protest, was one of the first post–World War II groups to use the fame of individual members to forge a platform to effect its political goals. Throughout the 1960s this organization protested the war in Southeast Asia. Rudolf Baranik, May Stevens, Elaine de Kooning, Ad Reinhardt, Denise Levertov, Mitchell Goodman, and other key participants organized an open letter that appeared in the *New York Times* on June 27, 1965, advocating withdrawal from Vietnam. Called “End Your Silence” and signed by many prominent artists, it read in part, “We artists of the United States are divided in many ways, artistically and ideologically, but we are as one in our concern for Humanity.” Artists Protest placed a similar ad in the *Times* the same year signed by five hundred artists and writers. The group took part in antiwar marches and in 1967 initiated Angry Arts Week against the war in Vietnam. Robert Reitz was the chair of Angry Arts Week and artists and critics Dore Ashton, Frazier Dougherty, Bernard Apteckar, Barbara Rose, and Irving Petlin were actively involved. More than six hundred artists participated in the weeklong campaign of actions, protests, and happenings in support of peace. The Angry Arts group described itself as composed of “artists joining together to proclaim unanimously our revulsion for this war” and announced its intent to “make our protest not through rallies or marches but through work in our own fields.” Between



Nancy Spero, *Male Bomb*, 1968. Courtesy of Nancy Spero.

January 29 and February 5, 1967, Angry Arts Week included public manifestations of dissent in numerous venues, including the presentation of the collaboratively made *Collage of Indignation* at Loeb Student Center at New York University. As one of its last actions, Artists and Writers Protest, working together with the Art Workers' Coalition, initiated a letter-writing campaign in 1970 asking Pablo Picasso to withdraw *Guernica*—a work of art made to protest war—from permanent display at the Museum of Modern Art in reaction to atrocities perpetrated by the United States in Vietnam. Robert Mangold, Herbert Marcuse, Ossie Davis,



Martha Rosler, *Vacation Getaway*, from the series *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful*, 1969–72. Courtesy of Gorney Bravin + Lee, New York.

Donald Judd, and Robert Gwathmey were among the writers of the 265 letters generated by the campaign. That effort was unsuccessful.

Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, 1968–69

When the Whitney Museum of American Art's exhibition *The 1930s: Painting and Sculpture in America* (1968) failed to include any Black artists, a group of about thirty artists and critics led by Henri Ghent, Faith Ringgold, and Vivian Browne picketed the show; other participants were Romare Bearden, Camille Billops, Tom Lloyd, and Benny Andrews. Under Ghent's curatorial guidance, the group produced a counterexhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem, *Invisible Artists: 1930* (1968). The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC) evolved in response to major museum exhibitions that ignored the work of Black artists. The event that catalyzed the loose association to formalize as an organization was the documentary multimedia show "Harlem on My Mind" (1969) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, curated by Allon Schoener under the supervision of Met director Thomas Hoving. On November 17, 1968, Ed Taylor, director of the Harlem Cultural Council, initiated a demonstration against the exhibition then being planned. Subsequent meetings were held at Benny Andrews's studio to organize a demonstration at the Met criticizing the exhibition for completely neglecting contemporary

Cityarts Workshop, 1968

Cityarts Workshop began as a publicly funded grassroots organization based on the Lower East Side with the motto “out of the gallery and into the streets.” Founded by ceramist Susan Kiok, it sponsored and produced community-based public wall murals. Most of the murals were made under the direction of an artist in collaboration with nonartist community members, often young people or the disenfranchised. Kiok regarded the murals as community-organizing tools: process was as important as outcome. In the 1970s, the wall paintings usually combined social messages or history with aesthetics. *Wall of Respect for Women*, for example, was made by a group of women—none of whom was an artist—in collaboration with artist Tomie Arai. From 1974 to 1978, Arai ran Cityarts’s resource center, for which she organized conferences on mural work and teacher training programs, and found artists to guide mural making. By the late 1970s, funding for Cityarts had diminished, hampering its ability to make large-scale paintings. Cityarts is still active, but its focus has shifted to working with children, with content that is more decorative and less political than in its earlier years.

Museum: A Project of Living Artists, 1968

A group of eight artists, including Arthur Hughes, Gary Smith, Sharon Brant, and Robert Resnick, started Museum: A Project of Living Artists. The membership soon grew to forty. Located at 729 Broadway, Museum was initially governed by artists and intended as a communication and community center with social, aesthetic, and political fluidity. The agenda was to make available services, facilities, a meeting place, a social environment, information, and exhibition space. The organization’s stated goal was to forge “a more alive connection between art and society, without the dissipation of force and quality occurring so frequently in the current art establishment.” Museum had a membership of more than three hundred artists by 1970 (anyone who wanted to participate was considered a member), but was beset by considerable philosophical disagreement. Some members wanted formal exhibition and administrative structures; others wanted a looser art association with exhibitions, events, forums, and services; and still others wanted a completely unrestricted artists’ space. A steering committee was formed to seek state funds for exhibition programs and to organize drawing classes and a print workshop. Museum was also used as a meeting hall for groups such as the Art Workers’ Coalition. All exhibitions were group shows with no criteria restricting subject matter or access; the schedule was determined on a first-come, first-served basis. When Museum ceased its activities in 1971, Gary Smith described it as “an alternative to an unworkable situation that didn’t work” (quoted in Schwartz).

Studio Museum in Harlem, 1968

Between 1966 and 1968 a consortium was organized that consisted of members of the Junior Council of the Museum of Modern Art and others—among them artists Betty Blayton and Theodore Gunn, social worker Frank Donnelly, Charles Cowles (publisher of *Artforum*), New York City councilman Carter Burden, MoMA curator Kynaston McShine, and American Civil Liberties Union lawyer Eleanor Holmes Norton. These individuals and organizations provided start-up aid, but the Studio Museum was conceived not as a satellite of the major museums but as an independent cultural entity dedicated to building an infrastructure to support artists in the community, to exhibiting work by Black artists, and to presenting relevant programs for Harlem residents. Its first two programs were the Studio Program, which made work space available for Black artists, and the Film Unit, which provided occupational and creative training for local young people. The Studio Museum opened in September 1968 in loft spaces at 2033 Fifth Avenue with an inaugural exhibition by artist Tom Lloyd, a vocal lobbyist for decentralizing major museums and creating community institutions. Grace Glueck in the *New York Times* wrote about its inauguration: “The museum has not met with an entirely favorable reception. Some militants and intellectuals have criticized what they call its ‘white establishment orientation.’”

Over time, the organization’s orientation shifted. In the early 1970s, director Edward Spriggs recognized the need for exhibition space to show works of Black artists not only from Harlem but from around the country. Although the Studio Museum began as a community-oriented institution, over the years its mission has expanded to make it the nation’s premier African American fine art museum. In 1978 its board hired an art historian, Mary Schmidt Campbell, as the museum’s director, and she sought to confer legitimacy on the institution through employing a scholarly approach to art. During her tenure, which ended in 1987, the Studio Museum became a scholarly institution accredited by the American Museum Association. In 1979 she guided the museum’s move to 144 West 125th Street (where it is still located), a five-story building given to the museum by New York Bank for Savings. The current mission of the museum is to collect, document, preserve, and interpret African American art and artifacts from the African Diaspora. It also continues an artist-in-residence program.

Apple, 1969

Apple was founded and run by artist Billy Apple, who, according to his statement in the New Museum’s *Alternatives in Retrospect*, “began the space at 161 West Twenty-third Street in order to provide an independent and experimental alter-

native for the presentation of my own work and the work of other artists.” Initially the exhibition space was part of Billy Apple’s studio, and during its four years of operation he intermittently exhibited his own work there. A group of participating and interested artists including Geoff Hendricks, Mac Adams, Davi Det Hompson, and Jerry Vis maintained and financed the space, which was considered to be a forum for art and discourse, both formal and informal.

Art Workers’ Coalition, 1969

On January 3, 1969, artist Takis (Vassilakis) and several friends removed a sculpture he had made from the Museum of Modern Art’s *Machine* exhibition because he did not want to be represented by the piece in that context. Takis took the artwork into MoMA’s garden, where he waited for written assurance that it would not be reinstalled. Takis’s move to control the use of his work—despite the fact that the work was no longer his and had been purchased by MoMA—set off a chain of events resulting in the formation of a group that would soon be called the Art Workers’ Coalition (AWC). A group of artists and critics including Gregory Battcock, Hans Haacke, Tom Lloyd, Takis, Wen-Ying Tsai, and John Perreault began a dialogue with MoMA director Bates Lowry over demands they were drafting with the intention to reform the museum. During the first few months of 1969 the AWC grew steadily and demonstrations were staged at the museum to dramatize its demands. Lowry never agreed to AWC’s first demand, which was to hold a public forum, “The Museum’s Relationship to Artists and to Society,” at MoMA. Lowry noted that some of the artists’ proposals were “identical” to those under discussion within the museum and he instead proposed to establish a Committee on Artists Relations that would deliberate the issues over a series of meetings. He resigned his post before the committee was in place. The AWC held its own forum, “Open Public Hearing on the Subject: What Should Be the Program of the Art Workers Regarding Museum Reform, and to Establish the Program of an Open Art Workers’ Coalition,” on April 10 at the School of Visual Arts. More than three hundred people attended and galvanized a larger group that later refined its initial demands to MoMA and readdressed them to all New York museums. The open membership of the AWC included artists, filmmakers, writers, critics, and museum workers, and the group held weekly meetings at Museum: A Project of Living Artists. The Art Workers’ Coalition organized several demonstrations and was a catalyst for many subgroups, offshoots, and initiatives resulting in the founding of alternative spaces and institutions. AWC published and distributed the *Open Hearing* as well as the publication *Documents 1*, which charted the group’s early activities through correspondence, flyers, internal documents, and press coverage. AWC ceased its activities by the end of 1971.

Art Workers' Coalition is here to save artists the embarrassment of being identified with:

- 1) The political ambitions of Nelson A. Rockefeller.
- 2) The Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art, who assume – to the detriment of the intellect, energies, and intentions of artists – that they establish cultural values.

Art Workers' Coalition therefore demands artists' representation on the board of trustees.

Art Workers' Coalition is here to reassert that the artist be given power to control his work. Art Workers' Coalition demands that the artist be given moral control and a share of the capital gains realized from the resale of his work. Art Workers' Coalition demands that the Museum pay rental to artists whose work it displays but does not own. Art Workers' Coalition demands that the artist be paid a residual on all reproductions of his work. Art Workers' Coalition demands that a share of all profits gained by the public or private resale of the work of dead artists be redistributed to contribute to the growth of living art.

DEMONSTRATION (9 : 30 p m)
May 26  **9 AT The Museum of Modern ART**
11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 245-3200 Cable: Modern

Rockefeller and the "Elite" invited to this evening's opening are more than capable of assuming the full financial support of the Museum of Modern Art. Art Workers' Coalition demands that admission fees be discontinued. We object to the fact that free access is given this evening to the very group most guilty of the subversion and rape of the content and meaning of the work of art. Art Workers' Coalition demands free access for all at all times.

Again, Art Workers' Coalition is here to rescue Art from identification with a social community that is guilty of promoting racism. Art Workers' Coalition demands that the museum set up a Martin Luther King Center devoted primarily to the work of black and Puerto Rican artists.

JOIN OUR DEMONSTRATION.

Art Workers' Coalition, P.O. Box 553, Old Chelsea Station, New York, N.Y. 10011

Art Workers' Coalition flyer, 1971.

Artists Poster Committee, 1969

The Artists Poster Committee (APC), composed of Jon Hendricks, Irving Petlin, and Frazier Dougherty, was a subgroup of the Art Workers' Coalition. In 1969 Arthur Drexler, acting director of the Museum of Modern Art, agreed to collaborate with the AWC to sponsor, produce, and distribute a poster expressing dissent against the war in Vietnam. The APC formed to execute this initiative. Following the advice of Emilio Ambasz of MoMA's design department to "keep it simple and

direct,” the APC designed a poster using photojournalist Ron Haeberle’s image of the My Lai massacre as a background for a text overlay. The text came from an exchange between newscaster Mike Wallace and one of the U.S. Army commanders present at the massacre. Wallace had asked, “You went in and killed men and women?” The officer reiterated “and women.” Wallace then asked, “and babies?” The respondent affirmed, “and babies.” When the mockup of this powerful pairing of image and text was finished, Drexler decided to run it by MoMA’s chairman of the board, Bill Paley, the founder and head of CBS. Paley adamantly objected to MoMA’s association with the poster, and Drexler consequently reneged on his promise. The APC nonetheless produced fifty thousand copies and rubber-stamped some of them with the account of MoMA’s about-face. The posters were distributed freely to organizations through large mailings and were wheatpasted up throughout the city. In a 1997 interview Hendricks said, “We were working with MoMA on this in good faith . . . We were really working to make a significant statement of some sort from the art community in collaboration with a major cultural institution.” In 1984 the APC, now including Coosje van Bruggen and Claes Oldenburg among its members, made another offset poster: a picture of President Ronald Reagan layered with a graphic depiction of a clock and a quotation from Reagan, who, just before a radio broadcast but not realizing his microphone was on, had joked, “We begin bombing in five minutes.”

El Museo del Barrio, 1969

El Museo del Barrio is an art institution born from the legacy of cultural activism of the late 1960s. Puerto Rican educators and artists (notably Raphael Montanez Ortiz) and social and political activists from East Harlem founded El Museo as a unique educational institution with the mission to preserve and reflect the cultural heritage of their communities. El Museo began as a neighborhood museum in a public classroom. Ortiz had led the Puerto Rican Art Workers of the Art Workers’ Coalition, which picketed against exclusionary museum practices and demanded inclusion of Puerto Rican, Black, and women artists on museum boards and staffs, as well as the purchase and exhibition of their works. As a direct result of their picketing the Metropolitan, an agreement was reached for assistance to start a community gallery in the Museum of the City of New York. Ortiz was Museo’s first director. The founding goals were to connect aesthetics with the desire to create a more just and equitable society. Speaking in 1993 on a panel called “The Artist as Activist,” Ortiz said, “The Museo has all these years managed to survive despite inadequate funding to become what I envisioned in my original proposal for the Museo, to become both an active part of the Barrio culture and art, while having bridged the mainstream of art.” Susana Torruela Leval directed El Museo del Barrio from 1994 to 2002. It is the only museum in New York City devoted to

Puerto Rican, Caribbean, and Latin American art. It is a member of the American Association of Museums and is located at 1230 Fifth Avenue in a facility owned by the City of New York.

El Taller Boricua, a ka El Taller, 1969

During the late 1960s, Puerto Rican artists and activists Marcos Dimas, Armando Soto, and Adrian Garcia formed El Taller Boricua in East Harlem. They linked the establishment of the organization to the political ideologies of the Black and Puerto Rican factions of the Art Workers' Coalition, of which Dimas was a member. El Taller grew out of the AWC's demand that major museums decentralize and aid in the development of community museums and culture workshops, particularly in predominantly Black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods. El Taller opened at 1538 Madison Avenue in 1969, initially seeking to create a space for artists to work and a cultural and education center to support Puerto Rican artists defining a New York Puerto Rican aesthetic. Its goals were to work collectively and build resources to achieve political and cultural objectives. El Taller Boricua has produced festivals, outdoor projects, forums for dialogue, a silkscreen program, a graphic workshop, exhibitions, and workshops. Working with artists of all ages, but especially serving emerging, urban, Latino/a artists, El Taller Boricua is today located at the Julia de Burgos Latino Cultural Center, 1680 Lexington Avenue; it is a highly respected community cultural center responsive to the communities it serves and committed to the revitalization of East Harlem through creative programs.

Gain Ground, 1969

Founded as a forum for visual exchange, Gain Ground consisted of a studio space at 246 West Eightieth Street, where projects were staged through June 1970. Its director, Robert Newman, was involved in the concrete poetry scene, and its first exhibition was *Bookwork Art, Objects Made by Poets, Word Art, and Poet Visions* (April 12–27, 1969). Artists and poets, including Vito Acconci, Eleanor Antin, and Juan Downey, staged other projects. After losing its space, Gain Ground continued to produce artists' projects at other sites until February 1971.

Guerrilla Art Action Group, 1969

Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG) was formed by artists Jon Hendricks and Jean Toche. Having witnessed other artist groups unsuccessfully attempt to effect political change through picketing and issuing demands, Hendricks and Toche decided to "put their bodies on the line" and employ dramatic strategies to present their views. With intermittent participation from Poppy Johnson, Virginia Toche,

Joanne Stamerra, and Silvianna, Hendricks and Toche produced “art actions not performances” to unsettle the trustees and people in positions of power within cultural institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art. On November 18, 1969, in an action called Blood Bath, GAAG members entered the lobby of the Museum of Modern Art and began pouring and smearing animal blood over their bodies, while distributing flyers printed with the headline “A Call for the Immediate Resignation of All the Rockefellers from the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art.” GAAG used the museum as a forum for free speech to express its outrage, to generate discussion, and to force a dialogue. “We were trying to touch those people that we couldn’t even see. We didn’t know their names, we didn’t know their faces, they weren’t the nice people that shook our hand or that we saw at a reception,” Hendricks said in a 1997 interview. In addition to art actions, GAAG drafted and issued communiqués to the press and to elected officials in an attempt to bring attention to, among other things, the political uses of art and the brutality of the war waged by the United States in Southeast Asia. GAAG was an offspring of Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS). Although it often joined efforts with the Art Workers’ Coalition, and many times had the full support of the AWC, it maintained a separate identity. Though less active than in former times, GAAG still exists.

98 Greene Street, 1969

Artists working in diverse media founded 98 Greene Street in conjunction with Holly and Horace Solomon, who were at that time primarily known as art collectors. At the end of the turbulent 1960s, the Solomons felt that opening a space for interchange and questioning in the field of art was more important than purchasing objects. Founded on a “moral idea,” according to Holly Solomon, the space was left unrefined in opposition to Lincoln Center–style opulence. For four years 98 Greene Street existed as a venue for experimental theater and performance art, poetry readings, exhibitions, film, and social exchange. The artists involved included Bill Beckley, Dan Graham, Gordon Matta-Clark, Dennis Oppenheim, and Susan Hall; poets included Ted Berrigan and Taylor Meade. The Solomons along with Ted Greenwald made programming decisions.

Women Artists in Revolution, 1969

Initially a subgroup of the Art Workers’ Coalition, Women Artists in Revolution (WAR) fought for women’s rights in the art world. Founding member Juliette Gordon wrote in the May 2, 1970, issue of the *Manhattan Tribune*, “What was to become WAR began with small meetings in various lofts, where we found a strange new kinship awakening.” Other members included Sarah Saporta, Doloris

Holmes, Silvia Goldsmith, Muriel Castanis, and Jan McDevitt. WAR organized art actions to draw attention to bias against women artists, published a newsletter and posters, wrote articles, and met with representatives of museums to articulate the group's demands. The list of demands the AWC adopted in June 1969 reflected the issues that galvanized WAR: demand 6 read, "Museums should encourage female artists to overcome the centuries of damage done to the image of the female as an artist by establishing equal representation of the sexes in shows, museum purchases, and on selection committees." WAR was active for only a few years.

Women's Interart Center, 1969-70

The Women's Interart Center was New York's first women's alternative space, multidisciplinary workshop, and community center. It evolved from Women Artists in Revolution and from meetings held at a Lower East Side firehouse where participants "presented or performed a body of work and opened it up to discussion." The group, cofounded by Margo Lewitin and others, decided to raise grant money for a permanent location. In 1971, with funding from the New York State Council on the Arts, the group moved into four floors of a then-abandoned city-owned building at 549 West Fifty-second Street. In 1973 it opened a theater there as well. Although women-oriented, the center did not necessarily explore feminist issues. It continues to function as a training ground for artists through residencies, workshops, and technical guidance.

Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee, 1970

The Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee emerged from the Art Workers' Coalition as a subgroup formed specifically to address the low number of women artists represented in the Whitney Museum of American Art's Annual (later Biennial) exhibitions. The committee included artists and writers Faith Ringgold, Poppy Johnson, Lucy Lippard, Brenda Miller, Therese Schwartz, and members of other sympathetic groups. In 1970 the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee staged four months of picketing and actions at the Whitney. Lippard explained, "Survey shows are the most obvious examples of discrimination, which is why the Whitney Annual was chosen for a sustained public protest. If such shows are indeed focused on no particular taste, but on what is 'being done' in such and such an area this year, why are so few women's studios visited? The Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee demanded equal opportunity—that as many women's works be viewed as men's—and submitted a long list in case the museum didn't know any women artists" (*The Pink Glass Swan*, 1995). In 1970 the committee started the Women's Art Registry as a vehicle for gathering and disseminating information about art made by women; the registry was a concrete resource intended to counter

curatorial bias and ignorance, and it became a model for other resource initiatives. For years the registry was housed at the co-op galleries 55 Mercer and A.I.R., then subsequently at Artists Space. Since 1994 it has been maintained in the Mabel Smith Douglass Library at Rutgers University. The Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee ceased its activities in 1971.

Art Strike, a ka New York Art Strike, a ka Art Strike against Racism, War, and Oppression, 1970

Art Strike was a coalition of artists, dealers, museum officials, and other members of the arts communities who were catalyzed by the Art Workers' Coalition and the killings at Kent State, at Jackson State, and in Cambodia to plan a joint anti-war campaign. The organization urged a general strike by artists, galleries, and museums on May 22, 1970, in protest against the war. The group's committee for negotiation with museum personnel included artists Raphael (Ralph) Ortiz, Louise Nevelson, Adolph Gottlieb, Mel Bochner, and Robert Morris. MoMA director John Hightower opposed the closing of institutions that "nurture freedom" and instead dropped the admission charge for that day and extended the museum's hours. In order to "shift priorities from art making and viewing to unified action within the art community against the intensifying conditions of repression, war and racism in this country," artists whose works were in the Jewish Museum's exhibition *Using Walls* demanded it be closed several weeks early. Artist Robert Morris had his solo exhibition at the Whitney closed early as well. Art Strike was an umbrella organization for other groups such as AWC, Women Artists in Revolution, and United Black and Puerto Rican Artists. As such, it was the largest and broadest coalition and network of actions mobilized in the art field since the 1930s.

55 Mercer, 1970

55 Mercer was founded by artists in January 1970 in response to the Art Workers' Coalition's ideas about reforming the art world system. The initial group of twenty-two members wanted to create alternatives to the power that commercial galleries wielded over artists. 55 Mercer has a cooperative structure and seeks to expand the art distribution system through its exhibition facilities. Its membership is not united stylistically. The gallery is financed and run by its changing artist members and remains in operation today.

112 Workshop/112 Greene Street, 1970

112 Workshop/112 Greene Street was "activated" and run by artist Jeffrey Lew. In her essay "Seven Alternative Spaces" in the New Museum catalog *Alternatives in*

Retrospect in 1981, Mary Delahoyd commented, “Jeffrey Lew, the owner of the building, and Gordon Matta-Clark did not control or even organize the programs but rather provided the site and generated the attitude for things to happen. The history of this space was punctuated by bold group exhibitions of powerful sculptural forms, unexpected materials (even with the historical preparation of Dada), and grand experiments.” The raw and unfinished character of 112 Workshop inspired specific artistic responses and uses of materials: often artists defaced, intervened, and altered the architecture itself. The workshop lost its space in 1978 and relocated to 325 Spring Street in 1979. Given that the activities of 112 Workshop had been determined largely by its physical environment, it was renamed White Columns in its new incarnation.

Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation, 1970

Cofounded by artist Faith Ringgold and her daughters Michele and Barbara Wallace in 1970, Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation (WSABAL) also included Tom Lloyd and several students from the School of Visual Arts. In her autobiography Ringgold recounts that WSABAL was established when members of Art Strike and Art Workers’ Coalition were organizing *Liberated Venice Biennale*. The exhibition, designed to protest the war in Cambodia and government policies of racism and sexism, did not originally include any Black or women artists. WSABAL fought for inclusion against members of AWC and Women Artists in Revolution, wanting to “liberate” the counterexhibition. The result was an open show held at Museum: A Project of Living Artists that reflected the percentages of women, Blacks, and students that WSABAL felt were warranted. WSABAL persistently demonstrated for the inclusion of women artists in exhibitions of Black artists and protested various exhibitions that excluded Black and women artists. In 1970 it collaborated with the Ad Hoc Women Artists’ Committee in protest of the Whitney Museum’s exclusionary policy; this protest led to the exhibition of works by Betye Saar and Barbara Chase-Riboud, the first Black women artists exhibited in the Whitney.

Basement Workshop, 1971

Basement Workshop was founded as an Asian American multidisciplinary arts organization and resource center, housing such entities as the Asian American Resource Center (which became the Chinatown History Project in 1980) and the offices of *Bridge Magazine* and *Yellow Pearl* anthology (1972), which combined poetry, writing, and art by Asian Americans. Over time the workshop had many locations, in and outside Chinatown; its first space was the lower level of 54 Elizabeth Street. The organization arose from the collective research of a group of urban

planners and writers that included Danny Yung, Frank Ching, Eleanor Yung, and Rocky Chin as they were preparing for the 1970 census, an important rallying point in the community. Poet Fay Chiang served as the director and principal fund-raiser of Basement Workshop from 1975 through 1986. She saw the development of the grassroots association as an element of the larger social environment of civil rights and antiwar movements that involved many of the organization's affiliates. The Basement Workshop Gallery/Catherine Street Gallery opened in 1977 and was part of the larger community center that bridged cultural and social services with after-school youth programs, dance classes, folk arts, performances, visual arts programs, and collaborations between writers and visual artists. Among the workshop's many members were Colin Lee, Alex Chin, Fay Chew Matsuda, Pat Chu, Ming Fay, Jessica Hagedorn, and Margo Machida. In 1986, because of the departure of key staff members and lack of funds, Chiang and the board of directors announced the Basement's closing; its programs would be "dispersed among the many capable organizations operating currently in the Asian American community."

Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1971

The Bronx Museum of the Arts was founded to fill a void in visual arts and arts opportunity in that borough. As a result of efforts made in the late 1960s to decentralize the major art museums and sponsor exhibition facilities in traditionally underserved neighborhoods and districts, the museum opened in the rotunda of the Bronx County Building with sponsorship from the Bronx Council on the Arts and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. During its first year, the Bronx Museum presented an exhibition of Impressionist paintings on loan from the Metropolitan, as well as a show of work by local artists. In 1983 the museum relocated to its present home at 1040 Grand Concourse, inaugurating its new space in 1985 with an exhibition of twentieth-century paintings, photographs, and prints borrowed from the Met. The Bronx Museum of the Arts defines itself as a contemporary fine art museum serving the culturally diverse populations of the Bronx and the New York metropolitan area. Its mission is to increase and stimulate community participation in the visual arts through its permanent collection and special exhibitions. Among the events at the museum have been the annual *Artist in the Marketplace* exhibition of emerging artists and *A Decade of En Foco*, a retrospective of the community photographic arts agency. It has also been involved with satellite galleries and education programs. Luis Cancel, the museum's executive director throughout the 1980s, sought to generate exhibitions that highlighted the history of the Bronx and the roles of its ethnic groups; usually one show each year is devoted to an aspect or theme of local history.

Hatch-Billops Collection, 1971

The Hatch-Billops Collection is an archive of Black American cultural history located at 491 Broadway, founded by filmmaker James Hatch and artist Camille Billops. Its purpose is to gather primary and secondary resource materials and to preserve past and contemporary memorabilia for scholarly use. The collection contains slide and photographic documentation of works by contemporary visual artists; an oral history library of taped interviews with artists in film, dance, theater, visual arts, music, literature, and related subjects; a reference library of books, magazines, doctoral dissertations, catalogs, and original manuscripts; and the archives of individual artists.

Jamaica Arts Center, 1971

The Jamaica Arts Center, now known as the Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning, is a multidisciplinary, community-based art institution located at 161-04 Jamaica Avenue in Queens that presents an exhibition program, music events, workshops, art classes, and theatrical events. The JAC Co-op Gallery was started in 1982 by a group of African American artists with diverse artistic styles, including James Brown, Vernon Griffith, Mari Holmes, and Marguerite Mair Kissel. As visual arts director of the center in the mid- and late 1980s, curator Kellie Jones organized *Trading Places: An Arts Exchange Exhibition* with the Artists Foundation in Boston; it featured the work of Lorna Simpson and David Hammons. In 1988 JAC staged the exhibition *Masters and Pupils II: The Education of the Black Artist in New York, 1900–1980*. The program of the center includes contemporary and historical exhibitions, some guest curated, as well as thematic exhibitions and “Workspace” shows.

The Kitchen, 1971

The artists who founded the Kitchen were frustrated that museums and commercial galleries provided no outlet for video art. A group of artists, among them Steina and Woody Vesulka, began screening their video pieces in the only available space at the Mercer Arts Center—the kitchen. By 1973 the Kitchen was incorporated, moved to SoHo, and started presenting music and sound compositions as well, including works by Laurie Anderson, John Cage, Christian Marclay, and John Zorn. Robert Stearns ran the Kitchen in its early years. It had initiated a program of video distribution by 1974, when video was still an experimental form. Laurie Anderson called it the “first successful do-it-yourself art center.” The organization has expanded its scope and size throughout its history, becoming a venue for performance (John Kelly, Eric Bogosian, Karen Finley), experimental music (Philip Glass), dance (Bill T. Jones, Molissa Fenley), film, and literature in addition to video. It is now housed in its own four-story building at 512 West Nineteenth Street.

P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center (originally the Institute for Art and Urban Resources), 1971

Founded by Alanna Heiss, the Institute for Art and Urban Resources was dedicated to converting abandoned and underutilized buildings in New York City into exhibition, performance, and studio spaces for contemporary artists, especially those whose work was not shown in established museums. From 1971 to 1975 the Institute operated in several locations, among them the Idea Warehouse and the Anchorage at the Brooklyn Bridge.

In 1972 the Clocktower Gallery and P.S. 1 became the permanent exhibition spaces and studio facilities of the Institute. The Clocktower Gallery is on the thirteenth floor of 108 Leonard Street in Lower Manhattan, a building owned by the City of New York. In addition to exhibition rooms, it contains studios for artists selected each year by a committee of visual professionals as part of P.S. 1's National and International Studio Program. The Clocktower provided free office space for other nonprofit organizations such as Visual AIDS and Parasite in the 1990s.

P.S. 1 is presently the Institute's primary enterprise. It is located in a rundown former school at 46-01 Twenty-first Street in Long Island City. Heiss transformed the building into an exhibition and studio program space in 1976, renovating it only minimally in order to preserve its acquired roughness and promote an experimental atmosphere. P.S. 1 opened with the timely *Rooms* exhibition for which seventy-eight artists contributed installations and interventions throughout the building. Since then it has presented hundreds of exhibitions—solo and group shows, adventurous historical exhibitions, special projects, and permanent installations. P.S. 1 offers studio spaces as part of its studio program, begun in 1976.

P.S. 1 is self-described as “the oldest and the largest organization devoted to contemporary art and artists, and as a defining force of the alternative space movement.” In 1997 a substantially expanded P.S. 1 reopened after a three-year renovation. In partnership with the City of New York (which provides financial support and leasing of P.S. 1's properties), Alanna Heiss and Glenn Lowry, the director of the Museum of Modern Art, agreed to merge the two institutions in 1999. The objectives of the merger were to share complementary resources, interests, and constituencies, and to ensure financial stability for P.S. 1. Despite the fact that P.S. 1 has become a part of MoMA, it retains its artistic independence.

A.I.R. Gallery, 1972

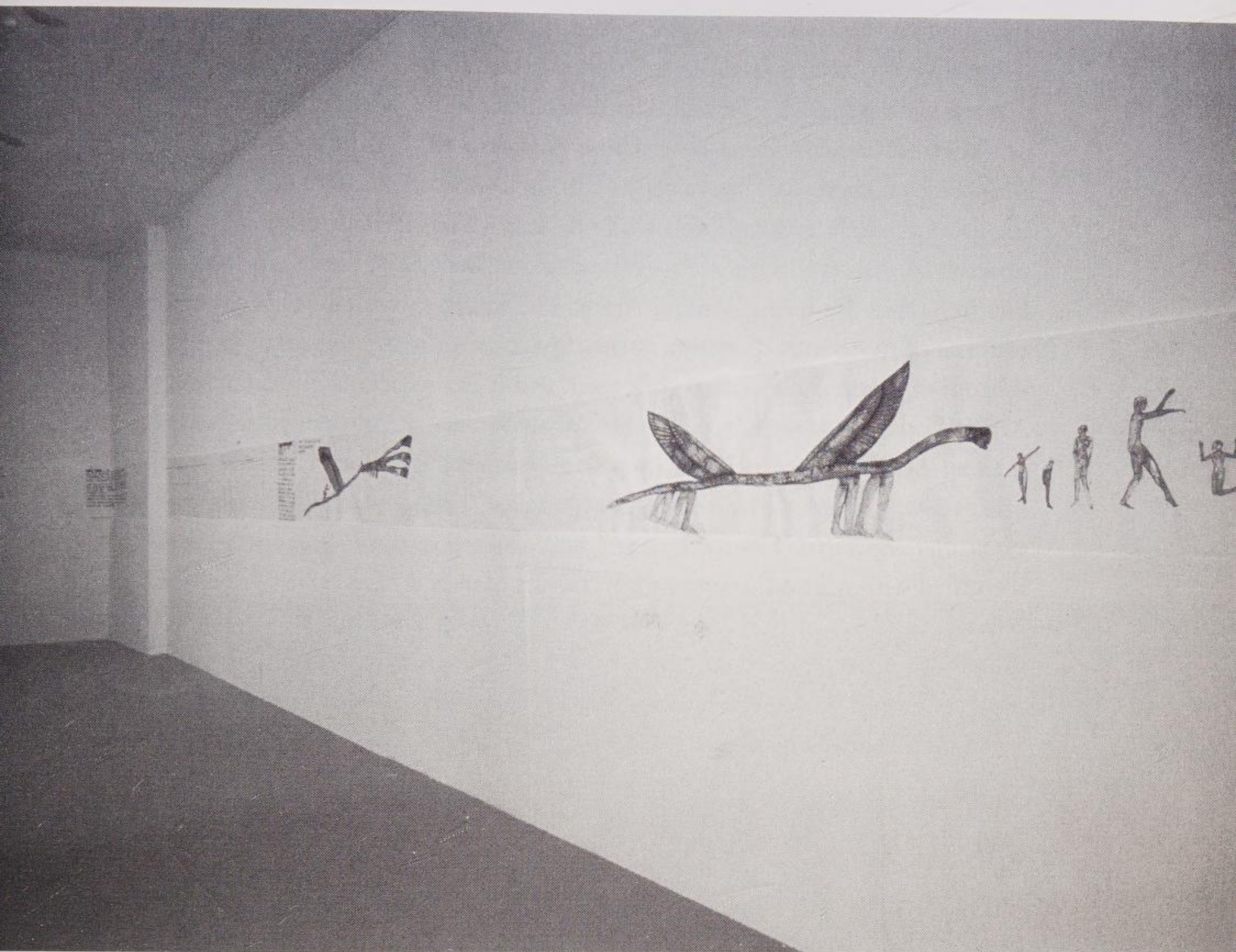
A.I.R. Gallery was the first independent women's gallery in the United States, and it soon became a prototype for others. Founded by artists Barbara Zucker, Susan Williams, Nancy Spero, Mary Grigoriadis, Dotty Attie, and Maude Boltz, A.I.R. Gallery was first located at 97 Wooster Street. The founders selected fourteen other members, including artists Daria Dorosh, Harmony Hammond, and Howardena Pindell, from the Women's Art Registry of the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee,



A.I.R. Monday Night Program, 1976. Topic: "Changing and Stabilizing Directions in Women's Art from the Curator's Point of View," with speakers Barbara Haskell and Marcia Tucker. Art exhibition by Sylvia Sleigh. Photograph by Mary Beth Edelson.

which at that time owned slides of work by six hundred artists. A.I.R. was conceived not as a support group but as a professional nonprofit organization with a co-op structure; it was financed and run with members' dues and energies, and decisions were made collectively.

Cooperative galleries had been numerous on Tenth Street in the 1950s, but the concept of "paying to show" had fallen out of favor until A.I.R. and other co-ops with specific objectives opened in the early 1970s. The inaugural announcement for the gallery read, "A.I.R. changes attitudes about art by women. A.I.R. offers women artists a space to show work as innovative, transitory or unsalable as the artists' conceptions demand." The gallery exclusively exhibits work by women. In the December 1973 issue of *Arts* magazine, Harmony Hammond justified the exclusion of male artists from its roster because the "entire art world establishment was open to and operated by men." In addition to mounting exhibitions by its members and invitational shows of nonmembers, A.I.R. in its early years func-



Nancy Spero, *Torture of Women*, 1976. Installed at A.I.R. Gallery. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Ottawa.

tioned as a forum for discussion and education through panels, lectures, workshops, and performances. Hammond's sentiment that "this is not a stepping stone, but an end in itself" was advocated by other members as well. A.I.R. was conceived as a lasting structure and viable alternative to commercial galleries, and is still in operation, now located at 511 West Twenty-fifth Street.

Artists Space/Committee for the Visual Arts, 1972

With financial backing from the New York State Council on the Arts, Irving Sandler, a consultant to that agency, and Trudie Grace, director of its Visual Arts Program, founded Artists Space in 1972 as a pilot program of NYSCA. Grace became its first director and Sandler its first board president. The concept was to create a service organization for artists that offered an exhibition program determined by artists selecting other artists; a space for performances, cultural meetings, and events; and the establishment of the Emergency Materials Fund and the

Independent Exhibitions Program (both running from 1973 to 1991), which awarded grants to artists and groups for presenting their work in other nonprofit venues or unorthodox sites. The direct distribution of funds to artists without excessive red tape has been a consistent goal of the Committee for the Visual Arts. The gallery Artists Space opened in 1973 and continues to function as a testing ground where artists exhibit while their work is still raw, innovative, or even unresolved. Another initiative was the creation in 1974 of the Unaffiliated Artists File (renamed the Irving Sandler Artists File in 1997), which holds slides and résumés of thousands of artists. Artists Space uses the file to curate its regularly scheduled group shows called *Selections*, and it is also accessible as a resource. Artists Space is known for its benchmark and sometimes controversial exhibitions, such as the multimedia *Dark Rooms* series initiated by curator Valerie Smith in 1982; *Pictures*, curated by art historian Douglas Crimp, which has been cited as the event that registered “postmodern art” and resulted in the *Pictures* generation later identified with Metro Pictures gallery, run by former Artists Space director Helene Winer; and *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing*, curated by artist Nan Goldin, which in 1989, along with its catalog, became the object of heated debate over public cultural funding. Located at 38 Greene Street, Artists Space is currently active with generally its same mission and methods.

SoHo 20, 1973

Modeled after the Tenth Street cooperative galleries of the 1950s, SoHo 20 opened at 99 Spring Street in 1973 to provide exhibition opportunities for women artists. Its mission includes educational and public service activities as well as increasing public awareness of the diverse art made by women. “In keeping with the feminist ideal of women defining themselves, the criterion for membership is professional excellence without restriction of style, medium, or theme.” SoHo 20’s inaugural exhibitions showed works by Sylvia Sleigh and Maureen Conner. Other members include Marion Ranyak, Diane Churchill, Elena Borstein, and Cynthia Mailman. SoHo 20 has hosted forums for relevant groups such as Artists Talk on Art and Women in Film. In a booklet published on SoHo 20 in 1982, critic Carrie Rickey wrote, “Heterodox rather than eclectic, socially conscious as well as aesthetically engaged, SoHo 20 is an artists-run cooperative flourishing while others of its ilk languish.” SoHo 20 is located at 545 Broadway.

3 Mercer Store, 1973

In 1973 artist Stefan Eins opened a storefront studio at 3 Mercer Street where he exhibited and sold his own work. In 1974 he opened the space to other artists on an informal basis for performances, installations, and film screenings. Participat-

ing artists included Sherrie Levine, Susan Hiller, Bill Beirne, Lil Pickard, and Willoughby Sharp. In "Cut Out the Middle Man," Alan Moore wrote, "Eins called himself the 'proprietor' of a 'store' selling objects conceived in the Duchampian tradition. . . . It was the ambiance of Eins' studio, with its sky-lit backroom where his plans were hatched, his personability, and sociability that was an odd combination of hustle and bustle with leisurely conversation that gave the tone to the 3 Mercer Store." The 3 Mercer Store closed in 1977.

Creative Time, 1974

Committed to producing visual and performative "art in unexpected, unlikely, unappreciated, and unassuming places," Creative Time began its activities in 1974. A self-described "alternative space" organization, it frequently rescued neglected



Tibor Kalman and Scott Stowell, *Everybody*, 1994. "The 42nd Street Art Project." Courtesy of Creative Time. Photograph by Maggie Hopp. Sponsored by Creative Time, Inc., The 42nd Street Development Project, Inc., a subsidiary of the New York State Urban Development Corporation. Presented in collaboration with M&Co and The New 42nd Street, Inc.

spaces for the production and presentation of art projects and performances, often experimental. Anita Contini O'Neill was Creative Time's principal founder and first director. The birth of Creative Time coincided with an economic recession that emptied massive amounts of office and corporate space in Lower Manhattan. The first space utilized was a giant lobby area at Wall Street Plaza where four exhibitions were produced, including the popular *Ruckus Manhattan* (1975) by Red Grooms. As noted in a self-published brochure, "Public art, as presented by Creative Time, challenges both the chronic isolation of artists and the widespread notion that 'Art' is an elitist pastime"; further, Creative Time's activities "are designed to make viewers and participants look at the environment with an increased perception of its possibilities." Art on the Beach at Battery City Park Landfill began in 1978 and continued annually until 1988. Art in the Anchorage, a massive brick chamber beneath the Brooklyn Bridge, was the site of several large-scale exhibitions in the 1980s.



James Luna, *Take a Picture with a Real Indian*, 1994. "The 42nd Street Art Project." Courtesy of Creative Time. Photograph by Maggie Hopp. Sponsored by Creative Time, Inc., The 42nd Street Development Project, Inc., a subsidiary of the New York State Urban Development Corporation. Presented in collaboration with M&Co and The New 42nd Street, Inc.

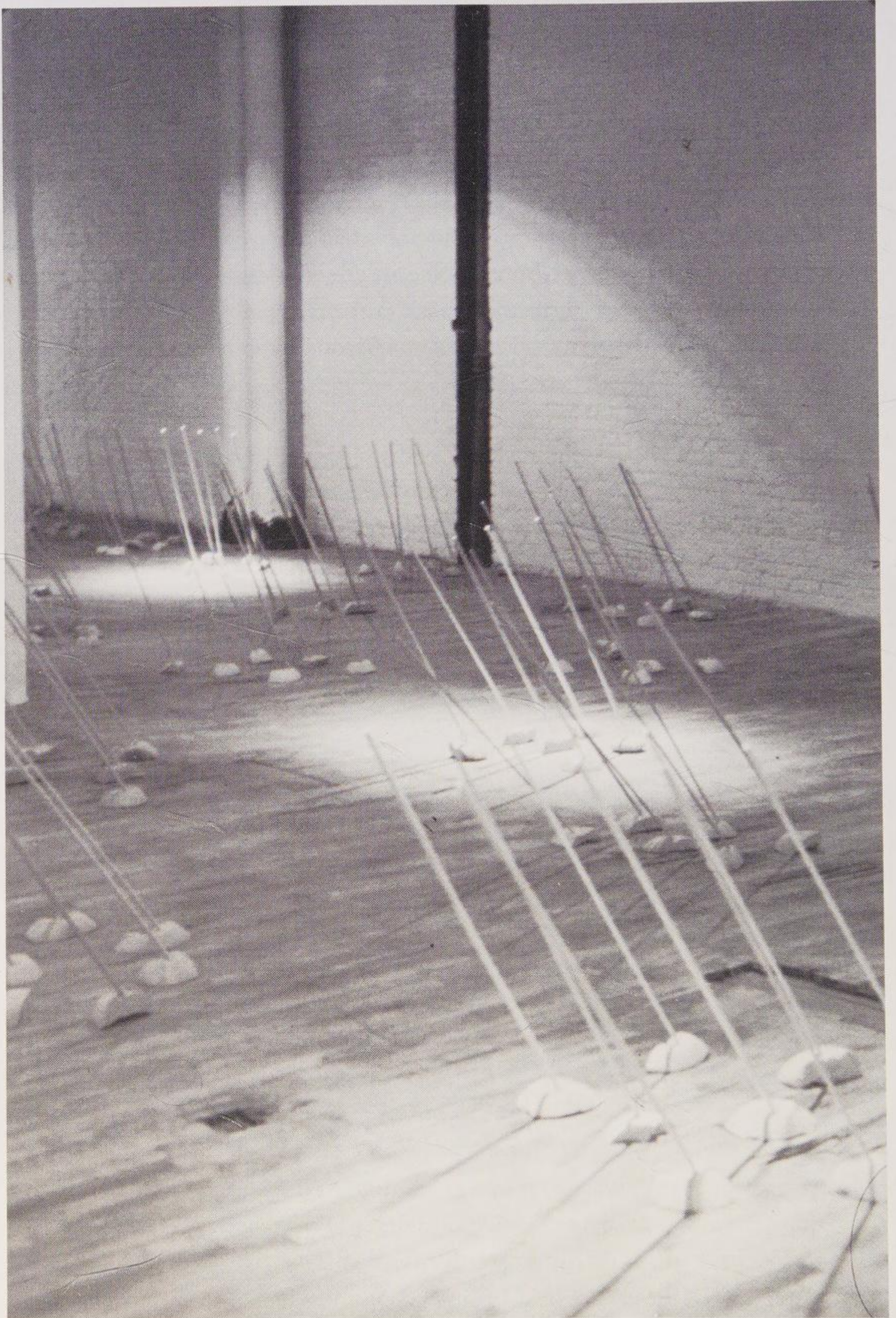
In 1993–94 Creative Time collaborated with the 42nd Street Development Corporation to sponsor a series of artworks staged on, and in some cases in, former theaters on Forty-second Street. The “possibilities” brought into focus in this case were economic and social rather than artistic. Through the 42nd Street Art Project, the “cultural capital” of the Times Square area became a topic in the media. Known for its seedy appeal and adult entertainment, Times Square had long been targeted for redevelopment, but plans had been repeatedly shelved because of economic recessions. Ultimately the art project aided in attracting investment to “revitalize the area” through “Disneyfication,” arguably an improvement. Creative Time remains active and is based in a Manhattan office.

Idea Warehouse, 1974

Directed by Alanna Heiss, the Idea Warehouse existed for less than a year in a semi-abandoned city building at 22 Reade Street. It was used primarily for the production and presentation of music and performance art. Among the artists who worked there were Charlemagne Palestine, Simone Forti, Philip Glass, Scott Burton, and the Mabou Mines theater troupe. Idea Warehouse closed within one year, after a fire.

Just above Midtown, 1974

Linda Goode-Bryant, a former education director at the Studio Museum in Harlem, founded Just above Midtown (JAM) to create a venue for exhibiting abstract work by Black artists. She situated it at 50 West Fifty-seventh Street in Manhattan’s most prestigious gallery district. According to JAM’s literature, Goode-Bryant was intent on “building a buying market for art by Afro-Americans and working from the business foundation of the art market.” In the July 1977 issue of *Essence* magazine, she maintained that “Blacks have suffered because they lacked an organized gallery system . . . essential to properly display and sell their work. Otherwise, they can never compete effectively with white artists.” Over time, JAM expanded and became more diverse, showing other work besides abstraction. JAM staged solo shows primarily, with occasional group exhibitions; initiated a seminar and service program, “The Business of Being an Artist”; and provided materials and opportunities for artists to use nontraditional space through The Artist/The Public program. After its first few years, JAM became a nonprofit arts organization that received economic support from foundations, corporations, public funding, and private contributions. In 1979 the West Fifty-seventh Street building was sold; faced with a formidable rent increase, JAM had to move, and by October 1980 it relocated to 178 Franklin Street in TriBeCa. It inaugurated the new space with a group exhibition curated by the staffs of several downtown spaces, including the American Indian Community House Gallery, A.I.R. Gallery, Cayman Gallery,



Maren Hassinger, 1982. Installation at Just above Midtown's Franklin Street space. Courtesy of Linda Goode-Bryant, Just above Midtown.

Franklin Furnace, and Artists Space. JAM was forced to move again in 1984 and closed in the late 1980s.

Kenkeleba House, 1974

Joe Overstreet was among the Black artists and educators who founded Kenkeleba House. Throughout its history it has been committed to presenting, preserving, and encouraging the development of art by African American, Latino/a, Asian American, and Native American artists, as well as others excluded from the cultural mainstream. Located at 214 East Second Street on the Lower East Side and directed by Corrine Jennings, Kenkeleba House features exhibition spaces and artists' studios. In one of its brochures Kenkeleba states its aims as the support of "the development of experimental work and the encouragement of an interdisciplinary approach to the arts. We are open to cultural exchange and have developed an archive of black art in America made up of thousands of books, slides, and records." The organization provides a literary and poetry forum, slide registry, referral and consultation on African American visual artists and art in the African Diaspora, and exhibitions of contemporary visual arts in all media.

Louis Abrons Arts for Living Center at Henry Street Settlement, 1974

The Louis Abrons Arts for Living Center at 466 Grand Street is part of the Henry Street Settlement, which has been a social service institution for residents of the Lower East Side since the early 1900s. The center provides opportunities for emerging artists in various disciplines through exhibitions, installations, workshops, performances, and residencies. Its purpose is to ensure that the least advantaged members of the community are exposed to meaningful arts activities and education. Providing consequential educational programming to underserved communities is central to its mission.

Alternative Museum, 1975

"Alternative museums (if not all museums) should devote themselves more often to exhibits with controversial substance, otherwise they won't be alternatives at all." So wrote director, artist, and curator Geno Rodriguez in the *Disinformation* exhibit catalog, a decade after he, Janice Rooney, and Robert Browning cofounded the Alternative Museum. Originally opened in 1975 as the Center for International Arts, "a non-profit organization dedicated to a pluralistic approach to the arts and cultural activities of New York City," it adopted its present name in 1979 after relocating from East Fourth Street to 17 White Street, where it stayed through the 1980s. The racial bias Rodriguez experienced when showing his work around the

New York art world in the early 1970s was a factor leading to the founding of the museum. Resisting the label “Hispanic American artist” and suspicious of the separate-but-equal aspect of institutions that gave exposure to artists according to their ethnicity or racial identifications, Rodriguez believed there was “a need for an institution that could function as an intermediary between the ‘minority’ institutions and the dominant Eurocentric institutions.” During its rich history the Alternative Museum has presented challenging solo, group, and thematic exhibi-

ALTERNATIVE MUSEUM, NEW YORK CITY

DISINFORMATION

THE

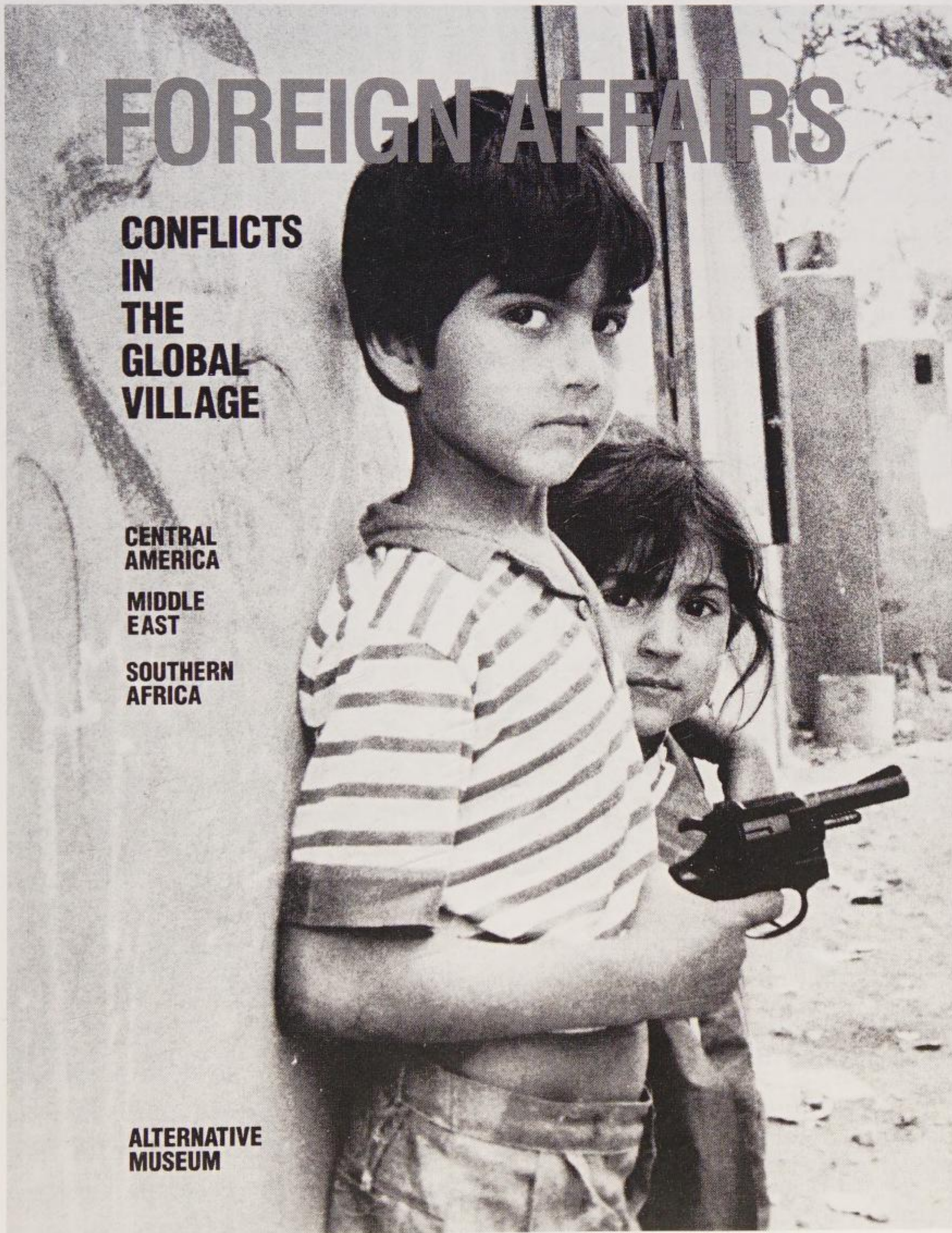
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CONSENT

MARCH 2 — MARCH 30, 1985

tions that interrelate politics and art and sometimes foreground social themes. These have often been supplemented by ambitious catalogs with critical and historical writings, such as *Artists of Conscience: Sixteen Years of Social and Political Commentary* (1992), *Disinformation: The Manufacture of Consent* (1985), and *Foreign Affairs: Conflicts in the Global Village* (1988). Curatorial emphasis has been on artists outside the mainstream, and since 1983 priority has been given to one-person exhibitions of midcareer artists, including Adrian Piper, Terry Berkowitz,



Cover of *Foreign Affairs* catalog, 1988.

Luis Camnitzer, Ming Fay, Dennis Adams, and Tseng Kwong Chi. The Alternative Museum has held popular annual Día de los Muertos celebrations and an acclaimed world music program. The museum's mission statement promises that it will "remain a museum in flux, responding to the changing needs of our society." The Alternative Museum no longer has a physical location, but is currently active as a cyber museum.

Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, 1975

Artists Meeting for Cultural Change (AMCC) was formed in December 1975. The group was largely galvanized around criticisms of Whitney Museum director Thomas Armstrong's decision to celebrate the Bicentennial of the American Revolution with a major exhibition drawn from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III. A letter to Armstrong cosigned by artist Benny Andrews for the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, writer Lucy R. Lippard for the Women's Slide Registry, and artist Rudolf Baranik for Artists and Writers Protest against the War in Vietnam stated: "We are appalled that a private collection will constitute the core of an exhibition mounted by the leading museum of American art to celebrate our revolution. An exhibition of this nature could not possibly include the various facets of American art a Bicentennial celebration should encompass: art of dissent; art by minorities; an adequate representation of art by women, reflecting a fresher and truer art historical view." An average of eighty people attended weekly meetings at Artists Space to discuss plans of action against the Rockefeller exhibition and to explore the role of art in effecting change.

Besides coordinating information and protests, in 1977 AMCC produced *an anti-catalog*, critical essays and documents intended to counter the viewpoints of "official culture" promoted by proponents of the Rockefeller exhibition. *An anti-catalog* questioned authoritative views of culture embodied in the exhibition and criticized the "misuse of art and art institutions to serve the interests of a wealthy minority of the population." Among those on the catalog committee were historians and artists Eunice Golden, Janet Koenig, Ann Marie Rousseau, and Alan Wallach.

Given AMCC's more abstract concerns about the interrelationships of art and politics, some members cautioned against allowing the urgency and "temporary solidarity" engendered by the Rockefeller issue to define the organization. They recommended that time be structured into meetings for "study, discussion and learning—seeing this dialogue as already being a step toward a new form of practice. In so doing we might begin to understand the nature of a group practice and how it might alter that very system." AMCC had for the most part ceased its activities by 1978.

1. WHY IS TODAY THE SAME AS EVERY OTHER DAY?

Today, as every other day, art remains the mute witness of the supremacy of a system of those who have over those who have not.

2. WHO PROFITS FROM ART?

Corporations, tax-shelter trusts and foundations, funding bureaucracies, dealers, private collectors. . . In short, those who profit are those whose wealth and power allow them to control and manipulate the market in their own interest. They buy art, and sell culture. The system and mythology that transform art into a profitable ruling class trophy are necessarily contrary to the potential social value of art.

3. WHO WINS WHEN ARTISTS COMPETE?

Not artists, nor society. Under present conditions competition is encouraged on the false premise that free enterprise constitutes freedom. In fact competition sets people against one another, encouraging divisiveness and hierarchy. In co-operation, study and political struggle artists can unite to find or invent an equitable system that will better serve art, artists and society.

4. WHO'S AFRAID OF ARTISTS?

Artists are afraid of other artists. Unorganized and competitive we threaten only one another. But artists—and all people—are makers of history, potentially threatening to the structures of the ruling class.

5. WHO SAYS ARTISTS CAN'T ORGANIZE?

Artists are meeting for cultural change. We can and we must. Without a social awareness we are powerless. Once we uncover and understand our relation to the cultural, economic and political structures of our society, we can act effectively. We invite you to join with us on Sundays at 8pm meeting at Artists Space, 155 Wooster Street.

ARTISTS MEETING FOR CULTURAL CHANGE

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Artists Meeting for Cultural Change flyer, c. 1976.

Artists Talk on Art, 1975

Founded by artists Lori Antonacci, Doug Sheer, and Robert Wiegand, Artists Talk on Art is a forum for presenting weekly panel discussions intended to foster critical dialogue on issues germane to contemporary art and the contemporary art world. Artists Talk on Art has sought to create a setting in which artists can meet, talk, and listen to one another. Rather than maintain a fixed meeting place, the organization holds its Friday night events in various art spaces. The hosts change

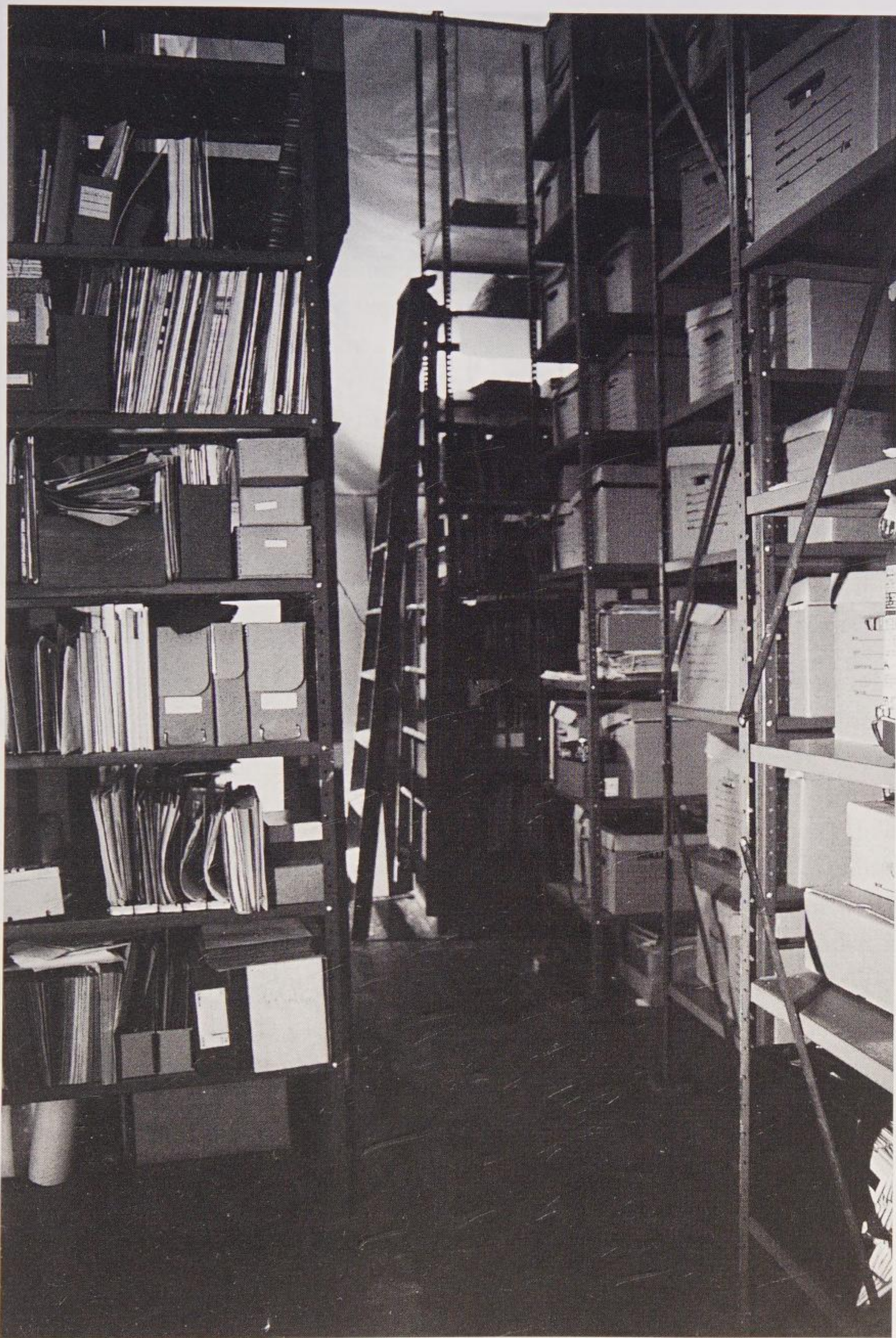
every one or two years. Artists Talk on Art has presented talks by more than six thousand artists, curators, and gallery directors.

Franklin Furnace Archive, 1976

Franklin Furnace, originally located at 112 Franklin Street, was founded by performance artist Martha Wilson for the “preservation and presentation of avant-garde art.” It soon became an archive for multiple-edition artists’ books and ephemera. Artists’ books were becoming increasingly popular because they were regarded as a democratic medium, allowing artists to distribute inexpensive artworks in less-rarefied circuits than galleries and museums. Wilson responded to the relatively new phenomenon by creating a small collecting institution—or museum—for these materials, which major museums were ignoring at the time. “As an organization, Franklin Furnace grew out of a historical vacuum,” Wilson said. “Publications have been denigrated as legitimate art forms throughout the twentieth century.”

Franklin Furnace also presented related exhibitions and became a showcase for performance artists: Eric Bogosian, Ann Magnuson, and Annie Sprinkle are among those who performed there early in their careers. On the heels of the congressional debates about the National Endowment for the Arts instigated by Senator Jesse Helms, controversial artist Karen Finley performed at Franklin Furnace in 1990. One day soon after Wilson arrived at Franklin Furnace to find it closed by the fire department for violations. Finley and other performance artists, as well as Franklin Furnace and other alternative spaces, were suddenly newsworthy and became embroiled in the so-called culture wars. The NEA National Council vetoed NEA funds to Franklin Furnace after its members viewed a segment of a video work by Scarlet O., who was scheduled to perform at the Furnace: they deemed it pornographic and lacking artistic merit. Simultaneously NEA funds were denied Finley and other performers. Wilson became a strong spokesperson for First Amendment rights for artists and used her institution as a platform for her beliefs.

The Museum of Modern Art acquired Franklin Furnace’s permanent collection of artists’ books and related archives in 1994, and it is currently accessible through the museum’s library. The collection contains an international array of artist-produced books, pamphlets, magazines, records, cassette tapes, and other ephemeral published material. Franklin Furnace Archives is now located at 45 John Street, where it maintains the records of the organization’s history and programs. The organization is compiling a database called Archives of the Avant-Garde.



Archive renovation at Franklin Furnace, c. 1988. Courtesy of Franklin Furnace. Photograph by Michael Katchen.

Printed Matter, 1976

Printed Matter was founded by a group of nine artists and art workers (Carl Andre, Edit deAk, Sol LeWitt, Lucy R. Lippard, Walter Robinson, Pat Steir, Irena von Zahn, Mimi Wheeler, and Robin White) devoted to the publication, distribution, and promotion of artists' books. During its first few years Printed Matter published artists' books, selecting projects from submissions. Profits from sales were invested in further publishing as well as promotion and distribution. The publishing program ultimately ended, and Printed Matter focused on presentation and distribution. For many years it maintained a small bookstore and exhibition space on Lispenard Street, which relocated to 77 Wooster Street in 1989. As an artists' book distribution center, Printed Matter has been the prime source of multiple art originals in book form. It has often featured window installations by artists to promote the interest and involvement of passersby. It is currently located at 535 West Twenty-second Street.

Cayman Gallery, 1977

Also known as Friends of Puerto Rico, Inc., Cayman Gallery was an exhibition space at 381 Broadway that provided exposure to works by artists of Latin American heritage. Its program encompassed solo and group exhibitions, performances, concerts, workshops, and audiovisual presentations. The gallery housed the Santos Collection, a permanent folk art museum. An artistic selection committee consisting of artists Laura Marquez and Nitza Tufino, art historians Susana Torruella Leval and Ramiro Fernandez, and Peter Schira from City University guided Cayman's programs along with its director Nilda Peraza. In the mid-1980s Cayman Gallery eventually became the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art (Mocha), also directed by Peraza.

Collaborative Projects, a ka Colab, 1977

Colab was an artists' group with a fluctuating constituency that started meeting in 1977 and incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1978. Its chief goal was to access government funding available to arts organizations. In the November 1980 issue of *Fuse* magazine, Tony Whitfield wrote, "Several years ago Colab group came together in an effort to solve the funding problems they were facing as individual artists working outside the mainstreams of the commercial art world and beyond the fringes that alternative spaces were willing to embrace." Colab successfully obtained government grants and produced and sponsored large thematic and group shows: *The Manifesto Show* in 1979 at 5 Bleecker Street; *The Doctors and*

Dentists Show in 1979 at 591 Broadway; *The Real Estate Show* and the edgy landmark *Times Square Show* at 201 West Forty-first Street in 1980, which instructed participants to “do a piece that pertains to the Times Square Area” in a former massage parlor. Colab also produced films and screenings, *X Magazine*, and *Potato Wolf*, a weekly live “experimental, performative, unpredictable” TV series broadcast on Manhattan Cable from 1978 through 1984. Colab projects were often messy, pluralistic, and democratic. Members included Charlie Ahearn, John Ahearn, Eric Mitchell, Diego Cortez, Liza Bear, Andrea Callard, Mitch Corber, Stefan Eins, Bobby G., Mike Glier, Jenny Holzer, Matthew Geller, Alan Moore, Eric Mitchell, Tom Otterness, Cara Perlman, Virginia Piersol, Robin Winters, Kiki Smith, Becky Howland, and Walter Robinson.

The Drawing Center, 1977

Martha Beck founded The Drawing Center “with the object of encouraging work on paper, and the visibility and appreciation of drawings which are often intimate, direct and experimental state of an artist’s creative process. . . . [T]he gallery presents shows of promising but lesser-known artists, and also historical or thematic exhibitions by established figures.” Early on, The Drawing Center instituted its Viewing Program, which allows artists to show their work to a curator and receive professional feedback. Annual group exhibitions, *Selections*, feature emerging and unaffiliated artists drawn from the Viewing Program. The Drawing Center is located at 35 Wooster Street.

The New Museum, a ka The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1977

Intending to remedy the neglect of living artists by museums in New York, former Whitney curator Marcia Tucker founded The New Museum (TNM), later renamed TNM of Contemporary Art, as an “exhibition, information, and documentation center for contemporary art—focusing on living artists and the work they make—work that does not yet have wide public exposure or critical acceptance.” TNM’s prospectus stated, “The New Museum’s projected scope lies between the non-historically oriented alternate spaces and the major museums.” Tucker’s concept was modeled after the German *Kunsthalle*, which has no parallel in the United States. After an initial planning and fundraising period, TNM began its public programs in 1978 in rent-free quarters in the Graduate Center of the New School for Social Research. In 1983 it moved to a much larger ground-floor space at 583 Broadway in SoHo where, expanded, it remains today.

The New Museum presents an array of exhibitions, united by curatorial



alt.youth.media, 1996. Installation view at the New Museum of Contemporary Art. Photograph by Julie Ault.

motives of investigation and critical inquiry. In its first decade TNM became known for its challenging and often intellectually driven shows, including *Bad Painting*, curated by Marcia Tucker in 1978; *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality*, curated by art historian Kate Linker in 1984; and *The Art of Memory/ The Loss of History*, curated by William Olander in 1985. It was known, too, for the inexpensive scholarly catalogs that accompanied these exhibitions. TNM also has staged solo exhibitions that would not have appeared elsewhere, such as *Golub*, curated by Ned Rifkin and Lynn Gumpert, 1984; *Ana Mendieta: A Retrospective*, curated by Petra Barreras del Rio and John Perrault, 1987; *Andres Serrano*, curated by Marcia Tucker, 1995; and *Sweet Oblivion: The Urban Landscape of Martin Wong*, curated by Dan Cameron and Barry Blinderman, 1998. Window installations, smaller-scale “Workspace” exhibitions, symposia, and panel discussions have also contributed to the discourse on contemporary art. Tucker resigned as director in 1998 and was succeeded by Lisa Phillips, another former Whitney Museum curator.

Public Art Fund, 1977

The Public Art Fund (PAF) was established in 1977 by Doris C. Freedman as a commissioning agency for artists to create temporary works for public spaces throughout New York City. This represented the consolidation of two organizations, City Walls and the Public Art Council. As a result of PAF's advocacy, New York City adopted its Percent for Art legislation in 1982, mandating that all new public buildings include a work of art commissioned through funds built into the construction budget. PAF administered this program for the city until 1986.

PAF works with artists, funders, government agencies, community boards, land use boards, and contractors. Projects are installed in a variety of sites, including parks, traffic islands, billboards, and bus shelters. Occasionally PAF programs



Spectacolor board, copyright 1982, Times Square, Messages to the Public program. Courtesy of Public Art Fund. Photograph by Peter Bellamy.



Removal of Spectacolor board, Times Square, September 1, 1990. Courtesy of Public Art Fund. Photograph by Peter Bellamy.

these sites on an ongoing basis; other locales are procured for specific projects. “The whole city is our museum,” commented former executive director James M. Clark. In 1982, PAF began a program called Messages to the Public, which gave artists access to the privately owned 800-square-foot animated Spectacolor Lightboard on Times Square; each month a different artist had a thirty-second spot broadcast every twenty minutes. Messages to the Public continued until 1990, when the lightboard was dismantled to make way for more sophisticated and profitable advertising technology.

Speaking about changes in public art during PAF’s existence, Susan K. Freedman, its president since 1986 and daughter of Doris C. Freedman, explains in a PAF brochure, “The scope of our early work developed with the evolution of artists working in the public sphere. At the time, this was a political move motivated by the desire to engage a new audience. Artwork created in this context necessitated a new definition of public art—one that went beyond traditional com-

memorative and decorative statuary. In the eighties we responded to artists who used the context of the streets as an active component of their work.” PAF currently seeks to respond to artists’ methods for working in public and to improve public space and civic life through art.

American Indian Community House Gallery/Museum, 1978

The American Indian Community House (AICH) was founded in 1969 by Native American volunteers as a community-based organization to serve urban and rural Native Americans. Over the past thirty years the AICH has grown into a multifaceted social support agency with a cultural center and exhibition space, located at 708 Broadway. Lloyd Oxendine founded the AICH Gallery in 1978 and was its curator for many years. It is the only gallery or museum in New York City owned and operated by Native Americans. Its exhibitions, workshops, and craft shows are devoted to promoting contemporary art in all media by Native American artists and increasing awareness about the living culture of Native Americans.

Fashion Moda, 1978

Fashion Moda began as a cultural concept in 1978 in a storefront space at 2803 Third Avenue in the South Bronx. It was created by Austrian-born artist Stefan Eins, who was later joined by codirectors Joe Lewis, an artist, poet, and musician, and William Scott, a younger associate from the neighborhood. Its guiding philosophy was that art can be made by anyone and can happen anywhere. Its directors resisted defining the place or restricting its activities according to existing categories of art and artists. Moda was a “place where art, science, fantasy, invention, technology would meet.” Joe Lewis characterized it in a flyer as follows: “Fashion Moda provides a sensitive nexus and polylogue between the multifarious ethnocentric groups that live in and/or pass through the stressopolis, NYC, via the South Bronx, an area all too often mistitled ‘Criminals Paradise Regained.’ Fashion spans the very confines of philosophic guilt, space and time, technique, right down to this very moment, right here and now, on earth!” The space encouraged exchange between downtown Manhattan artists and graffiti writers, artists, and residents of the Bronx. Fashion Moda was frequented by graffiti writers Crash and Daze, and it was the meeting place for John Ahearn and Rigoberto (Robert) Torres, who formed an alliance in their life-casting sculpture work. Eins commented in an interview for *Cover Magazine* in January 1980, “My idea was to do something that would connect with the people up there [in the South Bronx]. I think the avant-garde has always claimed it is possible to do, but it never has been successful in doing it. It has always been very elitist, always required refined tastes.” Fashion Moda closed in 1993.



Joe Lewis assuming the position, 1981. Copyright 1981 Lisa Kahane.



City Maze, 1980. Organized by Jane Dickson. Installation view at Fashion Moda. Copyright 1980 Lisa Kahane.

Gallery 345, 1978

The inaugural announcement of Gallery 345, located at 345 Lafayette Street, called it “a self-defined ‘political’ art gallery. The idea, says founder Karen DiGia, is that artists frequently respond through their craft to the most compelling social and political issues of the day . . . Gallery 345 sees itself as a people’s gallery.” The gallery sold political posters, tapes, slides, magazines, serigraphs by Sister Corita, and other ephemera from the 1960s and 1970s, much of which was related to the war in Vietnam. Among its exhibitions were *Radical Theater in America* and a multipart project, *Children in Crisis*. The work of members of Political Art Documentation/Distribution was often included in Gallery 345’s shows.

Painting Space 122/Performance Space 122 (P.S. 122), 1978

P.S. 122 was cofounded by artists Cynthia Karasek and Karen Eubel. Karasek had rented studio space in a classroom in a former public school building at 150 First

Avenue, which at that time housed several community groups. Eubel likewise rented space, and the two invited others to do the same. By 1979 artists had twenty-one rooms and an auditorium, with studio participants Larry Silver, Andrew Glass (who became the organization's first director), Barbara Quinn, Susan Daitch, and others. In 1979 Room 406 was inaugurated as a gallery space. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, studios were offered to artists, who agreed to help run the organization. Guest panels of arts professionals relied on an open-call approach to select shows. Two-person and large-group shows were common formats. P.S. 122 pioneered the constructive redevelopment of city-owned buildings. Saved from decay or sale, the building became a community center that remains a vital part of the neighborhood. Today P.S. 122 primarily exists as a performance space.

Action against Racism in the Arts, 1979

Action against Racism in the Arts (AARA) was an ad hoc organization formed in response to *The Nigger Drawings*, an exhibition by white artist Donald Newman



Demonstration outside Artists Space against the *Nigger Drawings* exhibition, 1979. Courtesy of Hatch-Billops Collection. Photograph by Camille Billops.

mounted at Artists Space in 1979. Artists and critics, including Howardena Pindell, Lucy Lippard, Faith Ringgold, Ingrid Sischy, and Tony Whitfield, wrote an open letter to Artists Space protesting the show's title and calling it a "racist gesture." Many curators, artists, and art historians also wrote letters of objection to the New York State Council on the Arts, the public agency that had virtually created Artists Space and was still its major funder. Artists Space was considered by many a model alternative space with a reputation for being artistcentric, and the conflict was therefore viewed as emblematic of systematic racism in the art world. Pindell and artists Janet Henry, Benny Andrews, and others protested outside Artists Space. The AARA with artist Cliff Joseph as its chairman organized protests and meetings with the Artists Space staff and board; distributed information and held teach-ins on racism in the arts at the Hatch-Billops Collection; and met with representatives of other alternative spaces and museums concerning exclusionary curatorial practices. An AARA communiqué read, "The misrepresentation of the multinational character of American art grows from and serves racist attitudes. The same ideology that denies the validity of a multiracial culture



Demonstration inside Artists Space against the *Nigger Drawings* exhibition, 1979. Courtesy of Hatch-Billops Collection. Photograph by Camille Billops.

justifies the economic and social oppression of non-white people in the United States.” *The Nigger Drawings* and the subsequent chain of events caused much anguish for those protesting and for those working at Artists Space. Reflecting on these events in *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space*, Howardena Pindell commented, “Some good came out of *The Nigger Drawings*. It raised some consciousness about what was happening in the art world, and not just in the art galleries, because everyone saw how sexist and racist they were. They were seeing how the alternative and so-called more liberal venues weren’t really all that liberal. So people sensitive to the issue were looking at it with a fresh eye, and that was good.” AARA was active for less than two years.

Group Material, 1979

Group Material was founded by a number of artists who sought a collaborative practice in which they could fuse their interests in art and politics. The original thirteen members included Tim Rollins, Patrick Brennan, Julie Ault, Mundy McLaughlin, Marybeth Nelson, and Beth Jaker. In 1980 and 1981 Group Material operated a storefront exhibition space on East Thirteenth Street, where it staged a series of shows focused on social themes. After 1981 the group shrunk to three members and chose not to maintain its own space but instead to create installations in existing venues (alternative art spaces, university galleries, and museums) and multiform projects in public (primarily through interventions using public advertising spaces). Doug Ashford joined the group in 1982, Felix Gonzalez-Torres in 1987, Karen Ramspacher in 1989, and Thomas Eggerer and Jochen Klein in 1995. Group Material’s dense installations were typically thematic and combined fine art in various media and styles, mass-produced items, and artifacts to form designed environments. These exhibitions were concerned with topical issues or debates in culture and politics and were institution- or site-dependent, such as *Subculture* on the IRT subway trains in 1982; *Democracy* at the Dia Art Foundation in 1988; and *AIDS Timeline* at the University Art Museum, University of California at Berkeley, in 1989. Group Material ceased its activities in 1996.

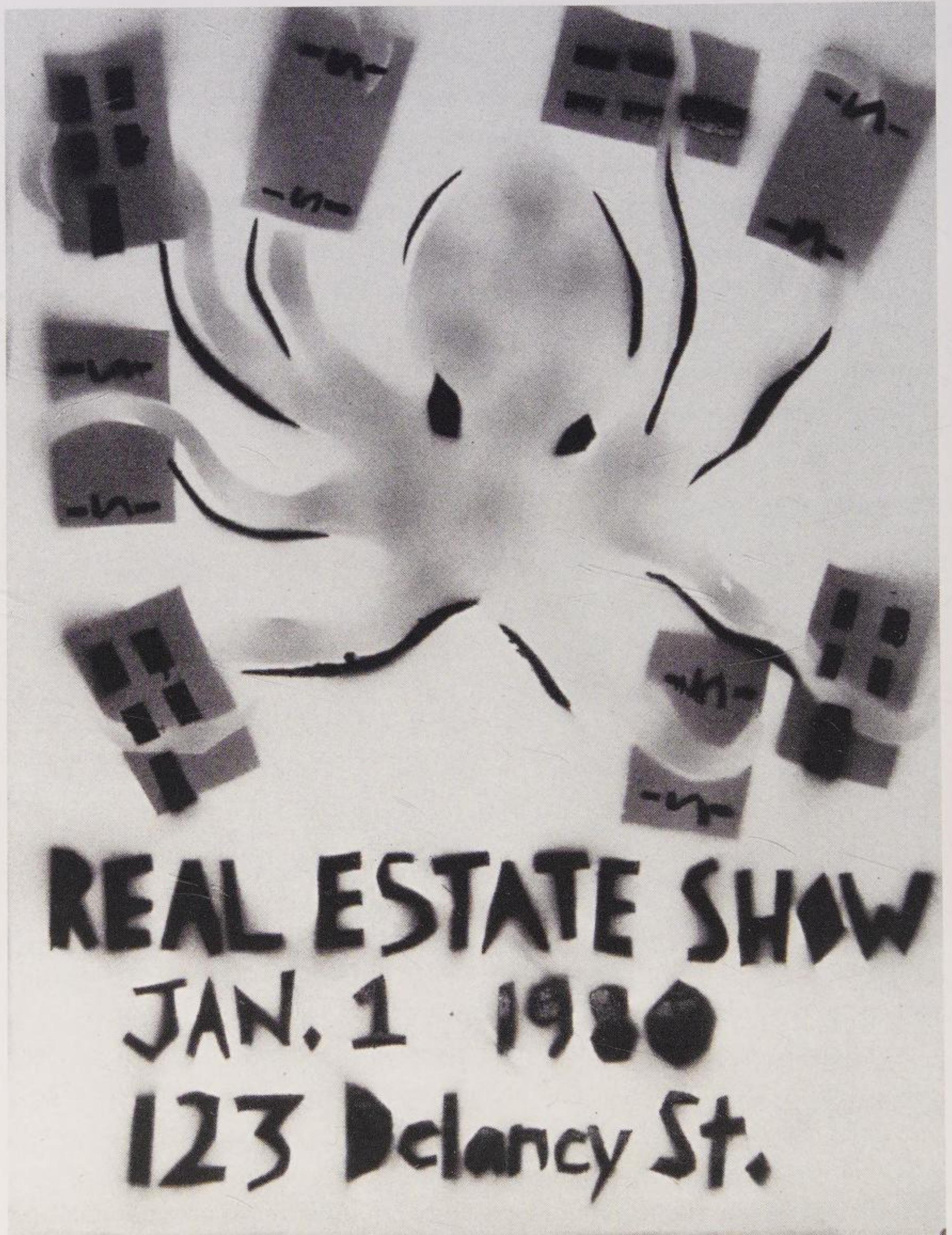
INTAR Latin American Gallery, 1979

INTAR Latin American Gallery and INTAR Theater were founded by Max Ferra at 420 West Forty-second Street as an alternative space (a “venue and a laboratory”) guided by the mission to explore the work of emerging and midcareer artists of “dual identity.” INTAR’s exhibitions, publications, symposia, and educational activities have enriched the cultural life of New York City with new voices and vitality. The gallery was directed by Inverna Lockpez from 1979 on. Its main objective is to provide exposure to emerging and established Latino visual artists and

artists from diverse cultures, including African American, Asian American, and Native American artists. INTAR has organized important touring exhibitions such as *Another Face of the Diamond: Pathways through the Black Atlantic South*, curated by Judith McWillie in 1989; *Autobiography: In Her Own Image*, curated by Howardena Pindell in 1988; and *Comix: Six Hispanic Artists*, curated by Inverna Lockpez in collaboration with the Jamaica Arts Center. It has also presented solo installations of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Amelia Mesa-Bains, James Luna, David Avalos, Pat Ward Williams, and Jorge Pardo, among others. The gallery still exists, but its programs were scaled back in 1994 when Lockpez left. INTAR Gallery has virtually closed, though modest events are held intermittently in the INTAR Theater's lobby, now located at 508 West Fifty-third Street.

ABC No Rio, 1980

“There was never a desire to start a space. It just happened,” remembers Christy Rupp. The formation of ABC No Rio was an unplanned consequence of the *Real Estate Show* staged by a group of artists at the end of the 1970s. Alan Moore, Ann Messner, Rebecca Howland, Christy Rupp, Bobby G., and others illegally occupied an abandoned building at 123 Delancey Street and mounted an exhibition about property and housing. Calculated to highlight the warehousing of space practiced by the City of New York, the occupation attracted the attention of officials from the Department of Housing, Preservation, and Development. Suspecting the seizure might be part of a well-planned political initiative, these authorities swiftly reclaimed the building and confiscated the exhibition. The *Real Estate Show* initiators negotiated to reopen it. Newspaper coverage was sympathetic to the artists' plight, and the Department of Housing, Preservation, and Development, wanting to escape further bad publicity, offered the group an alternate site in the neighborhood. That storefront at 156 Rivington Street was to be rent free for two years and “affordable” thereafter. The crude space was dubbed ABC No Rio (inspired by the remaining legible letters of a nearby sign) and its operation as an arts and community center began. Adopting a noncuratorial approach and welcoming ideas and projects from whoever proposed them, the *Real Estate Show* organizers guided No Rio's activities for the first couple of years, after which management gradually changed hands to Jack Waters and Peter Cramer. Its *Founders Era* brochure from 1998 begins, “If there is any unifying theme to be found among the ever changing multitude of people, ideas, and activities that have taken place over the eighteen-year history of ABC No Rio, that theme could be summed up as follows: that ‘space’ should be defined by those who directly use it in the business of living rather than by those who would manipulate these blocks of space in the interests of profit at the expense of communities.” ABC No



Rebecca Howland, *Real Estate Show Poster*, 1979. Courtesy of Rebecca Howland.

Rio continues to present exhibitions, performances, parties, music, poetry, and video events.

Political Art Documentation/Distribution, 1980

On the announcement card of the exhibition *Some British Art from the Left* (at Artists Space in 1979), curator Lucy R. Lippard printed an open call for materials



Christy Rupp, *Rat Patrol*, 1979. Four thousand *Rat Patrol* posters were printed and placed near accumulated garbage during the sanitation strike of 1979. Courtesy of Christy Rupp.

that would form an archive of socially concerned art and documentation. This was ultimately formalized as Political Art Documentation/Distribution (PADD), which also functioned as a discussion group. Catalyst Lippard, Irving Wexler, Herb Perr, Greg Sholette, Elizabeth Kulas, and Jerry Kearns were among PADD's members. Its initial flyer read, "PAD/D is a progressive artists' resource and networking organization seeking to provide artists with an organized relationship to society and demonstrate the political effectiveness of image making." The group did not maintain an art space but promoted political art and discourse by mounting socially themed exhibitions and streetworks, staging monthly forums and workshops at Franklin Furnace (called Second Sundays), and publishing *Upfront* magazine. Themed projects included *Out of Place—Art for the Evicted*, a month-long series of outdoor exhibitions in 1983 about gentrification of the Lower East Side, and *State of Mind: State of the Union*, a series of exhibitions in 1984–85 connected to Ronald Reagan's second presidential inauguration.

PADD's primary initiative and lasting legacy is its international collection of documentation relating to socially concerned art, ranging from political posters to individual statements. Lippard's term for the endeavor was "archival activism." Largely due to the efforts of Clive Phillpot, former librarian at the Museum of Modern Art, and Barbara Moore and Mimi Smith, who volunteered archiving labor and processed and organized the material, the archive was transferred to MoMA after PADD disbanded in 1988. It is still housed there and is available for use by appointment.

White Columns, 1980

Previously known as 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street, White Columns was named after an architectural feature of the space at 325 Spring Street where 112 Workshop moved in 1979. Former director Bill Arning cited the expansion of the art world and proliferation of artists in the early 1980s as responsible for a shift in programming procedure from the open informality of 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street to the curatorial selection process since employed by White Columns; its format of group and thematic exhibitions and small-scale solo exhibitions in the White Room, as well as its mission to serve unestablished artists, has remained more or less unaltered. The director of White Columns reviews work and meets with artists personally. Because of its status as a venue for new work by emerging artists, it is considered a testing ground and a source for new talent in the larger art economy. White Columns gave initial or significant exposure to such artists as Sean Landers, Andres Serrano, Lorna Simpson, Meyer Vaisman, and Sue Williams. It is currently located at 320 West Thirteenth Street.

Art and Knowledge Workshop, 1981

In 1981 artist Tim Rollins began teaching art to kids in a program for the "learning disabled" at Junior High School 52 in the South Bronx. He extended this work into an after-school program called the Art and Knowledge Workshop, later also known as Kids of Survival (K.O.S.). Rollins and the students read books together, then responded visually to the ideas they encountered, often combining historical circumstances with their own lived experiences and visual vocabularies. The workshop slowly developed a collaborative practice of painting on the pages of books such as Franz Kafka's *Amerika*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, or *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Although the workshop began as a pedagogical initiative to teach students how to read, draw, and paint, in the mid-1980s paintings by the group were circulated in the downtown commercial art world, and Tim Rollins and K.O.S. were celebrated not only in the local milieu but nationally and internationally. K.O.S. members have included Angel Abrue, Nelson Montes,



Tim Rollins and K.O.S., *Amerika—For the People of Bathgate, South Bronx*, 1988. Wall mural on exterior of Central Elementary School 4. Courtesy of Public Art Fund. Photograph by Peter Bellamy.

Carlos Rivera, Richard Cruz, George Garces, Annette Rosado, and Robert Branch. Still directed by Rollins, Art and Knowledge Workshop continues in operation with changing participants and a studio at Longwood Arts Project in the Bronx.

Art in General, 1981

Founded by Martin Weinstein and a group of artists, Art in General is located at 79 Walker Street in the midst of several intersecting neighborhoods—Chinatown, the Lower East Side, SoHo, and TriBeCa. A small group of artists initially approached General Tools Manufacturing Company, the owner of the building, seeking to use one of the vacant floors for an art exhibition. The company agreed and subsequently committed to a continuing program that has grown incrementally. By 1988 Art in General had received enough grant money to hire a director, Holly Block, who continues in this position. Art in General remains artist-centered and primarily presents group exhibitions rather than promoting individual artists. It seeks to represent a balance among artists of differing cultural and racial backgrounds and supports contemporary artists at varying points in their careers. The exhibition selection process begins with open submissions. Then, rather than relying on a single in-house curatorial view, a changing board of artists, curators, and critics chooses artists for exhibitions and special projects. This method allows Art in General to remain flexible and representative of diverse viewpoints.

Carnival Knowledge, 1981

Carnival Knowledge was an artists' activist group founded in response to the moral majority's anti-abortion campaign. The group included Anne Pitrone, Lyn Hughs, Ame Gilbert, Jodie Fink, and April Ford. Through 1985 the collective organized events at street fairs, on beaches, and during demonstrations, creating a carnival atmosphere complete with educational games, performances, booths, and displays—all of which dealt with reproductive rights. Carnival Knowledge employed humor and creativity to combat the conservative attack on women's reproductive rights.

Epoxy Art Group, 1982

Epoxy was a group of painters and sculptors who originated from Hong Kong and China and lived in New York City. The group joined forces in 1982 in order to create artistic opportunities for themselves and to counter the isolation of individual studio practice. The flyer for the Epoxy Art Group's 1988 exhibition, *Epoxy: Thirty-Six Tactics*, curated by Geno Rodriguez for the Alternative Museum, read, "Because the Epoxy Artist share the same rich Chinese heritage, their joint creative endeavors embody crosscultural influences unique in the U.S. Nonetheless, Epoxy

does not attempt to consciously proclaim statements about those bicultural experiences, in so much as they have chosen the name 'Epoxy' as a symbol of the reinforcement their bonding provides for each artist's individuality." The group's engagement in collective production has resulted in collage and ephemeral projects. Epoxy included Eric Chan, Ming Fay, Kwok, Bing Lee, Cissy Pao, and Jerry Kwan.

Exit Art/The First World, 1982

Exit Art was founded in 1982 by Jeanette Ingberman and Papo Colo. They currently codirect the organization and cocurate many of its exhibitions. *Illegal America*, its first exhibition at Franklin Furnace in 1982, brought together art and artifacts that



David Hammons, 1989. Installation at Exit Art. Courtesy of Exit Art. Photograph by Larry Lame.

embodied the “manipulation of illegality as a discourse in art.” As described in a self-published brochure, “Exit Art is a hybrid interdisciplinary arts organization dedicated to transcultural, multi-media explorations of contemporary art issues through critical presentations, publications, film and video projects. Exit Art programs create a context that helps change the way our society looks at art and to help break down the cultural and racial stereotypes. Our projects focus attention on the contributions of artists of different racial and ethnic backgrounds within their own communities and within the artworld at large.” Exit Art has always been located at 578 Broadway, but in 1992 it reopened in a much larger space as Exit Art/The First World; the addition to the name is an ironic play on the fact that many artists shown there have been categorized as “third world.” Along with the inauguration of the new name, Exit Art opened the First World Theater, the Apartment Store (which sells artist-made objects), and a coffee bar, Cafe Cultura.

Exit Art has historically taken on themes of cultural identity and has organized solo exhibitions and special projects of artists not yet known in more main-

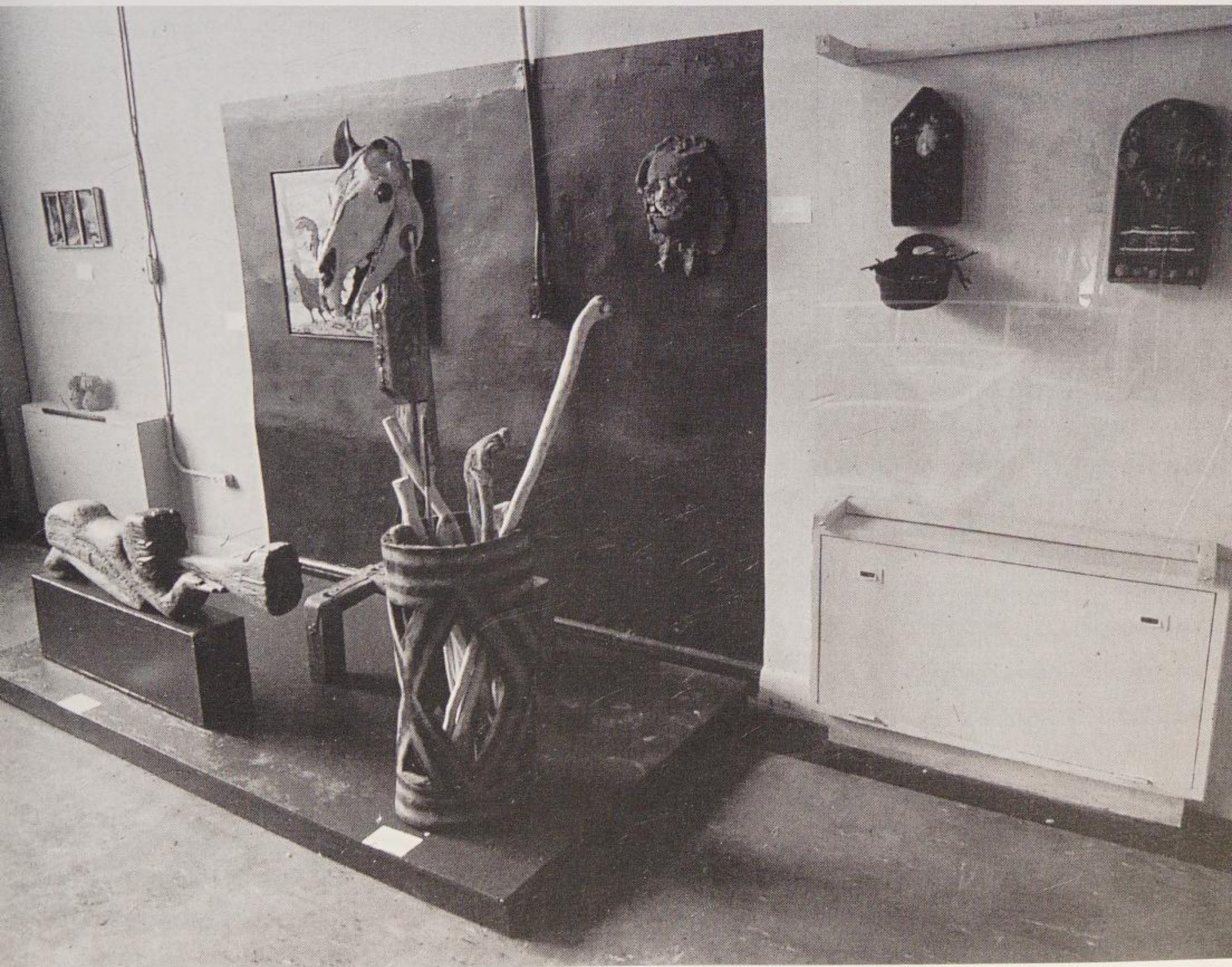


Counterculture: Alternative Information from the Underground Press to the Net, curated by Brian Wallis with Melissa Rachieff, 1996. Installation view at Exit Art. Courtesy of Exit Art. Photograph by Larry Lame.

stream institutions. Martin Wong, Muntadas, and David Hammons were featured at Exit Art at key moments in their careers. Exhibitions include *Forbidden Films*, organized in conjunction with the New York Public Library (1985); Juan Sanchez, *Rican/Structed Convictions* (1989); Jimmie Durham, *The Bishop's Moose and the Pinkerton Men* (1989); David Wojnarowicz, *Tongues of Flame* (1991); and *Let the Artist Live!*, in which fifteen artists were invited to live and work at Exit Art/The First World (1994). Exit Art produces catalogs, usually conceived or designed by Colo, that are artworks in their own right and feature bold use of imagery and changing designs rather than a unified format or look.

Longwood Arts Project, 1982

In the late 1970s the Bronx Council on the Arts helped convert P.S. 39, a closed public school, into an active multiservice building housing community services



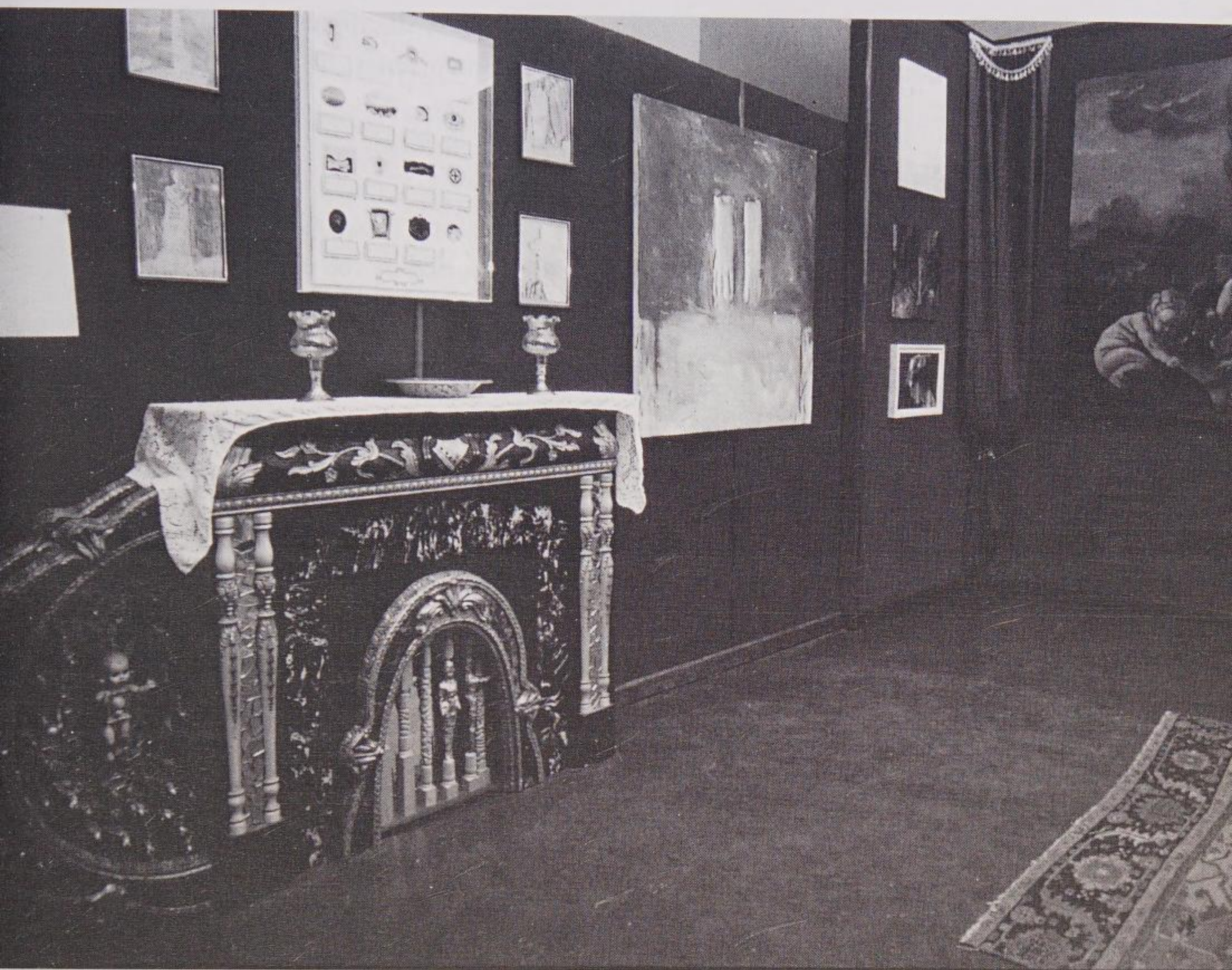
Rooms with a View: The Struggle between Culture, Content, and the Context of Art, curated by Fred Wilson, 1987–88. Three-room exhibition installed at Longwood Arts Project. Courtesy of Fred Wilson, Metro Pictures, and the Bronx Council on the Arts.

and city agencies. In 1982 the Longwood Arts Project was founded to serve the local community of the Longwood District in the South Bronx. It was established as an artists' studio program and evolved to include exhibition space and public programs in 1985. Free or inexpensive studio space, a mentor, and a stipend are given to selected artists. Both Pepón Osorio and the Art and Knowledge Workshop have had long-term studios here. Longwood Gallery mounts thematic exhibitions of works by African American and Latino/a artists.

Artist and curator Fred Wilson directed Longwood Arts Project from 1985 to 1992, then Betti-Sue Hertz was director from 1992 to 1998. Longwood Arts Project relates its programs to urban experience and embodies a process of cultural production that is inclusive of artists, community members, and exhibition audiences.



Rooms with a View: The Struggle between Culture, Content, and the Context of Art, curated by Fred Wilson, 1987–88. Three-room exhibition installed at Longwood Arts Project. Courtesy of Fred Wilson, Metro Pictures, and the Bronx Council on the Arts.



Rooms with a View: The Struggle between Culture, Content, and the Context of Art, curated by Fred Wilson, 1987–88. Three-room exhibition installed at Longwood Arts Project. Courtesy of Fred Wilson, Metro Pictures, and the Bronx Council on the Arts.

Storefront for Art and Architecture, 1982

Storefront, initially located at 51 Prince Street, was founded by Kyong Park as a nonprofit organization of artists and architects who maintained a gallery. Along with Glenn Weiss and Park, committees of former Storefront participants planned programs and organized solo and thematic exhibitions and projects, such as *After Tilted Arc* (1985), in which artists and architects exhibited alternative sculptures and supported a forum on public art, and *Adam's House in Paradise* (1984), about Adam Purple's "Garden of Eden" in the Lower East Side. In 1985 Storefront moved to its current wedge-shaped space at 97 Kenmare Street. Its program has been recognized for its experimentation, historical awareness, and critical responsiveness to society, particularly to the built environment. Storefront provides exposure for research and experimental work of independent artists and architects,

and has been a gathering place and platform for interdisciplinary discourse connecting critical issues of art, architecture, and urbanism.

Art against Apartheid, 1983

Legislatively sanctioned white supremacy in the form of apartheid had been practiced in South Africa since 1948, indirectly supported by the policies of the U.S. government. Formed as a “cultural arm of the anti-apartheid political liberation struggle,” Art against Apartheid (AAA) was founded in 1983 as “an independent, multiracial, and politically diverse coalition of artists and arts organizations working around the issue of apartheid.” The group put out an open call to artists to contribute to a large-scale anti-apartheid campaign of exhibitions and cultural events for the purpose of raising consciousness and funds to aid liberation organizations. Hundreds of artists participated, including Willie Birch, Regina Vater, Leon Golub, and Camille Billops, as well as more than twenty community spaces, such as including Jamaica Arts Center, Abyssinian Baptist Church, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, P.S. 1, the Bronx Museum of Art, and the Henry Street Settlement. The apartheid system existed in South Africa through the early 1990s, and the AAA campaign was organized annually for several years.

Artists Call against U.S. Intervention in Central America, 1983

Artists Call against U.S. Intervention in Central America was originated by a broad-based coalition of New York artists and intellectuals who disapproved of the U.S. government’s economic, political, and military interventions in Central and Latin America. The New York-based planning group of artists and writers included Lucy R. Lippard, Daniel Flores, Irving Petlin, Jon Hendricks, Leon Golub, Ron Wolin, Fatima Bercht, Doug Ashford, Coosje van Bruggen, and numerous individuals and organizations working in conjunction with the Institute for the Arts and Letters of El Salvador in Exile. The group placed a full-page advertisement signed by hundreds in the *New York Times* with a graphic contribution by Claes Oldenburg that depicted people toppling a monumental banana. Artists Call brought together art from Central America and art about or in support of Central America, and raised money from the sale of donated artworks for grassroots cultural struggles. Artists Call mushroomed into a national grassroots mobilization which took place in twenty-eight cities in 1984. The organization effectively generated political awareness in thousands of participants and viewers where the cultural campaign encompassed hundreds of exhibitions, performances, readings, and events.



Claes Oldenburg, *Artists Call* graphic, 1984.

Four Walls, 1984

Dissatisfied with the means for dialogue within the art world, artists Adam Simon and Michele Araujo began holding events in their Hoboken loft. These were combination one-night exhibitions and discussion forums about the art on view and related topics, and included *The Dub Show* in 1984; *The Naked Paint Show* in 1985; and many events featuring two or three artists. A core group of people was associated with Four Walls, which also attracted a larger, loose constituency. By 1988

Four Walls was hosting events in its signature format at existing spaces such as White Columns and P.S. 1. In 1990 it relocated to the Greenpoint/Williamsburg area of Brooklyn, a neighborhood known for its large population of artists. Mike Ballou, Claire Pentacost, and Amy Sillman joined the core group. The structure of Four Walls was intentionally low cost and relatively easy to operate. The program was open to anyone who proposed something, and in the 1990s it expanded to readings, screenings, and discussions with writers. Currently run by Ballou and located at 138 Bayard Street in Williamsburg, Four Walls Projects (as it is now called) provides special events and a base for the Slide and Film Club.

Bullet Space, 1985

Bullet billed itself as “the finest homestead art space in NYC.” The urban artist collaborative was founded in 1985 by Andrew Castrucci and Nadia Coen when they and other artists squatted the building at 292 East Third Street on the Lower East Side. Castrucci, with artist Thom Korn and others, has organized exhibitions and projects about the squatters’ homestead movement, such as *An Act of Resistance: 1986–89* and *Your House Is Mine*, a book and street project created in 1988. Bullet has housed a print shop for producing broadsides and newspapers denouncing gentrification and structural homelessness. It is still active.

Guerrilla Girls (Conscience of the Art World), 1985

Guerrilla Girls formed to combat sexism in the art world. Its first project plastered posters throughout New York City’s art districts, giving statistics concerning the small number of women artists represented in galleries, museums, and art magazines; ultimately a series of posters was produced. The group curated an exhibition of women artists at the Palladium nightclub in Manhattan. Members have lectured, organized panels, and sponsored advertisements and magazine projects in art journals. The Guerrilla Girls used strategies and tactics “appropriate to the 1980s,” conducting a campaign of information, statistical examinations, and public exposure directed against sexist exclusionary practices in the art world. In order to emphasize the issues rather than focus on personalities, the group members chose not to expose their individual identities.

Minor Injury, 1985

Minor Injury, an artist-run alternative space, opened in 1985 at 1073 Manhattan Avenue in the Greenpoint/Williamsburg area of Brooklyn to serve “the creative voices of those operating outside of the mainstream.” Minor Injury chose to maintain a small informal structure and organizational format to avoid the intricate eco-

GUERRILLA GIRLS

CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

WHAT DO THESE ARTISTS HAVE IN COMMON?

Arman	Keith Haring	Claes Oldenburg
Jean-Michel Basquiat	Bryan Hunt	Philip Pearlstein
James Casebere	Patrick Ireland	Robert Ryman
John Chamberlain	Neil Jenney	David Salle
Sandro Chia	Bill Jensen	Lucas Samaras
Francesco Clemente	Donald Judd	Peter Saul
Chuck Close	Alex Katz	Kenny Scharf
Tony Cragg	Anselm Kiefer	Julian Schnabel
Enzo Cucchi	Joseph Kosuth	Richard Serra
Eric Fischl	Roy Lichtenstein	Mark di Suvero
Joel Fisher	Walter De Maria	Mark Tansey
Dan Flavin	Robert Morris	George Tooker
Futura 2000	Bruce Nauman	David True
Ron Gorchov	Richard Nonas	Peter Voulkos

THEY ALLOW THEIR WORK TO BE SHOWN IN GALLERIES THAT SHOW NO MORE THAN 10% WOMEN ARTISTS OR NONE AT ALL.

SOURCE: ART IN AMERICA ANNUAL 1984-85

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM GUERRILLA GIRLS
CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

THESE GALLERIES SHOW NO MORE THAN 10% WOMEN ARTISTS OR NONE AT ALL.

Blum Helman	Fun
Mary Boone	Marian Goodman
Grace Borgenicht	Pat Hearn
Diane Brown	Marlborough
Leo Castelli	Oil & Steel
Charles Cowles	Pace
Marisa Del Re	Tony Shafrazi
Dia Art Foundation	Sperone Westwater
Executive	Edward Thorp
Allan Frumkin	Washburn

SOURCE: ART IN AMERICA ANNUAL 1984-85

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM GUERRILLA GIRLS
CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 6 MAY 1985

Contact 925-2587

Posters pointing to the inadequate numbers of women artists represented in leading New York galleries are appearing in SoHo streets, on walls, streetlamps and telephone booths. Two strongly worded posters drawing attention to the continuing discrimination against women artists are the work of a newly formed group calling itself Guerrilla Girls and preferring to conduct its campaign of information and public exposure without identifying its individual members. Guerrilla Girls plans to continue its campaign throughout the next weeks and next season, drawing attention to the retrograde attitudes toward women artists that characterize certain segments of the art world of the mid-80's. Simple facts will be spelled out; obvious conclusions can be drawn.

BOX 766 CANAL STREET STATION • NEW YORK 10013

Guerrilla Girls, inaugural press release, 1985.

conomic dependencies with which larger organizations are encumbered. "Our intention is to provide alternative exhibition facilities for artists who, for whatever reason, have not adapted to the existing system in New York." Their focus was on artists whose work reflected engaged concern with racial, cultural, political, and social minorities, and artists who were recent immigrants from troubled or developing

countries. Minor Injury was run by Mo Bahc and presented exhibitions and open forum slide seminars for the few years it existed.

PESTS, 1986

An anonymous artists' organization, PESTS was formed in 1986 to publicize the myopia of the art establishment in relation to race. Its first flyer stated, "Our immediate goals are to publicize the serious omission and de facto censorship practiced by galleries, museums and art publications. As a person of conscience, you must have reflected on these issues and wished you had been presented with a broader and more accurate view." Through its activities, PESTS sought to generate positive interest in artists of color and to overcome past neglect and misrepresentation. The name PESTS was chosen to express the group's intention to "bug the art world." Adhering to the anonymity of its membership and using statistical information to evidence racism, PESTS was modeled after the Guerrilla Girls. It produced and circulated posters and published a newsletter that listed exhibitions of work by artists of color, relevant events and panels, notices, and reproductions of PESTS posters.

References

While working on the exhibition *Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement, NYC* in 1996, I compiled an archive of ephemeral materials, including founding and mission statements, flyers, brochures, publications, announcement cards, correspondence, press clippings, and internal documents from various organizations. This collection, along with the Museum of Modern Art Library's subject files on spaces, organizations, groups, and artists, the PADD archive housed in the MoMA Library, and the Hatch-Billops Collection, was an important source for this chronology.

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Part I
Context

Biting the Hand: Artists and Museums in New York since 1969

Lucy R. Lippard

In memoriam: Rudolf Baranik (1920–1998)

New York art activism in the late 1960s and early 1970s focused on the museums that dealt with contemporary art. Why museums? For object-making and installation artists, the museum remains both the hand that feeds and the citadel to be stormed. In addition, artists perceived the museum as a public and therefore potentially accountable institution, the only one the least bit likely to listen to the art community on ethical and political matters. Museums were targeted in order to make points not only about artists' rights but also about opposition to the war in Vietnam, to racism and eventually sexism, and about the institutional entanglement of aesthetic with corporate finance and imperialism. Since 1975–76, except for occasional skirmishes, museums have rarely been called to account for complicity in political events. The only consistent exception is a decade of annual observations by many museums of Day without Art, in memory of those in and out of the art world who have succumbed to AIDS.¹

The cultural institutions remain contested ground, but there were few outraged mobs at museum doors during the 1980s and 1990s, although Women in the Arts, WAC (Women's Action Coalition), ACTUP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), and Godzilla (Asian American artists) have occasionally demonstrated at New York museums. Today the lines form inside, almost imperceptibly, with artworks that subtly nip at the hand that feeds them. Artists such as Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser have incorporated into their artworks some acutely critical approaches to their institutional refuges. This change in style, or strategy, reflects a broader

distinction between the politics of the 1960s and 1970s (with its emphasis on public displays of outrage, street works, and the rejection of the museum as final arbiter of taste or values) and the postmodernist "cultural politics" of the later 1980s and 1990s, with its focus on internal dissent and individual practice. The former aimed at a larger audience ("The Whole World Is Watching!") while the latter seemed to settle for subtle and often extremely complex influences within the status quo.

When the Museum of Modern Art, or the Whitney Museum of American Art, or the still more exalted Metropolitan Museum of Art, or even the Brooklyn, Queens, and Bronx museums, buy or accept the donation of an artist's work, one small bridge to posterity has been built and everybody knows it. There is no guarantee, of course, that one's work will be on display rather than squirreled away in the storage racks. Yet almost universally, artists pin their hopes on institutional support as a passport to the future. The indirect perks such as names dropped in the right places or press coverage leading to expanded bibliographies can make museum shows irresistible even to artists who mistrust the institutions, since there are few rewards for those not so blessed. At no time has it been easy to find artists willing to go up against their potential benefactors in public.

On another level, museums are our visual libraries and the archives for the official histories of the future. Contemporary urban artworkers learn from looking. Not many of our descendants are likely to peruse dusty tomes or even the Internet for mentions of our names if they have not been exposed to the art itself. Whoever decides what is worthy to occupy the spaces of our local museums (and galleries) decides what we will look at and who our models will be, thereby determining what art itself will be, at least in the public eye. Aesthetic superiority is an assumed by-product of museum shows. Those who claim to know it when they see it have already spoken, and it is exceedingly difficult to dispute them from a lower rung of the ladder.

Many artists are resigned to their own powerlessness, depending on powerful allies (critics, curators, collectors) to affect a definition of aesthetic quality that coincides with their own production. Those who lack or doubt such allies, those who disagree with the current criteria, hope to challenge the prevailing values, to change the system, to figuratively blow up the institutions' power over any community's expression. They target the museums with their art or with their politics, or with both. As painter Jo Baer said in 1970, "Political action need not inhibit art-making; the two activities are dissimilar, not incompatible."² It might be more efficient to start with the schools, where the initial constructions of art, aesthetic responsibility, and their interrelationships are formed. But the academy (as we found out during the heyday of the women's art movement) is far more isolated, impenetrable, and literally less visible than the museum. The museum's job is to display, and no matter how much may be hidden beneath the surface of

the display—politics, funding, byzantine relationships between collectors and galleries—a knowledgeable art world denizen can read at least some of the subtexts, precisely because the tip of the iceberg is out in the open.

Solo shows are the easiest to read: who gets them (which white men are tapped at any particular moment and who else is considered expedient at sporadic other moments), who curates them, who funds them, who writes in the catalogs—all are internal indicators of status and prestige driven, in turn, by the art market, which is itself driven by all kinds of “outside” economic and political factors. Thematic group shows may appear wholly innocent, or incoherent, to the casual bystander but they can reveal a good deal in the infrastructural accounts in small print in the catalogs and wall labels (collectors, sponsors, Philip Morris). Loans to a museum exhibition can benefit collector and dealer as well as artists on the general market. Another set of entanglements is discernible in the commercial repercussions of international exhibitions, especially those based on a single country with whom the United States is codependent through trade or military commitments.³ And in recent years some ammunition has been spent on the mallification of the sprawling museum shops, which sometimes threaten to overwhelm the shows.⁴

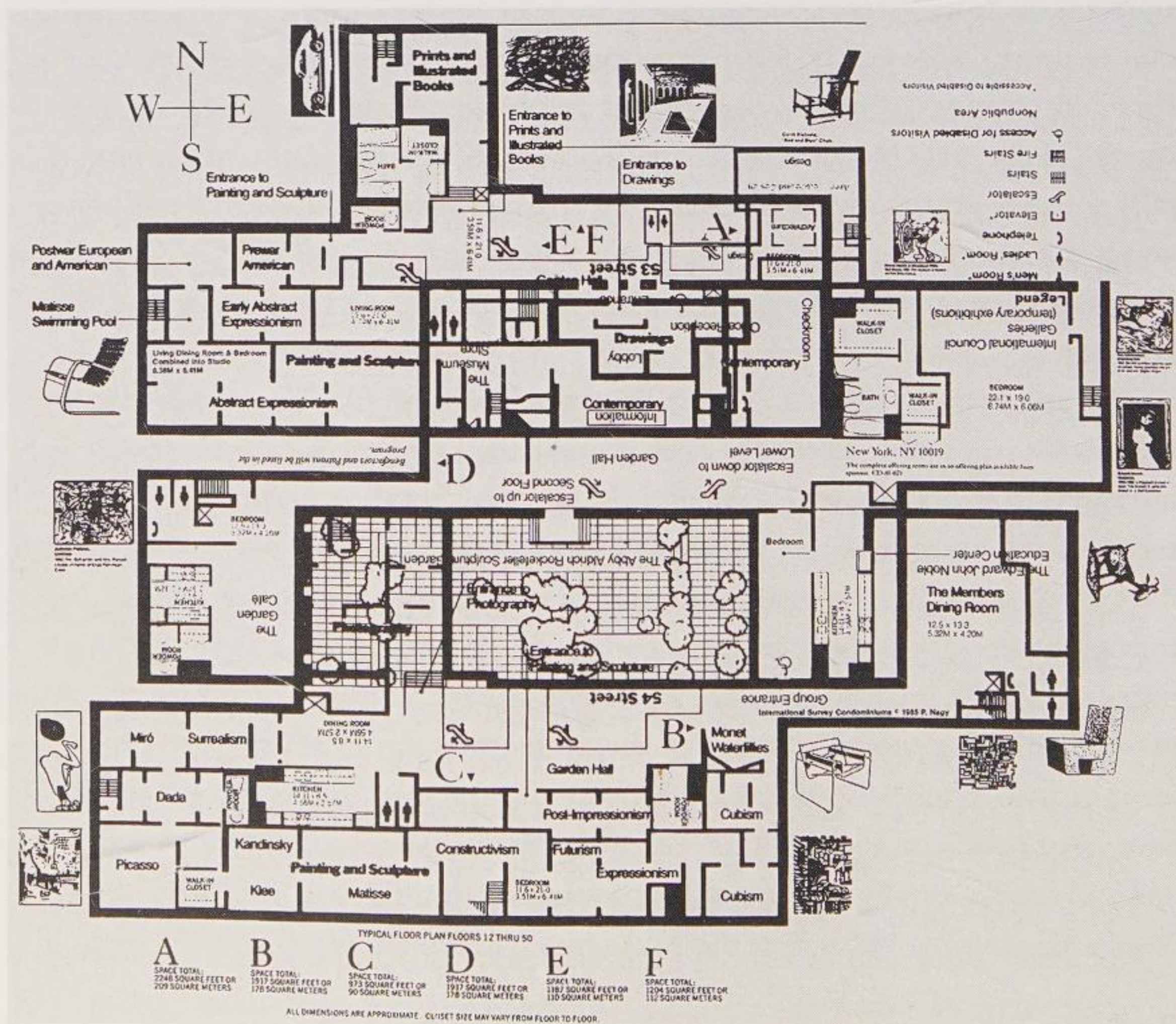
If an artist protests her or his exclusion from a museum’s exhibitions or collections on the lofty basis of communal outrage or aesthetic injustice (still more difficult to prove), s/he will probably be accused of sour grapes and, worse still, aesthetic inferiority. Yet one of the greatest epiphanies of my nascent art writing career (in the early 1960s) was the realization that “experts” could simply and totally disagree on the merits of individual artists. I found nothing to write home about, for instance, in Jules Olitski’s paintings, which were being touted as masterpieces by Clement Greenberg. I knew I wasn’t “wrong.” So there was no infallible criterion for “quality” that was not relative. Wow! A revelation.

A little later, courtesy of the Art Workers’ Coalition (AWC), came further revelations (those that inform the preceding paragraphs) about the function of museums in society and the roles of those who control their purse strings. At the center of the storm were the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney (best known then for its national Annuals)—the goals of every self-respecting ambitious artist. Inevitably, the goal became the target when the counterculture stirred up the national depths of antiauthoritarian, antiestablishment, antiwar outrage. From our present vantage point, the notion of the museum as the artist’s adversary may seem quaint. Whatever made us think that cultural institutions had or should have consciences? In the 1960s we were still idealistic about art as a moral force, a notion popular among the abstract expressionists in the 1950s. We wrote in *Does Money Manipulate Art?*, a flyer the AWC issued anonymously in 1969,

Is the artist’s final goal money? If not, what is it? Love? Fame (i.e. temporary notoriety)? Immortality? Do dealers love their artists or do they love the money they make

from art and artists? How much fame does an artist need? One year? Ten years? The top 10? The top 40? How much fame can an artist take? Is art that's worth a lot of money worth more than other art? Is it worth a lot of money because it's better than other art? Should society support artists so they can give away their art? Is art a career . . . Is a career carousing? Are galleries pimps for carousing artists cruising immortality?

Before I began a lifetime of freelancing, I worked for a year and a half at the Museum of Modern Art—in the library, hardly a power center, but a great vantage point from which to view institutional hierarchies and machinations. This was from 1958 to 1960, when the great but not infallible Alfred Barr still presided over MoMA's collections, though he had been deposed as director a few years earlier, along with the literally towering Rene d'Harnoncourt and the admirable Dorothy Miller. Initially it did not occur to me, apolitical and fresh out of college as I was, that there was ground on which to challenge this monster idol. Whatever MoMA did was fine with me. I was just glad to be able to bring books to art world players, to do research and caption writing for august curators. I learned a



Peter A. Nagy, *International Survey Condominiums*, 1985. Courtesy of Peter A. Nagy.

tremendous amount and met the artists—other flunkies there, including Robert Ryman, Sol LeWitt, and Robert Mangold—whose work would help to define my early criticism.

I didn't know that artists had from time to time picketed or attacked MoMA's policies. Ad Reinhardt, for instance, helped organize the American Abstract Artists demonstration against the Museum of Modern Art in 1940 for neglecting abstraction; he also debated social realist painters about "Art of the Museums" versus "Art in the Streets." And he was one of the "Irascibles" who protested the Metropolitan Museum of Art for ignoring avant-garde art. I would have been amazed to look into the future and see myself ten years later, yelling in picket lines outside the very doors I had first entered gratefully to work full-time for forty-five dollars a week. Eventually I would demonstrate outside MoMA in support of equally underpaid employees who had formed the union PASTA-MoMA, now part of the UAW.

The decade of protest arrived late in the art world. Everybody else was in the streets in the 1960s, but avant-garde artists were in the rear guard. The first public statement against the Vietnam war from the art community was a letter to the *New York Times* in 1965.⁵ The first organized antiwar art project was Angry Arts Week in 1967, organized by Artists and Writers Protest (including Dore Ashton, Rudolf Baranik, Leon Golub, Don Judd, Max Kozloff, Irving Petlin, and May Stevens).⁶ The week was highlighted by the *Collage of Indignation*, a wall of works executed in Golub's studio by a broad spectrum of artists ranging from Rafael Soyer to Phoebe Hellman to James Rosenquist. The as-yet-unnamed Art Workers' Coalition began on January 3, 1969, led by a group of kinetic artists, many of whom showed at the much-respected Howard Wise Gallery, and their critical supporter, Willoughby Sharp. The ostensible spark was the removal by Takis (the Greek-Parisian sculptor and an MIT fellow) of his work from MoMA's *Machine* show. John Perreault described the event in the *Village Voice* on April 10, 1969:

They moved like clockwork: Takis, unshaven, calm, looking like a saintly longshoreman or an anarchist ready to plant a bomb; Willoughby Sharp who took off all his clothes at Jill Johnson's panel discussion at NYU; black bearded Farman, a poet, and Do, a beautiful woman with reddish hair who called the Director's office from a telephone booth to explain what was going to happen. . . . In a crowded gallery, in front of stunned guards, Takis moved in on his own work, cut the wires, unplugged it, and . . . gently carried it out into the museum garden, with a coolness that was unbelievable.

The cause was artists' rights to control the uses of their own works, whether or not they had been sold, and Perreault's breathless account suggests how unprecedented such an action was. Takis had wanted a different (larger and more

recent) piece in the show, a piece the curators had originally chosen before deciding to represent him with a smaller, earlier work from the MoMA collection. Accompanied by a group of artists, Takis calmly moved his piece into the sculpture garden, where leaflets on artists' control over their works were handed out, stating that this was "just the first in a series of acts against the stagnant policies of art museums all over the world."

And it was indeed. The scene in the MoMA garden was duly reported by the press. Within two weeks another museum furor was set off by the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC), led by Benny Andrews, Henri Ghent, and Edward Taylor. Announcing in a flyer that "Soul's Been Sold Again," they demanded the cancellation or boycott of the Metropolitan Museum's *Harlem on My Mind*—a photodocumentation exhibition organized by a white curator, Allon Schoener, who had "either ignored or, even worse, unsubstantially represented the advisory resources of the Black artistic and intellectual community." The BECC also called for the appointment of "blacks to policy-making and curatorial positions" and "a more viable relationship with the TOTAL BLACK COMMUNITY."

Artists' meetings ensued around the two events. A name was adopted: the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC). I think it was Carl Andre, our resident Marxist, who insisted on the term *workers*, bringing a sector of the art world into the proletariat in one eloquent swoop and including critics, curators, and other art types in the labor force. Ironically the AWC's meeting place was a large artist-run co-op gallery of "living art" in a rough loft space on lower Broadway called "Museum." Photographs of MoMA director John Hightower meeting there with the AWC are often mislabeled as "*the museum*," i.e., the Museum of Modern Art. But in fact, the mountain occasionally came to Mohammed. As the years of protest went by, however, New York's museum directors became increasingly intolerant of artists speaking up and out. There was always an initial attempt to appear reasonable, accessible, ready for dialogue. But the discussions either broke down rapidly or were prolonged endlessly and futilely. The fault lay not only with the rhetorical expectations of the protesters but also with institutional arrogance. Artists were assumed to be grateful for favors dispensed, and rewards for courage and articulate dissent were few and far between.

The AWC was first set into motion, so to speak, by kinetic artists from abroad who were more politically savvy than most American artists at the time: Takis (Vassilakis), Wen-Ying Tsai from China, Len Lye from New Zealand, Hans Haacke from West Germany, and Farman from Iran. A number of minimal, conceptual, and Fluxus-related artists, along with politicized local mavericks, soon joined the anarchic hierarchy. There was no membership per se, because anyone who came to a meeting was considered a member, although several factions were always vying for leadership. All kinds of artists passed through AWC meetings, some merely as sympathetic or cynical observers, others as regular participants, among them



John B. Hightower, director of the Museum of Modern Art, at an Art Workers' Coalition meeting at Museum: A Project of Living Artists on Broadway. Copyright Jan van Raay.

Rudolf Baranik, Leon Golub, Tom Lloyd, Nancy Spero, Brenda Miller, Faith Ringgold, Alex Gross, Frazier Dougherty, and Irving Petlin. I was one of the few critics involved. We claimed to speak for all artists, representing by default those who did not speak for themselves. Some “constitutional articles” that were never formally adopted stated that the AWC was “a collective work of art whose character will only reflect the interests of those who are doing the work at any given time.” People took responsibilities but there were no elected officers. A different person ran each meeting, and voting was rare or irrelevant. No one had veto power over any of the autonomous committees, although heated general discussions were held on every issue. All of this made it very hard for the museums’ formal structures to deal with us.

In a press release on March 7, 1969, Bates Lowry, soon to be ex-director of MoMA, announced that “the whole field of the relations between museums and artists needs to be re-examined,” claiming that MoMA’s concern with these issues

had merely been “heightened by our recent discussions with a small group of artists who were interested in discovering the Museum’s attitude toward a series of questions, some of which were identical with those already under discussion at the Museum.” This seemed yet another attempt to co-opt the AWC’s initiatives and to herd us into an establishment corral. But herding cats isn’t easy. Lowry’s “Special Committee” of artists, by invitation only, was to consist of more illustrious names and presumably manipulable personae than the AWC would offer. Sometimes this backfired. Robert Rauschenberg, when invited to one “special” meeting, supported AWC positions. Even the most mildly progressive successful artists probably agreed that there could be some improvement in any museum’s general attitude toward and respect for artists and their works. But older artists often found the methods of the 1960s distasteful, and many remained in the shelter of the prevailing notion of “quality,” which included them in the pantheon. The AWC constantly reiterated the fact that museums wouldn’t exist without the artworkers’ artwork, and certainly some of these outsiders hoped that a revision of the criteria would open the institutions to their own work. (This in fact came about, especially in regard to conceptual art, the result either of artists organizing or of changing values.)

On April 10, 1969, a huge “open hearing” was organized at the School of Visual Arts after MoMA rejected the opportunity to host the event.⁷ The proceedings were polemical and erratic, passionate and performative (Richard Artschwager, for example, used his two minutes to set off firecrackers). It was covered, albeit condescendingly, by both Grace Glueck and Hilton Kramer in the *New York Times*. Carl Andre expressed the idealistic tenor when he said the AWC’s proposals were not radical enough: “The solution to the artist’s problems is not getting rid of the turnstiles at the Museum of Modern Art, but in getting rid of the art world. This artists can do by trusting one another and forming a true community of artists.” Hans Haacke noted that MoMA had gone back on its 1947 agreement to get rid of the older work in its collections and concentrate on contemporary art. I said I saw the open hearing as a way to “get people thinking about change instead of continuing the personal griping and backbiting that always goes on; to crystallize and analyze the broad dissatisfaction and see where constructive energy can be directed” for “increased civil rights for artists in general.”

Even Kramer, having sat through the open hearing, proclaimed that one issue proposed (“albeit incoherently, and with that mixture of naivete, violent rhetoric, and irrationality we have more or less come to expect from such protests”) deserved consideration: the plea to liberate art from the “heavy reliance on big money and false prestige . . . the entanglements of bureaucracy, commerce, and vested critical interests—a plea to rescue the artistic vocation from the squalid politics of careerism, commercialism, and cultural mandarinism.”⁸

One AWC proposal to remedy this situation was that “artists should deal per-

son to person with their customers," selling from their studios or from "decentralized Living Art Centers run by artists. . . . Prices would be kept at reasonable levels to encourage all kinds of people to buy art and to maintain a sense of reality as to the nature of their product." Reforms to museums, galleries, and legal and economic structures followed. An evolving list of demands to the establishment was publicized in various forms until the AWC expired in 1971. Although the open hearing often sounded like a call to abandon and even destroy the mausoleums of art, artists' ambivalence was reflected a week later, when an AWC group wrote a formal letter to Mayor John Lindsay adamantly opposing budget cuts affecting the city's museums.

The AWC soon veered from individual artists' rights to embrace the artist's right to speak out on broader political issues, especially the war in Vietnam. We marched (and were jailed) in Washington, and we wrote letters, leaflets, and statements on innumerable political issues. But the museums, especially MoMA, remained our preferred stages. They were familiar, and vulnerable to bad publicity. Among many other attention-grabbing activities was a blood-and-corpses action in the lobbies of MoMA and the Whitney staged by the Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG) to call attention to the war.⁹ GAAG was begun in October 1969 by Jon Hendricks and the Belgian (Flemish) iconoclast Jean Toche, with the later addition of Poppy Johnson and occasional participation of Silvianna. GAAG was both independent and part of the AWC Action Committee, the most radical and inventive of the various committees, each of which had very different characters, players, and agendas. Small groups were always writing position papers and leaflets under the AWC name, and they were often contradictory.¹⁰

Much of AWC's energy was spent negotiating with the museums. For several months, MoMA kept us hopping by suggesting meetings and discussions until we realized their strategy was just that. They were paid to talk to us, while we were trying to juggle careers, families, wage earning, and politics and did not have time for their lengthy, formal, irrelevant, and usually fruitless dialogues. We wanted them to put artists on the board of trustees, to speak out on the war and on racism, and to distribute our "And Babies?" antiwar poster. (The staff association had actually agreed to do this, until William Paley, president of the board of trustees, stepped in and scotched the plans.) We also wanted MoMA to abandon admission fees; Joseph Kosuth designed a MoMA annual pass with "Art Worker" or "A.W.C." rubber-stamped across it, implying that everyone (and especially artists) had the right to free admission to all museums.¹¹ On October 15, 1969, the date of the first and by far the most successful moratorium to end the war, the AWC did get MoMA, the Whitney, the Jewish Museum, and a large number of galleries to close for the day. Miraculously, the Metropolitan postponed a major opening that night, though it stayed open through the day and for its trouble was picketed, along with the Guggenheim.

A. WITH REGARD TO ART MUSEUMS IN GENERAL THE ART WORKERS' COALITION MAKES THE FOLLOWING DEMANDS:

1. The Board of Trustees of all museums should be made up of one-third museum staff, one-third patrons and one-third artists, if it is to continue to act as the policy-making body of the museum. All means should be explored in the interest of a more open-minded and democratic museum. Artworks are a cultural heritage that belong to the people. No minority has the right to control them; therefore, a board of trustees chosen on a financial basis must be eliminated.
2. Admission to all museums should be free at all times and they should be open evenings to accommodate working people.
3. All museums should decentralize to the extent that their activities and services enter Black, Puerto Rican and all other communities. They should support events with which these communities can identify and that they control. They should convert existing structures all over the city into relatively cheap, flexible branch-museums or cultural centers that could not carry the stigma of catering only to the wealthier sections of society.
4. A section of all museums under the direction of Black and Puerto Rican artists should be devoted to showing the accomplishments of Black and Puerto Rican artists, particularly in those cities where these (or other) minorities are well represented.
5. Museums should encourage female artists to overcome centuries of damage done to the image of the female as an artist by establishing equal representation of the sexes in exhibitions and museum purchases and on selection committees.
6. At least one museum in each city should maintain an up-to-date registry of all artists in their area, that is available to the public.
7. Museum staffs should take positions publicly and use their political influence in matters concerning the welfare of artists, such as rent control for artists' housing, legislation for artists' rights and whatever else may apply specifically to artists in their area. In particular, museums, as central institutions, should be aroused by the crisis threatening man's survival and should make their own demands to the government that ecological problems be put on a par with war and space efforts.
8. Exhibition programs should give special attention to works by artists not represented by a commercial gallery. Museums should also sponsor the production and exhibition of such works outside their own premises.

9. Artists should retain a disposition over the destiny of their work, whether or not it is owned by them, to ensure that it cannot be altered, destroyed, or exhibited without their consent.

B. UNTIL SUCH TIME AS A MINIMUM INCOME IS GUARANTEED FOR ALL PEOPLE, THE ECONOMIC POSITION OF ARTISTS SHOULD BE IMPROVED IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

1. Rental fees should be paid to artists or their heirs for all work exhibited where admissions are charged, whether or not the work is owned by the artist.
2. A percentage of the profit realized on the resale of an artist's work should revert to the artist or his heirs.
3. A trust fund should be set up from a tax levied on the sales of the work of dead artists. This fund would provide stipends, health insurance, help for artists' dependents and other social benefits.

Art Workers' Coalition demands, March 1970 version. From Lucy R. Lippard, "The Art Workers' Coalition: Not a History," *Studio International* 180, no. 927 (November 1970).

Other demands were that MoMA mount Black and Puerto Rican exhibitions and create a new wing for a Martin Luther King Jr. Study Center.¹² African American and Latino artists were on the march and allied with the AWC. They were also targeting the Whitney, which in 1968 mounted the exhibition *The 1930s: Painting and Sculpture in America*, which included not one Black artist—a slap in the face to the Black community and a total erasure of the Harlem Renaissance. Black artists organized and picketed the Whitney, which then announced a Black art show, *Contemporary Black Artists in America*, to be curated by Robert Doty, a white man. That show too, which omitted many important artists, especially women, was publicly protested, with white artworkers lending considerable support. Finally, after all these institutional rebuffs, two African American women artists, Betye Saar and Barbara Chase-Riboud, were included in the 1970 Whitney Annual, thanks to militant women's protests. This was the first time Black women had been shown in this "Museum of American Art."

The Rockefeller presence as founders and trustees of MoMA and in other New York cultural institutions was a constant thorn in the AWC's flesh.¹³ When MoMA showed the Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller Collection in 1971, the AWC invited people to the preview with a flyer that read in part "We invite you to the end of a political campaign at the Museum of Modern Art"; Nelson Rockefeller had



THE PRESIDENT AND TRUSTEES OF
THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
REQUEST THE PLEASURE OF YOUR COMPANY
AT A SPECIAL PREVIEW OF
THE EXHIBITION
TWENTIETH-CENTURY ART FROM THE
NELSON ALDRICH ROCKEFELLER
COLLECTION

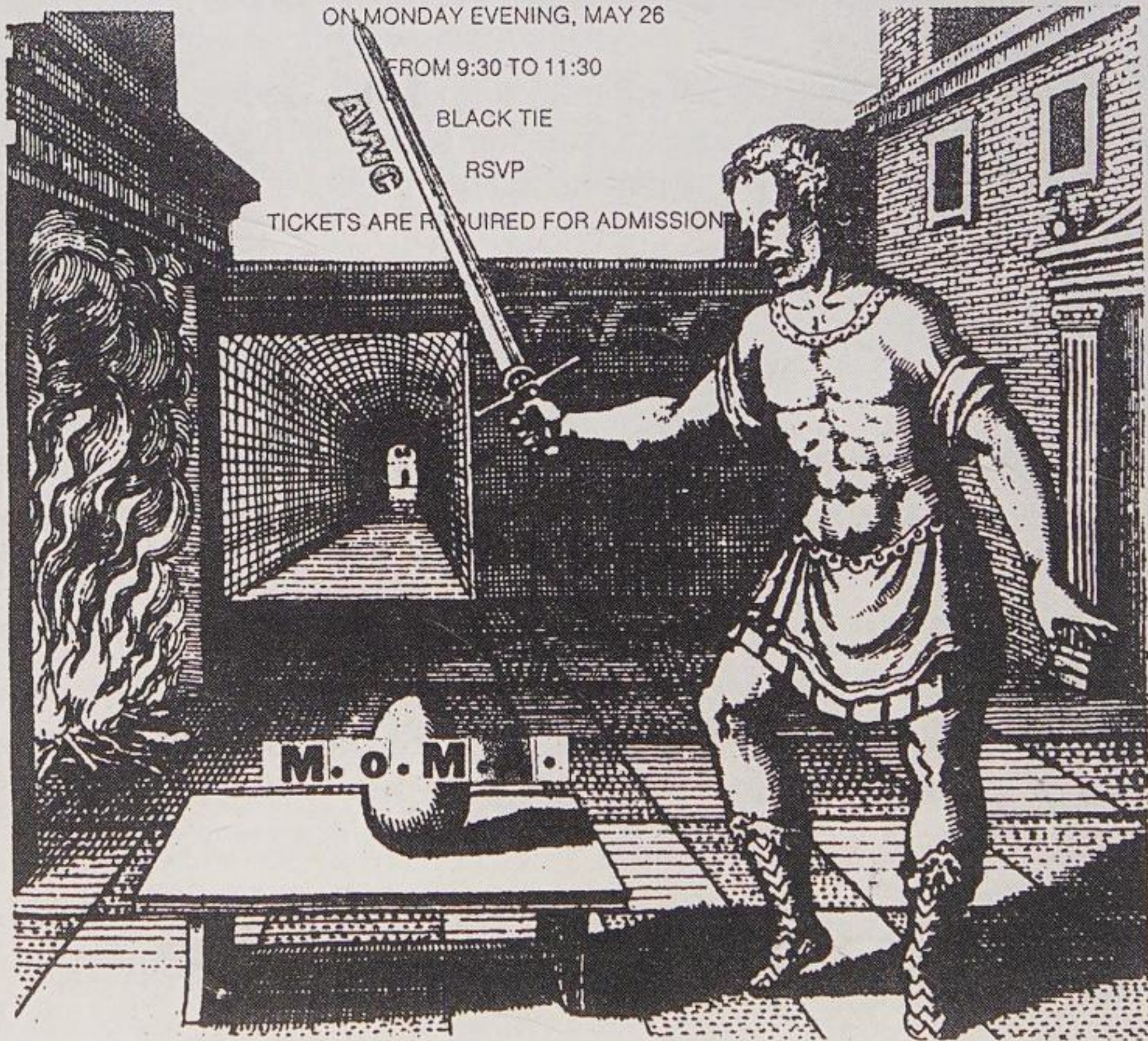
ON MONDAY EVENING, MAY 26

FROM 9:30 TO 11:30

BLACK TIE

RSVP

TICKETS ARE REQUIRED FOR ADMISSION



WE INVITE YOU TO THE END OF A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART.
— Art Workers' Coalition

Art Workers' Coalition flyer, 1971.

just become the Republican governor of New York. He was also picketed for his part in suppressing the Attica prison rebellion in September 1971 and for signing extradition papers for Angela Davis.¹⁴ On November 10, 1969, GAAG demanded the resignation of all Rockefeller from MoMA's board. In 1976 the Whitney's bi-

centennial offering of the John D. Rockefeller Collection set off more national artist organizing. The issue of “ownership” of the institutions and the often unsavory histories of the families in power have never gone away. Twenty years later activist artist Greg Sholette made a work titled *Culture and Barbarism* that juxtaposed the site of the Rockefeller-dictated Ludlow Massacre (in Colorado in 1914) and the floor plan of the Museum of Modern Art.

The Decentralization Committee of the AWC had an even more ambitious plan to survey a diverse array of neighborhoods (this was actually carried out in Jamaica, Queens), find out what various communities wanted in the way of cultural centers, somehow establish these centers, and then petition museums on their behalf to lend or donate relevant minor items from their collections, such as pre-Columbian artifacts to the Spanish Harlem Cultural Center and African art to Jamaica. The only funder who showed any interest in this project was the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation, which of course was an unacceptable co-optation. The likelihood of museums handing over even their least valuable holdings to funky public spaces was in any case pretty far-fetched. Nevertheless, this proposal predicted artists’ later interest in the analysis and manipulation of museum collections. The challenging idea of recontextualizing some of the colonial spoils in artist/community-run facilities remains to be tried.

The role of museums has changed drastically during the past three decades. Contemporary and modern art museums are more popular, more in step with current academic and aesthetic fashions, and more responsive to (some would say harnessed to) the art market. In the late 1950s and well into the 1960s, museums were still perceived by most as repositories for rare and expensive objects and/or “great art” (with some acknowledgment of shifting tastes). Museum audiences were students, the intelligentsia, and the upper classes. Their educational function was a subtext to connoisseurship and accumulation. Auxiliary bookshops had not yet been replaced by the expansive retail outlets we know now. The trustees were charged with policy and with giving and raising money, and no one questioned conflicts of interest and the propriety of trustees’ corporate and political allegiances. It was understood that these hallowed halls, with their intimidating architecture, hushed ambience, and class-coded accoutrements, were intended for those who deserved them. Artists themselves were marginal figures in the museum hierarchy, feted and honored when their objects passed the tests (they might be dead or doddering by that time), but never consulted about how their works were presented or interpreted.

In the 1960s, when a few artists became pop stars and many lined up for their Warholian fifteen minutes in the spotlight, not much changed fundamentally about the artist-museum relationship until the AWC brazenly proposed that artists should have some control over their own production and its distribution. (Only

later was much attention paid to the ways artistic content itself was manipulated, but a demonstration by AWC/GAAG in 1970 at MoMA in front of Picasso's *Guernica*—then labeled so unspecifically that no one would have known it was an antifascist protest painted by a member of the Communist Party—was an important precedent for later theory.) The AWC demanded that artists should sit on all New York City museum boards of trustees and be given a voice in all aspects of museum policy. MoMA paid a certain amount of lip service to this proposal with its “special committee” idea, but totally rejected the AWC's insistence that the artists be selected by a democratic system: every working artist in the city would receive a postcard on which to write the names of three artists to represent them in the halls of aesthetic power. These votes would be totaled and those most often nominated would be doled out to the various city art museums.

All hell broke loose in May 1970 when the Kent State and Jackson State student murders by the National Guard coincided with news of the United States's illegal invasion of Cambodia. Again, museums were the immediate targets. Research on the Metropolitan had revealed that its board of trustees was heavily drawn from the military industrial complex. New York Art Strike was formed as a separate entity on the model of the Art Workers' Coalition, mobilizing a much larger portion of the art world—not just the radical fringes but many “big names” as well. The idea was for artworkers to close down all New York's museums for a one-day moratorium. Probably because he had just closed his one-man show at the Whitney three weeks early to encourage a shift from “art making and viewing to unified action within the art community against the intensifying conditions of repression, war, and racism in this country,”¹⁵ Robert Morris was elected the leader of Art Strike at a mass meeting at New York University's Loeb Student Center on May 18 (“Robert Morris Prince of Peace” proclaimed sarcastic stickers around SoHo). When women demanded a share of the power, Poppy Johnson—smart, charismatic, beautiful, and fearless at age nineteen—was elected cochair. On May 22, by massing huge numbers on the front steps of the Metropolitan for a full day until 10 P.M., Art Strike blockaded the museum, after rejecting the administration's proposal to close for one hour.¹⁶ In June, Art Strike confronted Nelson Rockefeller when he spoke to the annual meeting of the American Association of Museums. Art Strike temporarily absorbed the AWC, but by the end of the summer it had fallen prey to the kind of anarchy familiar to the AWC and was soon defunct.

One other major event of this chaotic period was an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, organized by the young African American staff curator Kynaston McShine. *Information*, which opened July 2, 1970, was intended as a lively young international show about new communications technology, but given events of the Vietnam war it became (with the curator's blessings) a powerful political statement. Several artists contributed pieces directly relating to the war. Haacke created

Studio International

Vol. 180 No. 927 Journal of modern art Book Supplement 17/6 \$2.50



Studio International cover, 1970; photograph by Jan van Raay of (left to right) Jon Hendricks, Tom Lloyd, and Jean Toche. A protest was staged by members of GAAG and AWC during which they held copies of the *And Babies?* poster in front of Picasso's *Guernica* in order to recontextualize the painting on display at the Museum of Modern Art. The AWC asked art magazines to use this image on their covers; *Studio International* was the only one that did.

a visitors' poll and ballot box on the question, "Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?" My own catalog text, a kind of game of chance—to my surprise—was listed as an artwork. One of its sections directed that the name of an artist in the exhibition be matched with that of a trustee of

MoMA whose last name began with the same letter; each trustee was “to spend at least eight hours talking to that artist about art, artists’ rights, the relationship of the museum to society at large.”¹⁷

Beneath the antiwar activism remained a quasi-Marxist goal of artists’ control of the means of production *and* the means of display, though art had been relegated by Marxists to the mere “superstructure.” We often complained that the museums didn’t seem to realize that without the art—made, after all, by artists—they would be out of business: true at heart but pragmatically false. Several times the notion of artists striking the art world came up and flopped back down. Few artists were willing to leave their galleries (if they were lucky enough to have one) and alienate the museums by refusing to show. In the event of a strike, scab lines would have wound around the block. (The same went for critics: when we tried to start a critics’ union around the same time, only freelancers were willing to risk their careers for decent pay.) Tithing every artist in the city in order to set up artist-run institutions and kick the dependency on the establishment museums was also a failure. One recently wealthy painter responded, “What, and let everyone know how much I make?”

It was never clear how many artworkers actually supported the AWC. The meetings and demonstrations were often huge—perhaps more a sign of the times than of deep commitment.¹⁸ But the general goal of raising consciousness about any number of issues resounded across the aesthetic and generational spectrum. Occasional support was received from older “progressives.” (Ad Reinhardt had died in 1967, depriving us of a witty devil’s advocate.) Barnett Newman contributed to the open hearing but later turned coat, calling us “watchdogs” when we took on MoMA’s *New American Painting and Sculpture: The First Generation*. On behalf of that first generation (who must have wondered, “who asked you?”), we accused the museum of blackmail. While the exhibition was ostensibly historical, the decision to draw it from the MoMA collections rather than loans pressured artists wishing to be historicized to donate major works that the museum had not cared to acquire earlier, “when they were relatively undesirable and inexpensive,” as we noted in an AWC flyer: “As the present exhibition was organized, the Museum purchased one work by those living artists not previously in the collection, but considered necessary to the show. Donations were also solicited from the estates of dead artists. The burden of the exhibition was left, therefore, on those living artists whose work was already represented, often unsatisfactorily, in the Museum’s collections.” (This of course raised Takis’s issue of artists’ control over their sold and exhibited work as well as the use of art as cultural capital outside the artists’ reach.) “In the future other artists will be confronted by similar abuses,” we concluded, declaring ourselves “an artist’s group concerned with the rights and morality of artists, as a preventative as well as a corrective measure.”

After three years of intense activity, the AWC wound down in 1971, along

with the Vietnam war and the fragmentation of 1960s rebellion. There were the usual splinters and wounds, but the art movement was a stepchild of the larger Movement, which had already crashed. The AWC's last major issue closed the circle, as it too involved museums and artists' rights. Hans Haacke, an articulate founding member of AWC, was scheduled for a one-man show at the Guggenheim, curated in-house by Edward Fry. Among Haacke's "systems" pieces was a straightforward photo-text work that explored the ownership of a number of Lower East Side tenement buildings notorious for the illegal mistreatment of tenants. His information was culled from public records, but the Guggenheim identified with the absentee landlords and labeled the work libelous. In the ensuing fracas Haacke's show was canceled six weeks before the opening and Fry was fired. The AWC was mobilized. Yvonne Rainer led a conga line up and down the museum's spiral while we chanted "No More Censorshi-ip! No More Censorshi-ip!" More than one hundred artists signed a statement declaring they would not show at the Guggenheim until the advocates of censorship were gone. In 1974 Haacke completed another systems piece, *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Board of Trustees*, on the corporate affiliations of the Guggenheim's trustees.

An additional factor in the AWC's demise was the belated arrival of the women's liberation movement in the art world. Two independent women artists' groups emerged from the coalition. By the end of 1970 they were siphoning off a major source of energy from the organization. WAR (Women Artists in Revolution), led by Jackie Skiles, Nancy Spero, Sarah Saporta, Muriel Castanis, and Doloris Holmes, among others, was the first women's group to get mad at the AWC's mostly male leadership. It was a scary vanguard for those of us who hadn't yet gotten the feminist message. While WAR acted as artists, it also took on issues affecting women beyond the art world, such as reproductive rights. Probably, alas, because most of the individuals involved were too young or too unknown to be recognizable, WAR's immediate impact on the art world was minimal, although its long-term breakthrough was immensely important. In the fall of 1970 Poppy Johnson, Brenda Miller, Faith Ringgold, and I—also AWC "members"—founded another women artists' group, the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee.¹⁹ The Whitney Annual (later to become biennial) was the obvious target, since it claimed to represent all contemporary American art but had included only 4.5 percent women in the previous year's painting annual. Although we collaborated with WAR and WSABAL (Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation, led by Ringgold and her daughters, Barbara and Michele Wallace), we felt a new entity was necessary to reengage the museums and art world establishment. We launched a multifaceted campaign for "50% Women" that succeeded in raising the number of women in that year's Annual (devoted to sculpture) to 22 percent—an improvement of some 400 percent.



Sit-in by Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee at the Whitney Annual, 1970. Museum of Modern Art library. Photograph by Amy Stromsten.

In the process, we began the first artists' slide registry as a reference pool for museums so they could no longer claim there were "no women artists" making conceptual art, sculpture, lightworks, and so forth, and would no longer depend solely on galleries that excluded women. The registry idea caught on and is still used across the country in various contexts as a way for unaffiliated artists to make their work visible to curators and critics. The first women's alternative space and workshop center in New York, the Women's Interart Center, began to emerge from WAR and acquired a building on far West Fifty-second Street in July 1971. At the same time I organized *Twenty Six Contemporary Women Artists*, the first women's museum exhibition to come out of this wave of feminism, at a New York outlier—the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Ridgefield, Connecticut.²⁰ In the spring of 1971, after visiting that show, Judy Chicago, Miriam Shapiro, and I came up with the idea of WEB (West East Bag), a bicoastal national organizing tool and newsletter that networked with women artists nationally, encouraging the creation of slide registries and protests against institutions in other cities. Soon afterward, women's co-op galleries began to emerge nationwide on the model of A.I.R. in New York, followed in 1973 by SoHo 20. (The co-op gallery had been revived by 55 Mercer Street on an AWC impetus and by the historical model of the Tenth Street galleries of the late 1950s.) When it became clear that it would be a long time before museums took women artists seriously, other organizations, exhibitions, magazines, and alternative spaces sprang up, such as Women in the

Arts, the *Feminist Art Journal*, and *Women Artists' News*. Over the years, into the 1980s, we were again in front of the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim, in demonstrations organized by Women in the Arts to call attention to the exclusion of women from various major exhibitions claiming to represent the “major” art of the times.

Although women artists' groups continued to hound museums for higher representation during the 1980s, a backlash against feminism constricted activism. In the 1990s women artists pretty much gave up on museums except for the Guerrilla Girls, who since 1985 have kept pounding on the statistical doors, keeping the public informed about women's art world representation and holding the museums accountable for the glass ceiling, which limits women's museum representation to around 21 percent of art exhibited, a figure unchanged to this day, as far as I know. Thanks to their masked anonymity, the Guerilla Girls have continued to be both effective and free of the sour grapes syndrome. In the early 1990s the Women's Action Coalition (WAC) had a brief but extraordinary success in reviving feminist activism nationwide before falling prey to internal mayhem; artists were among its founders and leaders. Yet the only museum protest I can recall during the past decade was in 1992, when the downtown Guggenheim Museum opened to much fanfare . . . and a planned all-male show from its collection. Rumbles of protest reached the directors, and they hastily added Louise Bourgeois to the rolls. Carl Andre (former husband of Ana Mendieta, who had been acquitted of her murder) was in the exhibition, and WAC misguidedly, in my opinion, appeared en masse with signs demanding “¿Dónde Está Ana Mendieta?” This action unnecessarily personalized the general issues that would have had more impact left unfettered—such as the outrageous fact that after twenty-five years of feminist consciousness, there was still only one woman artist in the Guggenheim's collection considered sufficiently old hat and blue chip for this opening show. And Mendieta would have preferred posters of her work to posters about her death.

Art (and artist) alone, wholly severed from the mainstream's systems, is almost impotent unless an independent community and audience can be forged (as they were, briefly, on Tenth Street, before the New York School went big time). Without the paraphernalia of the market surrounding it, the experience of art is dulled, if for no other reason than the lack of context, information, and dialogue. Museums are crucial to this process. The strategies artists chose to contest the museums' dominance over their art in the 1960s and 1970s were attempts to replicate the primary functions of the museums themselves: access, publicity, distribution, display, and interpretation (including publications).

Public access to cultural institutions became an issue when museums began to charge admission. Free admission was one of the AWC's demands; for one demonstration, we advertised a “free day at the Modern.” Scott Burton did a performance

piece that consisted of handing out dimes as the elite entered for an opening, an ironic emulation of John D. Rockefeller's habit of distributing dimes to workers while making millions of dollars off them. The Metropolitan Museum, partially funded by the city, was another target. It initiated a voluntary "pay what you wish" admission, accompanied by signs suggesting an amount that was hefty for the times. (The "wish" to pay *nothing* cut no ice.) I recall spending at least one Sunday next to the Met's admission booth exhorting people to give only a penny, because art should be free. One Puerto Rican family in their Sunday best turned back because they were ashamed to pay a penny and didn't have the suggested price.

Early in January 1971, when the Met's admissions were high because of the holidays, the trustees closed the whole French wing on the one weekly night the museum was open to the public in order to hold a dinner party for the Acquisitions Committee (read collectors). The Action Committee of the AWC staged a dramatic raid, sneaking around Christmas trees and evading several furious guards. We burst in flashing (mostly filmless) cameras to make the trustees and their dinner guests feel exposed, demanding to know where the money had come from for their wining and dining. One artist independently collected cockroaches in a jar and emptied them on the table to "keep Harlem on their mind." A pregnant photographer who had stuffed her film in her underwear was chased to the ladies' room, where she gave the film to another woman who successfully smuggled it out. An alarm sounded through the entire museum and its main doors were closed, trapping visitors inside. We were herded into an office to wait for the police, who never came. Finally we just got up and left. During the hullabaloo an informer was unmasked when the secretary of the museum turned to him and snarled, "You never told me this was going to happen!"²¹

Publicity is best garnered by inventive demonstrations and exhibitions that will attract the press, who often may be ignorant of the issues or distracted from the reason and meaning of what's going on. The media also tend to interview and quote better-known art figures, which can lead to jealousy within the democratic ranks.

Distribution is the toughest task, as testified by the fact that the history I am telling here is already mostly forgotten. Some conceptual artists, especially those involved with Seth Siegelaub's nonexistent gallery, bypassed museums by publishing catalogs that were also the art, or by holding shows that existed only in the catalogs.²² Sometimes artists invited to museum shows would use the interior forum to direct viewers to works executed on the exterior, around the city.²³ In the early 1990s, Felix Gonzalez-Torres turned the distribution process inside out when he exhibited in museums his minimal and ambiguous piles of printed paper that viewers could take home free, sheet by sheet.

A multileveled outside-inside strategy was premiered by the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee at the opening of the Whitney Annual in 1970. First we anony-



Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (We Don't Remember)*, 1991. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Photograph by Peter Muscato.

mously sent out a false press release on Whitney letterhead, announcing that the show would include 50 percent women and 50 percent “nonwhite” artists. That caused a certain amount of confusion. (A lawyer confidant had assured us that a hoax was only a misdemeanor, but he failed to mention that inventing quotes and attributing them to the director were libelous; the FBI made feeble attempts to get us to admit our guilt.) Then we faked invitations to the opening so we could fill it with our supporters. The Whitney got wind of this and separated us out by analyzing the ink of the invitations with an ultraviolet machine at the door (hardly necessary, since we had to use cheaper paper). We responded by switching invitations with well-known art world types who were either amused or supportive. A brief sit-in was staged inside the galleries. But the most inventive ploy was stationing a small generator in the street (with an electric line to a bewildered nearby gallery) to run a slide projector displaying enlarged images of women’s art and demands for “50% Women” on the Whitney’s facade as people entered the opening.

Unfortunately it began to rain after only a half-hour, and we were afraid of getting electrocuted. But the images battering at the outside walls of the museum in resistance to their absence on the inside walls was a powerful strategy. The Whitney's architecture, with its moated exterior and narrow entrance bridge, provided another strong metaphor and also made it easy to corner all would-be visitors on our weekly Saturday picket lines for the Annual's duration.

Display and *interpretation* are a museum's strong points. These can be accomplished only with limited resonance in artist-run alternative spaces, which can mount shows but lack the resources for elaborate catalogs; as a result, they depend on indifferent mainstream reviewers for publicity and interpretation. During the second half of the 1970s, artists' strategies in regard to museums became more sophisticated, more pointed, but less immediately effective. As protest becomes more intellectual, words and publications gain importance and the audience may be smaller but more powerful. The most inventive action-by-publication took place in the late 1970s under the auspices of a collective within another artists' group, Artists Meeting for Cultural Change (AMCC), begun in 1975 to respond to the Whitney Museum's impolitic decision to represent the American bicentennial with a traveling exhibition from San Francisco, *Three Centuries of American Art from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III*. (Later, acknowledging perhaps that the Rockefeller name was a less than patriotic symbol of tyranny and robber baronism, the collection attribution was dropped, but not the biases inherent in the collection.) By January 1976 the museum was being picketed and AMCC called for a boycott. "AMCC wasn't merely demanding a 'larger slice of the pie,'" said the magazine *Red Herring*. "It was demanding an end to exhibitions which prolong the standards of ruling class history by excluding all but one woman and one black; an end to museums and other cultural institutions which provide moral and aesthetic justification for that ruling class history; an end to the connections between all large cultural institutions and surplus value as a form of power and consciousness; an end to large cultural institutions as the creators and purveyors of an Official Culture which tries to obscure the realities of class antagonisms." The writer concluded that "artists have to achieve at least a minimum degree of organization to carry out a boycott," and that "the boycott itself dialectically advances that organization. We should emphasize this now."²⁴

Museum catalogs are powerful reminders to artists and markets across the country that New York is still the center, that these are the hot new artists or the reheated old ones, and you can see them in the flesh in New York museums. *An anti-catalog* ran against the grain of conventional wisdom about what was relevant about works of art. It was part of a tendency in the 1970s to revise art history and reassess art's roles in society. If *an anti-catalog* had a limited audience, it nonetheless raised questions not previously considered theoretically, questions about how museum shows were constructed, questions that were to be more fully discussed by

ARTISTS UNITE!

PROTEST

Rockefeller's Bicentennial Exhibition:
"Three Centuries of American Art"

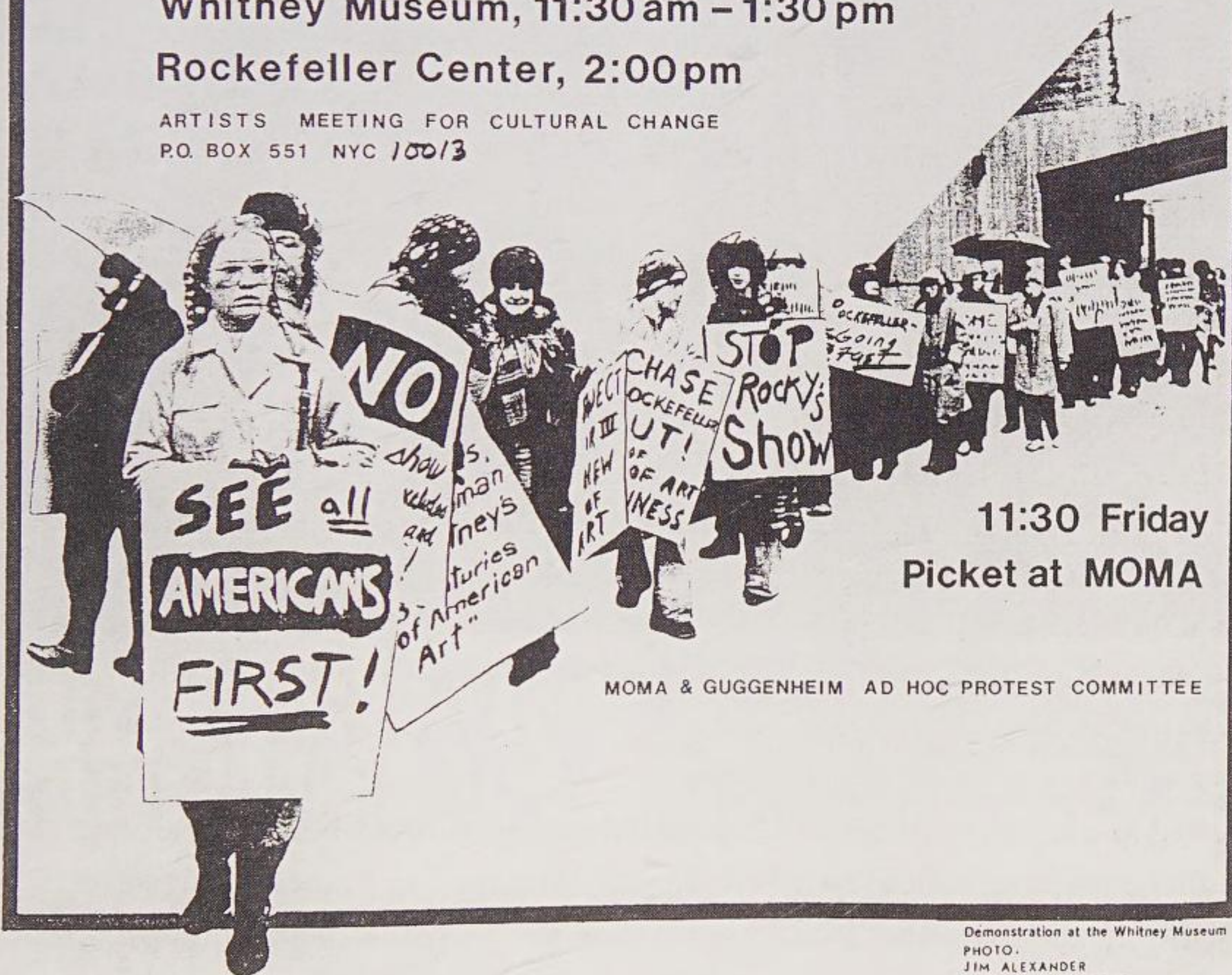
STOP RACISM & SEXISM

JOIN THE PICKET: Thursday, Feb. 26th

Whitney Museum, 11:30 am - 1:30 pm

Rockefeller Center, 2:00pm

ARTISTS MEETING FOR CULTURAL CHANGE
P.O. BOX 551 NYC 10013



11:30 Friday
Picket at MOMA

MOMA & GUGGENHEIM AD HOC PROTEST COMMITTEE

Demonstration at the Whitney Museum
PHOTO:
JIM ALEXANDER
MARY ELLEN ANDREWS
PHOTO MONTAGE:
ART WORKERS NEWS

Artists Unite! flyer, 1976.

art historians Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach.²⁵ *An anti-catalog* made unprecedented connections to the "real world" in which the Rockefeller collection had been formed and in which it was now on display, all spelled out in ways that may seem obvious today precisely because *an anti-catalog* was so successful at informing us of these issues. Artists' publications were and still are important not only for their content and educational information but also for the networking they generate. At a time when little politics appeared in art magazines (and if it did, it was



Artists picketing the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *Drawing Now: 1955-1975*, 1976. Photograph by Mary Beth Edelson.

treated as a separate category), these portable objects could be mailed around the country, sparking actions in other contexts (like the San Francisco Artworkers' Coalition, another group formed in reaction to the Rockefeller exhibition).²⁶

Artists were in the streets a lot during the first half of the 1980s, given Reagan's social mayhem and the wars in Central America, but museums were no longer their central target. Politicized artists had realized that the stranglehold the institutions held on artists' careers could be bypassed by those who didn't give a damn or were willing to sacrifice something for their values. Political Art Documentation/Distribution (PADD)—a vigorous activist artists' group often ignored or forgotten by those chronicling the art of the period because of its straightforwardly left politics—published a magazine (first called *1st Issue* and then *Upfront*) and organized several public projects between 1980 and 1987. The first of these was the city-wide *Death and Taxes*: artists' works on issues related to tax money spent on

the military were displayed in unexpected venues all over the city, including public toilet stalls, telephone booths, and store windows. Knowing that the museum structure was not going to show any politically timely work and also knowing that activism is diluted when brought into the museum, in 1984 PADD created four temporary sidewalk "alternate spaces" on the Lower East Side as part of its "Not for Sale" project on gentrification and homelessness ("The Lower East Side Is Not for Sale"), incorporating other activities and two indoor exhibitions at El Bohio

1st ISSUE POLITICAL ART DOCUMENTATION /DISTRIBUTION

February 1981

PAD: Waking Up In NYC

PAD (Political Art Documentation/Distribution) is an artists' resource and networking organization coming out of and into New York City. *Our main goal is to provide artists with an organized relationship to society; one way we are doing this is by building a collection of documentation of international socially-concerned art.* **PAD** defines "social concern" in the broadest sense, as any work that deals with issues—ranging from sexism and racism to ecological damage or other forms of human oppression. We document all kinds of work from movement posters to the most personal of individual statements. Art comes from art as well as from life. Knowing this makes us want to learn more about the production, distribution and impact of socially-concerned art works in the context of our culture and society. Historically, politicized or social-change artists have been denied mainstream coverage and our interaction has been limited. We have to know what we are doing. In New York. In the US. In Canada and Latin America. In Europe. In Asia and Africa. **The development of an effective oppositional culture depends on communication.**

UN CERTAIN ART ANGLAIS!



A Certain English Art, (Postcard) Rasheed Araeen, 1979

PAD celebrated its first birthday with a Valentine's evening of entertainment and discussion around a slide show of political art (followed by dancing, but not in the streets—yet). We began in February 1980 as an amorphous group of artworkers dimly aware of a mutual need to organize around issues, but without much notion of how to do it. We met at Printed Matter once a month and agreed to start collecting documentation so we would have a physical core from which to reach out. For a while we looked at each other's work, discussed it, and thought about a social club and various possibilities for cultural activism. Then in late Spring we were offered a room in a former high school on the Lower East Side under the aegis of Seven Loaves—an umbrella group for community arts organizations. Suddenly we existed physically. We *had* to be in the world, and that led to the present structuring, still in process.

We have three kinds of meetings now: 1) The relatively flexible core or work group of 15-20 people gets together on three Sunday afternoons a month at the Seven Loaves space (when not too cold). Here we deal with: soliciting and handling of the archive materials; how to connect with other cultural organizations in NYC with similar purposes so there's no overlapping and duplication of work. (For instance, we are working with Cityarts Workshop, which has an impressive resource center on the community mural movement, and with Karin di Gia of Gallery 345, who has a collection of original political art.) We are also beginning to connect with and inform each other about the political events and struggles taking place in the city, understanding the ways these relate to national and international situations. Finally, we are thinking about collectively created issue-oriented exhibitions in public spaces, such as windows, subways, libraries, etc.

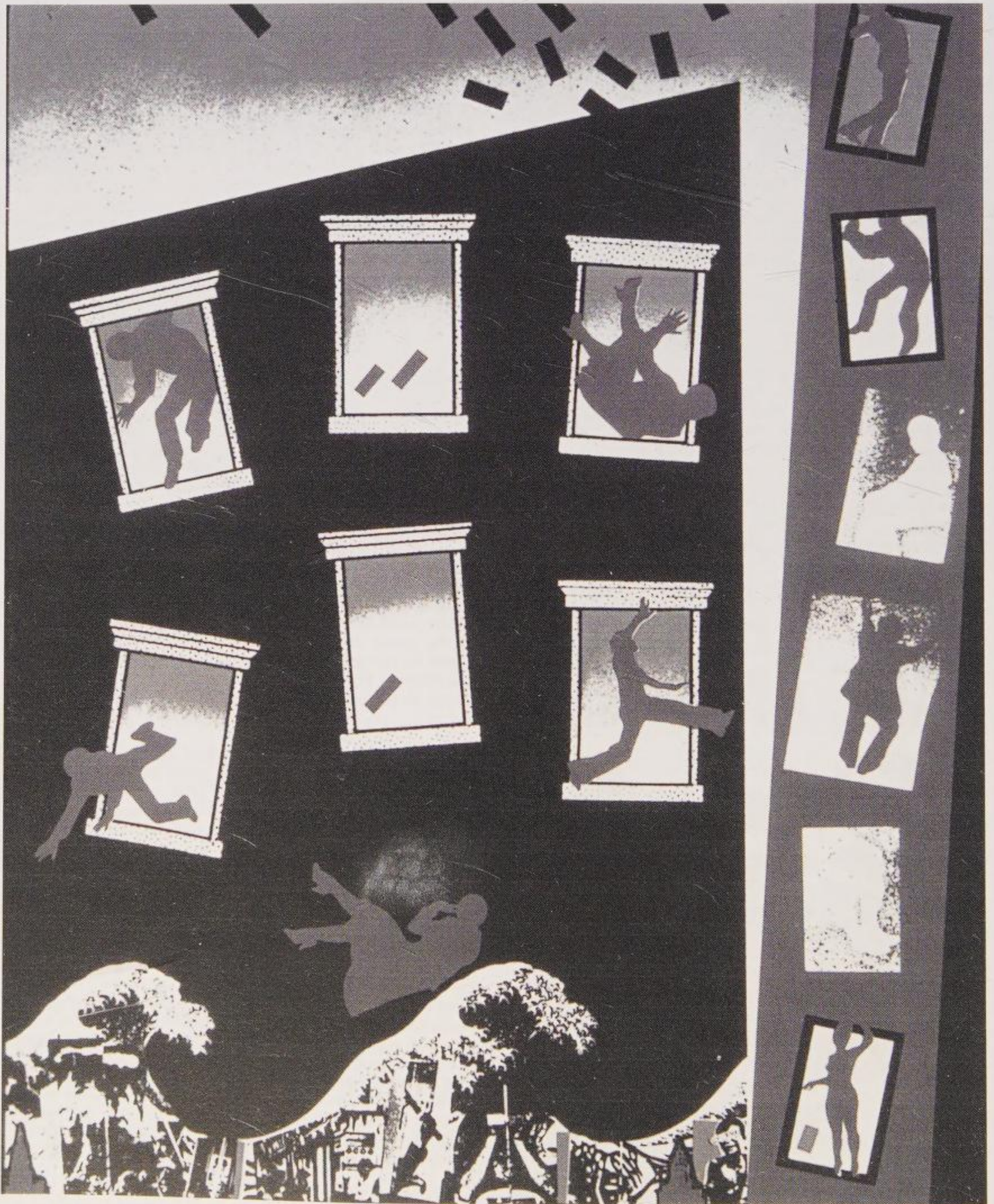
2) The open meetings with which we began. They take place on the second Sunday of every month at 8 PM at Printed Matter (7 Lispenard St., NYC 10013; 925-0325). Here reports are made from the work group and a brief visual or verbal presentation is given by a **PAD** member or guest as a sort of laboratory to stimulate discussion, education, consciousness raising and activism.

3) We are just beginning a series of public events centered around specific social issues seen in their historical perspectives, focusing on how they were opposed or supported by the socially concerned art of the time; for instance in May, a day on militarism in the "cold war" era, the Vietnam era and today, discussed by people from WRL (the War Resisters League), CARD (Committee Against Registration for the Draft) and artists who have done work with anti-militaristic content. We want to understand how the dialectic between oppositional art and society changes and takes different forms at different moments. These public afternoons will be publicized, and will lead up to an Autumn conference, at which we hope to bring together a wide coalition of cultural groups and artists. (For more information on events, see the "Calendar" section of **PAD**.)

PAD's theory is going to develop out of real experience instead of from the idealized and romanticized notion of a

and ABC No Rio. The works exhibited in these street “museums” were pasted to the walls of the Guggenheim Downtown (before there was a real one), Another Gallery (referring to the trendy East Village art scene, a prime instrument of gentrification), and the Leona Helmsley Gallery (on the wall of a former community center one notorious hotel queen owned at the time). Street openings were held, with wine served in stemmed plastic glasses, and passersby were welcomed and proselitized.

PADD began in 1979 as an archive of socially concerned art to combat the

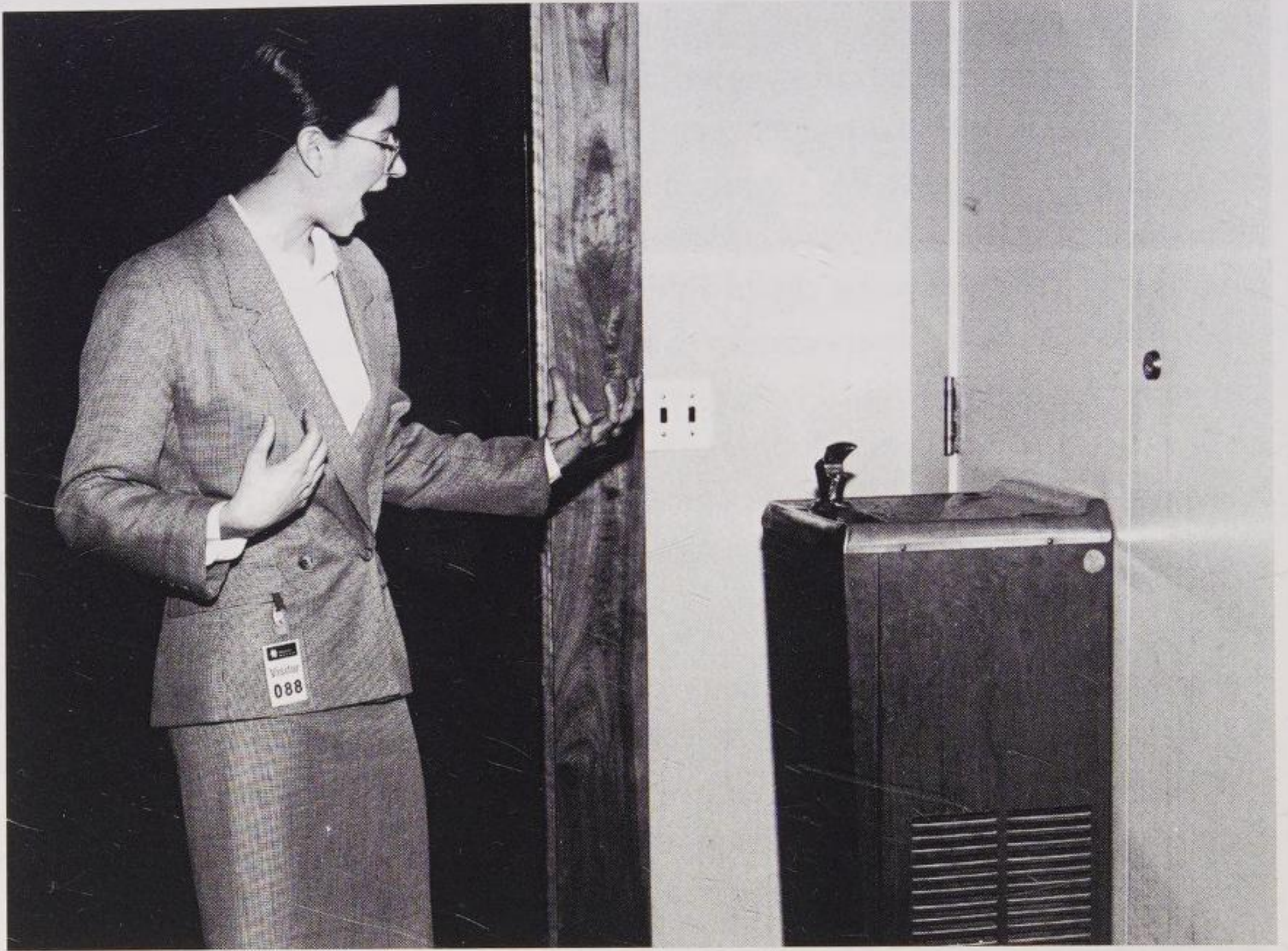


Tomie Arai, *Rising Waters*, 1986. Printed for the portfolio *Concrete Crisis: Urban Images of the '80s*, NY PADD, 1987. Copyright 1986 Tomie Arai.

suppression and amnesia about activist art internationally and almost immediately became an activist organization as well. Nine years later, when the organization folded, the collection of documents and posters ended up in the Museum of Modern Art library, thanks to PADD founding member Clive Phillpot, the museum librarian at the time. This was a curious turn of events, and for me in particular (since I began the archive) it closed a thirty-year cycle in my ambivalent relationship to MoMA, from library employee to protester to occasional curator, speaker, and writer for the museum. The archive was a source for the MoMA print department's *Committed to Print* exhibition in 1988, the first recent museum show to acknowledge the historical existence of this kind of work. It also meant that our history had come home to the belly of the beast, as have so many recalcitrant artists and their artworks.²⁷ There in the belly, the PADD Archive is accessible to a broad, if scholarly, public and used far more often than if we had kept it within our own small community. Yet the issue of the institutional co-optation of radical projects and fire-breathing artists remains debatable.

Another interpretive tool that can be employed from inside and outside is wielded by museum docents, who are trained from "above" to pass information to those "below" who do not trust their own experiences or dislike (for good reason) reading art criticism. During the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee protests of the Whitney Annual in 1970–71, a "guerrilla docent tour" was proposed but never fully executed. We realized that if you dressed "up," brought a few friends to pose as your group, and began to move around the exhibition sounding authoritative, you could soon attract a bigger audience and alter the institutional message, thus affecting how people saw the works and the show. During the Annual, a few of us brought tape recorders into the museum and interviewed Whitney visitors to see what effect our protests were having and to extend our confrontational strategies on a one-to-one basis. The results were illuminating. Some museum visitors were shocked and others were downright offended to be forced to think about such things in an art museum—site of sacrosanct disconnected entertainment. Some were already believers or got the message immediately. Some resisted and then got it, like the well-dressed Connecticut woman who said she was an artist and insisted she'd never run into any gender prejudice. Then a strange look passed over her face and she added hesitantly, "But of course, I use a man's name. . . ." then hastened away.

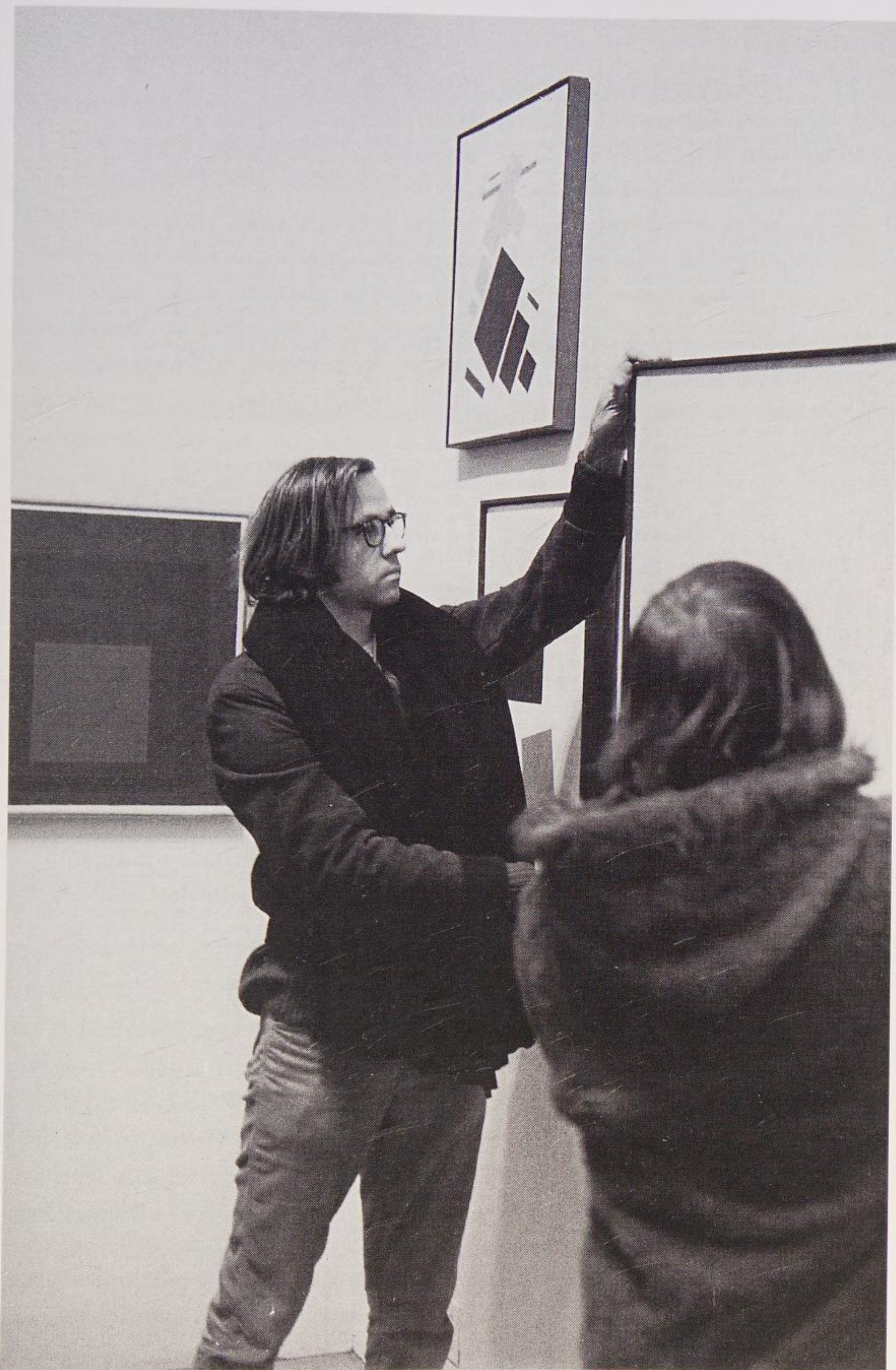
Andrea Fraser's 1989 video *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* starts out as a smarmily "typical" guided tour by "docent Jane Castelton" of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Then it begins to veer in and out of polite control, juxtaposing bland text with an almost demented commentary on urban institutional class relations and surreal harangues of "arty" adjectives ("graceful, mythological, life-size" is a repeated mantra). In value-added diatribes, everything is worthy or unworthy, beautiful or ugly, decent or indecent. (The classist language and purple prose are



Andrea Fraser performing *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1989. Photograph by Kelly and Massa Photography. Courtesy of Andrea Fraser.

lifted from museum publications from the turn of the last century to the present.) As the prim guide marches past unnamed artifacts, she compares the men's room to an opulent period room, provides a formal analysis of a drinking fountain, parodies a range of social and aesthetic stereotypes, and breezily devastates the "donor recognition program," which names every space after someone (she suggests the bookstore be called "Andrea"). "The public," declares Castelton vindictively, "must be forced to raise their standards of taste." The museum "puts things in the right places."

Intervention in the infrastructure of the museum is a more difficult task than physical intervention and public confrontation. At best it has long-term effects. It requires a sympathetic and even courageous figure inside the system who will collaborate with those outside to improve that system. Usually, however, artists must make their points without warning and without permission. In 1969, GAAG entered MoMA and carefully took down Kasimir Malevich's *White on White*, leaned it against the wall, and replaced it with a manifesto on the social responsibility of museums. In another action, GAAG and others, with Joyce Kozloff holding her baby Nicholas, called attention to the fate of Vietnamese babies, choosing as the protest site Picasso's *Guernica*, which was hung in MoMA as an apolitical masterpiece. (Later Tony Shafrazi—then a rebellious artist, now a posh dealer—took this notion an unpopular step further and spattered *Guernica* with red paint.) This strategy resurrects dead or distant artists as allies in current struggles.



GAAG members Jon Hendricks (left) and Jean Toche removing a Malevich painting from the wall at the Museum of Modern Art, 1969. Photograph copyright Jan van Raay.

MANIFESTO FOR THE GUERRILLA ART ACTION GROUP

1. We demand that the Museum of Modern Art sell the equivalent of one million dollars worth of art works from their collection and that the money be given to the poor of all races of this country, the money to be used by those communities and for those communities, without any interference or attached conditions.

We as artists feel that at this time of social crisis there is no better use for art than to have it serve an urgent social need. We realize that one million dollars given to the poor to help alleviate their condition can be no more than a symbolic gesture, but at this time of social crisis even the smallest gesture on the part of an art institution will have a profound effect toward changing the attitude of the establishment toward the poor. In a sense, the donation is a form of reparation to the poor, for art has always served an elite, and therefore has been part of the oppression of the poor by that elite.

2. We demand that the Museum of Modern Art decentralize its power structure to a point of communilization.

Art, to have any relevance at all today, must be taken out of the hands of an elite and returned to the people. The art establishment as it is used today is a classical form of repression. Not only does it repress the artist, but it is used:

- 1) to manipulate the artists themselves, their work, and what they say for the benefit of an elite working together with the military/business complex
- 2) to force people to accept more easily - or distract them from - the repression by the military/business complex by giving it a better image
- 3) as propaganda for capitalism and imperialism all over the world. It is no longer a time for artists to sit as puppets or "chosen representatives of" at the feet of an art elite, but rather it is the time for a true communilization where anyone, regardless of condition or race, can become involved in the actual policy making and control of the museum.

3. We demand that the Museum of Modern Art be closed until the end of the war in Vietnam.

There is no justification for the enjoyment of art while we are involved in the mass murder of people. Today the museum serves not so much as an enlightening educational experience, as it does a diversion from the realities of war and social crisis. It can only be meaningful if the pleasures of art are denied instead of reveled in. We believe that art itself is a moral commitment to the development of the human race and a negation of the repressive social reality. This does not mean that art should cease to exist or to be produced - especially in serious times of crisis when art can become a strong witness and form of protest - only the sanctification of art should cease during these times.

ART WORKERS
ACTION COMMITTEE for the
ART WORKERS COALITION
COALITION

New York, October 30, 1969
GUERRILLA ART ACTION GROUP
Jon Hendricks
Jean Toche

Jon Hendricks *Jean Toche*

GAAG manifesto, 1969.

There are even instances when museums have welcomed the blip in their image. Beginning with his examination of the Guggenheim's hierarchy, Hans Haacke continued to scrutinize the hidden sociopolitical agendas and resources of art museums, especially in Europe, calling attention on their home grounds to the questionable backgrounds of collectors and corporations usually whitewashed as major cultural donors. At the 1985 Whitney Annual, Group Material's *Americana* represented a Trojan horse ploy; its room-sized installation included the work of a

number of artists—activists, women, artists of color—who would not have been invited to show at the Whitney in their own right, indirectly heralding Fred Wilson's more direct attacks on racial representation in museums in the early 1990s.

Wilson found an ally and coconspirator in curator Lisa Corrin, who helped place his project *Mining the Museum* at the usually conservative Maryland Historical Society.²⁸ Having already executed several installations with museum-related subjects (on display and labeling techniques, the role of the invisible African American guard, cultural bias, and colonial collection policies), he spent more than a year at the historical society studying the collections and then “mining” them to produce an unprecedented reinstallation that rewrote the history of race in art and in Maryland. Wilson dredged up the few positive race-related objects he could find and commented in various ingenious ways on the negative objects, placing a Ku Klux Klan hood in an antique pram, for instance, and including slave shackles in a vitrine with elegant silverware.

With this show, Wilson began a revolution in artists' works about museums by using the actual collection as raw material and social mirror. He also went outside the art museum to make art *about* museums, effectively shifting the context to comment implicitly on the more esoteric and less visible counterparts of racist selection and display in art museums. In 1993 curator Donna de Salvo, then at the Parrish Art Museum on Long Island, constructed a historical critique from within the institution in her show and book *Past Imperfect: A Museum Looks at Itself*.²⁹ These two projects set the tone and the standards for art about museums in the coming decades, providing inventive structural critiques that build upon earlier works and analyze the roles of museum, art, and artist.

Certain victories have been won on the contested ground of museums, but corporate control has not lessened since 1969. Artists remain relatively powerless to affect institutional representation. The same monocultural and market-oriented values we were battling then remain in place, altered only slightly by the events and scholarship of the past forty years. Yet looked at as models, even at times as aesthetic models, artists' rebellions against museum control of art have often changed how art is seen by those willing to look outside the conventional frames. From the Russian Revolution to Dada and surrealism, to the social realism and photojournalism of the 1930s and 1940s, to the politicized art of the 1960s to 1990s, artists have made bold moves to redefine the social role of art. Never underestimate the strength and contagiousness of critical consciousness, of sudden revelations about how things work and who is doing what to whom.

Despite the paucity of information about these actions and activities, and their absence in most academic art history, in each generation younger artists have sought out and studied the genealogy of the socially concerned and politically engaged visual artist. At the same time, each era demands its own forms of protest

PRESS COMMUNIQUE

Friday October 31, 1969 at 2:45 pm, two Destruction Artists removed Malevich's painting "White on White" from the walls of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and replaced it with a manifesto of demands to the museum.

I. Objectives

- 1) To do a dramatic art action at the Museum of Modern Art of New York, involving the removal from the wall of an important art work and placing it on the floor against the wall and replacing it with the Guerilla Art Action Group's manifesto of October 30, 1969.
- 2) The object was not to damage the painting nor to steal it, but rather to radicalize it by desanctifying a once-revolutionary work which had become only a valuable object.
- 3) To present our demands to the representative of the museum while standing next to the moved painting.

II. Description

Jean Toche and Jon Hendricks of the Guerilla Art Action Group entered the premises of the Museum of Modern Art at 2:35 pm October 31, 1969. They paid two admissions at \$1.50 each and went to the third floor, to the gallery room where Kasimir Malevich's "Suprematist Composition: White on White" was hanging. This was the painting they had previously decided to use for their art action.

They waited until the museum guards had left the room and, in front of a number of witnesses (members of the Action Committee of the Art Workers Coalition as well as individuals from the New York art community), they proceeded to carefully lift the Malevich painting from the wall and gently place it on the floor resting against the wall.

At this point a plainclothes "guard" yelled at them: "Wait, what are you doing that for?" The artists proceeded to tape on the wall - where the painting had been - the Guerilla Art Action Group's manifesto of October 30, 1969. The plainclothes guard at that point said: "Here we go again" and ripped the manifesto off the wall. The artists said that they wanted to present the manifesto to a representative of the Museum of Modern Art. The plainclothes guard said: "Come with me." The artists said: "No, we want to stay here until the representative of the museum comes

Press communiqué, 1969.

and critique. Those I have described here were right for their times. If they are known and analyzed, they can be adapted to present concerns. As younger artists tackle these issues anew, they will not be reinventing the wheel but building on earlier accomplishments to devise new ways of making people think about the world through art.

As Ad Reinhardt wrote in 1960:

It's not right for artists to feel it's all right to be "irascible" when young and without means, and "docile" when doddering and well paid-off. Artists stricken with "fall-out"

to receive our demands." Then two regular guards of the museum were stationed near the artists and the painting and the plainclothes guard left with the manifesto that he had removed from the wall.

While Jean Toche and Jon Hendricks waited, Hendricks held another copy of the manifesto prominently in front of him for the public to read. Several people came forward and read it.

After a while, two other plainclothesmen with walkie-talkies showed up, and one of them asked the artists their names, addresses and telephone numbers. The artists complied, and asked to see the identification of the plainclothesman who was doing the questioning. The identification shown was for "Security of the Museum of Modern Art" and the man's name.

Then two representatives of the museum arrived and identified themselves as Miss Elizabeth Shaw, Director of Public Relations, and Mr. Wilder Green, Director of Exhibitions. The two artists introduced themselves and everyone shook hands. The two artists handed their manifesto to Mr. Green, who asked why the artists had chosen a Malevich. The artists replied that they had intended to use an Impressionist work, but that the gallery was closed at the present time. Mr. Green said: "Yes, one of the old paintings." Then the artists said that they chose the Malevich because it was a revolutionary work. Mr. Green said: "You made a good choice." Then Miss Shaw commented: "That painting can be shown here, but not in Russia." The artists said that was not the point. They added that their intention was not to damage the painting, but to use it in an art action as a dramatization of their demands. Then Mr. Green said: "Thank you for not damaging the painting" and the artists repeated that it was not their intention, that they just wanted to remove the painting from the wall and put in its place their manifesto, but that one of the guards had removed the manifesto from the wall. Mr. Green said: "Yes, I have it here and I have already read it." He then showed the artists the copy that still had the tape on it; then he said: "You must realize we can not give you an answer to these demands now, that it has to come from the Board of Trustees." He pointed at the demands and said that the first and second demands were unlikely to be met, and for the third, the decision would have to come from the Board. The artists asked Mr. Green to give the demands to the Board of Trustees. Mr. Green said that he would, and then asked if the artists wanted to stay next to the painting. The artists said they had finished their piece. They all shook hands and the artists left the museum.

New York, October 31, 1969
 GUERRILLA ART ACTION GROUP
 Jon Hendricks
 Jean Toche

or "sell-out" should be institutionalized, pensioned, and enabled to lead a comfortable hand-out-to-mealy-mouth existence for the rest of their natural lives.³⁰

Notes

1. Patricia Hills, *Modern Art in the USA: Issues and Controversies of the Twentieth Century* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2001) is a very important book that covers many of these issues, including museums.

2. Jo Baer, "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," *Artforum* 9, no. 1 (September 1970): 39.

3. See Brian Wallis, "Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy," in *Museum Culture*, ed. Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 265–81.

4. See Lucy R. Lippard, "Exhibitionism," in her *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place* (New York: New Press, 1999): 88–102.

5. Letter to the editor, *New York Times*, June 27, 1965. For excerpts, signers, and more on Angry Arts Week, see David Craven, *Poetics and Politics in the Art of Rudolf Baranik* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1997), 18–19. Baranik was one of the early instigators of antiwar activities in the New York City art community and designed the well-known posters for Angry Arts Week based on Picasso's *Guernica* and on the photographic image of a napalm-burned Vietnamese boy (which inspired his *Napalm Elegies* painting series).

6. Artists and Writers Protest continued to organize through the 1960s, sometimes collaborating with the Art Workers' Coalition ("memberships" overlapped); the flamboyance of the latter tended to overshadow its quieter colleague. Together they produced one of the most moving actions of the antiwar movement—the May 1969 funeral march up Fifth Avenue, in which participants carried black body bags marked with body-count figures and two banners, each about fifteen hundred feet long, bearing the names of American and Vietnamese war dead.

7. See two xeroxed publications of the Art Workers' Coalition, *Open Hearing* (New York, 1969) and *Documents 1* (New York, 1969).

8. Hilton Kramer in the *New York Times*, May 4, 1969. On January 18, 1970, he wrote another, less sympathetic, article on the AWC, then a third on February 8 that was published with our reply. He complained about "the politicization of art"; we noted that the AWC was concerned with ethics, not aesthetics, and that we never offered opinions of form or content of art, which we considered the concern of the individual artists alone. We added, "If the men now controlling the Museum of Modern Art are not politically involved, who the hell is?"

9. See Jon Hendricks and Jean Toche, *GAAG: The Guerrilla Art Action Group, 1969–1976, A Selection* (New York: Printed Matter, 1978).

10. See Lucy R. Lippard, "The Art Workers' Coalition: Not a History," first published in *Studio International* 180, no. 927 (November 1970): 171–74, and reprinted in *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984), 10–19.

11. MoMA now has a policy that artists in the collections are admitted free to the museum and invited to special events.

12. Faith Ringgold reports in her book *We Flew over the Bridge* (Boston: Little, Brown/Bullfinch, 1995), that in a private meeting at her house with Tom Lloyd and MoMA director John Hightower, it was decided that Carroll Green would curate a show of Romare Bearden at MoMA in 1971, and this actually happened (171).

13. Ringgold also reported that Nelson Rockefeller referred to MoMA as "my museum" and suggested instead of a Martin Luther King Jr. wing, "a Nelson Rockefeller wing for Martin Luther King Jr." (*We Flew over the Bridge*, 171).

14. Benny Andrews and Rudolf Baranik edited *Attica Book* (South Hackensack, N.J.: Custom Communications, 1972), a handsome collection of artworks on the issue. Romare Bearden, Faith Ringgold, Camille Billops, Vivian Browne, Nancy Grossman, Alice Neel, Carl Andre, Michelle Stuart, and Jacob Lawrence were among the well-known artists who contributed.

15. Morris's press release of May 15, 1970, quoted in Maurice Berger, *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 118.

16. See the detailed, if rather Morris-centric, account in Berger, *Labyrinths*, 107–13.

17. Kynaston L. McShine, ed., *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 81.

18. See Lippard, "The Art Workers' Coalition," for a contemporary account (which names names) of support for AWC and lack thereof.

19. For WAR's and some of Ad Hoc's history, see *A Documentary: Herstory of Women Artists in Revolution* (New York: WAR, 1971), xerox book, reissued by Women's Interart Center, 1973. See also Nancy Spero and Joyce Kozloff, eds., *RIP-OFF FILE* (New York: Ad Hoc Committee of Women Artists, 1972), "a dossier of reports (rip-offs, put-downs, discrimination) in the Art World and Art Schools" (an eight-page printed tabloid calling for more stories and subsequently used in publications and exhibitions).

20. This show is, for some reason, not mentioned in the chronology of Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *The Power of Feminist Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994). For a list of the artists included, see Lucy R. Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan* (New York: New Press, 1995), 50.

21. For a contemporary account of the Metropolitan Museum of Art dinner action, see Lucy R. Lippard, "Charitable Visits by the AWC to MoMA and Met," originally published in *The Element* (January 1971), reprinted in *Get the Message?*, 20–22.

22. See, for instance, the catalogs (which were also the shows or integral parts of the shows) for Seth Siegelau's *January 5–31* (1969) and *March* (or *One Month*) (1969).

23. Among these artists were Robert Huot, Steve Kaltenbach, and later Charles Simonds.

24. *Red Herring* (1977), 17–18; see also Lippard, "Exhibitionism."

25. Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis," *Marxist Perspectives* 1, no. 4 (winter 1978): 28–52; Duncan and Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History* 3, no. 4 (December 1980): 448–69; Wallach, *Exhibiting Contradictions: Essays on the Art Museum in the United States* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998).

26. *The Fox* was an allied periodical, published by members of Art & Language and the AMCC, but it was more theoretical and did nothing much on museums.

27. The AWC was also aware of posterity, having self-published its two photocopied compendiums, *Documents I* and *Open Hearing*, to keep the record straight. A similar archive of feminist papers and slides from the 1970s and 1980s from the Women's Slide Registry is in Douglass Library, Rutgers University.

28. See Lisa G. Corrin, ed., *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson* (New York: New Press, 1994).

29. Donna de Salvo, ed., *Past Imperfect: A Museum Looks at Itself* (Southampton, N.Y. and New York: Parrish Art Museum and New Press, 1993).

30. Ad Reinhardt, "Thirteen Rules toward a Code of Ethics for Artists," paper read at the College Art Association and the Artists Club, 1960.

THE ARTIST'S RESERVED RIGHTS TRANSFER AND SALE AGREEMENT

The accompanying 3 page Agreement form has been drafted by Bob Projansky, a New York lawyer, after my extensive discussions and correspondence with over 500 artists, dealers, lawyers, collectors, museum people, critics and other concerned people involved in the day-to-day workings of the international art world.

The Agreement has been designed to remedy some generally acknowledged inequities in the art world, particularly artists' lack of control over the use of their work and participation in its economics after they no longer own it.

The Agreement form has been written with special awareness of the current ordinary practices and economic realities of the art world, particularly its private, cash and informal nature, with careful regard for the interests and motives of all concerned.

It is expected to be the standard form for the transfer and sale of all contemporary art, and has been made as fair, simple and useful as possible. It can be used either as presented here or slightly altered to fit your specific situation.

If the following information does not answer all your questions consult your attorney.

WHAT THE AGREEMENT DOES

The Agreement is designed to give the artist:

- 15% of any increase in the value of each work each time it is transferred in the future.
- a record of who owns each work at any given time.
- the right to be notified when the work is to be exhibited, so the artist can advise upon or (see Article Seven (b)) veto the proposed exhibition of his/her work.
- the right to borrow the work for exhibition for 2 months every five (5) years (at no cost to the owner).
- the right to be consulted if repairs become necessary.
- half of any rental income paid to the owner for the use of the work at exhibitions, if there ever is any.
- all reproduction rights in the work.

The economic benefits would accrue to the artist for life, plus the life of a surviving spouse (if any) plus 21 years, so as to benefit the artist's children while they are growing up. The artist would maintain aesthetic control only for his/her lifetime.

Although the contract may seem to alter the previous relationship between artist and art owner principally by putting new obligations on the owners, the Agreement really does some very good things for the collector. In return for these obligations, which are almost costless for the collector, he gets substantial benefits; the Agreement is designed:

- to give each owner the formalized right to receive from the artist (or his/her agent) a certified history and *provenance* of the work.
- to create and clarify a non-exploitative, one-to-one relationship between the artist and the owner.
- to maintain this relationship—what lawyers call “privity”—between the artist and each successive owner of the work.
- to establish recognition that the artist maintains a moral relationship to the work, even as the collector owns and controls it.
- to give assurance to the owner that he is using the work in harmony with the artist's intentions.

WHEN TO USE THE AGREEMENT

The Agreement form has been designed to be used by the artist at the time of the FIRST TRANSFER—

either by gift, or barter for things or services, or sale

of EACH INDIVIDUAL work of art—

either a painting, a sculpture, a drawing, a graphic, a multiple, a mural, an immovable sculpture, a non-object work, or any other fine art you can think of

from the artist to ANYONE else—

either a friend, another artist, collector, museum, gynecologist, lawyer, corporation, landlord, relative or dealer.

IMPORTANT: it is NOT for use when you lend your work to exhibitions or when you give it to your dealer on consignment. It IS for use when the dealer sells your consigned work.

In short, the Agreement form is to be used when you part with your work for keeps.

Its terms are effective and it requires a very simple procedure to keep it in effect with each successive owner of your work of art.

It requires the artist and the first owner of the work to fill out and sign the Agreement form and also, to affix a notice of the existence of the Agreement somewhere on the work of art itself.

HOW TO USE THE AGREEMENT

1. To begin, xerox or offset a number of copies of each page of the Agreement form. You will need at least 2 copies for each work you sell or give or trade away. (Save *this* copy to make future copies and so you can refer to this information.)
2. Fill out the contract forms—one copy for you, one for the new owner, and another copy of the last page only (from which you cut out the notice to affix to the work). Make sure that you fill it out legibly.
3. Follow the simple instructions in the margin of the Agreement form. Double check to make sure you have filled in the spaces that must be filled in and struck out what must be struck out.

IMPORTANT: Fill out only those parts of the Specimen TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD which identify the work and the *original* parties to the *original* Agreement (“between _____ and _____ made the _____ day of _____, 19____”). Be sure you fill out the specimen NOTICE.

You will note that the contract form speaks in terms of a “sale” (“whereas Artist is willing to sell the Work to Collector and Collector is willing to purchase. . . .”); this doesn't mean you can't use it when you give a friend a work or pay your dentist with a painting or trade works with another artist. We have used the words “sell” and “purchase” only for the sake of simplicity (likewise, we use the term “Collector” just because it is the most all-inclusive word for this purpose). Strictly speaking, even if you are giving or trading your work you are “selling” it for the promises in the Agreement and whatever else you get.

This Agreement form is not a bill of sale or an invoice, nor is it a substitute. If the work is sold for money, prepare a separate bill of sale for your financial records.

In Article One, you enter the price OR value of the work; you, the artist, can put any value that you and the new owner agree upon. If the work is resold for a figure higher than the one you have entered as “value”, the owner will have to pay you 15% of the difference over that figure; obviously the higher the figure you put in, the better break the new owner is getting. If you are giving a friend a work or exchanging with another artist (you need two separate Agreements for the latter situation) you might want to enter a nominal value so that you would get some money, even if he/she later sells it for less than what your dealer would sell it for.

IMPORTANT: if there are rights given the artist under the Agreement form that you as the artist do not want, you strike them out. **IMPORTANT:** be sure to examine ARTICLE SEVEN (b); if you don't feel you must have a veto over all details of the future exhibition of the work, be sure you strike (b) out of ARTICLE SEVEN. Few collectors will want to buy a work if their right to lend it for exhibition is so restricted by someone else. If you give a work away you can leave (b) in, but that will make it very difficult for your friend to sell it. We have put (b) in because (a) is the least an artist should accept and (b) is the most he/she can ask for. If (a) is not enough for you but you don't need (b), have an attorney draft a short rider to the Agreement setting forth those specific controls over exhibition that you feel you must have.

4. You and the Collector should each sign both copies, yours and his, so they will both be legal originals.
5. Before the work is delivered, be sure that a copy of the NOTICE is affixed to the work. DO NOT cut it out of one of the originals. Put it on a stretcher bar or under a sculpture base or wherever else it will be aesthetically invisible yet easily findable. It should get a coat of clear polyurethane—or something like it—to protect it. It won't hurt to put several copies of the NOTICE on a large work.

If your work simply has no place on it for the NOTICE or your signature—in which case you should always use an ancillary document which describes the work, which bears your signature, and which is transferred as a (legal) part of the work—glue the NOTICE on the document.

PROCEDURE FOR FUTURE TRANSFERS. For future transfers, the owner makes three copies of the TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD form from his original (without the words "SPECIMEN"). He then fills them out, entering the value or price that he and the next owner have agreed upon. Both the old and new owners sign ALL THREE copies of the dated TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD, each keeps one copy and the third is sent with the 15% payment (if any is required) to the artist or his/her agent. The old owner gives the new owner a copy of the original Agreement, so he will know his responsibilities to the artist and have the TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD form if HE transfers the work.

THE DEALER

If you have a dealer, he is going to be very important in getting people to sign the contract when he sells your work.

The dealer should make the use of the Agreement a policy of the gallery, thereby giving the artists in the gallery collective strength against those few collectors and institutions who do not really have the artist's interests at heart.

Remember, your dealer knows all the ins and outs that go down in the business of the art world. He knows the ways to get the few reluctant art buyers to sign the Agreement—the better the dealer the more ways and the more buyers he knows and the easier it will be. He can do what he does now when he wants things for his artists—give the buyer favors, exchange privileges, preferential treatment, discounts, hot tips, time, advice and all the other things that collectors expect and appreciate.

The Agreement only formalizes what dealers do now anyway; dealers try to keep track of the work they have sold, but now they can only rely on exhibition lists, catalogues, hit-or-miss intelligence and publicity to keep them up-to-date. The Agreement creates a very simple record system, which will automatically maintain a biography of each work and a chronological record of ownership. It is private, uncluttered and no dealer should ever have to hire another secretary to administer it; if each work engenders a dozen pieces of paper over the entire life of the Agreement, it will be a lot. The requirement of giving a *provenance* to the current owner is no more than what goes on today, but under this system it will be accurate and almost effortless.

A dealer shouldn't be expected to do this for nothing; it seems reasonable to compensate the dealer with some part of the 15% he/she is collecting for the artist, perhaps one-third of it.

When, as is often the case, an artist moves from one dealer to a more prestigious one, the first dealer might continue to collect whatever payments are occasioned by the resale of the earlier work.

When a dealer BUYS work directly from the artist (for resale or otherwise), they should write the intended RETAIL value of the work in their Agreement, NOT the actual amount of money the dealer is paying the artist, which would be less.

Getting the contract signed is mostly a state of mind. If your dealer does not think the benefits of the Agreement are important for you, he will have dozens of reasons why he can't get those few reluctant buyers to sign it; on the other hand, if he seriously wants you to have these benefits he will be able to overcome all those obstacles without losing a single sale.

THE FACTS OF LIFE: YOU, THE ART WORLD AND THE AGREEMENT

The general response to the preliminary draft of this Agreement form has been extremely favorable; the vast majority of people in the art world feel it is fair, reasonable and practical. A few have expressed certain reservations about whether or not people will actually use it. These reservations can be summed up in two basic statements:

- "... the economics of buying and selling art is so fragile that if you place one more burden on the collectors of art, they will simply stop buying art ...", and
- "... I will certainly use the Agreement—if everyone else uses it ..."

The first statement is nonsense; clearly the art will be just as desirable with as without the Agreement and there is no reason why the value of any art should be affected at all, especially if this contract is standard practice in the art world—which brings us to the second statement. If there is a problem here, this statement reflects it: it is the concern of the individual artist or dealer that the insistence on the use of the contract will jeopardize their sales in a competitive market.

If we examine this notion carefully, we see it doesn't hold up.

ALL artists sell, trade and give their work to only two kinds of people:

- those who are their friends.
- those who are not their friends.

Obviously, your friends will not give you a hard time; they will sign the Agreement with you. The ONLY trouble will come when you are selling to someone who is not a friend. Since surely 75% of all art that is sold is bought by people who are friends of the artist or dealer—friends who dine together, see each other socially, drink together, weekend together, etc.—whatever resistance may appear will come only in respect to some portion of the 25% of your work that is being sold to strangers. Of these people, most will wish to be on good terms with you and will be happy to enter into the Agreement with you. This leaves perhaps 5% of your sales which will encounter serious resistance over the contract. Even this real resistance should decrease toward zero as the contract comes into widespread use.

In a manner of speaking, this Agreement will help you discover who your friends are.

If a collector wants to buy but doesn't want to sign the Agreement, you should tell him that all your work is sold under the contract, that it is standard for your work.

If he buys work only from those few artists who won't insist on using the Agreement he is being very foolish; non-use of this Agreement is a very dumb criterion for building one's collection.

There are other things that you can point out to the reluctant collector:

- first of all, it's not going to cost him anything unless your work appreciates in value. If that doesn't cut any ice, and he wants to keep *all* of whatever profit he might make with your work, you can simply write in a higher value for it, thus giving him a free ride for the first part of the appreciation he anticipates.
- if and when he sells your work and he owes you some payment, he doesn't necessarily have to pay you with money; you can give him credit against the purchase of a new work or take payment in services or something other than money.
- of course, if a collector buys a work without the contract when the use of the Agreement has become the standard practice for the artist, the collector will have to rely on sheer good-will when he later wants the artist (or his/her dealer) to appraise, repair or authenticate it. Why he should expect to find any good-will there is anybody's guess.

Is the collector really going to pass up your work because you want him to sign the contract? Work that he likes and thinks is worth having? If the answer is yes, given the fact that it won't cost *him* anything to give you the respect that you as the creator of the work deserve—if that will keep him from buying, he is being very stubborn and foolish and nobody can tell you how to illuminate him.

Using the contract doesn't mean that all your relationships in the art world will hereafter be strictly business or that you will have to enforce your rights down to the last penny. Friends will still be friends; you will be able to waive your rights to payments (in whole or in part), your right to make repairs, to grant reproduction rights, to be consulted—but they will be *YOUR* rights and the choices will be *YOURS*.

The Agreement form has been prepared to be used by any and all artists—known, well-known and unknown. Simply make a lot of copies and use it whenever you give, trade or sell your work. It will be effective from the moment you use it. The more artists and dealers there are using it, the better and easier it will be for everybody. It requires no organization, no dues, no government agency, no meetings, no public registration, no nothing—just your will to use it. Just plug it in and watch it go—a perfect waffle every time!

ENFORCEMENT

First, let's put this question in perspective: most people will honor the Agreement because most people honor agreements. Those few people who will try to cheat you are likely to be the same kinds who will give you a hard time about signing the Agreement in the first place. Later owners will be more likely to try to cheat you than the first owner, with whom you or your dealer have had some face-to-face contact, but there are strong reasons why both first and future owners should fulfill the contract's terms.

What happens if owner #2 sells your work to owner #3 and doesn't send you the transfer form? (He's not sending your money, either.)

Nothing happens. (You don't know about it yet.)

Sooner or later you do find out about it because it takes a lot of effort to conceal such sales and the grapevine will get the news to you (or your dealer) anyway. To conceal the sale, owner #3 has to conceal the work and he's not going to hide a good and valuable work just to save a little money. And if he ever wants to sell it, repair it, appraise it or authenticate it, he *MUST* come to you (or your dealer). When you do find out about such a transfer—and you will—you sue owner #2, who will be stuck for 15% of the increase based on the price to owner #3 OR on the value at the time you find out about it, which maybe much higher. Clearly, a seller (in this case owner #2) would be extremely foolish to take this chance, to risk having to pay a lot of money just to save a little money.

As to falsifying values reported to the artist, there will be as much pressure from the new owner to put in a falsely high value as from the old owner to put in a low value. There are real difficulties inherent in getting two people to lie in unison, especially if it only benefits one of them—the seller. In 95% of the cases the amount of money to be paid to the artist won't be enough to compel the collectors to lie to you.

You will note that in the event you have to sue to enforce any of your rights under the Agreement, ARTICLE NINETEEN gives you the right to recover reasonable attorney's fees in addition to whatever else you may be entitled to.

SUMMATION

We realize that this Agreement is essentially unprecedented in the art world and that it just may cause a little rumbling and trembling; on the other hand, the ills it remedies are universally acknowledged to exist and no other practical way has ever been devised to cure them.

Whether or not you, the artist, use it, is of course up to you; what we have given you is a legal tool which you can use yourself to establish ongoing rights when you transfer your work. This is a substitute for what has existed before—nothing.

We have done this for no recompense, for just the pleasure and challenge of the problem, feeling that should there ever be a question about artists' rights in reference to their art, the artist is more right than anyone else.

Seth Siegelaub, 24 February 1971, New York

SEE OVERSIDE FOR AGREEMENT FORM

Please POST, REPRODUCE and USE this poster freely.
This poster is not to be sold.

All the information contained on this poster will also be contained in the April 1971 issue of Art News, Studio International and Arts Canada.

The cost of the production, printing and distribution of this poster has been underwritten by the School of Visual Arts in New York.

For further information: Seth Siegelaub, Post Office Box 350, New York 10013, U.S.A.

AGREEMENT OF ORIGINAL TRANSFER OF WORK OF ART

Fill in date,
names and
addresses of
parties

This agreement made this _____ day of _____, 19____, by and between

(hereinafter the "Artist"), residing at

and

(hereinafter the "Collector"), residing
at _____;

Fill in data
identifying
the Work

WITNESSETH:

WHEREAS the Artist has created that certain work of art;

Title: _____ Identification #: _____

Date: _____ Material: _____

Dimensions: _____ Description: _____

(hereinafter "the Work"); and

WHEREAS Artist is willing to sell the Work to Collector and Collector is willing to purchase the Work from Artist, subject to mutual obligations, covenants, and conditions herein; and

WHEREAS Collector and Artist recognize that the value of the Work, unlike that of an ordinary chattel, is and will be affected by each and every other work of art the Artist has created and will hereafter create; and

WHEREAS the parties expect the value of the Work to increase hereafter; and

WHEREAS Collector and Artist recognize that it is fitting and proper that Artist participate in any appreciated value which may thus be created in the Work; and

WHEREAS the parties wish the integrity and clarity of the Artist's ideas and statements in the Work to be maintained and subject in part to the will or advice of the creator of the Work,

NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the foregoing premises and the mutual covenants hereinafter set forth and other valuable considerations the parties hereto agree as follows:

Fill in price
or value; strike
out one not
applicable

PURCHASE AND SALE. ARTICLE ONE: The Artist hereby sells to Collector and Collector hereby purchases the Work from Artist, subject to all the covenants herein set forth (for the price of _____, receipt of which is hereby acknowledged) (at the agreed valuation for the purposes of this agreement of _____).

Fill in name,
address of
artist's agent,
if any; strike
out one not
applicable

FUTURE TRANSFERS: ARTICLE TWO: Collector covenants that in the event Collector shall hereafter sell, give, grant, barter, exchange, assign, transfer, convey or alienate the Work in any manner whatsoever or if the Work shall pass by inheritance or bequest or by operation of law, or if the Work shall be destroyed and insurance proceeds paid therefor, Collector or Collector's personal representative shall:

(a) file a current TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD in the form and containing the information set forth and called for in the specimen hereunto annexed and made a part hereof, completed and dated, and subscribed by Collector or Collector's personal representative and collector's transferee, with the (Artist at the address set forth above) (Artist's agent for the purpose: _____)

at: _____) within thirty days of such transfer, distribution, or payment of insurance proceeds, and shall

(b) pay a sum equal to fifteen percent (15%) of the Appreciated Value (as hereinafter defined), if any, occasioned by such transfer or distribution or payment of insurance proceeds to (Artist at the address set forth above) (Artist's agent for the purpose: _____) at: _____

_____) within thirty days of such transfer, distribution, or payment of insurance proceeds.

Fill in name,
address of
artist's agent,
if any; strike
out one not
applicable

PRICE/VALUE. ARTICLE THREE: The "price or value" to be entered on a TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD shall be:

(a) the actual selling price if the Work is sold for money; or

(b) the money value of the consideration if the Work is bartered or exchanged for a valuable consideration; or

(c) the fair market value of the Work if it is transferred in any other manner.

APPRECIATED VALUE. ARTICLE FOUR: "Appreciated Value" of the Work for the purposes of this Agreement, shall be the increase, if any, in the value or price of the Work set forth in a current duly executed and filed TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD over the price or value set forth in the last prior duly executed and filed TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD, or, if there be no prior duly executed and filed TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD, over the price or value set forth in ARTICLE ONE herein

(a) In the event a current duly executed TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD is not timely filed as required by ARTICLE TWO herein, Appreciated Value shall nonetheless be computed as if such current TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD had been duly executed and filed, with a price or value set forth therein equal to the actual market value of the Work at the time of the current transfer or at the time of the discovery of such transfer.

Strike out one
not applicable

TRANSFEREES TO RATIFY AGREEMENT. ARTICLE FIVE: Collector hereby covenants that he will not hereafter sell, give, grant, barter, exchange, assign, transfer, convey or alienate the Work in any manner whatsoever or permit the Work to pass by inheritance or bequest or by operation of law to any person without procuring such transferee's ratification and affirmation of all the terms of this Agreement and transferee's agreement to be bound hereby and to perform and fulfill all of the Collector's covenants set forth herein, said ratification, affirmation and agreement to be evidenced by such transferee's subscription of a current duly completed and filed TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD.

PROVENANCE. ARTICLE SIX: Artist hereby covenants that (Artist) (Artist's agent for the purpose as set forth in ARTICLE TWO) will maintain a file and record of each and every transfer of the Work for which a TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD has been duly filed pursuant to ARTICLE TWO herein and will at the request of the Collector or Collector's successors in interest, as that interest shall appear, furnish in writing a provenance and history of the Work based upon said records and upon Collectors' notices of proposed public exhibitions and will certify in writing said provenance and history and the authenticity of the Work to Collector and his successors in interest, and, at Collector's reasonable request, to critics and scholars. Said records shall be the sole property of the Artist.

EXHIBITION. ARTICLE SEVEN: Artist and Collector mutually covenant that

(a) Collector shall give Artist written notice of Collector's intention to cause or permit the Work to be exhibited to the public, advising Artist of all details of such proposed exhibition which shall have been made known to Collector by the exhibitor. Said notice shall be given for each such exhibition prior to any communication to the exhibitor or the public of Collector's intention to cause or permit the Work to be exhibited to the public. Artist shall forthwith communicate to Collector and the exhibitor any and all advice or requests that he may have regarding the proposed exhibition of the Work. Collector shall not cause or permit the Work to be exhibited to the public except upon compliance with the terms of this article.

Strike out (b)
if not required

(b) Collector shall not cause or permit any public exhibition of the Work except with the consent of the Artist to each such exhibition.

(c) Artist's failure timely to respond to Collector's timely notice shall be deemed a waiver of Artist's rights under this article, in respect to such exhibition and shall operate as a consent to such exhibition and to all details thereof of which Artist shall have been given timely notice.

ARTIST'S POSSESSION. ARTICLE EIGHT: Artist and Collector mutually covenant that Artist shall have the right, upon written notice and demand to Collector made not later than 120 days prior to the proposed shipping date therefor, to possession of the Work for a period not to exceed sixty (60) days solely for the purpose of exhibition of the Work to the public at and by a public or non-profit institution, at no expense whatsoever to Collector. Collector shall have the right to satisfactory proof of sufficient insurance and pre-paid transportation or satisfactory proof of financial responsibility therefor. Artist shall have the right to such possession of the Work for one period not to exceed sixty (60) days every five (5) years

NON-DESTRUCTION. ARTICLE NINE: Collector covenants that Collector will not intentionally destroy, damage, alter, modify or change the Work in any way whatsoever.

REPAIRS. ARTICLE TEN: Collector covenants that in the event of any damage to the Work, Collector shall consult with Artist prior to the commencement of any repairs or restoration and if practicable Artist shall be given the opportunity to make any required repairs or restoration.

Strike out one
not applicable

RENTS. ARTICLE ELEVEN: In the event that Collector shall become entitled to any monies as rent or other compensation for the use of the Work at public exhibition, the Collector shall pay a sum equal to one-half of said monies to (Artist) (Artist's agent as set forth in ARTICLE TWO herein) within thirty (30) days of the date when Collector shall become entitled to such monies.

REPRODUCTION. ARTICLE TWELVE: Artist hereby reserves all rights whatsoever to copy or reproduce the Work. Artist shall not unreasonably refuse permission to reproduce the Work in catalogues and the like incidental to public exhibition of the Work.

NON-ASSIGNABILITY. ARTICLE THIRTEEN: No rights created in the Artist and for the Artist's benefit by the terms of this Agreement shall be assignable by Artist during the Artist's lifetime, except that nothing herein contained shall be construed as a limitation on Artist's rights under any copyright laws to which the Work may be subject.

NOTICE. ARTICLE FOURTEEN: Artist and Collector mutually covenant that there shall be permanently affixed to the Work a NOTICE of the existence of this Agreement and that ownership, transfer, exhibition and reproduction of the Work are subject to the covenants herein, said NOTICE to be in the form of the specimen hereunto annexed and made a part of this Agreement.

Strike out (a) if
not applicable

(a) Because the Work is of such nature that its existence or essence is represented by documentation or because documentation is deemed by Artist to be part of the Work, the permanent affixing of said NOTICE to the documentation shall satisfy the requirements of this article.

TRANSFEREES BOUND. ARTICLE FIFTEEN: In the event the Work shall hereafter be transferred or otherwise alienated from Collector or Collector's estate in any manner whatsoever, any transferee, taking the Work with notice of this Agreement shall in every respect be bound and liable to perform and fulfill each and every covenant herein as if such transferee had duly made and subscribed a properly executed TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD in accordance with ARTICLE TWO and ARTICLE FIVE herein at the time the Work was transferred to him or her.

EXPIRATION. ARTICLE SIXTEEN: This Agreement and the covenants herein shall be binding upon the parties, their heirs, legatees, executors, administrators, assigns, transferees and all other successors in interest and the Collector's covenants do attach and run with the Work and shall be binding to and until twenty-one (21) years after the deaths of Artist and Artist's surviving spouse, if any, except that the covenants set forth in ARTICLE SEVEN, ARTICLE EIGHT and ARTICLE TEN herein shall be binding only during the life of the Artist.

WAIVERS NOT CONTINUING. ARTICLE SEVENTEEN: Any waiver by either party of any provision of this Agreement, or of any right hereunder, shall not be deemed a continuing waiver and shall not prevent or estop such party from thereafter enforcing such provision or right, and the failure of either party to insist in any one or more instances upon the strict performance of any of the terms or provisions of this Agreement by the other party shall not be construed as a waiver or relinquishment for the future of any such terms or provisions, but the same shall continue in full force and effect.

AMENDMENT IN WRITING. ARTICLE EIGHTEEN: This Agreement shall not be subject to amendment, modification, or termination, except in writing signed by both parties.

ATTORNEYS' FEES. ARTICLE NINETEEN: In the event that either party shall hereafter bring any action upon any default in performance or observance of any covenant herein, the party aggrieved may recover reasonable attorneys' fees in addition to whatever remedies may be available to him or her.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have set their hands and seals to this Agreement as of the day and year first above written.

SPECIMEN - SPECIMEN - SPECIMEN

Fill in NOTICE in full (Do not remove from original)

NOTICE

Ownership, Transfer, Exhibition and Reproduction of this Work of Art are subject to covenants set forth in a certain Agreement made the _____ day of _____, 19____, by and between _____

and _____, the original of which is on file with _____ at _____.

(Artist)

(Collector)

SPECIMEN - SPECIMEN - SPECIMEN

Fill in ONLY:

TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD

To: _____
Know ye that _____
residing at _____
has this day transferred all his right, title and interest in that certain Work of art known as:

Title: _____	Identification #: _____
Date: _____	Material: _____
Dimensions: _____	Description: _____

to _____ residing at _____, transferee, at the agreed price or value of _____. Transferee, hereby expressly ratifies and affirms all the terms of that certain Agreement made by and between _____ and _____ on the _____ day of _____, 19____, and agrees to be bound thereby and to perform and fulfill all of Collector's covenants set forth in said agreement.
Done this _____ day of _____, 19____, at _____

data identifying the Work

names of parties ("between _____ and _____")

date

(Do not remove from original)

On Discourse as Monument: Institutional Spaces and Feminist Problematics

Juli Carson

Prequel: The Discursive Site

The building site is the site for a story, a story that acts as if the site proceeded it. But there is no site without project. The project actually produces the site it appears to be aimed at. . . . In a sense, the project is never more than an image, an image that, like all images, can be occupied. . . . The project is the story that produces the image of the site's reality.

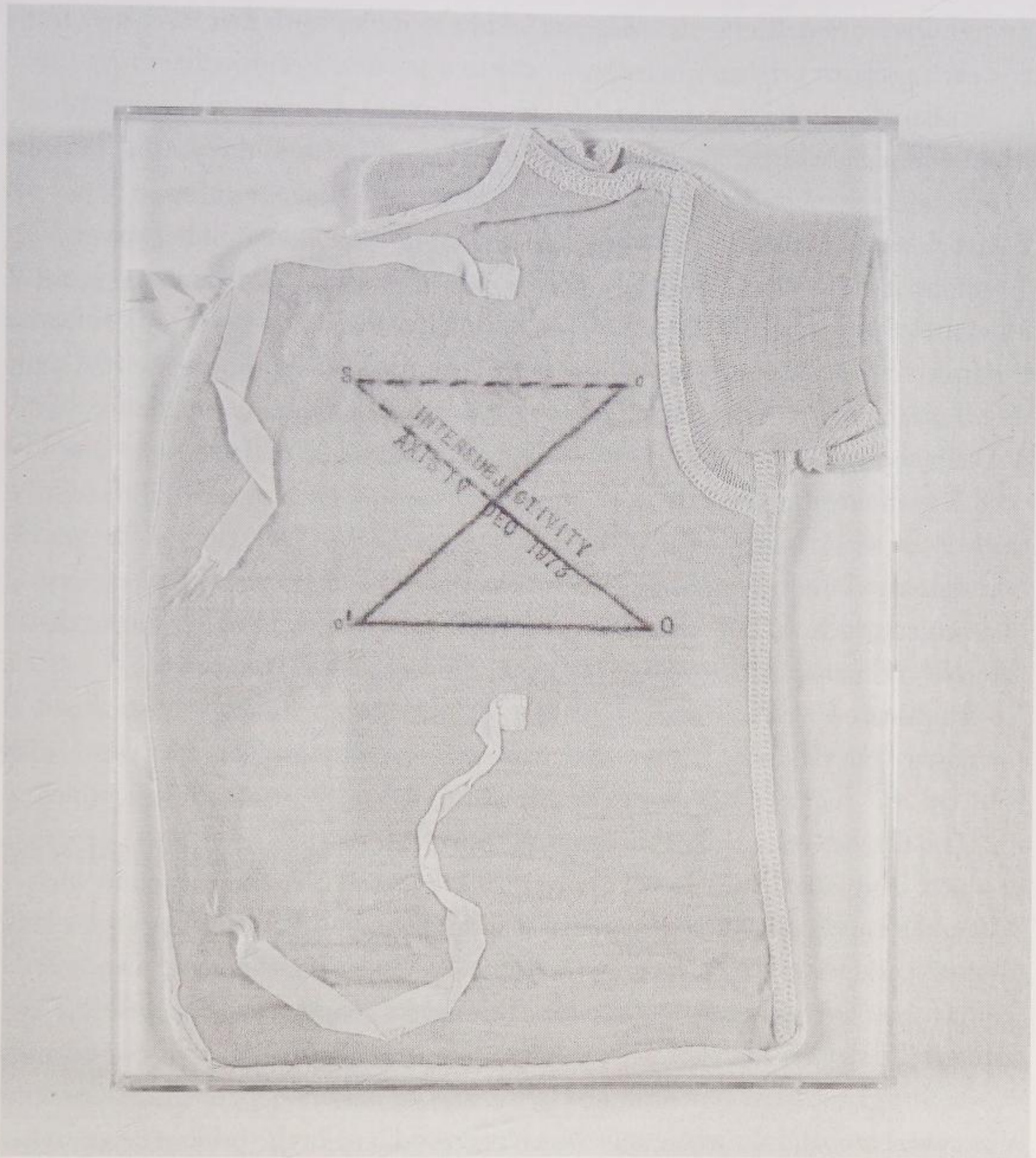
—Mark Wigley, *On Site*

Here's a story about an emblematic building many feminists are discussing today. In 1971 Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro initiated the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts). Their curriculum, as former graduate student Faith Wilding recalls, addressed "the myths of (male) genius and mastery deemed as necessary to the making of art; the lack of social expectation of achievement and ambition for women; and the traditional hierarchies of materials and methods taught in art schools which devalued many of the skills and experiences women have been trained in."¹ From this program came Womanhouse, a group of collaborative installations mounted in a condemned Hollywood house for just one month in 1972. As Arlene Raven recalls, the house was "eventually destroyed by the city as planned, but not before Womanhouse made a widespread difference in art making and in all subsequent art."²

Twenty-three years after this project was torn down, the Bronx Museum



Faith Wilding, *Womb Room*, 1972 (re-created 1995). Installation in the exhibition *Division of Labor: "Women's Work" in Contemporary Art* at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1995. Courtesy of Bronx Museum of the Arts. Photograph by Tony Velez.



Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Introduction*, 1973. Courtesy of Mary Kelly and the collection of Eileen and Peter Norton, Santa Monica, California. Photograph by Kelly Barrie.

recreated it as a museum installation for a show entitled *Division of Labor: "Women's Work" in Contemporary Art*.³ This was a chance for the original participants of Womanhouse to defend their project, which they believed had been wrongfully maligned by feminists in the 1980s for its empirical emphasis on women's *known* experience. The exhibition's curator restaged this debate by including Womanhouse's psychoanalytic Other, Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*, which had been made in Britain at roughly the same time. Unlike Chicago's project, Kelly's work interrogated models of intentionality by taking up the *unconscious* drives that made men *and* women complicit within patriarchal structures of representation. The only problem with reenacting this debate in a show historicizing the 1970s, however, was that it never actually took place at the time either

project was created. Rather, it *retroactively* came to define both that moment's spirit and each project's original intention.

Although it is not only interesting but also fruitful to restage feminist debates that are implicit within feminism's nascent moments (I plan to do just that here), to naturalize them as explicit positions is problematic because doing so concretizes a modernist notion of a site—that is, a one-to-one relation between a given idea and the physical work “representing” it. This historical dilemma is not only one of reception, for this notion of site characterized Chicago's project from the start. In their original press release, participants of Womanhouse asserted that their installations represented a *preexisting* condition of women's experience, without acknowledging that the project *itself* came to form and define an image of such “experience,” one that women could later identify with or argue about. In this way, as Mark Wigley argues, such sites are always already discursive. To ignore that sites are at once physical *and* discursive is to leave unacknowledged the fact that projects such as Womanhouse and *Post-Partum Document* only came to debate each other explicitly *through* discourse at a much later date.

To think of Womanhouse in this way, as a work constituting a “discursive” site rather than reflecting a physical one, is useful beyond problematics concerning “site-specific” feminist art.⁴ It tells us something about historical context, which is traditionally viewed as the stable “ground” on which an analysis of a given event or object is situated. But it is imperative that critics and historians listen to what Womanhouse (against its will) teaches us about history—that meaning is not only discursive but also, in fact, metaleptic. Jonathan Culler has theorized just that: “context is not given but produced; what belongs to a context is determined by interpretive strategies; contexts are just as much in need of elucidation as events; and the meaning of context is determined by events.”⁵ Thus, Culler concludes, context is just *more text*, and the manner in which it is produced in the present needs to be understood from the beginning of any analysis.

The inability to locate an “authentic” context for a given project is to acknowledge the futility of context-driven hermeneutic strategies, for they will only lead one into a fruitless infinite regress. As Norman Bryson argues:

The context-idea invites us to step back from uncertainties of text to “context” posited as platform or foundation. But once this step is taken it is by no means clear why it may not be taken again; that is, “context” entails from its first moment a regression without breaks.⁶

Better, then, to make the very framing of one's analysis actively a part of said analysis. This involves accounting for how debates surrounding contemporary feminist polemics come retroactively to define what we find in 1970s art projects. This is precisely the manner in which a return to the subject of 1970s and 1980s

feminist theory and art practice should be made. However, many critics don't account for the dilemma of positing a context a priori of their investigation.

Most notable on this account are writings by Mira Schor, an artist who attended CalArt's Feminist Art Program under Chicago's direction. Schor's writings are led by a "sadness" that people today resist "reconciliation and synthesis [of the] split between theoretical positions of the essentialism/social construction debate."⁷ What gets lost in this sadness, however, is the recognition that a debate over representations of gender that engages theories of essentialism (Chicago's model) versus constructionism (Kelly's model) characterized a *second* generation of feminists working in the 1980s as heirs to these models. Moreover, while it is true that debates over constructionism versus essentialism are being waged again today as they were in the 1980s, their discursive formation—which is to say, the *terms* of their debate, their very pulse—is radically different now. What really drives such historicist models (Schor's in particular) is the dissatisfaction that one type of feminist art practice (psychoanalytically informed semiotic work) seemingly trumped another (an expressive, oppositional model) in New York City during the 1980s. It is exactly this moment—or rather, *discursive site*—to which I now return. Or perhaps, better put, this is the site that has recently returned to us.

Two Theoretical Trajectories

In the early 1980s two feminist exhibitions were mounted by The New Museum. One was *Events: En Foco, Heresies Collective* (1983), and the other was *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* (1984). The first exhibition was associated with *Heresies*, a New York-based feminist collective magazine, founded in 1976 as a consciousness-raising platform for women artists primarily concerned with cultural issues surrounding gender. The second exhibition was associated with *Screen*, founded in 1969 as "the British journal of the Society for Education in Film and Television." Initially, *Screen* had a pedagogical function: to provide filmmakers with lists of books in print, available 16mm films, relevant courses, exhibitions, and so forth. During the 1970s, however, the journal underwent several theoretical evolutions whereby Marxist and feminist considerations of ideology, semiotics, and psychoanalysis were discussed through the lens of film practice and, later, art practice.

Within these two exhibitions, *Difference* and *En Foco, Heresies*, lies what appears to be the hypostatization of a regional divide in feminist theory and art practice in the 1980s. But when looked at closely, it is actually the culmination of a discursive divide that was implicit within feminist theory during the previous decade. In the 1970s, American feminists (largely New York-based artists) associated with magazines such as *Heresies* took as their theoretical model the combined writings of feminists Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*), Kate Millet (*Sexual Politics*),

and Shulamith Firestone (*The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*) in a fight for gender parity on the job and at home.⁸ At the same time, the *Screen* model (attracting artists and filmmakers in Great Britain) took up psychoanalytic writings by feminists Juliet Mitchell (*Psychoanalysis and Feminism*), Laura Mulvey (“Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”), and Julia Kristeva (“The System and the Speaking Subject”) in an analysis of women’s representation in the visual field.⁹

Schor dismisses this heterogeneous moment in 1970s feminist art practice when she periodizes “academic,” “text-based,” and “text-driven” feminism following the works of Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Jean Baudrillard (who were associated with *Screen* in the 1970s) as a 1980s backlash against the American model.¹⁰ Her confusion arises from the fact that American feminist artists and writers working in New York were introduced to the British model in the early 1980s, in large part through The New Museum’s publications. I am speaking not only of the *Difference* exhibition catalog, but also of The New Museum’s 1984 anthology *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, which translated and introduced relevant texts by Barthes, among others.¹¹ Through Schor we can clearly see how The New Museum’s overall discursive project has retroactively come to define its so-called original physical site founded in the 1970s, a metalepsis we can and must expect. However, if we do not recognize the operations of this metalepsis, we naturalize the manner in which the *reception* of 1970s art and theory has been conflated with its *production*. From there, we get Schor’s dialectic: an American cultural feminism *followed* by a British text-driven model. But there’s a more interesting story at hand, one that begs us to consider the following questions: How did two art practices associated with two theoretical models indirectly define themselves in relation to questions of sexuality and representation in the 1970s? And what were the conditions in which their legacies finally met and directly engaged during the 1980s? Moreover, what role did The New Museum play in facilitating this rendezvous? Let’s digress here to look at the intellectual development of the American feminist position (the story) leading up to the founding of the New Museum in 1977 and, later, the *Difference* and *Events: En Foco, Heresies* exhibitions.

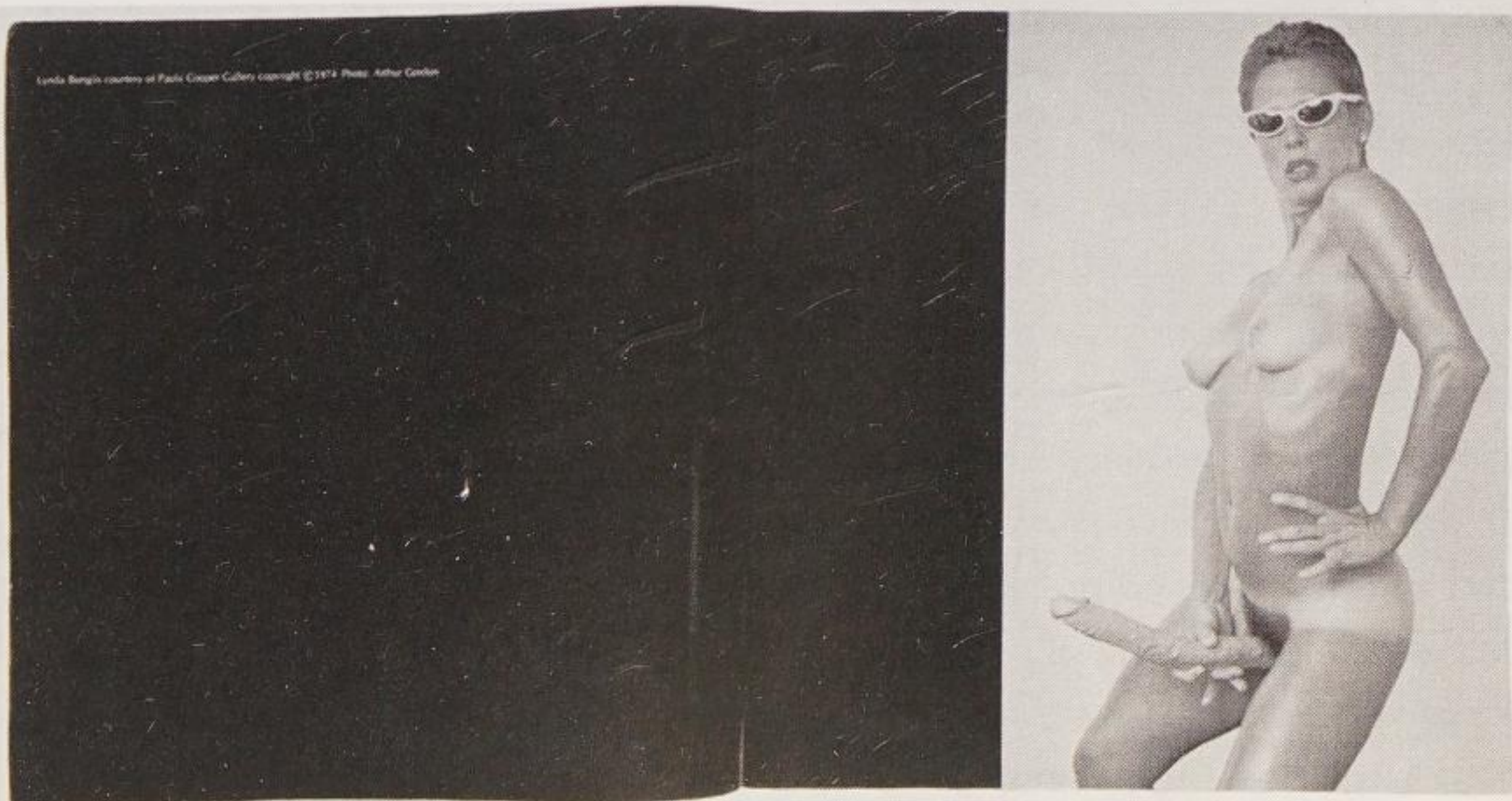
On March 19, 1970, the *Village Voice* published an article by Muriel Castanis, entitled “Behind Every Artist There’s a Penis,” addressing the same question Linda Nochlin would ask a year later in *Art News*: “Why Are There No Great Women Artists?” Nochlin noted that women artists in the nineteenth century had no access to such pedagogical norms as nude models, outside encouragement, educational facilities, and intellectual circles. Extending the premise of Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* to an analysis of art production, Nochlin concluded that female artists were trained to excel in the artifice of femininity, not professional art careers. How, then, did artists like Mary Cassatt or Berthe Morisot get around this in the nineteenth century? They had male mentors. In the same vein, Castanis’s

article considered the masculinization of women once they gained access to art education in postwar American universities. Moreover, male work, she argued, became more phallic as it reacted to female presence:

their reaction is reaching desperate proportions, what about sculpture, where they can step away from the wall and really grab hold of a lot more space? The controlling aspect of plaster-casting life in a frieze or of massive cubes balanced effortlessly on their corner, huge steel pipes positioned like tinker toys or sewn with steel thread, the hardness of steel, the lightness of lead, the largeness of Brillo Boxes, the softness of a telephone—veritable giants in mother's kitchen. And let's not leave out the wrapping up of a whole skyscraper or even a mountain. Recently we are being led into the backyard to appreciate the mile-long hole big junior has dug in the earth.¹²

As to whether there is a female countervoice, Castanis dialectically affirmed: "When we see sexism (like racism) take over, we know there must be a female voice by negation." In an art market dominated by masculine "brutal confrontation," the solution was therefore an expressionist, humanist one: "Art must be the expression of the total human world, and only an art fed by male and female views interacting can be vital." And as a revolutionary coda, she gives the following imperative: "The time is now and is overdue."¹³

This was the discursive background against which Lynda Benglis would assert that indeed she did not have penis envy, an anti-Freudian position that paradoxically informed her infamous 1974 advertisement in *Artforum*: a nude photograph of the artist sporting sunglasses and an enormous dildo held at her crotch.¹⁴ Yet the same year that Benglis took out her advertisement, Juliet Mitchell published



Lynda Benglis, advertisement in *Artforum* 13 (November 1974). Copyright Lynda Benglis/Licensed by VAGA, New York, N.Y.

Psychoanalysis and Feminism, a book written to combat the American feminist rejection of Freud. Mitchell's primary contention dealt with the denial of an unconscious. She argued that such a denial serves to overdetermine social realism at the expense of the subject's desire and phantasies—the latter of which is the *cause* for the subject's "knowable" social existence or gender identification. As Mitchell's text was absolutely central to subsequent psychoanalytic developments within British feminism, it is necessary to examine her approach at length.

It should be underscored that Mitchell's psychoanalytic reading of the subject was devised as a *political* model, though importantly it was not separatist, drawing as it did on her earlier socialist reading of women's oppression. This earlier reading, put forth in her 1966 essay "Women: The Longest Revolution" was an attempt to understand a woman's sexuality through Engels's claim that women's condition derived from the economy and Marx's symbolic equation of it to society.¹⁵ However, without the concepts and terminology afforded by Freud's reading of women's condition, Mitchell's Marxist reading hit an impasse. Just what *was* Marx naturalizing when talking about "women's experience"? she would subsequently ask through Freud. If we know that our conscious gender identification is not innate but constructed, how then does the subject come to build it and for what hegemonic structure? Through Freud's analysis of the subject's unconscious motivations ("what does the woman want?"), Mitchell argued that we could come to understand and possibly *get to* the conscious, oppressive motivations that construct a patriarchal society.

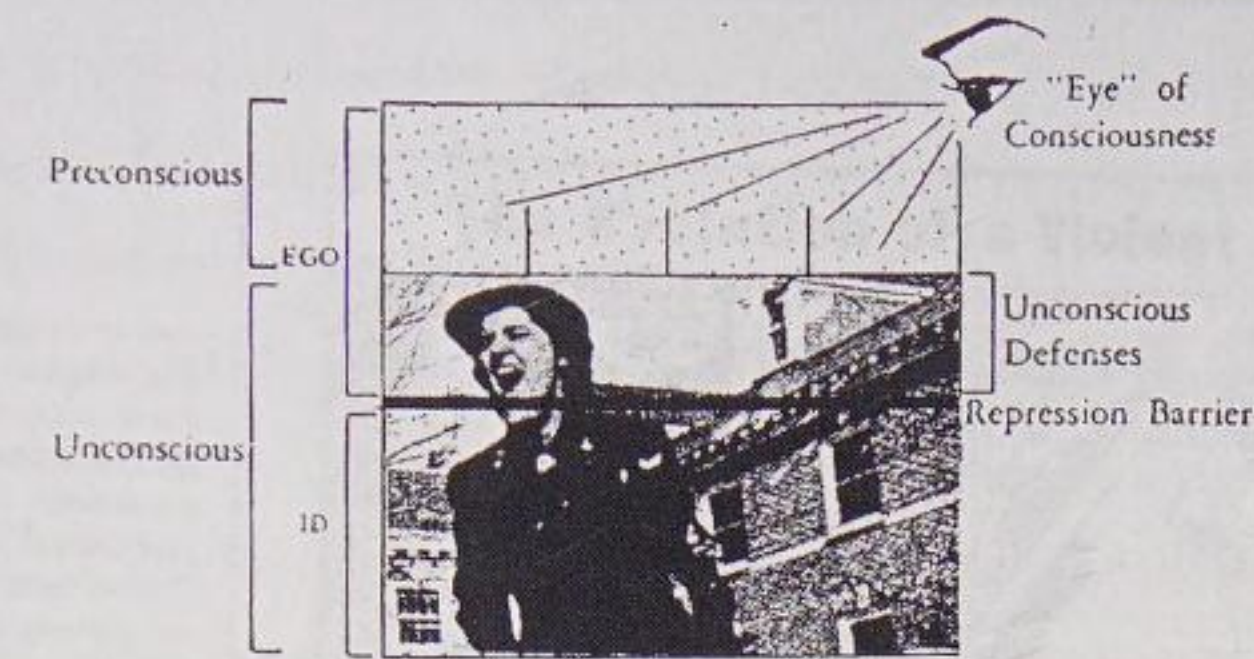
From this standpoint, a turn to the unconscious was not a bourgeois flight of fancy into the unknown. For, as Mitchell stressed, Freud's notion of the unconscious is not a "deep, mysterious place, whose presence, in mystical fashion, accounts for all the unknown." On the contrary, the thoughts contained by the unconscious are "knowable and normal," though the (patriarchal) laws of repression transform them. The purpose of psychoanalysis (extended by Mitchell as a political, feminist imperative) is to decipher the operation of these laws, which are recognizable and readable. The importance of the unconscious in Mitchell's view of feminist practice, then, was the manner in which it exposed sexuality—femininity specifically—as that which is "lived in the mind."¹⁶

American feminist writers, such as Friedan, Millet, and Firestone, were also addressing women's sexuality at the time, but their investigations were polemically waged against psychoanalysis in general and Freud's presumed sexism in particular. Subsequently, Freudian tropes, such as "anatomy is destiny" and "penis envy," were widely circulated and attacked in a populist context. Mitchell argued that this was a debased form of psychoanalysis, one that merely recapitulates the very hegemonic structure of patriarchal ideologies that feminism seeks to undo.

Diametrically opposed to feminists such as Friedan, Mitchell was compelled by Freud's assertion that an individual's acquisition of human culture was less vol-

Editorial

There are a number of traditional ways of explaining violence in human culture. The perspective on violence is usually congruent with a set of beliefs about the sources of human motivation and behavior. The argument has often been drawn along the Nature/Nurture divide, with biology and culture placed in opposition to each other. We need to question explanations based on erroneous assumptions and explanations which cannot account for the male use of violence against women in specific historical periods and social contexts. We need to be critical of simple answers whether they are presented by male scientists or feminist authors. The stance of a self-reflective movement requires a careful evaluation of answers that mask ideology or refuse to include counter-examples, including the ways in which women participate in violence and oppression. Locating the cause of violence within biology, socialization or a violent society posits the cure for that violence within its own terms. Biological explanations demand biological treatment. Implicit in all theories of causation are the



hormonal differences, male aggression and violence is inevitable and natural: "boys will be boys." The only appropriate treatment is short-circuiting these drives by lobotomies, physical or chemical castration or a eugenics program that will breed gentler men. Some women would dispense with men altogether and institute a program of parthenogenesis. Similarly, those who attempt to explain women's subordination as a result of physiological differences in strength offer a biological determinist argument. This view reinforces the status quo, as violence is seen to be inherent in the human race.

2) *Psychological Explanations* — Here

treatment depends upon whether the violence is seen to be deeply embedded in the unconscious during childhood or the result of learning inappropriate behavior.

If the key to male violence is to be found in the unconscious then only an examination of intrapsychic structures can explain its occurrence. This model claims that the Unconscious is basically unbounded by history or culture, though influenced by socio-economic factors. Unconscious structures are seen to be universal and as deeply embedded as language.

Many psychologists who do therapy with sexual aggressives, a clinical name

Editorial page, *Heresies* 6 (1978).

untary and more internally duplicitous. She explained this internal duplicity via the bisexuality of the drives:

Each little baby can't repeat the whole meaning of human history, it has to be acquired very, very rapidly. That infant has to find its place within the human order. And while that place is a feminine or masculine one, it's never absolutely so. That's the psychological concept of bisexuality, which I do think is true. Bisexuality, not in the popular sense of object-choice, loving either a man or a woman, but in the sense that one has the possibility of the other sex within one's self, always. One's social orientation is always to the repression of the psychological characteristics of the sex that one, anatomically, is not.¹⁷

The popular American notion of bisexuality, based on the subject's conscious dual object choice, with its concomitant countercultural polymorphous perversity, was of little interest to Mitchell on its own. Indeed, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* interrogated the revolutionary potential of such nonconformist or "libertine" practices, popularized by the radical psychology of Wilhelm Reich and R. D. Laing, both of whom were popular among Americans in the 1960s and 1970s for their repudiation of Freud.¹⁸ As they advocated a kind of separatism, Mitchell argued, such models offered little analysis of the existing ideological structures *unconsciously* taken up by the subject. A psychoanalytically informed feminist practice, on the other hand, sought the material bases of these internalized attitudes.

According to Mitchell, those material bases are not exclusively located within

a knowable, empirically defined “masculinist” structure. A psychoanalytically informed feminist practice, therefore, would engage in a textual analysis of the site where these attitudes are unconsciously reiterated. Also directly related to the topic at hand is Mitchell’s interrogation of the conventional feminist response to Freud’s passage on penis envy. She begins by citing his most “offensive” statement:

So far there has been no question of the Oedipus complex, nor has it up to this point played any part. But now the girl’s libido slips into a new position along the line—there is no other way of putting it—of the equation “penis-child.” She gives up her wish for a penis and puts in place of it a wish for a child: and with that purpose in view she takes her father as a love-object. Her mother becomes the object of her jealousy. The girl has turned into a little woman.¹⁹

Mitchell then proceeds with an explication of the unconscious in this passage.

The unconscious, of course, revolves around the fact that the little girl wants a penis. Since this desire is incompatible with convention, she represses it into the unconscious. On occasion, the desire will resurface, transformed in the guise of a symptom, ultimately sublimated into the desire to have a child, which is perfectly compatible with convention. The woman’s wish—bifurcated into unconscious (penis) and conscious (baby)—thus establishes her subjectivity as divided. The obstacle for most feminists in this passage, however, is the original “wish” for a penis. And yet, this reified wish can only be posited at the expense of the unconscious. That is to say, the subject’s “conscious decisions and perceptions” replace the “mechanism of unconscious life.” In doing so, the psychoanalytic *principle* of “penis envy” is transformed into the *conscious wish for a penis*. According to Mitchell, this move reenacts (rather than analyzes) the subject’s unconscious repression of phantasy and desire in favor of the subject’s knowable experience, thus replacing the unconscious into the mysterious realm of the “unknowable.” Such a move, she argues, serves only to naturalize conventional femininity because it leaves the original repression mechanism that defines normative sexuality uninterrogated.

Should such a socialist realist model of knowledge be privileged, Mitchell argues, the subject is only resutured into an indivisible, discrete unit—the “woman,” as it were, under patriarchal law. To substantiate this claim, Mitchell cites Millet’s response in *Sexual Politics* to the same passage by Freud:

What forces in her experience, her society and socialization have let [a woman] to see herself as an inferior being? The answer would seem to lie in the conditions of patriarchal society and the inferior position of woman within this society. But Freud did not choose to pursue such a line of reasoning, preferring instead an etiology of childhood experience based upon the biological fact of anatomical difference. . . . it is supremely

unfortunate that Freud should prefer to bypass the more likely social hypothesis to concentrate upon the distortions of infantile sexuality.²⁰

Not only was such consideration of the unconscious anathema to Millet's understanding of a woman's "real" experience, but also, she later asserted, Freud's invention of the unconscious was meant to deny a woman's life experience outright.

If Millet thus saw Freud as a quintessential misogynist, incapable of acknowledging the real-life experience of women (*rape*, not castration, constituting such experience), Mitchell in turn points out the inability of Millet's socialist realism to account for the primacy of the subject's *unconscious* "experience." For Millet, desire exists in the conscious world alone, arguing that a girl envies not the penis but what the penis can give her in a world dominated by "the male superior status." What is completely denied, Mitchell argued in turn, is the psychic *origin* of such structures as "male superiority." From Mitchell's perspective, then, Millet's child is born "directly into the reality principle," bypassing the moment of infantile sexuality, Oedipal development, and subsequent gender identification. For feminists like Millet, Mitchell would argue, Freud's starting point—the subject's "reality"—is the end point.

British feminists following Freud thus saw the development of the subject's sexuality as originating with the repression of unacceptable impulses within the Oedipus complex, while American feminists saw the "reality" of incest (a repressed *phantasy* for Freud) as formative of the subject's sexuality. Put simply, Millet wanted to recognize the reality principle as the basis of a woman's sexuality, whereas Mitchell wanted to put such a reality principle itself under analysis as a means of finding the material, ideological foundation of the structures that form such a sexuality. The effects of these two opposed theoretical positions would be far-reaching in feminist art production throughout the 1970s, coming directly together as a polemic in the mid-1980s, as I have noted. I will return to the British model via The New Museum's *Difference* exhibition shortly. First, we should look at the effects of the American model, one that in part contributed to Marcia Tucker's founding of The New Museum.²¹

Gender Parity and the Institution

Although American feminists may have overdetermined the reality principle at the expense of analyzing the unconscious roots of such reality, their demand for parity of representation was nevertheless instrumental in challenging the administrative hierarchies of such major venues as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the Whitney Museum of American Art. In fact, one could argue that the proliferation of alternative spaces and galleries in the 1970s and 1980s, centered on the politics of class, race, and gender identification, was, in part, a result of this feminist

demand for parity. Of note are New York spaces such as the Clocktower Gallery, P.S. 1, Artists Space, Fashion Moda, Longwood Gallery, and ABC No Rio, where artists established forums to develop their work at the “margins” of the mainstream gallery system.²² These alternative spaces displayed a hybrid of concerns surrounding parity and representation, reminding us that feminist challenges to museums in New York were initially conceived within broader coalitions centered on general socialist challenges to cultural institutions.

For instance, in 1970, the same year that Castanis sarcastically argued that “behind every artist is a penis,” a collective called Women Artists in Revolution (WAR) demanded accountability for the discrepancy between the fact that while 65 percent of New York City art students were women, only 3 percent of them were represented by New York City galleries.²³ WAR was founded in 1969 as an offshoot of the Art Workers’ Coalition (AWC), both of which argued for the democratization of art production and exhibition.²⁴ That June the AWC and WAR jointly made the following demands of MoMA: free admission, racial and gender parity in the exhibition schedule, decentralization of the institution to include outreach to “black, Spanish, and all other communities,” the creation of a public registry listing all artists, an emphasis placed on supporting nonrepresented artists, and granting artists control over the destiny of their work, including rental and resale charges. On September 28, 1970, Brenda Miller and Poppy Johnson added to the AWC’s agenda the demand that 50 percent of the artists included in the Whitney Annual be women. The demand for gender parity exposed an internal contradiction within the group—the desire for an *open* Whitney show (regardless of gender) being preferable to some of the men. Jon Hendricks, of Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG), ultimately saved the motion from foundering.²⁵

That fall an ad hoc committee was formed to wage a letter-writing campaign focused on the Annual, spearheaded by Johnson, Miller, Lucy Lippard, and Faith Ringgold. A central issue was how to afford museum access to women artists denied by the canon:

[H]ow many one-man exhibitions of men’s work have been held at the Whitney since the new building opened, and what is the percentage of those to the four full-fledged and two one-room women’s exhibitions of which you are so proud? With all respect to Louise Nevelson’s achievements, the fact that two of the four large shows have been hers indicates the Whitney’s narrow outlook on women’s work in general. . . . we consider this a “lousy” record. As you say, the curatorial staff is new and can’t be blamed for anything but the last few years. Unfortunately, your Director has been at the Whitney for some 20 years.²⁶

Recalling Castanis’s complaints, initially there was an attempt to connect gender parity with a gendered aesthetics. In a previous letter to MoMA the committee



Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee at the Whitney Annual, 1970. Museum of Modern Art Library. Photograph by Amy Stromsten.

had emphasized that those women achieving access to the institution (artists such as Nevelson, Helen Frankenthaler, and Georgia O'Keeffe, whom the Whitney touted) had been corrupted, or masculinized, by the structure in which they were assimilated:

The central point of the W.A.R. committee was that discrimination versus women—including women artists—is so general, profound, and long standing that it can be reversed only by a positive and conscious reconstruction program, which will seek in frankly experimental ways to discover and establish truer feminine values, and thus a genuinely feminine aesthetic. Women artists should not be judged solely on presently available criteria (intellectual or intuitive), since these criteria are the product of the dominant male culture.²⁷

The feminist art movement in New York was based on the belief that total gender parity in museums' economy of exhibitions, coupled with a feminized aesthetic

criterion, could be achieved via an oppositional women's practice. Its founders contended this would revolutionize the existing "masculinist" hegemonic museum structure.

Such was the spirit in which the Ad Hoc Committee founded the Women's Slide Registry in 1970, which at that time contained slides of work by more than six hundred women artists. Developed by Lucy Lippard, the registry served as a network in which women artists—underrepresented by the gallery/museum system—could encounter each other's work and develop alternative practices and exhibitions. Although New York-based, the registry bridged the East and West Coast divide, giving artists in New York access to projects such as Womanhouse as well as related projects associated with the Women's Building in Los Angeles, described by its founders as "a new art community built from the lives, feelings, and needs of women."²⁸ In this same oppositional spirit, a collective of women artists in New York, including Howardena Pindell, Nancy Spero, and Barbara Zucker, founded the Artists in Residence Gallery (A.I.R.) in 1972, an alternative space run by the collective in order to show the work of its members. The collective's first press release defined its intended demographic: women artists in their early thirties who "have been working for a number of years, some in total isolation, others exhibiting extensively." According to Corinne Robins, the dominant aesthetic of A.I.R.'s opening exhibition (September 17, 1972) was based on the "eccentric, non-fine-art materials" of Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeois, with an added emphasis on "domestic materials and erotic and autobiographical content," something perceived by the group as missing in mainstream work of the time.²⁹

Although a common aesthetic was indeed apparent, the A.I.R. collective's focus rapidly shifted to the professionalization of women artists at the expense of promoting a particular theoretical, political, or aesthetic investigation. Barbara Zucker, one of the group's founders, makes this clear in her account of A.I.R.'s evolution: "We wanted to demonstrate that there were at least twenty women artists producing innovative, professional work in 1971."³⁰ Nevertheless, the artwork produced and exhibited by the collective had in common the general look of "nontraditional" artwork (decorative, autobiographic, intimate scale), as the collective believed such an aesthetic would "change attitudes about art by women . . . [showing that women's work] is as innovative, transitory, or unsaleable as the *artist's* conceptions demand" (my italics).³¹ Autonomy of the artist's aesthetic and professional intentions was thus the group's emphasis, as was the intervention of such intentions into the mainstream art world, a sensibility that A.I.R. shared with such groups as WAR.

Referring to the Women's Slide Registry, Lippard has similarly asserted that its contribution to the movement empowered women's sense of being gendered, working artists. In 1974, defending the registry against challenges that "quality" was overlooked in the selections, Lippard sarcastically argued: "Men have always shown bad art. Until recently, *most* of the bad art has been made by men. We



Mary Beth Edelson, *Death of the Patriarchy/A.I.R. Anatomy Lesson*, 1976. Courtesy of Mary Beth Edelson.

should have less privilege?" Parity was parity, good and bad art alike. The fight here was clearly for the woman as practitioner. At the same time, Lippard, along with others, emphasized the aesthetic discourse of "cultural" feminism, a sensibility she maintained even though she had been drawn to socialist feminism during her stay in London from 1977 to 1978. In 1993 she reflected on this time, recalling that although British socialist feminists developed theories on women and class "far in advance of theory and praxis in the American art world," she had nevertheless become "obsessed" with cultural feminism's interest in the "great prehistoric stone and earth monuments on the Dartmoor, at Avebury and elsewhere." For Lippard, this interest allegorically spoke to women's roots in both nature and culture. Many cultural feminists at the time viewed socialist feminists as "male-identified, unfeeling intellectuals bound to an impersonal and finally antifemale, economic overview," while socialist feminists saw cultural feminists as "a woozy crowd of women in sheets taking refuge in matriarchal 'herstory,' . . . reactionary, escapist and possibly fascist in its suggestions of biological superiority." Lippard's position in relation to these two camps speaks to the contentious diversity of early feminist rhetoric.³² And yet, given the contrasted emphases on aesthetics and economic factors that distinguished these two approaches, both camps still sought a type of materialist parity.

While the emphasis on professional empowerment indicative of American

cultural feminism was undeniably momentous (witness the subsequent alternative spaces engendered by the collaborative efforts of WAR and AWC), we would be remiss if we overlooked how this discursive tone encoded other like-minded revolutionary movements long before Lippard's own conflicted identification. Specifically, cultural feminism's rhetoric recalled some key traits of Zhdanovism, a theory surrounding socialist realist art in the Soviet Union from 1922 to 1953. As a post-Leninist position, Zhdanovism was based on economic determinism—that is, the theory of direct superstructural (ruling class) reflection of society, such that art of the bourgeoisie world only ever reflected bourgeois “economic decadence.” The art of a socialist society, therefore, would mirror revolution in the form of proletarian art. In 1934 Zhdanov characterized the crisis of representation under capitalism this way: “The decadence and disintegration of bourgeois literature results from the collapse and decay of the capitalist system. Now everything is degenerating—themes, talents, authors, and heroes.”³³ The tone and logic of Zhdanov's statement parallel the feminist rhetoric associated with both A.I.R. and *Heresies* in the mid-1970s if we substitute the word “bourgeois” with “patriarchal,” “capitalist” with “masculinist,” and “heroes” with “goddess.” Certainly it recalls Judy Chicago's *Womanhouse*, in which “women took on power, metaphorically confronting the symbolic penis with the symbolic vagina.”³⁴ The desire for a mythic, oppositional *return* also mirrored a dominant faction (although certainly not all) of the *Heresies* collective. In particular, issues of *Heresies* such as *The Great Goddess* (spring 1978), described by Carrie Rickey as “a veritable multi-cultural textbook in its discussions of the many paths of female spirituality,” became best-sellers. Religious edifices from Anatolia to Chartres were framed in terms of the Goddess debate, as were Navajo rug making, ancient Anasazi structures in Arizona's Chaco Canyon, and earthworks by Mary Miss, Nancy Holt, and Alice Aycock.³⁵

Implicitly, this attitude also recalled Georg Lukács's position on revolutionary aesthetics. Lukács believed that “modernist theories of popular art, strongly influenced by avant-garde ideas” had “pushed the sturdy realism of folk art very much into the background.”³⁶ Lukács ultimately desired a space of production outside capitalism and its concomitant modernist theories, as a means of returning to a pure precapitalist moment. In much the same manner, feminists such as those in the *Heresies* collective seemed to desire a space outside patriarchy and its concomitant avant-garde strategies of minimalism and conceptualism, as well as outside burgeoning theories of postmodern psychoanalysis. This was seen as a means of returning to a homogenous, utopic female space, away from 1970s masculinist practice and antecedent to a theoretical 1980s model.

However, it is important to note that American feminists in the 1970s were not unanimously engaged in the promotion of a utopic female space or practice. At the same time, a different model maintaining an interventionist relation to the



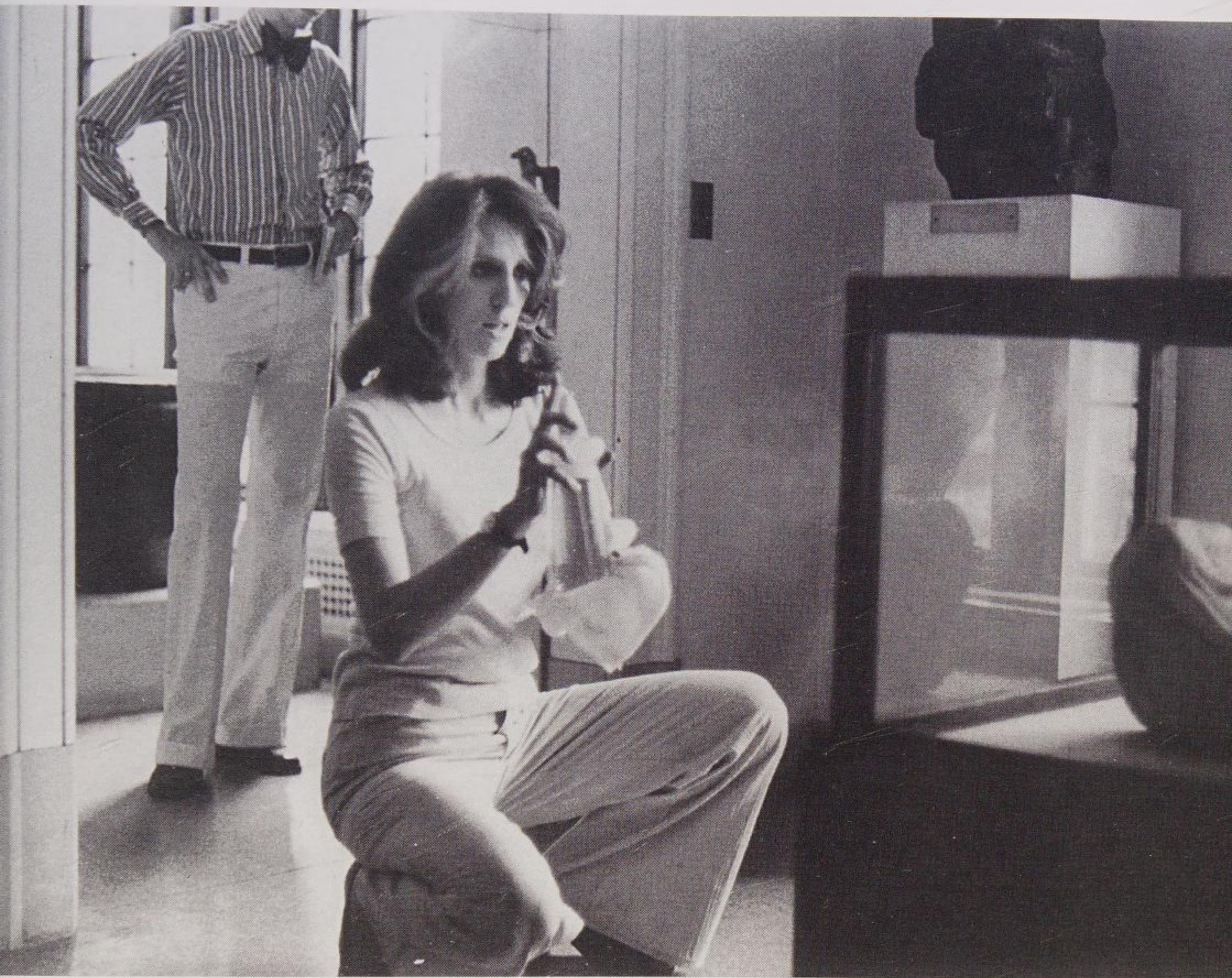
Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Maintenance Art Interviews* at A.I.R. Gallery, 1973. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

museum (rather than an oppositionalist one) was initiated by Mierle Laderman Ukeles's 1973 performance series, *Maintenance Art Activity and Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object*. Informed by her maintenance "manifesto" from 1969, these performances utilized the aesthetic strategies and rhetoric of the avant-garde in order to wage a feminist problematic within it. Contemporaneous with Marcel Broodthaers's mock Museum of Modern Art, which exposed the falsely "naturalized" curatorial hand of museum exhibitions, and projects by Mel Bochner, Michael Asher, and Daniel Buren that exposed the falsely conceived "neutral" physical framework of the museum exhibition, Laderman Ukeles's performances exposed the purposefully hidden labor force that kept all museum exhibitions clean. Here, gendered labor (which metonymically signifies domesticity) entered the exhibition space not as a separatist *representation*, but as a performative signifier of what is excised from our perception of any given space, be it at home or in a public institution.³⁷

Such strategies would later come to fruition in the works of Andrea Fraser



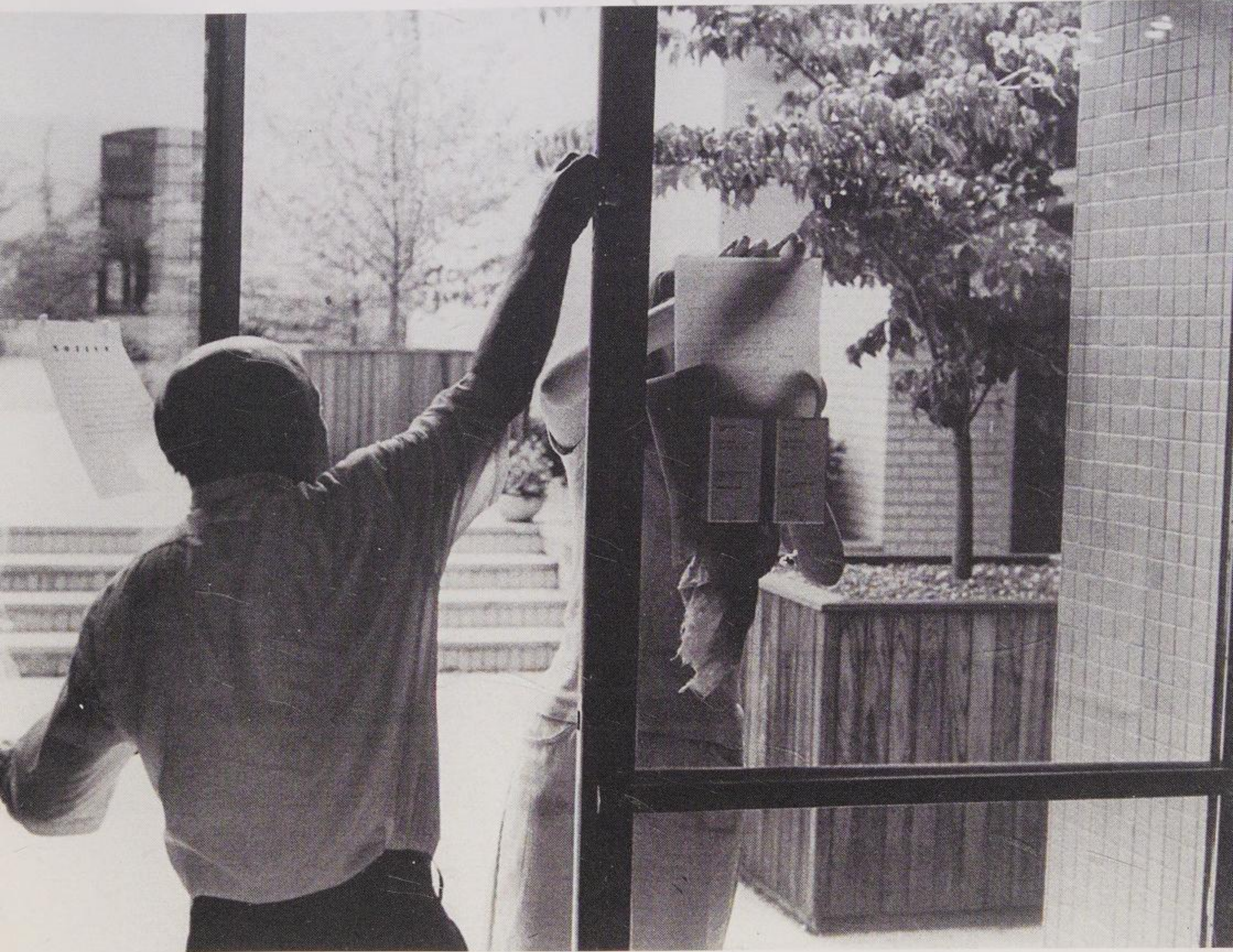
Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Maintenance Art Interviews* at A.I.R. Gallery, 1973. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object*, 1974. From Maintenance Art Activity performance series at Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

during the mid- to late 1980s; they similarly took up gender in the space of institutional critique, although her mock docent performances, especially the video *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989), extended this critique even further to include psychoanalytic considerations. A central contribution of that work was her interrogation of the public's psychic identification with cultural institutions, something she came to consider through exposure to Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*.³⁸ The issue of gender in the public space of the museum, initiated by Laderman Ukeles and continued by Fraser, may have employed avant-garde strategies in a deconstructive move. Nevertheless, the motivating politic stemmed from the initial activities of AWC and WAR.

As for the outcome of WAR's activism, the Ad Hoc Committee's demands were never met either by MoMA or the Whitney; the letter-writing campaigns eventually turned to guerrilla actions. However, notable in the correspondence



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *The Keeping of the Keys*, 1974. From Maintenance Art Activity performance series at Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

that circulated between WAR and the Whitney was the inclusion of Marcia Tucker's name—one of four curators targeted by the group. After Tucker was fired from the Whitney in 1976, she went on to found The New Museum, an institution informed by the agendas of the women's movement, the history of civil rights, and the anti-Vietnam War movement.³⁹ This was also the site where the aforementioned British and American feminist models, with their concomitant semiotic, oppositionist, and interventionist theories, would directly enter into debate, which was The New Museum's founding intention.

Aesthetic Models and Institutional Spaces: The New Museum

To me, a museum of contemporary art should be a place where dialogue and controversy are synonymous. There is a posture of inquiry that certain artists have that can be shared by museums.⁴⁰

Starting out in 1977 as two small rooms in the Fine Arts Building at 105 Hudson Street, The New Museum was intended to fill the gap between “challenging contemporary” and “noncommercial forums.” What it held in common with museums versus alternative spaces such as A.I.R. was not only its structure—it had a 501-3C (not-for-profit status), a director (Tucker), a staff, and a board—but also its commitment to contemporary art scholarship. On the other hand, what differentiated The New Museum from mainstream institutions was its commitment to being an “exhibition, information, and documentation center for contemporary art made within a period of ten years prior to the present.” It was also unique at the time for focusing on living, practicing artists “which until [then] could not readily be seen outside the studio.”⁴¹

The effect of AWC’s activism is obvious here. Tucker had been involved in feminist activity at the same time that she was a target of WAR’s campaigns. In 1968 she was already a member of Redstockings, one of the early groups associated with the women’s liberation movement that held public demonstrations of the kind associated with the New Left. However, the feminist perspective that informed her museum project was more deconstructive and theoretical, employing as it did a feminist *problematic* versus a feminist *model*. A feminist problematic intervenes into hegemonic structures, be they institutions or discourses, without propagating a stable solution. If feminism is a problematic, rather than a style or politic, then any notion of a “feminist art” is something that should be problematized. Mary Kelly put it this way: “perhaps we shouldn’t maintain this formulation ‘feminist art,’ because an ideology doesn’t constitute a style. Rather I would say ‘art informed by feminism.’”⁴² We can extend this question of a “feminist art” to consider the notion of a “feminist space” in terms of The New Museum’s founding project and Tucker’s role in structuring it differently from such separatist feminist exhibition spaces as A.I.R.

Although The New Museum was in fact conceived in terms of feminist demands to restructure the museum, the challenge for Tucker was to take this up as an *insider* practice of dismantling museological authority. She recalls that this is what distinguished The New Museum from other alternative spaces. In the early 1970s people focused “more on the way things [were] done on the outside,” such as the number of women included in exhibitions. “In museum culture,” she asserted, “feminism never penetrated the actual *structure* of the organization” (my italics).⁴³ This would be the museum’s project, to the extent that exhibitions were both conceived as a theoretical challenge to normative art culture and enacted administratively as a “team” effort by the staff.⁴⁴ The initial result was a series of contradicting temporary exhibitions, each accompanied by a catalog of essays on the show’s topic written by the curators and invited contributors. As an “investigative” rather than a “didactic” space (Tucker saw the latter as promoting an authoritative attitude of expertise), the idea was to “have enough variety in perspectives to be

able to deal with different audiences at different times in different ways.”⁴⁵ At the start, then, The New Museum sought to *formulate* a range of discursive practices rather than being ideologically fixed to a given aesthetic or striving to be monumental as an institution.

It took awhile, however, for this discursive gesture to meet with a rigorously intellectual project. The first shows, in 1977, were unremarkable in their critical vision and scholarship. For instance, the inaugural exhibition, *Memory*, had a pop psychology theme: “memory . . . is common to us all and is our primary means of understanding ourselves and sharing our lives with others.”⁴⁶ The second, *New Work/New York*, an exhibition with no unifying theme, featured unknown artists “who had not shown extensively in the city [but] deserved wider public exposure.”⁴⁷ A performative shift occurred with *Bad Painting*, which Tucker defined as “figurative work that defied the classic canons of good taste, draftsmanship, acceptable source material.”⁴⁸ The exhibition’s anti-Greenbergian rhetoric wasn’t its most engaging aspect. More interesting was the way statements by contributing artists resisting the term “bad” actually demonstrated—via the contingencies of artistic desire and canonical identification—the residual problematics of Greenberg’s claims for the categories of kitsch and the avant-garde. Specifically, *Bad Painting* exposed how Greenberg’s dichotomy was still (unconsciously) operative—Tucker striving to herald “kitsch” against the “avant-garde,” the artists’ maintaining notions of “quality” in their work against such claims.⁴⁹ It was precisely this combination (a theoretical investigation, a historical aesthetic debate, and the active engagement of artists in the form of participation and/or critique) that would come to characterize The New Museum’s more mature exhibitions of the 1980s.⁵⁰ I’ll concentrate now on two such shows—*Events: En Foco, Heresies Collective* (1983) and *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* (1984)—through which the two feminist approaches to art practice I have discussed here were debated vis-à-vis what came to be known as “essentialist” versus “constructionist” strategies.⁵¹

In June 1983, the Heresies collective mounted an exhibition that they described as a “visual version” of an upcoming issue of their magazine, entitled *Mothers, Mags, and Movie Stars: Feminism and Class*.⁵² Lucy Lippard wrote a portion of the statement of purpose in the exhibition catalog:

Mothers, Mags and Movie Stars . . . [was] a way of getting to know each other better and discussing politics and aesthetics more directly, outside of our usual business-meeting format. For several months we discussed our own relationship to our mothers in terms of feminism and class. . . . Our meetings took on the double aspect of sewing circle and study group. Most of our anecdotes centered on images, clothes, objects, and spaces.⁵³



Heresies retreat at Joan Snyder's farm, 1977. Courtesy of Mary Beth Edelson. Photograph by Mary Beth Edelson.

At the fore of the project was not the operation of a *bodily* essentialism, associated with the vaginal works of such artists as Judy Chicago. Yet, something else was nevertheless essentialized: the conscious condition of social relations between men and women, an idea that in part echoed the writings of Guy Debord, translated to consider issues of femininity.

This was clear in the rhetorical tone of the magazine version of the show. Lucy Lippard's concern with a feminine subjectivity fragmented along class lines was continued in the magazine's editorial statement, which asserted: "There are bits and pieces of us all over the place. Cutting up is rebellion. We're formed by an alienated society, parts of which are severed from mothers by a class system that is largely ignored or denied."⁵⁴ Both the exhibition and magazine focused on images of women—in various roles as mothers, daughters, sisters, and so on—reclaimed from "false" images women encountered in mass culture. Debord's claim had been that "The whole of life . . . in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles," such that "all that

was directly lived has become mere representation”⁵⁵; similarly, the Heresies collective claimed that women’s experiences had fallen into the commodified condition of spectacle.

Moreover, Debord longed for a space of “real life experience” outside the hegemony of spectacle, seen “not as a collection of images; rather . . . [as] a social relationship between people that is mediated by images”; so, too, did the Heresies collective seek a space outside patriarchy’s spectacle.⁵⁶ In such a space, the social relation between men and women would no longer be mediated by demeaning images of women. This space was conceived as an alternative visual culture, one that would initiate a *counter* social relation among women mediated by empowering images of women’s “true” lived experience. This was embodied in the exhibition by the *Roomful of Mothers* installation by Sabra Moore, which consisted of images Moore had gathered from twelve women, each of whom provided a photo and a handwritten history of her mother. The result was “shared stories, describing our families’ work histories, the crossings between classes through marriage, political refuge, or education.”⁵⁷ Other pieces attempted to “deconstruct” the meaning of mother, especially the 1950s stereotype in which women were taken “back into modernized jail cells,” that is, to the modernized domestic space where the mother “ran” the family unit via commodities of efficiency (washing machines, refrigerators, and so on). The situationists themselves had commented upon the parallel spaces in which personal experience was commodified—domestic and public—but stopped short of the recognition that each space was gendered as feminine or masculine, respectively.

Sally Stein’s article, “The Graphic Ordering of Desire,” in the magazine form of the show, took this up directly. Stein diagrammed and analyzed the ways middle-class women were modernized in women’s magazines, specifically how graphic techniques of color, photography, and serial cartoons “were orchestrated in a more dynamic layout to sustain the reader’s interest and draw the reader closer to the marketplace.” At the heart of Stein’s essay was a quasi-Debordian argument, well documented and convincingly articulated, that the woman’s magazine *Ladies’ Home Journal* had lulled the reader, through the combination of lengthy literary texts and advertising, into a visual experience that constituted women homemakers as “an audience of spectators and by extension consumers.”⁵⁸ To accompany her essay, Stein devised an elaborate graph system that charted the development of the *Ladies Home Journal* to include advertisements for a wifely lifestyle that appeared in recipe catalogs, fashion design periodicals, and the like, literally demonstrating the *graphic* order of feminine desire. The theoretical support for Stein’s graphic analysis included such reception theory books as Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour’s *Learning from Las Vegas*; and Raymond Williams’s *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*.⁵⁹

Stein’s article was indeed the most analytic and theoretically informed text in

Guest curated by Kate Linker and Jane Weinstock, *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* was distinguished by the role it accorded theory. Although its lineup of artists was impressive (those who would soon be known as the New York School—Judith Barry, Dara Birnbaum, Victor Burgin, Hans Haacke, Mary Kelly, Silvia Kolbowski, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, Martha Rosler, and Jeff Wall), equal focus was placed on the theoretical texts accompanying Linker’s curatorial statement in the catalog:

As the title suggests, this exhibition pertains to recent interest in representation and, particularly, in the powers inherent in representation. However, it diverges—differs—in the role it accords theory. The essays collected here indicate the influence on this work of psychoanalytic theory and its account of the development of sexed subjectivity. Central to it are Jacques Lacan’s writings on the subject’s construction in language. Underlying Lacan’s theory is the conviction that the human subject is never a discrete self, that it cannot be known outside the terms of the society and, specifically, of the cultural formations of patriarchy. Implicit in his speculations is awareness of how gender informs, infuses, and complicates a range of social “texts,” permeating supposedly neutral fields.⁶⁰

And just as the show’s premise was that the gendered subject could not be considered outside his or her construction *within* language (i.e., patriarchy), neither could the work of art be considered outside theorizations of its own representation. Practice and theory were thus chiasmatically intertwined in much the same way that the show’s organizers saw women as being constructed within patriarchy. For the woman—like the art object—was bound up in a larger signifying system, one that Lacan called “the Symbolic” and that poststructuralists since the 1960s had been intent on deconstructing.

In this regard, one of the most important essays in the *Difference* catalog was Jacqueline Rose’s “Sexuality in the Field of Vision,” whose title came to define a type of American art discourse centered on a psychoanalytic definition of a sexual difference versus a materialist one. A dominant figure in British circles studying psychoanalytic theory in the mid- to late 1970s, Rose was instrumental in introducing Lacan’s writings to British and American feminists, in much the same way that Mitchell had been in the argument for Freud.⁶¹ For the *Difference* exhibition, Rose extended Lacan’s model to the postmodern imperative of “disrupting visual form and questioning sexual certainties and stereotypes of our culture.” This connection—the relation between sexuality and the image—was substantiated by Rose’s return to Freud’s essay on Leonardo da Vinci.⁶² She asserted that “there can be no work on the image, no challenge to its powers of illusion and address, which does not simultaneously challenge the fact of sexual difference.”⁶³ For Freud, Rose argued, voyeurism, fetishism, and castration are all related to sight. In such terms,

the little boy refuses to believe the anatomical difference that he sees, while the little girl sees what she doesn't have and immediately knows she wants it. However, Rose continued, sexuality relies less on what is *consciously* seen than it does on the subjectivity of the viewer who sees it—that is, what it comes to signify *later* in a moment of deferred action. Seeing, like subjectivity, is always caught in a state of fracture, its meaning always somewhere *other*, embodying the dialectics of recognition/misrecognition, pleasure/pain, identification/disgust. Accordingly, the manipulation of images can then be either complicit, reinforcing sexual identity, or disruptive, exposing “the fixed nature of sexual identity as a fantasy.”

Rose argued that this Freudian paradigm—one that “unsettled our certainties”—was consistent with a postmodern practice that resisted the certainty in a sign. She saw Roland Barthes's reading of Balzac's *Sarrasine* as a quintessential example of a psychoanalytically informed postmodern practice because Barthes argued that Sarrasine's indecipherable sexuality is the actual source of the pleasure/pain in Balzac's book. Modernism (of the Greenbergian paradigm), on the other hand, emphasized the purity of the visual signifier—a gestalt akin to the “I” of Lacan's mirror stage. But this “I” is a lie—a primordial misrecognition that is masked by the belief in a pure, unified signifier. Again, the image—like the subject—is split, troubled, decentered, along the division between conscious and unconscious desire.⁶⁴

This connection, between visual production and the psychoanalytic means of theorizing sexuality in the field of the visual, was a major development in feminist art practice. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, The New Museum would continue mounting exhibitions that incorporated a psychoanalytically informed feminist problematic within postmodern logic. Two shows in particular come to mind. In 1986 *Damaged Goods: Desire and Economy of the Object*, organized by Brian Wallis, afforded Andrea Fraser the opportunity to develop her performative docent tours in the context of works by Judith Barry, Gretchen Bender, Barbara Bloom, Jeff Koons, Justen Ladda, Louise Lawler, Ken Lum, Allan McCollum, and Haim Steinbach. In 1990 The New Museum hosted Mary Kelly's *Interim* exhibition, which addressed a number of discourses relevant to the history of feminism—fiction, fashion, medicine, family, media, and social science—at the level of women's psychic identification across generational lines.

Difference, *Damaged Goods*, and *Interim* accorded with an art practice in which feminist theories incorporated a psychoanalytic approach in order to question the politics of *visual* practice, rather than promoting a separate sociological or ideological imperative for gendered production. From this position, Rose and others advocated a deconstructive approach (akin to that of Barthes) in place of a feminist corrective, such as gender parity. Postmodern artists utilizing such deconstructive strategies, the argument went, would necessarily draw upon the same critical and artistic tendencies they sought to displace. In this way, a separatist

strategy was purposefully averted, allowing “reference” itself (e.g., “woman”) in its problematized form to reenter the frame.⁶⁵

The Historical Left and Second Wave Feminism: Debates on the Unconscious

The debate invoked by the emblematic comparison of the *Difference* and *Events: En Foco, Heresies* exhibitions recalls an older debate within the left concerning the role of the unconscious in revolutionary politics, specifically the debate between André Breton and Georg Lukács.⁶⁶ Breton wrote in accordance with the avant-garde feeling that unbridled imaginative freedom was the ultimate form of resistance against bourgeois conventionality and rationality. This move toward internalization, of course, was decidedly antirealist, which he claimed was “inspired by positivism” and was “hostile to any intellectual or moral advancement.”⁶⁷ Influenced by Freud’s dream-work theories, Breton argued for the revolutionary potential not of consciousness-raising but of consciousness-lowering. This line of thinking culminated in his 1932 book *Communicating Vessels*, which defended the “revolutionary power” of a Freudian approach against Marxist claims that that approach complied with bourgeois sensibilities. Specifically, Breton argued that a link between the conscious and unconscious states held disruptive, even revolutionary potential in terms of challenging deadened bourgeois and communist sensibilities alike. In other words, Breton’s model waged a psychoanalytic interrogation of materialist dialectics.

Breton took this up directly in his “Second Manifesto of Surrealism,” in which he responds to two Marxist questions asked of him in 1928: First, “Do you believe that literary and artistic output is a purely individual phenomenon? Don’t you think that it can or must be the reflection of the main currents which determine the economic and social evolution of humanity?” And second, “Do you believe in a literature and an art which express the aspirations of the working class? Who in your opinion are the principal representatives of this literature and this art?”⁶⁸ Breton answered that the first question, being too positivist, presumes a “sovereignty of thought.” Instead, the question that should be taken up is the relation between the *nature* of human thought (which is unconscious) and the *reality* of human thought (which is conscious). Citing Engels, Breton argued that “in this sense human thought is [both] sovereign and is not; and its capacity to know is both limitless and limited.” It is the space in between these two states, or rather their inextricable, chiasmatic relation, that a revolutionary art should underscore. To the second question, he answered “no” to a working-class art, as the pre-revolutionary bourgeois cannot accurately translate working-class aspirations.⁶⁹ Although Breton argued that Marx was right regarding social phenomenon, he also contended that the point of entry for a revolutionary art was based not on class consciousness but in the space provided by the divided subject—divided

between conscious identification (in society) and unconscious drives (internalized, conflicting identifications).

Herein lies the reference for a Lacanian approach, continued by the British School, that was skeptical of a realist, materialist practice—specifically in the form of a separatist, feminist aesthetic. If an emphasis is placed on establishing an innate aesthetic for a given social group, be it the proletariat historically or feminists recently, then class takes precedence over subjectivity, a move opposed by Breton, Lacan, and later by certain British feminists. In fact, the founding editorial statement of *m/f*, a British feminist journal on art and culture, explicitly denied such a privileging of a working-class aesthetic with respect to feminism:

A tendency in the application of classic Marxist ideas of class to women can be seen in any political project which claims that it is working class women alone who will form the vanguard of any feminist politics. . . . While no one would want to dispute the double pressure on working class women, it cannot be said either that they are necessarily politically progressive, or that they are the only women who are exploited. The operations of the law, education, and employment discriminate against women of all classes. To ignore these areas is to miscalculate the current situation.

The editors instead advocated a psychoanalytic evaluation of the social structures that *place* women in positions where they are exploited.⁷⁰

Lukács was a proponent of working-class realism, and if the unconscious *did* play a role in the revolution, it was a counterproductive one. He begins his book *History and Class Consciousness* by citing Marx and Engels's fundamental assertion that "the real motor forces of history are independent of man's (psychological) consciousness of them." The idea was to bring the "real motor forces of history" into consciousness—particularly class consciousness. Moreover, history itself is the history of institutions, "of the changes they undergo *as* institutions which bring men together in societies." Following Marx, Lukács concluded, "Such institutions start by controlling economic relations between men and go on to permeate all human relations."⁷¹

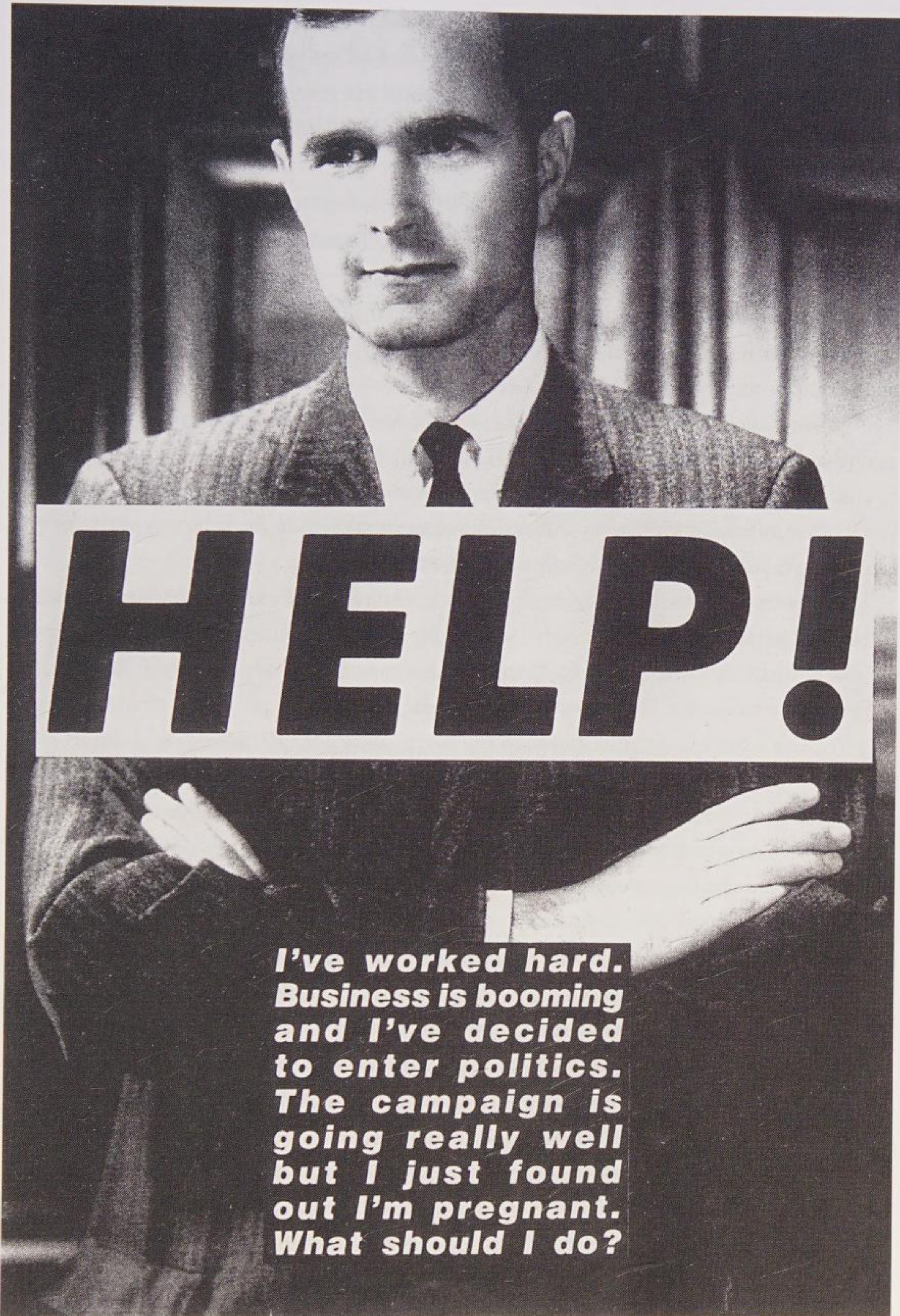
It was precisely this human relation, one constructed by institutions rather than by nature, of which society needed to be conscious. That is, man needed to understand how capital, according to Marx, was "not a [natural] thing, but a social relation between persons mediated by things."⁷² We can recall that Marx's statement was taken further by Debord, for whom "spectacle" came to replace "capital" when *things* were replaced by their *representation*. The imperative for a revolutionary society, according to both Lukács and Debord, was thus to raise the proletariat's consciousness of such a state of affairs in order to reinstate a (pre-capitalist) moment when relations were based neither upon on the exchange of capital nor on the mere representation of things.

This divide between Lukács and Breton over the role of the unconscious in revolutionary art practice clearly predates the similar divide between the American and British models in the formative moments of the second wave of feminism in the 1980s.⁷³ It would thus not reduce the complexity of the feminist debate (as it was played out at The New Museum) to argue that two practices or aesthetic concerns were in part defined by their respective relation to the unconscious, in general, and to theories of penis envy, in particular. For as Mitchell argued, penis envy is not a conscious desire for an organ but an unconscious desire for a symbolic (masculine) position of authority. One model—1970s American—consciously focused on women’s access to institutions of power via the strategy of gender parity and separatist cultural feminism. Another model—1970s British—sought to theorize how those institutions constituted a symbolic to which men consciously had access but from which women were psychologically barred due to the way both genders were sexually marked within it.

The *Difference* model thus begged a deconstructive approach, positing as it did that women couldn’t disentangle themselves from the structures of patriarchy—much as Breton had argued that one couldn’t disentangle one’s “sovereignty of thought” from those registers of the unconscious that mark it. The *Heresies* model, on the other hand, focused on the establishment of a feminist practice as a *counter*-institution, initiated by consciousness raising, and was thus Lukácsian in tone. Ironically, the American model established a precedent for institutions such as The New Museum, which would then consider such “opposing” feminist theorizations of the subject in art, such as the ones that were defined, in part, by the British model. Should we search for a point of reconciliation between these two models, as Mira Schor begs us to do, perhaps one can be found in the ironic contingency of their collaboration.

Today, after many shows and articles have argued the theories and practices initiated by the *Difference* and *Events: En Foco, Heresies* exhibitions, those two models have come to be hybridized. For instance, artists such as Barbara Kruger, whose work takes up Situationist tactics of direct address and public consciousness-raising, have also been theorized around psychoanalytic considerations of feminine sexuality, most prominently the role of the “male gaze” in fetishizing the woman’s body as commodity. Similarly, artists such as Mary Kelly have recently been re-historicized in light of practices in the 1970s that addressed domesticity.⁷⁴ I have sought here to illustrate how institutions such as The New Museum were both product and producer of feminist discourses as they evolved during the mid-1970s and 1980s. Moreover, it is important to note how earlier Marxist debates over social relations implicitly return to us, although they are in the guise of contemporary feminist debates over identity and sexuality.

The manner in which The New Museum was designed to facilitate such debates distinguished it from other cultural institutions; it promoted discussions about theory and aesthetics rather than any given one. As such, in its earliest for-



Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Help!)*, 1991. Originally appeared on Op-Ed page, *New York Times*, June 4, 1991. Courtesy of Barbara Kruger.

mation The New Museum openly demonstrated how *all* institutions constitute a discursive site, although it was one of several defined by contentious debate, while other museums (from MoMA to A.I.R.) constituted a specific discursive position *within* such debate. Should we wish to return to the theorization about feminist

practice in the arts that was prevalent during the 1970s and 1980s, we can't eclipse the importance of museums, alternative spaces, and collectives as discursive monuments through which related historical debates are recalled.

Notes

1. Faith Wilding, "The Feminist Art Programs at Fresno and CalArts, 1970–75," in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 39.

2. Arlene Raven, "Womanhouse," in *The Power of Feminist Art*, ed. Broude and Garrard, 48.

3. See Lydia Yee et al., *Division of Labor: "Women's Work" in Contemporary Art*, exh. cat. (Bronx, N.Y.: Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1995).

4. I have chosen to term Womanhouse a "discursive" site because the topic of this essay is feminist art. However, a similar discussion could readily focus on any work or building; Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* is a perfect example.

5. Jonathan Culler, *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988).

6. Norman Bryson, "Art in Context," in *Studies in Historical Change*, ed. Ralph Cohen (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 21.

7. Mira Schor's untitled response to my letter "Why This Return Now," both in *Documents* 17 (winter–spring 2000): 66–68. My letter was written in response to a Schor article entitled "The ism That Dare Not Speak Its Name," *Documents* 15 (spring–summer 1999): 28–39, in which the author addresses my presentation "The F-Word: Contemporary Feminisms and the Legacy of the Los Angeles Feminist Art Movement," at the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, October 1998. Schor's main complaint was that my discussion of Kelly's early 1970s art production, which is theoretically based, overshadowed the conference's more earnest return to nontheoretical 1970s art production. My response focused on the homogenization of 1970s feminist art practice that such complaints as Schor's enact. For other retrospective views of Chicago's project in the context of this debate, see Emily Apter, "Essentialism's Period," *October* 71 (winter 1995): 8–9; Amelia Jones, ed., *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Laura Cottingham, "Interview with Laura Cottingham," in *environ 27 ans (peut-être un peu plus . . .)*, exh. cat. (Geneva: Société des Arts de Genève, Classe des Beaux-Arts, 1997), a project by Martine Anderfuhren, Pauline Boudry, and Anne-Julie Raccoursier; and Helen Molesworth, "Cleaning up in the 1970's: The Work of Judy Chicago, Mary Kelly, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles," in *Re-writing Conceptual Art*, ed. Michael Newman and John Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999).

8. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953); Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1970); Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Morrow, 1970).

9. Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (New York: Vintage, 1975); Laura Mul-

vey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (autumn 1975): 6–18; Julia Kristeva, "The System and Speaking Subject," *Times Literary Supplement*, October 12, 1973, 1249–52.

10. Mira Schor, "Backlash and Appropriation," in *The Power of Feminist Art*, ed. Broude and Garrard, 255.

11. Two related texts that were discursively imbricated in the *Difference's* rhetoric were: Kaja Silverman's *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), and Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (London: Routledge, 1983).

12. Muriel Castanis, "Behind Every Artist There's a Penis," *Village Voice*, March 19, 1970.

13. *Ibid.* The sensibility of Castanis's article would be the referent for more recent discourse by American writers such as Anna Chave who also focus on the masculine, industrial connotations of minimalist forms. See, in particular, Chave's "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine* (January 1990): 44–63. Her heavy reliance on biography to substantiate her argument goes beyond poststructuralist claims that she essentializes form along gender lines. I would argue that she more egregiously essentializes the artist's intentions as the very soul of a given work. See Rosalind Krauss, "Sense and Sensibility," *Artforum* 12, no. 3 (November 1973): 149–56, for the original poststructuralist account of minimalism. For more recent arguments that counter Chave's position, see Hal Foster's "Crux of Minimalism," in his *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

14. *Artforum* 13, no. 3 (November 1974). Ironically, although Benglis's intention was "to mock the idea of having to take sexual sides—to be either a male artist or a female," the literalization of gender roles around the possession of a penis created a controversy among the editors of *Artforum* (who wrote letters of complaint to the magazine) as well as among feminists (who accused Benglis of having penis envy after all). See Susan Krane, *Lynda Benglis: Dual Natures*, exh. cat. (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1990). For more on this exchange, see Leslie C. Jones, "Transgressive Femininity: Art and Gender in the Sixties and Seventies," in *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*, Jack Ben-Levi et al., exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993).

15. Juliet Mitchell, "Women: The Longest Revolution," *New Left Review* 40 (November–December 1966). This essay was revised and expanded in Mitchell's *Women's Estate* (New York: Pantheon, 1971).

16. Carol Morrell, "Interview with Juliet Mitchell," *Sparerib*, no. 22 (April 1974): 6.

17. *Ibid.*, 7.

18. Laing's theories, in particular, were important to feminist writers such as Eunice Lipton, who cited his work in a liberationist attack on patriarchal ideology and violence. See Lipton's "The Violence of Ideological Distortion: The Imagery of Laundresses in Nineteenth-Century French Culture," *Heresies 6: On Women and Violence* 2, no. 2 (summer 1978): 77–85. The editors ran this story alongside Suzanne Lacy's "Evolution of Feminist Art," a survey of feminist artworks based on the "expanding self," a "metaphor for the process of moving boundaries of one's identity outward to encompass other women,

groups of women and eventually all people.” At the base of these arguments was the belief that a return of the repressed—the radical feminine voice—would have liberationist effects. Indeed, the issue’s editorial statement includes a diagram of the registers of the conscious, unconscious, and preconscious, with a screaming woman in the unconscious register, repressed by the “Eye” of (patriarchal) consciousness. This is fundamentally different from Freud’s reading of gender and repression, as that which is repressed differs among individuals due to their individual formative traumas and subsequent neuroses. Moreover, according to Mitchell’s reading of Freud, it is more likely that the so-called masculine drive would unconsciously be repressed by the conscious position of “woman.” In a liberationist, separatist community Mitchell’s reading of the unconscious has critical resonance.

19. Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (New York: Vintage, 1974), 7.

20. *Ibid.*, 352–53.

21. My account of the founding of select New York–based feminist institutions here is admittedly schematic. I’ve focused on events as they relate to a genealogy of theoretical considerations of sexuality, as discussed in the first part of this essay, and to an approach to art production distinctive to New York, discussed in the third part. For a more inclusive account of these events, presented anecdotally by someone central to their making, see Lucy R. Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* (New York: New Press, 1995).

22. By the late 1980s, many of these spaces would be subsumed into the very system they initially interrogated; P.S. 1’s current affiliation with MoMA is the most notable example.

23. WAR solicitation flyer, February 1970. The year before, the Whitney Annual exhibited works by 8 women artists among 143 men. They included: Sarah Saporta, Doloris Holmes, Jacqueline Skiles, Juliette Gordon, Silvia Goldsmith, and Jan McDevitt.

24. Similar activist organizations were being formed at the time in Britain. The Artists’ Union (aligned with the Trade Unions) made similar demands. The Women’s Art Coalition was also formed as a part of this union.

25. N. N., “50% No Joke,” *New York Element* (November–December 1970).

26. Ad Hoc Women Artists’ Committee, letter to Stephen E. Weil, Whitney Museum of American Art, November 9, 1970, reprinted in *A Documentary: Herstory of Women Artists in Revolution* (Pittsburgh: Women’s Interart Center, 1973).

27. This is Betsy Jones and John Szarkowski’s summary of WAR’s position as stated in a memo to MoMA’s executive committee. The memo is in reference to a meeting WAR had with Jones and Szarkowski on December 23, 1969. Reprinted in *ibid.*

28. Judy Chicago, Sheila de Bretteville, and Arlene Raven, Women’s Building founding statement. Quoted in Faith Wilding, *By Our Own Hands: The Woman Artists’ Movement, Southern California, 1970–1976* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Double X, 1977), 83.

29. For A.I.R.’s beginnings, see Corinne Robins, “The A.I.R. Gallery: 1972–1978,” *Womanart* 1, no. 4 (winter 1977–78). Again, mainstream work at this time would be characterized by the minimalist industrial aesthetic of Donald Judd and Robert Morris, or the conceptualist analytic aesthetic of Lawrence Weiner, Sol LeWitt, Mel Bochner, or Joseph Kosuth. A.I.R.’s aesthetic, on the other hand, was most likely drawn from Lucy Lippard’s

Eccentric Abstraction exhibition held at Fischbach Gallery in New York from September to October in 1966. The work was, in Lippard's words, aligned with "the non-formalist tradition devoted to opening up new areas of materials, shape, color and sensuous experience." See Lucy R. Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," *Art International* 10, no. 9 (1966).

30. Barbara Zucker, "Making A.I.R.," *Heresies 7: Women Working Together* 2, no. 3 (spring 1979): 81.

31. Robins, "The A.I.R. Gallery."

32. Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan*, 9–10.

33. Cited in Maynard Solomon, ed., *Marxism and Art: Essays Classic and Contemporary* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 237.

34. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, "Conversations with Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro," in *The Power of Feminist Art*, ed. Broude and Garrard, 78.

35. Carrie Rickey, "Writing (and Righting) Wrongs: Feminist Art Publications," in *The Power of Feminist Art*, ed. Broude and Garrard, 128.

36. Georg Lukács, "Realism in the Balance," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Fredric Jameson (New York: Verso, 1977), 55.

37. For more on Laderman Ukeles's work in this context, see Miwon Kwon "In Appreciation of Invisible Work," 15–18, and Helen Molesworth, "Work Stoppages," *Documents* 10 (fall 1997): 19–22.

38. For a script of the performance, see Andrea Fraser, "Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk," *October* 57 (summer 1991): 105–22.

39. Marcia Tucker, unpublished interview by Julie Ault, July 11, 1995.

40. Marcia Tucker, "A Museum in the Village: An Idea Whose Time Has Come," *Villager*, October 20, 1977.

41. Mission statement, *ibid.*

42. Mary Kelly et al., "A Conversation on Recent Feminist Art Practices," *October* 71 (winter 1995): 50.

43. Tucker, unpublished interview.

44. Although The New Museum's approach was intended to be democratic and "self-critical," it is important to note that the director possessed veto power. Nevertheless, the internal debate was continual, from the beginning and all through the 1980s. Alice Yang, curator from 1988 to 1993, recalls that "a few of the staff meetings . . . led to long discussions, heated debates, and the clash of divergent viewpoints about the museum's programs and basic mandates. The candid nature of these meetings was unlike anything I had witnessed at the larger, more established art institutions where I had worked before. I had not known any other museum which laid bare, so nakedly, the ongoing process of its own self-definition." Alice Yang statement, in *Temporarily Possessed: The Semi-Permanent Collection*, exh. cat. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995), 152. This administrative model was one that more greatly valued the theorizations of institutional critique by artists (such as Buren, Haacke, Asher, Smithson, and Laderman Ukeles) than that of nineteenth-century museum practice continued into the late twentieth century by museums such as MoMA, the Whitney, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

45. Tucker, unpublished interview.

46. Marcia Tucker, *Memory*, exh. cat. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1977).
47. Marcia Tucker, *New Work/New York*, exh. cat. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1977).
48. Marcia Tucker, *Bad Painting*, exh. cat. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1977).
49. See "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
50. I am thinking here of the series of exhibitions that were formative in defining a theoretical/aesthetic model of practice known loosely as the New York School of critical postmodernism: *Art and Ideology* (February 4–March 18, 1984), curated by Benjamin Buchloh, Donald Kuspit, Lucy R. Lippard, Nilda Peraza, and Lowery Sims; *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* (December 8, 1984–February 10, 1985), curated by Kate Linker and Jane Weinstock, with catalog essays by Craig Owens, Lisa Tickner, Jacqueline Rose, and Peter Weinstock; and *Damaged Goods: Desire and Economy of the Object* (June 21–August 10, 1986), curated by Brian Wallis, with catalog essays by Hal Foster and Wallis. *The Art of Memory: The Loss of History* (November 23, 1985–January 19, 1986), curated by William Olander, significantly marked the museum's passage from a gestural engagement with discourse, indicative of its first exhibition on memory, to a more analytical use of discourse engaged in contemporary debates on aesthetics, history, and art practice.
51. The Heresies collective exhibition was among the last shows mounted at The New Museum's 65 Fifth Avenue space, and *Differences* was among the first at 583 Broadway. The *Events: En Foco, Heresies* show was part of the Events series, which showcased projects by local alternative galleries and collectives.
52. *Heresies 18: Mothers, Mags, and Movie Stars: Feminism and Class* 5, no. 2 (1985).
53. Lucy R. Lippard, "Classified: Big Pages from the Heresies Collective," in *Events: En Foco, Heresies Collective*, exh. cat. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1983), 27.
54. Heresies Collective, editorial statement, *Heresies 18* 5, no. 2 (1985): 3.
55. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 11.
56. Ibid.
57. Sabra Moore, "A Roomful of Mothers," in *Events: En Foco, Heresies*, 30.
58. Sally Stein, "The Graphic Ordering of Desire: Modernization of a Middle-Class Women's Magazine, 1914–1939," *Heresies 18* 5, no. 2 (1985): 7–8.
59. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), and Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975).
60. Kate Linker, curator, *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* (New York: New Museum, 1985), 5.
61. Two years before the *Difference* exhibition, Rose and Mitchell coedited an anthology of articles by Lacan and his school (the école Freudienne). The book's double introduction by Mitchell (on Freud) and Rose (on Lacan) was important in translating (lit-

erally and figuratively) Lacan's later writings to an anglophone audience. See Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, eds., *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, trans. Jacqueline Rose (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982).

62. Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of Childhood*, in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* (New York: Norton, 1964).

63. Rose, "Sexuality in the Field of Vision," in Linker, *Difference*, 31.

64. *Ibid.*, 32.

65. In 1985 such arguments on deconstruction were common among New York intellectuals and artists, initiated in part by the work of Craig Owens and Douglas Crimp. In particular, see Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism," part 1, *October* 12 (spring 1980): 67–86; part 2, *October* 13 (summer 1980): 59–80; and Douglas Crimp, "On the Museum's Ruins," *October* 13 (summer 1980): 41–57. In 1985 Hal Foster canonized the modern/postmodern debate within the field of art criticism in his *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1985). Jacqueline Rose was among the first critics to advocate the consideration and inclusion of psychoanalytic theories of gender in debates on art production. Previously, such considerations had been limited primarily to the fields of literary and film theory.

66. Again, the ties between feminism and other historical discourses of change are important to note so that we can value feminism's larger contribution to the history of critical thought.

67. André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 6.

68. Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 154.

69. This formulation is consistent with Marx's beliefs that (1) revolution is initiated, in part, within the intellectual circles of bourgeois society, and (2) that there is no one aesthetic for revolutionary advancement. The argument for a Marxist, revolutionary aesthetic would be left to Marx's followers, of which Lukács was one. Lukács believed in a working-class aesthetic based on class consciousness.

70. Parveen Adams, Rosalind Coward, Elizabeth Cowie, eds., *m/f* 1 (1978): 4.

71. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 48.

72. Lukács citing Marx, *ibid.*, 49.

73. As Peter Wollen describes it in his discussion of psychoanalysis in the Situationist International, whereas Breton wanted to free unconscious desire from the constraints of the ego, Marxists, following Lukács, "wanted to free the ego, the conscious self, from the determinism of the unconscious." For more on Lukács and Breton's debate over the role of the unconscious in the context of the historical avant-garde and the Situationist International, see Peter Wollen, *Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 136.

74. In the 1980s, Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," came to define an American feminist practice concerned with the "male gaze." Regarding the 1990s, I am again referring to the Bronx Museum's 1995 *Division of Labor* exhibition, which conflated Kelly and Chicago's work around the subjects of maternity and domesticity.

Part II



Mainstreaming

Public Funding and Alternative Spaces

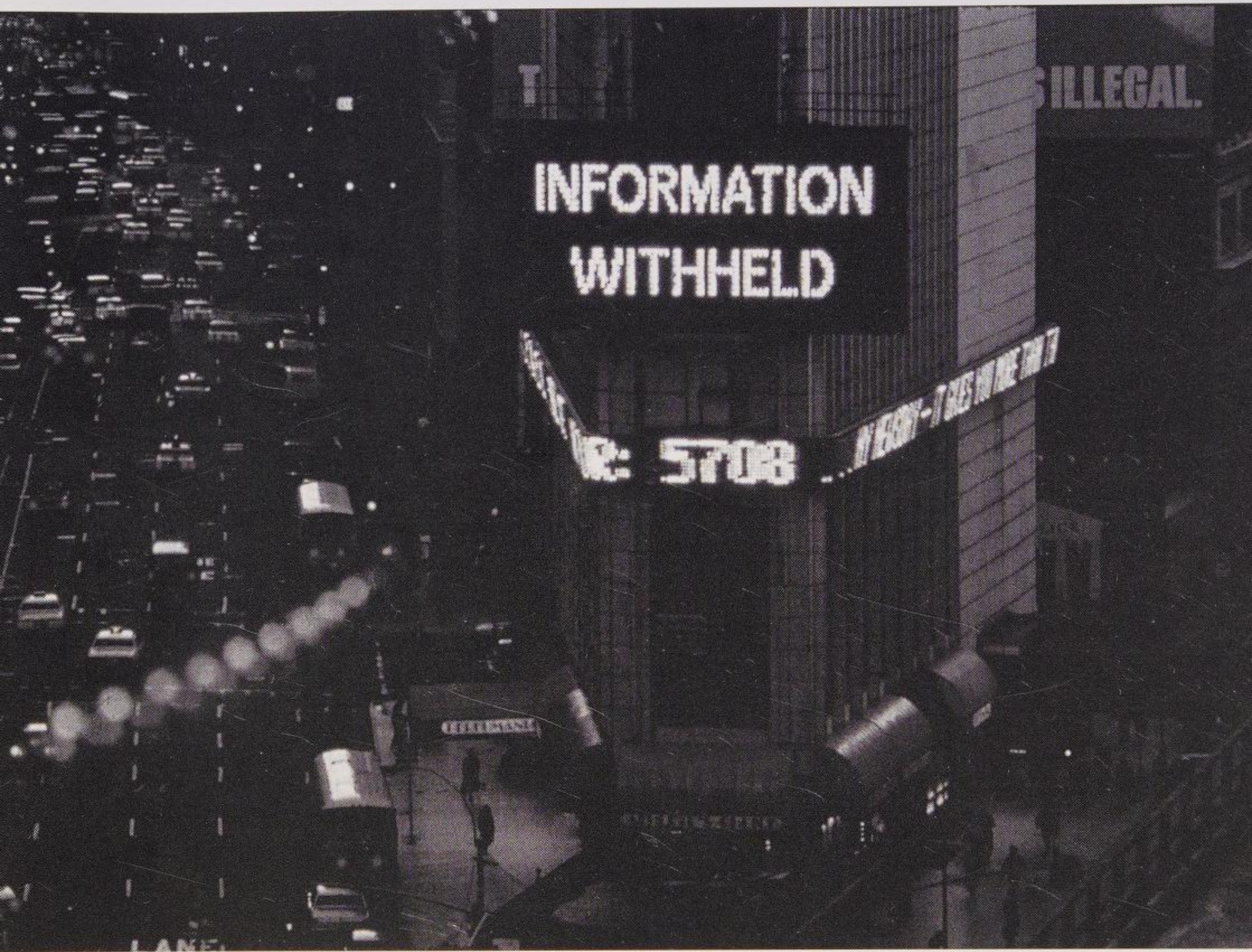
Brian Wallis

The capitalist's power to move a factory away from a region because of militant union activity is exactly the same as the capitalist's power to withdraw support from a museum when he or she disapproves of the art shown there. . . . Alternative spaces which depend on elites for their support are not really alternative to anything and are not even reformist.

—Carl Andre, 1980

In 1989, when right-wing politicians and religious leaders began attacking U.S. government funding for contemporary art, their oppositional rhetoric focused mainly on certain kinds of objectionable imagery, which they labeled pornographic or blasphemous. Explicit depictions of gay sexual acts or reconfigured religious icons helped these antiart zealots to capitalize on public fears about the supposed immorality of public culture. The national media eagerly collaborated in inciting a full-fledged “sex panic,” which embraced condemnation of gay and lesbian artists as well as the ferreting out of so-called child pornographers.¹ But in the midst of the ensuing culture wars, which lasted for at least a decade, the real legislative goal continued to be the removal of government support of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Since at least 1980, conservatives had sought to abolish the NEA, regarding it a liberal luxury and a symbol of the “excess of democracy” that had been allowed to flourish in the radical sixties.²

One of the least remarked aspects of this broad-based culture war of the 1990s was its devastating effect on a rather narrow but important sector of the cultural



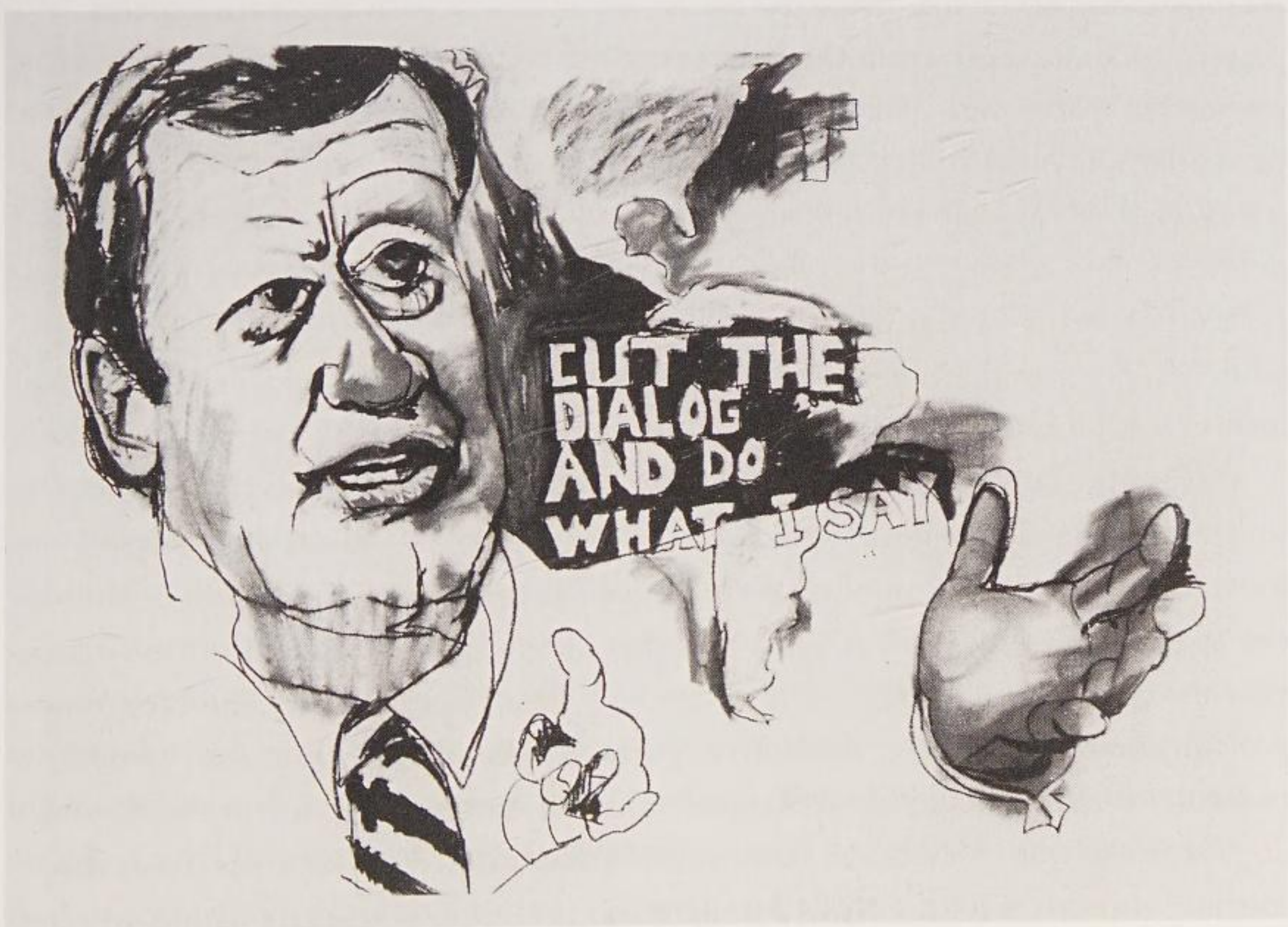
Juan Downey, *Information Withheld*, 1988. Messages to the Public program. Courtesy of the Public Art Fund. Photograph by Jennifer Seacor.

field, the alternative space. Mostly artist-founded and artist-run alternative spaces had sprung up nationwide since the 1960s as venues for a range of experimental multimedia art activities and as a deliberate “alternative” to the commercial gallery system. By the late 1980s, alternative spaces were well established within the international art world and well funded by the NEA. In the beginning, these spaces had been forced to struggle and try to get by on private funding of various kinds. Things changed radically in 1972, when the NEA began supplying substantial support for these local efforts. In 1978, the NEA established a separate granting category for “artists’ spaces,” and as funding in this category increased, alternative spaces expanded, continuing their practice of fostering bold challenges to the social and political conventions of the art world.³

When the radical right began to assault the NEA, it turned, seemingly by instinct, toward artists and exhibitions supported by alternative spaces. In almost every key battle over the NEA, alternative spaces were at the center of the conflict. Throughout the episodic unfolding of conservative complaints, the litany of alter-

native spaces—the Kitchen, Franklin Furnace, the Washington Project for the Arts (WPA), and Beyond Baroque—became almost as familiar as the names of the publicly vilified artists Robert Mapplethorpe, Andres Serrano, Karen Finley, and Tim Miller. But while the individual artists and the NEA itself survived the ordeal, sometimes even strengthened by their oppositional positions, the already waning alternative space movement was dealt a death blow.

Although alternative spaces garnered far less of the overall NEA budget than operas, theater companies, and major museums, they suffered a disproportionate amount of cuts to their budgets, often as punishment for supporting “controversial” artists. In 1990, the NEA withheld twenty-five thousand dollars from the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in Philadelphia for having organized a Mapplethorpe exhibition, and it eliminated funding for the Southeast Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, for having promoted the work of Serrano. The agency subsequently sought to withdraw federal funds from Artists Space and Franklin Furnace in New York, as well as from other small arts spaces throughout the country for fear that NEA funds would be associated with controversial activities. Most egregiously, the NEA virtually discontinued funding for the WPA in Washington, D.C., which had taken the controversial Mapplethorpe show after it had been aborted by the Corcoran Gallery of Art. The Corcoran purportedly canceled the exhibition out of fear that the (homo)sexual content of some of Mapplethorpe’s photographs would cause controversy; at that



Mike Glier, *White Male Power: Cut the Dialog and Do What I Say*, 1980. Courtesy of Mike Glier. Photograph by Mike Glier.

time Congress was deliberating NEA funding. While the WPA had averaged around two hundred thousand dollars annually in support from the NEA during the 1980s, by 1995 it was receiving only ten thousand dollars a year.⁴ As a consequence of such dramatic defunding, by 1998 alternative spaces, once the symbol of the NEA's adventurous philanthropy, were being subjected to what one critic described as "a kind of malnutrition or fading away."⁵

Certainly, many economic and political factors have led to the decline of the alternative space movement, but the punitive withdrawal of NEA funds was unquestionably the final straw for many organizations. This was crushing not only because of the sudden loss of capital but also because of the betrayal by the NEA itself, which had earlier nurtured the ramshackle artists' spaces like foundlings. It was painfully ironic that when the NEA was forced to reform, it enacted a series of measures that distanced it from the contemporary artists and alternative spaces that had once been its hallmarks.⁶ In 1995, the NEA abolished individual fellowships to artists, reorganized and reduced its granting categories, and entirely eliminated the genre "Artists' Organizations" under which the agency had traditionally funded alternative spaces. Moreover, it launched cost-cutting attacks aimed at specific alternative spaces. To save itself, the NEA cannibalized its own stepchild, the alternative space.⁷

The NEA sought to portray these efforts as an attempt to protect artists by challenging the overt censorship of the right wing, but one might also regard these reformist measures by the NEA bureaucracy as censorship by other means. And if we look closer at the history of the NEA's involvement with alternative spaces, a pattern becomes clear: from the beginning, the NEA, while nominally supporting alternative spaces, was always engaged in shaping and curtailing their activities. In particular, the NEA strategically compelled alternative spaces to become more institutionalized, to seek and rely on greater and greater amounts of funding, to redefine the role of contemporary artists as professional workers, and to qualify the types of art being made and shown. Those everyday practices of social control, while less obvious than the blunt force of conservative politicians, may ultimately have exacted a far greater price from the original mission of the alternative space.

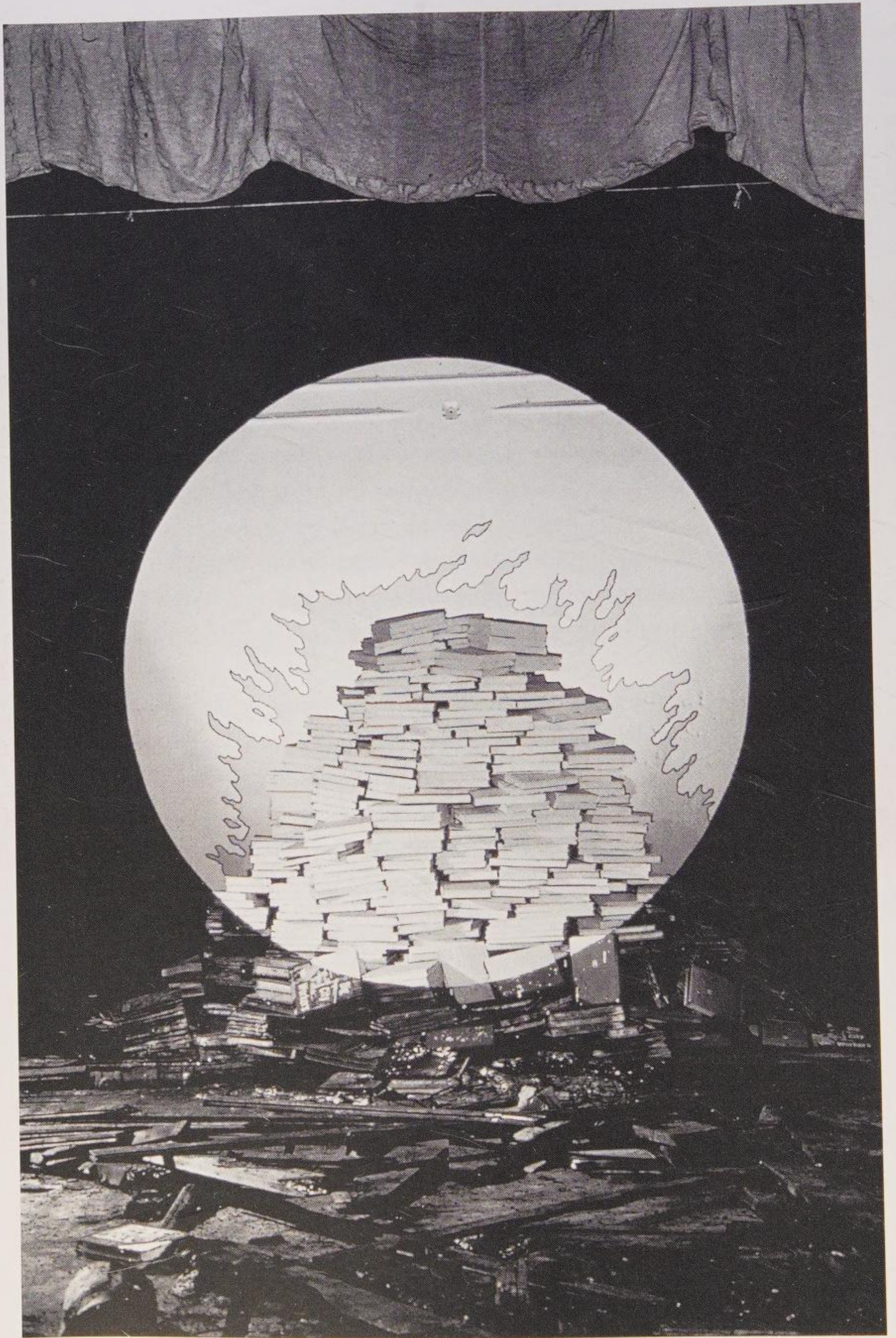
Given the later successes of alternative spaces, it is sometimes difficult to understand the radical transformations that took place in the alternative space movement as a result of public funding. By all accounts, the emergence of alternative spaces in the mid- to late 1960s was part of a radical, utopian effort to circumvent the commercial gallery system, especially its social exclusivity and economic prerequisites. In this sense, alternative spaces derived directly from the political movements that agitated for civil rights, equality for women, student rights, and an end to the war in Vietnam. Alternative spaces offered artists a new basis for forming collectives to discuss and understand their role as workers within an eco-

nomically and politically regulated system. Thus, the formation of collectives like the Art Workers' Coalition, the Guerrilla Art Action Group, the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, and Womanhouse provided opportunities for artists to voice their political opposition (through protests and demonstrations) and to understand their own political positions (through organizing and discussion). As critic Kay Larson commented, "protests over the Vietnam War were shaking the art community, disrupting the international exhibitions (such as Documenta and the Venice Biennale) and instilling the notion that individuals acting in concert could actually have an impact on 'the system.'"⁸

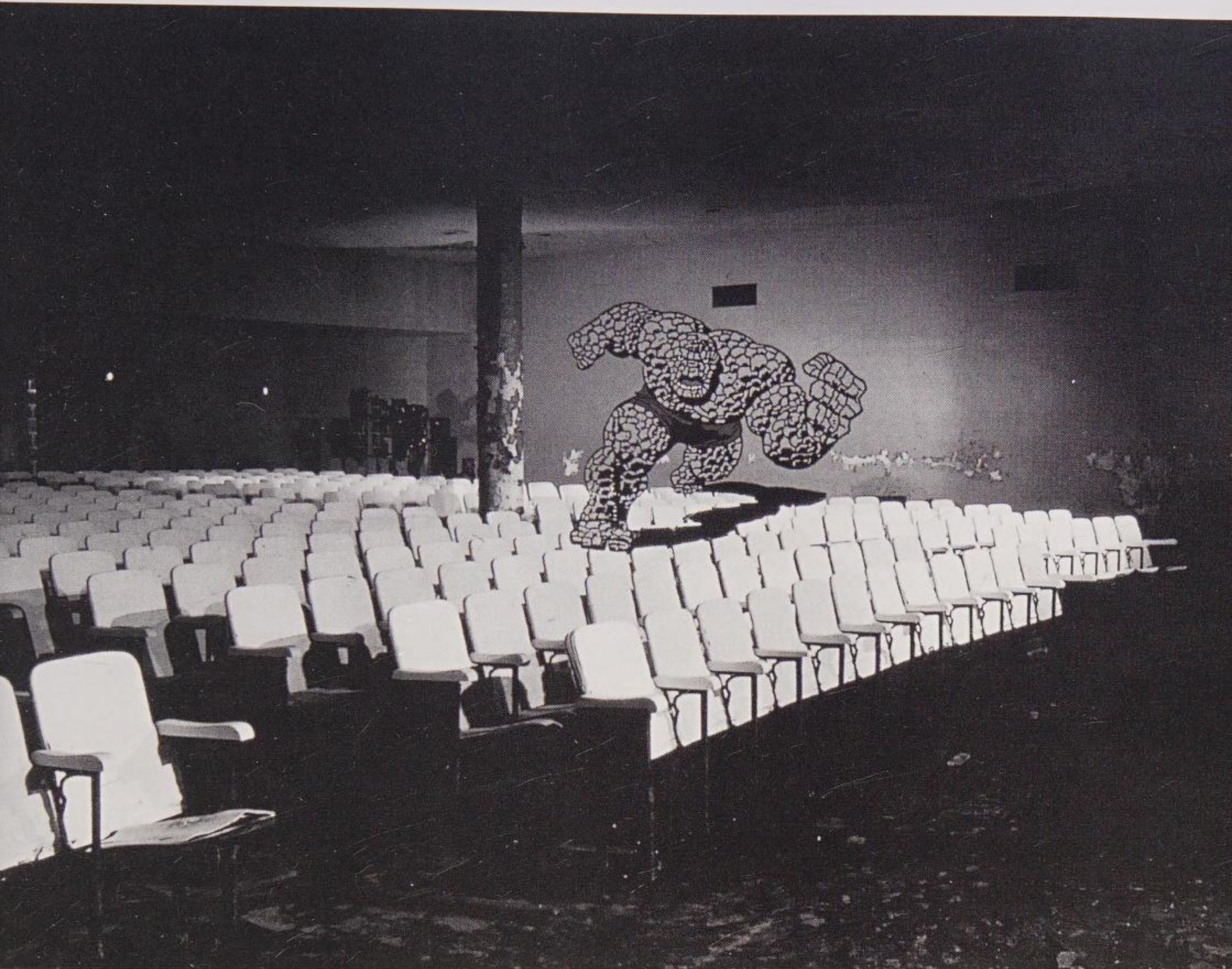
In fact, the impact of these artists was so great that critic Allan Schwartzman wrote that "alternative spaces were the center of American artistic life in the '70s."⁹ Many date the tendency from 1970, when 112 Greene Street was founded in New York. Within a few years similar grassroots spaces were founded throughout the city, including the Kitchen (1971), the Institute for Art and Urban Resources/P.S. 1 (1971), Artists Space (1972), and Just above Midtown (1974). Within a few years, grassroots arts organizations were established in storefronts and lofts throughout the country. Among them were Southern Exposure in San Francisco (1974), and/or in Seattle (1974), NAME in Chicago (1973), and Hallwalls in Buffalo (1974).

A second generation of alternative spaces, which began around 1975, tended to focus on new media, diversity, and performance art. These "artists' organizations" included New York's Franklin Furnace (1976) and Printed Matter (1976), which both focused on artists' books; San Francisco's New Langton Arts (1977), which emphasized performance; and New York's Alternative Museum (1975), which presented political and marginalized culture. Between 1981 and 1983, a third generation of artists founded alternatives to the alternatives in the form of commercial galleries in New York's East Village (Fun Gallery, Gracie Mansion, Nature Morte, Civilian Warfare, International with Monument). Even museums became more receptive to "alternative projects." By 1998, more than seven hundred identifiable alternative spaces existed throughout the United States, ranging from occasional publications to nonprofit institutions boasting multimillion-dollar budgets. Local and state arts councils also encouraged these grassroots arts organizations, which sometimes provided the sole cultural nexus in isolated areas and often revitalized old or abandoned real estate for cultural purposes.

Much of the impetus for alternative spaces—as for early conceptual art—was economic, an effort to break the commercial galleries' stranglehold on exhibition opportunities and to overturn the conditions of cultural consumption. By making work that was both noncommercial and not infused with the aura of museum art, the artists involved with alternative spaces sought to prevent the transformation of their artistic production into "a tool of ideological control and cultural



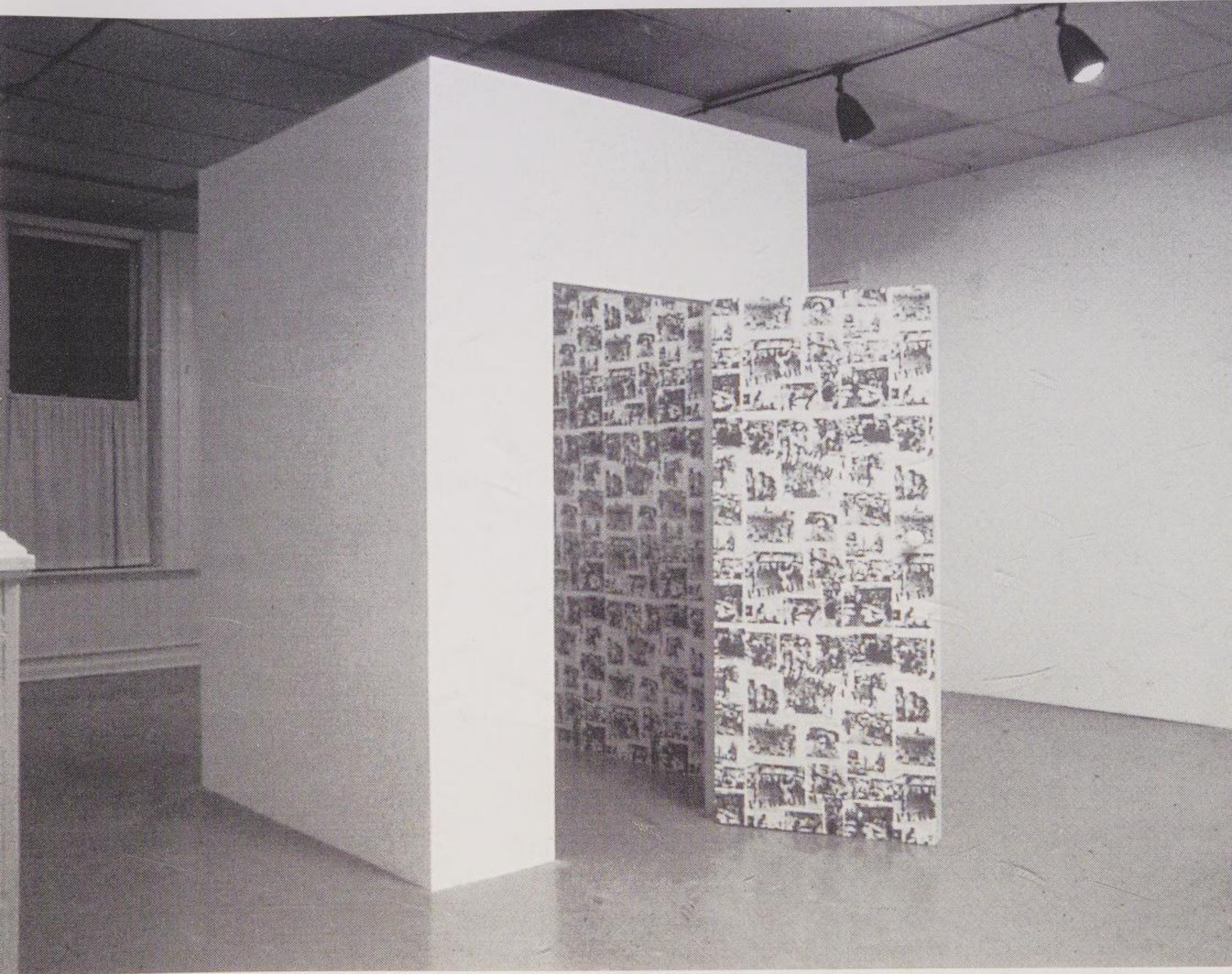
Justen Ladda, *bookburning*, 1981. Site-specific piece at P.S. 37, an abandoned school in the South Bronx. Courtesy of Justen Ladda. Photograph by Martha Cooper.



Justen Ladda, *The Thing*, 1981. Site-specific piece at P.S. 37. Courtesy of Justen Ladda. Copyright TM Marvel Comics Group 1981. Photograph by Martha Cooper.

legitimation.”¹⁰ Alternative spaces facilitated and directly encouraged artistic experimentation that yielded no product or salable art, which therefore would not have served the purposes of the museum or gallery. Such artistic activities or manifestations were often labeled “antiart” and included conceptual art, site-specific installations, artists’ books, and performance art. Not only were these forms not welcome in most conventional art institutions of the early 1970s, but they also seemed to require the sort of raw, quirky contexts that alternative spaces provided.

Central to the opposition to commercial art, then, was a dispute with the preconditions of commercial art, namely, the imposed value system of the “white cube” gallery, with its implied transcendence of time and its focus on the individual art object.¹¹ The art produced in alternative spaces was process oriented and situationally specific, that is, it involved “a relationship between materials, concepts, actions, and locations.”¹² In this sense, the actual sites for production



Adrian Piper, *Art for the Artworld Surface Pattern*, 1976. Courtesy of Adrian Piper. Commissioned for Paris Biennale, Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris.

and exhibition were critical elements of the work, particularly as artists explored the politics of spatial and corporeal transgressions. Typically, alternative spaces were located in large, empty lofts or abandoned buildings, and the art shown or created there could often be spontaneous, improvisational, ephemeral, or even dangerous. At 112 Greene Street, for example, artists broke down walls, dug into the basement, hung ropes from the ceiling, covered windows, and set up shop in a dumpster outside. The overriding need to foster artistic freedom and experimentation tended to obscure the novel organizational and funding structures that were being established. One alternative space artist, Roger Welch, has said, “They were spaces run by artists or other non-gallery art people so that artists could work with a sense of freedom and explore their ideas.”¹³ The artists’ goal was to experiment with new experiential situations, not to make an object or a product.

If this approach to art making was fueled by both idealism and self-sufficiency,



Adrian Piper, *Art for the Artworld Surface Pattern*, 1976. Courtesy of Adrian Piper. Commissioned for Paris Biennale, Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris.

so too was the desire to create in alternative spaces a new type of institutional structure. An early article on the movement defined alternative spaces as “neutral, nonjudgmental, nonauthenticating, openly experimental and sympathetic places to house new ideas, [places] unconcerned with traditional amenities like engraved invitations and plaques on the walls, or trustees with connections to IBM or Xerox.”¹⁴ Artists sought to formulate loose administrative structures in these venues that were communitarian, antielitist, collective, anticommercial, and culturally diverse.¹⁵ But far from establishing a single institutional model, alternative spaces prompted many hybrid forms of cultural organizations, some preinstitutional (such as the placeless collectives Group Material, Guerrilla Girls, and Gran Fury); some anti-institutional (Colab, Fashion Moda, Public Art Documentation/Distribution, and ABC No Rio); and some deliberately replicating established institutional structures, though with very different content (for instance, the Alternative Museum, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Studio Museum of Harlem).¹⁶ These variable and flexible infrastructures were meant to suit the needs of both the artists and the changing types of art they were imagining. As arts administrator Ruby Lerner pointed out, “A new kind of organization was envisioned: one that would be more adventurous artistically, less bureaucratic in organization, able to respond directly to the changing needs of local artists.”¹⁷

A key function of alternative spaces, recognized from the beginning, was their potential to fulfill and to reshape the necessities of the artist: to emphasize the collective struggle of artists and to counter the alienation of the individual artist from the art economy. This was accomplished in part by offering participation in a parallel art system, in which artists had a greater degree of power and control. Many of these spaces were administered entirely by artists, who decided how money would be allocated and whose work would be shown. Even official government support was predicated on the idea that the artists’ interests were paramount. According to one NEA publication, “[Alternative spaces] support a range of the artists’ needs, particularly for exhibitions of experimental contemporary art. In doing so, they generate a dialogue among local artists as well as between artists and the public.”¹⁸

Artists believed the following needs had not been addressed in the commercial gallery or museum context: the need for unions or other democratic collectives not ruled by capitalistic interests; the need for defense of artists’ legal and moral rights; the need for the control of exhibition space and artists’ housing; the need for monitoring of and protecting artists from specific health hazards; and the need for changes in the distribution of power within the art world. Also important to many artists were movements toward community organizing, both social (identity formation, particularly in ethnic neighborhoods) and physical (adaptive reuse of old buildings and the formation of artist districts). Many of these issues were origi-

nally promoted by groups affiliated with early alternative spaces, such as the Art Workers' Coalition and A.I.R.

Although a principal impulse of the alternative spaces was the requirement to be nonprofit and anticommercial, this did not preclude the need for fund-raising, and the collision of these contradictory tendencies led to the development and implementation of many novel funding schemes. For instance, 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street in New York's SoHo was founded in 1970 in a space owned by an artist with some seed money from the uncle of a friend. Artists Space in New York was established in 1972 as a pilot project of the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA); Trudie Grace, head of NYSCA's Visual Arts Program, became the organization's first director. Even more unusual, San Francisco's 80 Langton Street was founded in 1975 by the local art dealers' association.

While it might seem ironic that the federal government would be involved in funding such deliberately alternative or even antisocial arts projects, from the start there was a certain logic to the reciprocity between the NEA and the alternative arts movement. The NEA was created in 1965 as part of a larger group of welfare proposals put forth by President Lyndon B. Johnson. It was meant to aid state policy by helping to achieve three specific ideological goals: to strengthen a sagging sector of the economy, to promote American cultural values abroad, and to make culture available to all Americans at home. As cultural critic Grant Kester notes, however, "in none of these early arguments are artists themselves considered to be the principal recipients or beneficiaries of government largesse."¹⁹ Rather, it was assumed that art and artists would serve the needs of the country in terms of propaganda and international public relations.

Unlike later Republican executives, who sought to eliminate the bothersome arts agency altogether, President Richard Nixon recognized immediately the real potential of cultural programs to serve as Cold War propaganda both at home and abroad. During his two administrations, the NEA received its greatest boost. Under chairwoman Nancy Hanks, who served from 1969 to 1977, the agency expanded greatly, increasing its budget from \$11 million in 1969 to \$114 million in 1977.²⁰ Federal funding for alternative spaces also began in earnest during these years. "We got involved in it from the beginning," noted Brian O'Doherty, NEA director of the Visual Arts Program from 1969 to 1976. "Government support came in at just the right moment. It was a happy accident that the endowment was there when all this started."²¹ In 1972, the NEA began awarding small grants to some artist-run spaces through its Workshop Program; that year, twenty-three organizations were awarded a total of \$203,478.²²

O'Doherty was instrumental in channeling NEA funds to alternative spaces. As an artist himself and an influential art critic (he wrote a classic critique of the conventional art gallery, *Inside the White Cube*), he was directly responsible for aligning support for what he first called "alternative spaces."²³ Although

O'Doherty's interventions within the NEA demonstrated laudable support for the aims of artists, his desire to assist their unconventional art making often bore conventional baggage. He argued, for example, that through alternative spaces "the *best* local artists are brought into the national channel of recognition and national artists are brought into contact with the regions."²⁴ Statements of this sort demonstrate the contradictions of NEA support for alternative spaces. Many of the goals of the NEA were precisely those originally opposed by alternative spaces: the notion of quality ("the *best*"), the shaping influence of the art world star system ("the national channel of recognition"), and the top-down dispersal of artistic credibility (whereby famous "national artists are brought into contact with the regions").²⁵ O'Doherty also fostered the argument that NEA money came with no strings attached, saying, "NEA support is nonintervening and nonideological, that is, it does not make the kinds of demands or impose the kinds of pressures that would fall on an organization supported solely by a popular base within a community."²⁶

Contrary to this view is considerable evidence that by the end of the 1970s "the managerial class of artist/administrators and the NEA's staff transformed the relatively amorphous funding philosophy of the Endowment into a highly nuanced paradigm centered on the artists' space and artist-run organizations."²⁷ This success was noted by O'Doherty's successor, Jim Melchert, who stated in 1977, "There is such enthusiasm for the alternative spaces program that we are not about to change that funding category."²⁸ In 1980, the NEA boasted that Artists' Spaces was one of the visual arts division's "fastest growing categories," with double the application load of three years before. A year later, the NEA highlighted the category in its bimonthly magazine, *Cultural Post*, in an article titled "New Dimensions for Artists' Spaces."²⁹

But already by 1980 others were beginning to have doubts about federal funding for the arts and the direction of the NEA, particularly its investment in the alternative space movement. As an influential transition document prepared in 1980 by the right-wing Heritage Foundation shows, the incoming Republican administration of President Ronald Reagan was encouraged to disregard the agency. Skirting the issue of the artist's role, the report, authored by Michael S. Joyce, criticized the arts for being both too elitist ("the enduring audience for art is largely self-selecting, a relatively small public") and too populist (the NEA has come "to emphasize politically inspired social programs at the expense of the independence of the arts").³⁰ The latter criticism was aimed at initiatives of the Carter administration that had sought greater geographical distribution of grants, but it was typical of the perceived failure by the NEA to identify a widespread consumer demand for art.

As part of a general plan to "privatize" the arts, the Reagan administration began to examine how to make alternative spaces profitable, help them gain private-sector funding, or eliminate them altogether. In 1983, critic Gerald Marzorati

observed, “No one at the NEA is saying that alternative spaces are slated en masse for some Endowment scrap heap. But no one is exactly defending them either.”³¹ Reportedly, Visual Arts Program director Benny Andrews initiated a plan that would provide NEA-funded consultants to assist alternative spaces in instituting programs for selling the work they showed. Although this seemed fundamentally contrary to the purpose of alternative spaces, Andrews, a respected artist, argued: “The people who set up the alternative spaces, they kept a certain attitude, an anti-commercial attitude. It’s built in—they don’t want to sell work. But most artists don’t see anything wrong with selling.”³² This attitude typified the new acceptance and promotion of the commercial gallery structure under Reagan, but ultimately the plan to tinker with alternative spaces was shelved.

The overtly political attacks on the arts that characterized the early days of the Reagan administration and were later revived by far-right critics of the NEA such as Patrick Buchanan and Senator Jesse Helms were not favored by President George Bush. He responded to the NEA crisis of 1989 by regarding it as a managerial problem. The chairman of the NEA, John Frohnmyer, was dismissed, the rules of granting and accountability were overhauled, and more levels of mediation were placed between the government and “controversial” artists. The Bush administration’s handling of the NEA crisis not only returned to the basic practice of shaping U.S. cultural policy through disciplinary management but also demonstrated the politics of brokering, compromise, and conflict avoidance.³³ In a sense, this marked a return to the type of administrative management that had silently shaped the agency—and the alternative spaces it funded—from the beginning.

The significant changes, then, were found less in the types of art that artists were producing than in the types of artists they were compelled to become. Even those who did not move on to successful gallery careers found that they and the alternative spaces with which they were affiliated had gradually been co-opted. “Success and visibility have turned originally rebellious artists’ alternatives into full-fledged art institutions with all the bureaucratic trappings that new identity entails,” noted one critic. “Not surprisingly, their directors and founders have undergone a similar transformation. Now in their middle to late thirties, they are no longer the politicized idealists of the 1960s who initiated these radical projects; they have become professional art administrators.”³⁴ This shift was more than a practical necessity; it was a concrete demonstration of what philosopher Michel Foucault called “governmentality,” the technique of producing self-regulating, freethinking, and autonomous individuals who conform to the pastoral form of power.

Given that the programs for alternative spaces were developed during the law-and-order Nixon presidency, with its Cold War policies of “containment,” it is not surprising that they were governed by a plethora of bureaucratic rules designed both to regulate the industry and to draw artists into a language of administration.

Even while providing subsidies to experimental artists, the NEA effectively neutralized dissent by instilling a self-regulating standard of professionalization: “Artists with good artistic sense could start organizations but that’s no longer enough. Now you have to be a financial expert who understands marketing and personnel issues,” says arts fund-raiser Jeff Jones.³⁵ Formerly autonomous artists were required, first, to see themselves as part of a professional class. In addition, through the granting process, they were encouraged to give institutionally acceptable shape to their practices through the conventional managerial means of planning, performance, and accountability. For the first time, many artists had to explain what they were going to do before they did it, then do it.

Professionalism also had an economic aspect: “professional artists” contributed to the general economy not only through the artistic products they made but also through their cultural capital, a certain level of competence or expertise based on degrees of education and experience. Many alternative spaces, such as Artists Space in New York, were established primarily to help young and unaffiliated artists become established in their professional field, the implication being that gallery representation was a desirable goal. Others regularly sponsored programs like Just above Midtown’s popular seminar “The Business of Being an Artist.” The NEA regularly provided information and specialized training for artists, arts administrators, and arts educators to increase their “professional” skills.³⁶

Moreover, there is evidence that the NEA was established, at least in part, with the specific idea of organizing and improving the business of the arts. Cultural policy expert Richard A. Peterson notes that in 1965, when there were calls for government funding to cure the “costs disease” of the arts, many critics argued that what was really needed was better management: “The professionalization of arts managers was one of the recommendations of the Rockefeller Panel Report [*The Performing Arts: Problems and Prospects*, 1965] that . . . was influential in shaping the structure of the National Endowment for the Arts. The need to upgrade the managerial skills of arts managers was a continuing theme through the 1970s.”³⁷

The NEA guidelines also served to bureaucratize the alternative spaces, particularly in ways that could serve the economy. First, just as artists were professionalized, so too were the managers of the new exhibition spaces. These managers, most of whom were neither artists nor formally trained museum directors, were forced to adhere to specific administrative programs. Most alternative spaces were reconstituted as nonprofit organizations to qualify for NEA grants, matching grants, and tax benefits; this meant they were compelled to have a formal hierarchy and a board of directors and to be legally and fiscally accountable. As Robyn Brentano wrote in a book on the history of 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street, “Although the grants insured that the workshop could continue free from commercial considerations and the special interests of private funding, their advent in turn created new demands—for policy, scheduling, budgets and record keeping—

things which necessitated an administrator and threatened to put an end to the anarchic, spontaneous flow of events in the space.”³⁸

In an early article speculating on the impact of government funding on arts organizations, sociologist Paul Dimaggio theorized that the very structure of the granting process would require a minimum level of administration. Grant applications and reviews would require administrative staffs for preparation, accounting staffs for audits and budgets, and grant writers to prepare mission statements and other formal proposals, policies, and plans.³⁹ These administrators also had to function as mediators between the artist and the state, as well as other donors. In collaborating with the NEA as peer-panel participants and even in drafting some of the language of grant materials, alternative space administrators helped to formulate cultural policy.

The NEA sought to foster new artistic developments, yet it provided little encouragement for odd or unrecognizable—that is, alternative—business structures. Instead the agency encouraged alternative spaces to become more like other cultural organizations; small groups were urged to adopt conventional structures like the ones they had been founded to oppose. The twin themes of an NEA-sponsored conference on alternative spaces held at the Contemporary Art Center of New Orleans in 1981 were professionalizing the management of artists’ spaces and forming a national membership organization. The result is, as Judy Moran and Renny Pritikin of New Langton Arts point out, “Structurally, artists’ organizations today have come to resemble museums—the consensual anarchy of the early years having by necessity faded away to a more traditionally hierarchic form.”⁴⁰

The expectations of the NEA in this regard were undoubtedly fueled not only by a desire to curb the unruly managerial habits of untrained artist-managers but also by the current vogue for arts administration. The first college course in arts management was offered at the New School for Social Research in New York in 1963, then the real heyday of the movement occurred during the late 1970s, precisely coincidental with the alternative space movement. As Richard Peterson notes, between 1976 and 1981 the number of postgraduate arts administration programs in the United States doubled, from twelve to twenty-four.⁴¹

In the beginning many alternative spaces had managers or directors who were artists and who accepted these jobs by default, but later most hired professional directors trained in mediating between artists, their patrons, and audiences. In effect, these directors were acting as culture brokers. Their role as mediators was to create a compromise between the two parties, the NEA as sponsor and the artists as grantees. Richard Kurin, director of the Smithsonian Institution’s Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies, wrote: “Culture brokers act within the parameters of their own professional conventions. For many these are twofold: the practices of their institutions . . . and the practices of their disciplines or fields of

knowledge.” But, Kurin continued, this benign description belies the manipulation and compromise necessary to brokering: “As culture brokers manipulate their own and collaborating institutions, they necessarily demand compromise in order to effect agreements between divergent parties.”⁴²

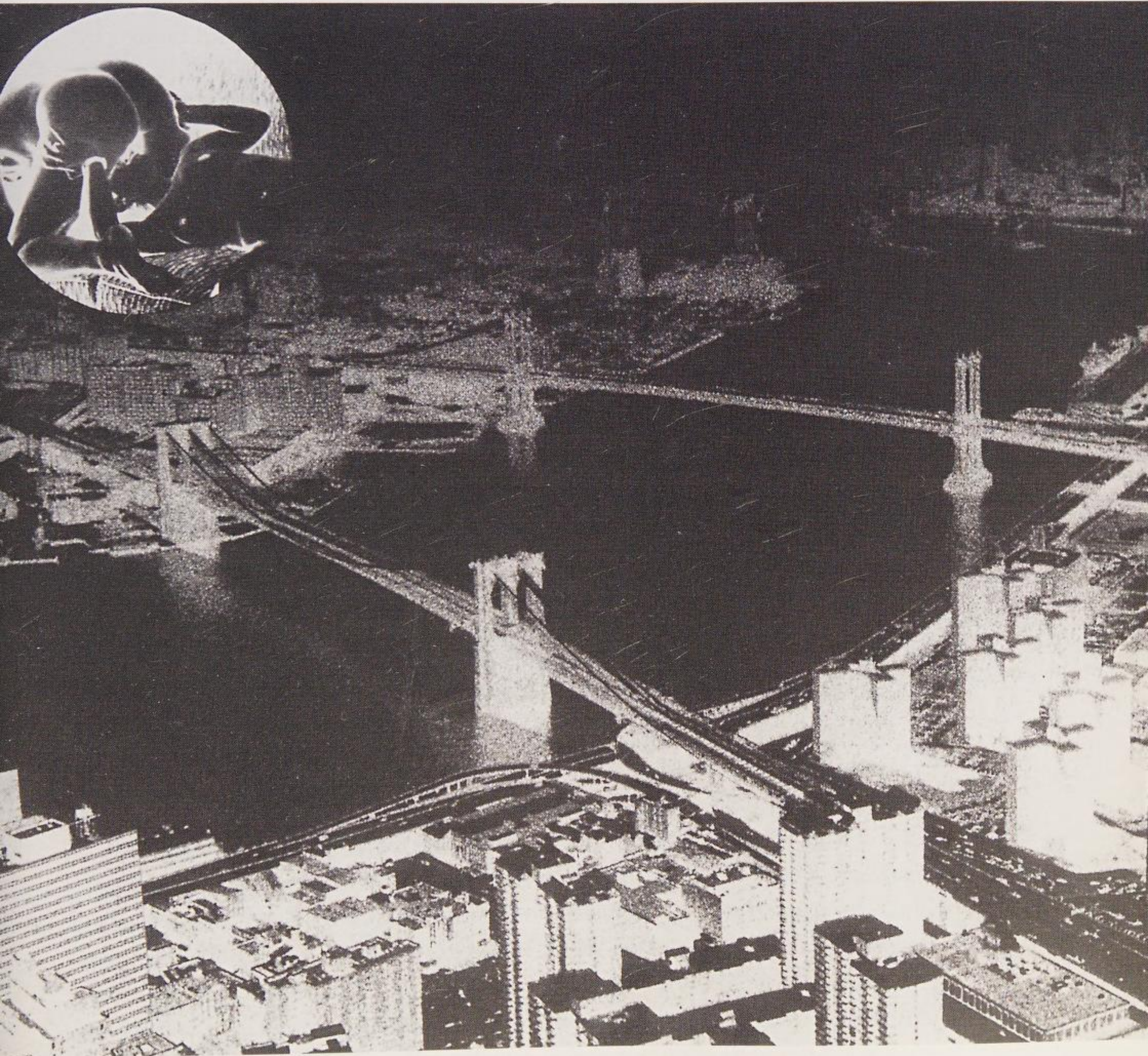
For the most part, this collaboration between the NEA and alternative spaces was beneficial to avant-garde artists, who came to anticipate individual grants, support from alternative spaces, and relative autonomy. But at the same time, with relatively minimal NEA investment, the union furthered certain state interests: boosting local economies (through the gentrifying influence of artists’ organizations in certain neighborhoods, particularly in small cities), reviving old buildings (particularly abandoned government or industrial facilities), promoting research and development (by offering “laboratories” or “institutes” for creative experimentation in the knowledge industry), and providing training for underemployed citizens (highly educated artists). Thus, what can be read from one angle as a successful takeover of the governmental cultural apparatus by artists might from another view be seen as a textbook case of governmentality in action.

In his famous lecture on governmentality in 1978, Michel Foucault sought to reconsider conventional notions of power.⁴³ In particular, he was trying to understand shifts in the notion of governance that occurred in political philosophy in the sixteenth century (coincidental with the origins of modernity). In analyzing the simultaneous rise of reformist religion and the triumph of sovereignty over feudalism, Foucault noted the emergence of a new, “pastoral” form of power. As opposed to the doctrine of governance proposed in Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, in which the differences or discontinuities between princely and other forms of power must always be controlled, pastoral power desires and requires two-way continuity. An upward continuity requires the leader to learn to govern, principally from guidebooks and other forms of education. With a downward continuity these same rules of leadership and management are applied to domestic and everyday situations. Instead of a top-down centralized authority, power is dispersed across a wide range of self-regulating individuals and local circumstances. Thus, concludes Foucault, “it is the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private, and so on; thus the state can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality.”⁴⁴

One of the disheartening conclusions to be drawn from Foucault’s notion of governmentality is that even oppositional identities can be—or, perhaps, always will be—harnessed to the larger systems of social production and reproduction. Indeed, one might argue that oppositionality itself is a constitutive and programmed part of social organization. While the artists and organizers of alternative spaces always feared some sort of “institutionalization of dissent” through their liaisons

with the NEA, the true nature of this governmentalist appropriation was quite different from what they suspected.⁴⁵ It was not the case, for instance, that the state (through the NEA) dictated any particular type of art, in terms of style or content. Nor did the state directly proscribe the type or location of the new art institutions. Rather, through a series of regulatory guidelines, the agency established a new subject, the “professional artist,” and a new form of administration, the “artist-run organization.”

Whenever sponsorship is involved in facilitating the production of art, some forms of social control or censorship are also involved. But in the case of the NEA’s patronage of alternative spaces, social control supplanted censorship. This fact is



David Wojnarowicz, *Sex Series (Bridge)*, 1988–89. Courtesy of PPOW, New York. Photograph by Adam Reich.

particularly sensitive with respect to alternative spaces, which were established to ensure maximum autonomy for the individual artist. As Nello McDaniel, president of Arts Action Research, has explicitly stated, "Any time a small group tries a new structure and is forced back into a traditional mode because guidelines require certain quantitative procedures, this is retaliation."⁴⁶ In reviewing the ways the NEA exerted control over alternative spaces, it is important to consider several factors: social control as compliance (professionalization); social control as institutionalization (models of practice); social control as nondeviance (compliance); social control as utility (product making, market value); and social control as publicity (government patronage strengthening ideological control and providing symbols of legitimacy for government programs and activities). These regulatory features, while less obvious than other forms of control, dramatically delimit alternative artistic practices. "Artists are not exempt from the social control exerted by occupational norms," sociologist Steven Dubin has observed. "Rather, they can be likened to scientists, who also operate in a regulated sphere of symbolic inquiry."⁴⁷

In recent years, the gradual withdrawal and reallocation of NEA funds have created a sort of Darwinian ethos in the world of alternative spaces. Many of the smaller and more fragile spaces have ceased to operate or have become "virtual spaces." Those that have survived have become larger and more like those institutions they once challenged. The Institute for Art and Urban Resources/P.S. 1, for instance, has merged with the Museum of Modern Art. Whether this indicates a triumph or an evisceration of the values once espoused by artists of the alternative space movement is a point for debate. But what surely has been lost in the art world is the original, political motivation for alternatives of all kinds.⁴⁸

Notes

1. On the culture wars, see Carole S. Vance, "The War on Culture," *Art in America* (September 1989): 39–45; Richard Bolton, ed., *Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts* (New York: New Press, 1992); and Brian Wallis et al., eds., *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America* (New York: New York University Press, 1999). On the sex panic, see Lisa Duggan, "Sex Panics," *Artforum* 28, no. 2 (October 1989): 26–27; and Carole S. Vance, "Reagan's Revenge: Restructuring the NEA," *Art in America* 78, no. 11 (November 1990): 49–55.

2. For a brief discussion of the "excess of democracy" as developed in the Trilateral Commission's *Crisis of Democracy* (1975), see Brian Wallis, "Democracy and Cultural Activism," *Democracy: A Project by Group Material* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), 5–10.

3. This funding category of the Visual Arts Program of the NEA was called Workshops when it was established in 1972. In 1978 the category name was changed to Workshops/Alternative Spaces; from 1980 to 1981, the name was Artists' Spaces; and from 1982 to 1995, it was Visual Artists' Organizations.

4. In 1996 the WPA went bankrupt and, ironically, was absorbed by the Corcoran as a “department.”

5. Robert Bedoya, director of the National Association of Artists’ Organizations (NAAO), quoted in Robert Atkins, “On Edge: Alternative Spaces Today,” *Art in America* 86, no. 11 (November 1998): 57.

6. On the reformation of the NEA, see Brian Wallis, “Bush’s Compromise: A Newer Form of Censorship,” *Art in America* 78, no. 11 (November 1990): 57–63.

7. Allan Schwartzman, “Alternative Art Spaces: Survival of the Nimblest,” *New York Times*, February 20, 1994, sec. 2, 1, 29. A useful contemporary source on the alternative space movement is Joan Jeffri, *The Emerging Arts: Management, Survival, and Growth* (New York: Praeger, 1980), especially 106–29.

8. Kay Larson, “Rooms with a Point of View,” *ArtNews* 76, no. 8 (October 1977): 34.

9. Schwartzman, “Alternative Art Spaces,” 1.

10. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique (Some Aspects of Conceptual Art, 1962–1969),” in *L’art conceptuel, une perspective* (Paris: Musée national d’art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1989), 53.

11. On the “white cube,” see Brian O’Doherty, “Inside the White Cube: Notes on the Gallery Space,” *Artforum* 14, no. 7 (March 1976): 24–30; “Inside the White Cube: The Eye and the Spectator,” *Artforum* 14, no. 8 (April 1976): 26–34; “Inside the White Cube: Context as Content,” *Artforum* 15, no. 3 (November 1976): 38–44; reprinted as *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

12. Jacki Apple and Mary Delahoyd, *Alternatives in Retrospect: An Historical Overview, 1969–1975* (New York: The New Museum, 1981), 5.

13. *Ibid.*, 30.

14. Larson, “Rooms with a Point of View,” 33.

15. There has been considerable debate about the perception that the largest—and most extensively funded—alternative spaces are overwhelmingly white male establishments. When the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art held the conference “Alternative Visual Arts Organizations” in April 1978, women artists and artists of color protested that no nonwhite artists or administrators were present.

16. For these distinctions, see Julie Ault, “For the Record” and “A Chronology of Selected Alternative Structures, Spaces, Artists’ Groups, and Organizations in New York City, 1965–85,” in this volume.

17. Ruby Lerner, “Artists’ Organizations,” in *The Modern Muse: The Support and Condition of Artists*, ed. C. Richard Swaim (New York: ACA Books, 1989), 92.

18. *Cultural Post* 6, no. 1 (May–June 1980): 33.

19. Grant H. Kester, “Rhetorical Questions: The Alternative Arts Sector and the Imaginary Public,” in *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage*, ed. Grant H. Kester (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 106. This is a particularly insightful and valuable essay.

20. On the early history of the NEA, see Edward Arian, *The Unfulfilled Promise: Public Subsidy of the Arts in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Livingston

Biddle, *Our Government and the Arts: A Perspective from the Inside* (New York: American Council on the Arts, 1988); and C. Richard Swaim, "The National Endowment for the Arts, 1965 to 1988," in *Public Policy and the Arts*, ed. Kevin Mulcahy and C. Richard Swaim (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982).

21. O'Doherty, quoted in Larson, "Rooms with a Point of View," 35.

22. NEA Annual Report (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 1972).

23. O'Doherty exhibited as an artist under the name Patrick Ireland. As a critic, he wrote *Inside the White Cube*.

24. O'Doherty, quoted in Larson, "Rooms with a Point of View," 38.

25. Some sense of the official criteria that NEA peer panels employed in judging alternative spaces can be gleaned from the report of the 1980 Artists' Spaces panel of the NEA. The panel reviewed 170 applications and recommended 97 grants totaling \$907,050. According to a report in *Cultural Post*, "Panel tended to support organizations that: present high-quality work; maintain innovative exhibition or program schedules; offer opportunities to young or emerging artists; provide services to the local community of artists" (*Cultural Post* 6, no. 1 [May–June 1980]: 33).

26. O'Doherty, quoted in Larson, "Rooms with a Point of View," 35.

27. Kester, "Rhetorical Questions," 114.

28. Melchert, quoted in Larson, "Rooms with a Point of View," 38.

29. Stephen Sinclair, "New Dimensions for Artists' Spaces," *Cultural Post* 7, no. 1 (May–June 1981): 1–4.

30. Michael S. Joyce, "The National Endowments for the Humanities and the Arts," in *Mandate for Leadership*, ed. Charles L. Heatherly (Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, 1981), 1055–58.

31. Gerald Marzorati, "The Arts Endowment in Transition," *Art in America* 71, no. 3 (March 1983): 9. See also Vance, "Reagan's Revenge."

32. Marzorati, "The Arts Endowment," 13.

33. On Bush's cultural policies, see Wallis, "Bush's Compromise."

34. Deborah C. Phillips, "New Faces in Alternative Spaces," *ArtNews* 80, no. 9 (November 1981): 90.

35. Jones, quoted in Robert Atkins, "On Edge: Alternative Spaces Today," *Art in America* 86, no. 11 (November 1998): 59.

36. See, for example, *Report of the Task Forces on the Education, Training, and Development of Professional Artists and Arts Educators* (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 1978). Critical to the attainment of professional status for these artists was the formation in 1977 of the first professional group for alternative spaces, the National Association of Artists' Organizations (NAAO).

37. Richard A. Peterson, "From Impresario to Arts Administrator: Formal Accountability in Nonprofit Cultural Organizations," in *Nonprofit Enterprise in the Arts: Studies in Mission and Constraint*, ed. Paul Dimaggio (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 19.

38. Robyn Brentano, introduction to *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street: History, Artists, and Artworks* (New York: New York University Press, 1981), n. p.

39. Paul Dimaggio, "The Impact of Public Funding of Organizations in the Arts," Yale Program on Non-Profit Organizations, working paper 31, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1981).
40. Peterson, "From Impresario to Arts Administrator," 19.
41. Lerner, "Artists' Organizations," 96.
42. Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A View from the Smithsonian* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 22.
43. Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87–104. On governmentality, see also Toby Miller, *Technologies of Truth: Cultural Citizenship and the Popular Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), especially 14–18; George Yúdice, "Civil Society, Consumption, and Governmentality in an Age of Global Restructuring: An Introduction," *Social Text* 13, no. 4 (1995): 1–25; Tony Bennett, "The Multiplication of Culture's Utility," *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 4 (1995): 861–89; and Michael Dorland, "Policing Culture: Canada, State, Rationality, and the Governmentalization of Communication," in *Capital Culture: A Reader on Modernist Legacies, State Institutions, and the Value(s) of Art*, ed. Jody Berland and Shelley Hornstein (Montreal: McGill–Queen's University Press, 1996), n. p.
44. Foucault, "Governmentality," 103.
45. Sandy Nairne, "The Institutionalization of Dissent," in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg et al. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 387–410.
46. Quoted in Lerner, "Artists' Organizations," 96.
47. Steven V. Dubin, *Bureaucratizing the Muse: Public Funds and the Cultural Worker* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 179.
48. For one of the best overviews of alternative art and practices, see Josephine Gear, "Some Alternative Spaces in New York and Los Angeles," *Studio International* 195, no. 990 (1980): 68. Gear concludes her article with this advice: "One should recognize the real accomplishments of these truly alternative spaces, in the domain of collective and socially organised art-making rather than profit or prestige-oriented work; in the lowering of barriers between the professional and the non-professional or the maker and consumer of art; and in the overcoming of traditional artistic solipsism."

When (Art) Worlds Collide: Institutionalizing the Alternatives

Arlene Goldbard

As I have attempted to prize useful lessons from alternative art manifestations of the 1970s and 1980s, I've found myself wondering whether the extremely modest progress they produced yields any sort of positive strategic lesson. Perhaps they illustrate the need to exaggerate one's own power to summon the courage to tackle entrenched interests. It may be in the nature of artists' insurgency that revolutionary hopes can only lead—if they succeed at all—to evolutionary results. Or do they make a better lesson in the pitfalls of hubris? I try to temper my analysis with understanding: that youthful exuberance leads to excess, that artists organizing to change both the art world and the big world beyond is in itself remarkable, that real change takes time, and so on. But I still can't help thinking that a more nuanced understanding of power (both "our" side's and the other's) might have yielded a more significant and lasting effect.

Calling It a Movement Doesn't Make It One

I have a bad habit (and I'm not the only one): it's a form of intellectual pack-rat-ism—that, and a compulsion to make patterns out of life's profusion. It involves gathering up social phenomena that are in some way related and tying them into a package labeled "movement," something bigger, further reaching, and more potent than the sum of its parts. It can be wishful thinking or chutzpah—or in my case, both. My particular sin has to do with an illusion called "the movement for

cultural democracy,” which my partner Don Adams and I cobbled together in our heads nearly twenty years ago out of alternative art groups, civil rights organizations, and various single-issue activists whose causes could be related to the culturally democratic values of pluralism, participation, and equity. It’s not that there weren’t—aren’t—legions of people who espouse these values. It’s simply that most had no conscious intention of banding together across the many barriers of our social obstacle course to form a coherent movement.

Once upon a time, mostly in the 1970s and 1980s, young (mostly) artists got together to start activist organizations and exhibition spaces of their own. They had a slew of reasons and inspirations for doing so. The temptation is powerful to scoop them all together, making a full-fledged, potent movement out of a temporary convergence of artistic rebellions. But in the interests of clear sight, I want to counsel resisting that temptation for several reasons. Treating an assortment of different impulses as if it were a coherent movement is a kind of inflation, ballooning expectations like overrisen dough. Instead of taking the painstaking, considered steps that lead to real change, people are led to a kind of magic thinking, in which change just happens. Grandiosity breeds demoralization when real life falls short of inflated hopes. Demoralization leads to inaction, inaction to reification of the existing order. What’s lost is the ability to make accurate distinctions and, therefore, the ability to devise strategies that might really build a movement.

When I look back, I see three primary impulses at play. First, artists wanted to show their work despite the indifference or hostility of an art world not much interested in work by women and people of color, nor in oppositional art that pushed at conventional boundaries of both form and content. The spirit of the times was for inclusion, the blooming of a thousand flowers, the community garden springing out of a pile of rubbish.

Group Material’s project is to exhibit the art of Group members, community artists, famous artists, even non-artists. We will show work that tends to be under-represented or excluded from the official art world due to the art’s sexual, political, ethnic, colloquial, or unmarketable nature.¹

Second, artists were fed up with the whole cultural-industrial complex with its market orientation, pecking orders, and functionaries, from critics to curators to collectors. Gatekeepers and tastemakers came to be seen as unnecessary obstacles to the dissemination of art, roadblocks to be circumnavigated. Many artists were intent on controlling how their artwork was used, striving to create a context free from the commercial corruption of the art market.

Freedom from the commodification of art is the most significant achievement of the artist-space movement.²

The most significant achievement of the artist-space movement thus far has been to put decisions about which art gets publicly distributed (seen, heard, read, etc.) in the hands of artists vs. dealers, theaters, publishers, and museums.³

Third, artists wanted to change the world, starting with the world in which they lived. There was a focus on the microcosm, altering one's immediate landscape was seen as a way to start a chain reaction that might remake the world. Inspired by the social movements of the 1960s, many wanted to enlist the power of art in the service of social justice. Often their efforts were shaped by the thesis that artists were subject to the same social forces that oppressed the poor, such as gentrification fueled by real estate speculation. The promise of this impulse lay in digging where one stood, helping to transform the social and cultural conditions directly impinging on one's life. The peril was a form of magic thinking, as if artists' power to command words and images was equivalent to the power to bring about social change, as if pointing to problems were the same as curing them. Critic and arts activist Lucy Lippard summed up the sentiment:

Artists can no longer claim ignorance of the way they are used as a wedge for corporate development schemes and scams. An increasing number is acknowledging its responsibility to fight the displacement of people who have even fewer options than artists do.⁴

These impulses were braided through the groups that seemed to spring up everywhere, especially around the beginning of the Reagan era, but rarely were alternative art rebellions propelled equally by all of them. Some groups started like clubhouses for edgy artists; some set out to model alternative art economies; some were impelled by urgent political missions. Some groups painted the walls white and hung paintings; some offered performances in abandoned buildings; some organized street demonstrations. The sheer vitality of this writhing tangle of simultaneous ideas and action makes me want to pack it into a catch phrase, wrap the entire skein in a red ribbon, and there you have it, the Alternative Arts Movement—or rather, a bundle of contradictions. The problem is that the term lumps artists who'd have settled for nothing less than total revolution together with artists who'd have been happy simply to have a show in a good gallery.

It goes without saying that those in the second category had a much better chance of getting their wish, as a quick review of some of the retrospective publications demonstrates. We have, for example, *The Kitchen Turns Twenty* (Laurie Anderson, Jenny Holzer, Karen Finley, and others) and *Consider the Alternatives: Twenty Years of Contemporary Art at Hallwalls* (Cindy Sherman, Vito Acconci, Jonathan Borofsky, and others).

One way to look at them is exemplified by what Glen Harper (editor of the

Atlanta-based *Artpapers*) wrote in a cautionary mode, that for such artists, alternative spaces functioned the way farm clubs do for baseball teams:

Artists' organizations must also continue to reevaluate their role in certifying or validating artists and artistic practices. That is, we cannot allow ourselves to be the gatekeepers, winnowers, or scouts who do advance screening for museums and commercial galleries.⁵

Obviously, this call to purity came rather late. Some organizations had allowed themselves to become precisely what Harper warned against, without much guilt or fanfare. Indeed, these were the groups that survived the 1980s.

Feeding into the mainstream art world can be seen as a simple adaptive strategy, one that can coexist with the impulse to self-determination. Every cultural sector has its equivalent—shoestring music venues that turn into trendy clubs, theater groups that start out in garages, student film competitions that become feeders for Hollywood. I'm not so sure that any special culpability or virtue attaches to this type of cultural institution: where there is a gate, there will be gatekeepers. Sometimes the categories blur; for example, an artist or group, marking out an autonomous path, can be "discovered" without necessarily being co-opted.

Group Material flyer, 1981.

CAUTION! ALTERNATIVE SPACE !

Sept. 1981

WE LEARNED THE HARD WAY.

Group Material began as twelve young artists who wanted to develop an independent group that could organize, exhibit and promote an art of innovative form and social change. Starting two years ago, we met and planned in living rooms after work. We saved money collectively. After a year of this, we were theoretically and financially ready to look for a gallery space. This was our dream - to find a place that we could rent, control and operate in any manner we saw fit. This pressing desire for a room of our own was strategic on both the political and psychological fronts. We knew that in order for our project to be taken seriously by a large public, we had to resemble a "real" gallery. Without these four walls of justification, our work would probably not be considered as art. And to be honest, the gallery was to become a security blanket in our own minds as well; a second home, a social center in which our politically provocative work was protected in a friendly neighborhood environment. We finally found such a space in a 600 sq. ft. storefront on a Hispanic block on East 13th St. in New York.

We hated the association with "alternative spaces" because it was clear to us that most prominent alternative spaces are, in appearance, policy and social function, the children of the dominant commercial galleries in New York. To distinguish ourselves and to raise art exhibition as a political issue, we refused to show artists as singular entities. Instead, we organized artists, non-artists, a very broad range of people, to exhibit around a special social issue. From ALIENATION to ATLANTA to GENDER to a very popular show of artwork from the living rooms of people on our block, Group Material sought to reinvent a dialectical approach to reality through the means of art.

Because of our location we had in effect limited our audience to East Village passersby and those curious enough to venture out of their own neighborhoods to see art off-Soho. But our most rewarding and warm and fun audience was the people on the block. Because they integrated us immediately into the life of their street, our work, no matter how tedious or unrecognized by media, always had a direct and energetic social meaning.



But let's not confuse the desire for a slice of the pie as a movement, or exaggerate a coincidence of oppositional impulses into a united front.

Straining at a Gnat and Swallowing a Camel

Claiming a place in the art world is as legitimate, of course, as claiming a place in the jazz world, the academy, the medical profession. But if the entire program of alternative art groups consisted of a drive for inclusion, I doubt we would be writing about them now. The groups that did want to change the world (as opposed to merely claiming a place in it) were driven by a formidable sense of mission. In its service, they made some remarkably grandiose claims about the power of art to bring about social transformation. Typically, there was a bippety-boppety-boo tendency to see the rather contained gestures of artists in alternative arts settings as somehow acting on the art world or the big world. Note the use of "inevitably" in this quotation from Jacki Apple:

[T]he collective art activities that took place were characterized by a shared attitude of experimentation, immediacy, and urgency—the process of making work being the primary concern. Accompanying was the desire to “break out of the frame,” to extend

2.

Externally, Group Material's first public year was an encouraging success. But internally, problems advanced. The maintenance and operation of the storefront had become a ball-and-chain on the collective. More and more our energies were swallowed by the space, the space, the space. Repairs, new installations, gallery sitting, hysterically paced curating, fundraising and personal disputes cut into our very limited time as a bunch of individuals who had to work full-time jobs during the day or night or both. People got broke, people got tired, people quit. As G.M. closed its first season, we knew we could not continue this course without self-destructing. Everything had to change. The mistake was obvious. Just like the alternative spaces we had set out to criticize, here we were sitting on 13th St., waiting for everyone to rush down and see our shows instead of taking the initiative ourselves of mobilizing into more public areas. We had to cease being a space and become a working group once again.

For this second season, Group Material is a very different organization, with new associates, new tactics. We've learned that the notion of alternative space isn't only politically phony and aesthetically naive - it can also be diabolical. It is impossible to create a radical and innovative art if this work is anchored in one special gallery location. Art can have the most political content and right-on form, but the stuff just hangs there silent unless its means of distribution makes political sense as well. Working out of our new headquarters on E. 26th and Lexington Ave. in N.Y.C., Group Material has planned not only special gallery shows (we haven't totally dispensed with them) but also exhibitions in public areas: streets, city squares, newspapers, mass transit, even churches.

If a more inclusive and democratic vision for art is our project, then we cannot possibly rely on winning validation from bright, white rooms and full-color repros in the art world glossies. To tap and promote the lived aesthetic of a largely "non-art" public - this is our goal, our contradiction, our energy.

GROUP MATERIAL WANTS TO OCCUPY THAT MOST VITAL OF ALTERNATIVE SPACES -
THAT WALL-LESS EXPANSE THAT BARS ARTISTS AND THEIR WORK
FROM THE CRUCIAL SOCIAL CONCERNS OF THE AMERICAN WORKING CLASS.

the boundaries and definitions of what was considered art, and to inevitably alter the established structure of the art world itself.⁶

Or check out my own wishful thinking of 1982, foreseeing a mass movement of artists and other citizens working in tandem:

The way we see it, the strategy for progressive arts people is local and regional, and involves making common cause with other groups and individuals concerned about broadly cultural issues including housing, neighborhood organizing, the media, and opposition to war. . . . In a national organization like NAPNOC they can attain the strength and influence necessary to change things.⁷

Judged by such claims, these alternative art rebellions failed utterly. Significant change has taken place, but it has all been in the *content* of the art world—whose work is exhibited, what themes are legitimately the province of art, how the role of art is understood. “The established structure of the art world”—the power relations, financial underpinnings, and institutional character of that world—hasn’t changed significantly, except in response to market forces far more powerful than any oppositional movement, which have driven it to become even more basely commercial. Because art world structures remain manifestations of elite social and economic power, the core character of art world institutions expresses the domination of wealth over our cultural commonwealth.

The alternative art rebellions helped to ensure that talented people who, within the confines of the established art world, would have been roundly discouraged (if they were noticed at all) took heart, stepped up, and made art. Women artists and artists of color of both sexes made inroads into the lily-white exhibition schedules of the prestige art world. Compare the pages of one of the mainstream art journals today with its counterpart twenty years ago: that the art world is no longer entirely dominated by the work of white men is in large part due to the resounding wake-up call delivered by insurgent artists in the intervening years.

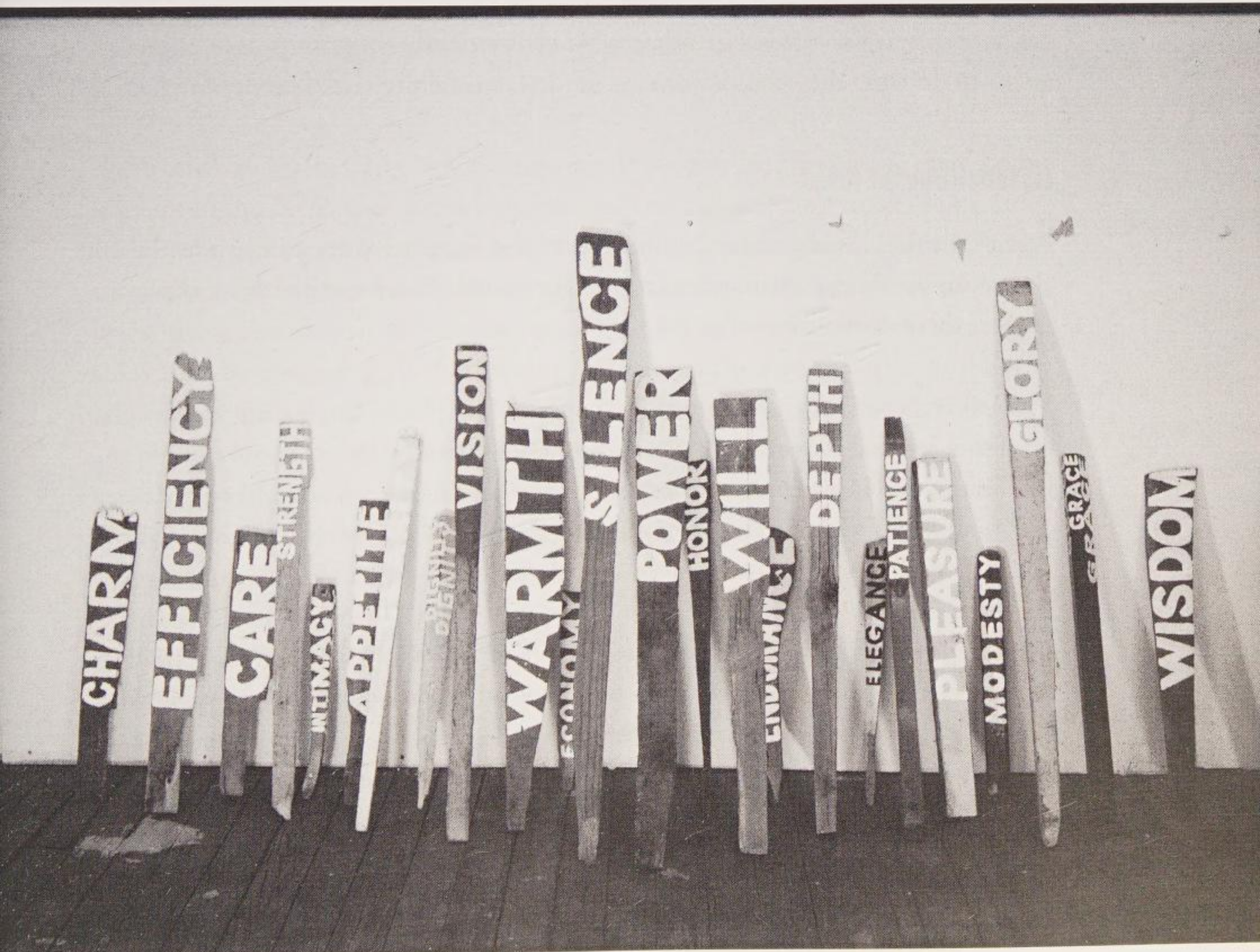
Interesting and often powerful art was created and experienced, much of it in contexts far from the art world as it was then conceived. Artists now frequently make work in collaboration with nonartists, work that unfolds in streets, parks, schools, and community centers nearly as often as in galleries and museums. Art of social protest and criticism has been legitimated to the point that museums began to feature it regularly—to the point that conservative critics complain bitterly of excess, as in the case of the 1993 Whitney Biennial. Artists have pricked the conscience of the art world, even if they have failed to make much headway in the world at large.

A breath of fresh air may have wafted through the art world in the wake of alternative art rebellions, but if the individuals who control the art world through the power of the purse decide that the wind ought to blow another way, artists will

not be able to stop them. This truth—that artists' fate remains linked to the wishes of patrons and marketers—is one reason why, despite all the rhetoric and action of the 1970s and 1980s, no one can credibly claim there is a broad movement of artists and other citizens linked in support of a democratic, egalitarian cultural and social agenda.

But bygone alternative art groups shouldn't be judged by these claims—hot air and whistling in the dark. Undoubtedly, their members wanted change, but the only fair test of whether their literal, programmatic aims were in fact to “alter the established structure” of the art world and the world beyond it is to examine what they did to advance those aims. What strategies were constructed? What means were deployed to implement them?

Downsizing the rhetoric, the truth is that these rebellions had valid, if less sweeping, common goals, which they pursued through action. Their members' strong suit was articulating cultural and social critiques and then asserting alternative modes of making art embodying those critiques. This was significant, because it charted a course for artists to follow for decades to come. What they put into



Mike Glier, *Clubs of Virtue*, 1979. Courtesy of Mike Glier. Photograph by Mike Glier.

the mix were ideas of how artists might work, of what art might be about, of how it might be used—liberationist ideas that expanded the scope of art making all in a flash, rendering it unlikely that our understanding of art will again contract into the narrow shape of earlier orthodoxies. On the cusp of a new consciousness of life in our image-saturated age, artists in the 1970s were among the first to point out the buried or obscured power of cultural manifestations to shape perception and, thereby, behavior.

But alas, since the 1960s mass movements to end the war in Southeast Asia and secure civil rights, the machinery is not in place in the United States to connect progressive ideas and visions with social life. Alternative art groups could never have achieved the world-changing aims many of them put forward because they had no way of influencing the actions the great mass of people took in relation to the system—the dominant culture, the machinery of commerce, and the government that institutionalizes commercial values. The link was broken, and no one has yet been able to repair it.

When I look back, I wonder why the most socially critical and visionary of the alternative art groups of past decades are the ones that are dead or moribund today. By asserting aims that could never be achieved, did they invite exhaustion, an expense of spirit in a waste of grandiosity? If activists had thought it was enough for artists to do what they could, however modest, would they have survived?

Essentializing the Artist

Part of the fuel for the exalted ambitions of the alternative art groups was the almost mystical belief that artists are endowed with special sensitivities and powers that set them apart from other people.

Artists and their organizations have a critical role to play in shaping this nation's political future. Perhaps more than any group, artists possess the ability to question authority, find new solutions to problems, and teach others to do so. And we do it on a shoestring. This fundamentally counter-hegemonic ethos must be nurtured if we are to correct the social ills wrought by xenophobic bigotry and unbridled capitalism.⁸

Such special claims are dangerous, especially to those who make them and inevitably find themselves called upon to deploy an armada of modifiers, rationales, and excuses in their defense. Many artists see themselves as visionaries and social critics, although there is no obvious unity or coherence to their extremely diverse visions. Some actually live up to this ambition, slaying conventional perceptions, raising questions that seem to stop time. But our world is also full of artists who care nothing for correcting social ills. Social position doesn't entirely determine character, so we cannot know artists' politics by learning their incomes or job sta-

tus. We've all met the wealthy artist who has no desire to overturn a system that has brought him success nor to annoy the social class his success has enabled him to join; the artist who teaches or who works in an advertising agency, perhaps grateful for the chance to earn a living at something allied to her heart's desire—or perhaps bitter and thwarted; or the artist who lives aligned to the grain of middle-class life, taking pleasure in talents and materials, but never wishing to stand apart from the institutions that maintain its social order.

For true believers in the special powers of artists (as opposed to art), such objections are easily dismissed with a glib rejoinder also favored by Christians and Marxists: anyone who doesn't fit the mold isn't a "real Christian" or a "real Marxist"—or a real artist. This belief is never damaged by the mass of evidence that contradicts it.

I would like to take this opportunity to repudiate an egregious error of my own along these lines. In cheerleader mode, responding to a request from the National Association of Artists' Organizations (NAAO) for an essay on artists organizations in the 1980s, Don Adams and I wrote,

Among artists' greatest skills and potential contributions is their ability to exercise social imagination, to propose new, more humane ways of seeing social relationships and institutions.⁹

I don't think so. Artists, like other categories of people, are all over the map. Some are adept in the exercise of social imagination, but a great many aren't. Some are ruthlessly self-interested; some are generous to a fault. Some waste their lives on easy pleasures; some work with maniacal dedication, with no time for friends or play; some are models of balance and harmony. Some care deeply about social values and the exercise of justice, while others live entirely in the little world of their immediate lives. When I was an organizer for the San Francisco Art Workers' Coalition in the early 1970s, my talks to groups of artists always received mixed reviews: for every artist who applauded my critique of dominant institutions and their infantilization of the artist, another would chastise me for ingratitude or impertinence.

Many of the alternative art groups of the 1970s opposed a dominant idea of the artist as child, fool, or idiot savant, asserting—correctly, it must be argued—the rightful role of the artist as citizen, with as much stake in public affairs and as much right to public expression as a doctor, plumber, or salesclerk. Somehow, in a number of the national arts advocacy efforts of the late 1980s and 1990s, this elided into a cult of the artist, with organizations proclaiming the artist's essential virtues as opposed to the far right's pronouncements concerning the essentially evil character they attributed to artists such as Karen Finley, Andres Serrano, Holly Hughes, Marlon Riggs, and Robert Mapplethorpe. Asserting that artists are angels invites

the counterassertion that they are devils; in such a contest, their right to be simply human individuals, full of possibility and contradiction, is lost.

When I look back on the alternative art rebellions of past decades, I recall a great deal of stupid, self-indulgent behavior tolerated in the name of artists' presumed specialness. People exempted themselves from social conventions that might pertain to meetings, for instance, insisting on their right to immediate, public self-expression even if what was being expressed was merely the desire for attention. A nihilistic spirit infused many gatherings, aiming at shattering conventions and heedless of what might replace them. If people had been able to take inspiration from artists such as Augusto Boal, a onetime member of the legislature of Rio de Janeiro, or Czech president Václav Havel—models of the artist as citizen, who wielded their gifts like knives instead of excuses—I wonder if less energy and momentum would have been lost in indulgence of self-delusions.

New Wine in Old Bottles

Most expressions of alternative art insurgency are temporary. It can legitimately be argued that this is the nature of the beast.

Artists' initiatives are invariably high energy, they are intense and require full commitment. Inevitably there is burn-out, ideas become stale, actions rote.¹⁰

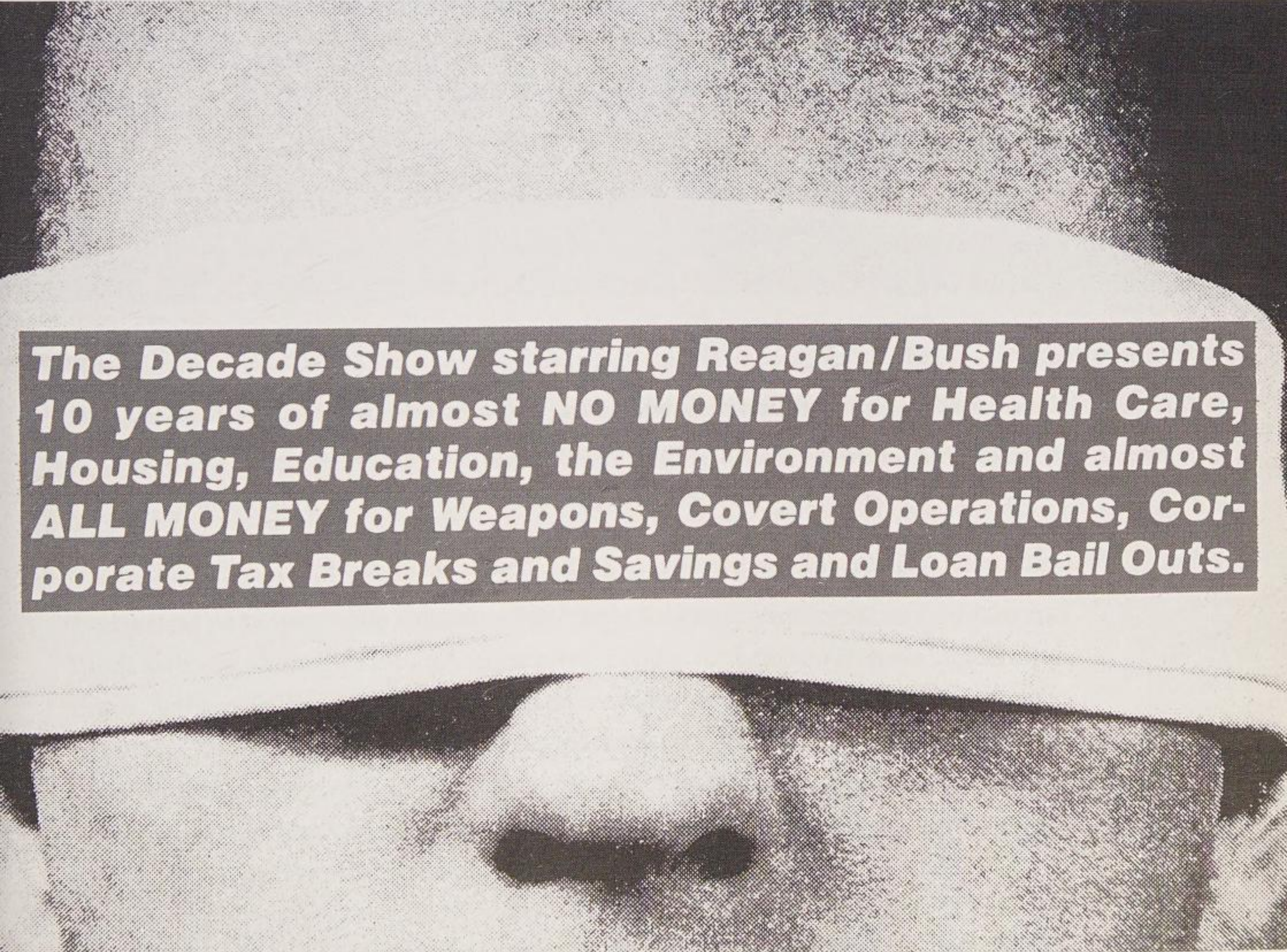
Yet several alternative art groups of the 1970s and 1980s have converted themselves into permanent fixtures of the New York art world, forming a transitional zone between establishment institutions such as museums and the street-level arts activity still operating beneath the establishment's radar.

Our job is to continue to broaden the pool of artists and approaches so that women, artists of color, seniors, the handicapped, gays and other individuals of diverse cultural identity are sucked up into the commercial, and hence acceptable, maw of American culture.¹¹

To become permanent residents of this buffer zone, organizations have adapted to the dominant structures of public, corporate, and foundation funding, all of which follow a pattern set by corporate culture. At minimum, to receive grants they must obtain tax-exempt status, which requires establishing a board of directors. In practice, they must satisfy funders that grant money, once received, will be properly secured, accounted for, and spent for the purposes for which it was obtained, and they must describe their plans in a vocabulary that signals they are initiates of the nonprofit arts cult. Most grants programs use artists and administrators to review applications, so applicants must also make themselves known in

the appropriate professional milieus, or at least convey a convincing impression that they are known—and well thought of—by those whose judgment is prized.

These are minimum requirements, but most groups that have succeeded in raising adequate operating funds have gone far beyond. During our nation's long love affair with markets since the 1980s, official policy has been to downplay any public role in cultural subvention while emphasizing the responsibility of the private sector. According to this elite fantasy, in a time of market-driven prosperity, volunteers will fulfill the social responsibilities that had to be delegated to government in the bad old days. (I would like to think this illusion has been dispelled, now that it has been proven that the chief impact of 1980s economic policies was to make the distribution of wealth in the United States the most inequitable on the planet—and not to create new, voluntarily financed low-income housing and medical care to replace what had been government funded. But it seems the market metaphor has been so universally accepted that no one questions the assertion that everything worthwhile earns its keep.) Although in theory the arts-funding



**The Decade Show starring Reagan/Bush presents
10 years of almost NO MONEY for Health Care,
Housing, Education, the Environment and almost
ALL MONEY for Weapons, Covert Operations, Cor-
porate Tax Breaks and Savings and Loan Bail Outs.**

Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Decade Show)*, 1990. Poster for *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s*, sponsored by the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Studio Museum in Harlem.

world is populated by liberal types, arts funders and bureaucrats have in practice embraced the romance of capitalism with a passion unequalled in other nonprofit sectors. Through the 1980s when they reviewed arts organizations' boards for evidence of appropriate fiduciary care, they wanted to see bankers, wealthy patrons, and corporate executives—people they thought could lead naive and underfunded arts groups toward the new income streams that would soon overflow from bounteous markets.

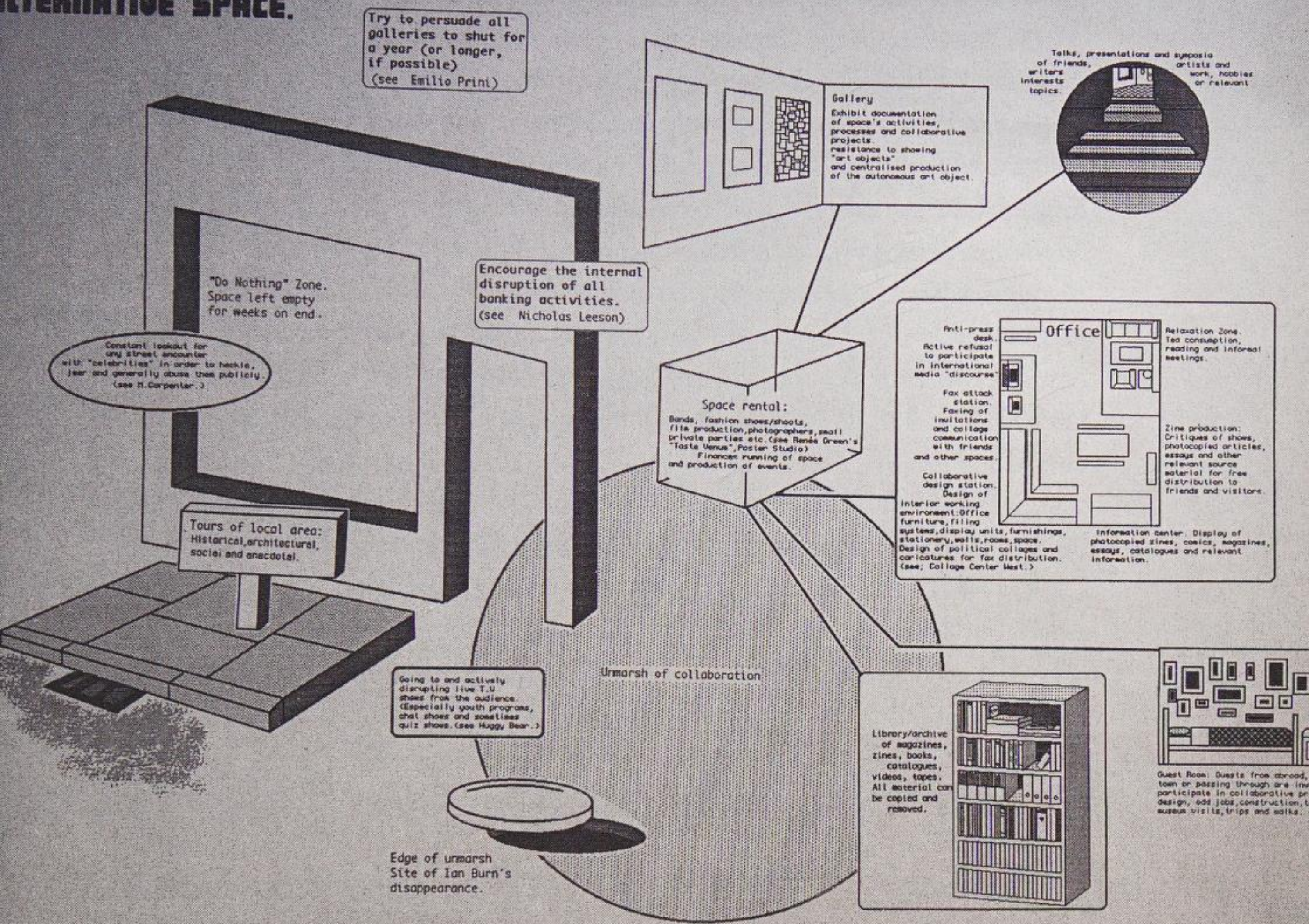
In short, when these executives and socialites gazed at the artists' organizations they'd been asked to assist, they wanted to see themselves—with just a bit more excitement, creativity, color, and downtown fashion sense. Artists' organizations were pushed to conform to corporate models of accountability and corporate styles of doing business. Thus, within groups previously controlled by artists doing for themselves, an internal class system was created, stocked with administrators, development directors, marketing directors, and so on. Earlier manifestations of alternative art insurgency had been fueled by a sometimes childish antipathy to administrators, as if organizations managed themselves.

Colab was founded . . . by artists who realized that public funding was routing money into the hands of arts administrators. It proposes instead that funding be distributed to artists by artists¹²

But now artists' organizations were eager to install administrators of their own. These arts managers (especially those no longer of an age or inclination to mount guerrilla art shows in abandoned hotels) saw the possibility of achieving the sort of security and professional standing for which most artists could only yearn. Their class identification shifted from the free-form underfunded coterie of artists to the professional class of other managers, people like their funders and board members.

An essay I read in the late 1990s made the claim that both the left and the right are deluded in their understanding of contemporary cultural realities.¹³ The author, Mark Lilla, characterized the right as believing that the "sixties revolution" of pleasure-loving relativism and pluralism was not only a failure, rejected by the vast majority of Americans, but also a poisonous residue that needed to be leached out of our culture once and for all. The left, according to Lilla, believes that the "Reagan revolution," valorizing markets rather than public social spending, is a public relations ploy foisted on Americans, and that once a few obvious economic truths pierce the establishment's media armor, the public's overwhelming objections will become evident. The truth, Lilla contended, is that both "revolutions" were real. The synergistic interaction of the two produced the younger generation at century's end, twenty-somethings who work hard for the corporation all week long and on the weekends swallow psychedelics, expose their tattoos and piercings, and head out for a gender-bending good time.

ALTERNATIVE SPACE.



Nils Norman, *Alternative Space*, 1995. Courtesy of American Fine Arts and Nils Norman.

When I think about the alternative art insurgencies of the 1970s and 1980s, I wonder if this synthesis was taking place then, when the first groups got the first permanent facilities and initial grants to support their staffs. "Follow the money" is always a useful instruction when one is trying to understand social systems within a capitalist society. In this case, it seems easy to follow the money as it leads groups to "professionalize" by adopting the operating styles and values of corporate culture, as administrators preserve self-images and personal tastes that root them in the world of artists but operate in a way that places artists in the category of needy "other," or even "pest" and "nuisance." In theory, nonprofit organizations are a separate but equally valid category of institution that coexists with markets. Their validity is predicated on the idea that some social goods must be measured by criteria other than profitability, that it is imperative to support initiatives that advance such social goods. But since the Reagan revolution, this theory has been eroded. Nonprofits are widely seen as institutional "welfare queens," parasites that fail to pay their own way. More and more, in exchange for the contributed income

they receive, nonprofits are expected to make a sort of penance by pledging allegiance to the values that animate corporate America.

Still, while money is powerful, it is not overdetermining. If you want to have a building, a budget, a program, you need people to manage them. But there is considerable room for individual administrators to resist the pressures of their positions and the blandishments of the managerial class welcoming them into its ranks. In the 1970s and 1980s, some groups practiced what Group Material called “righteous deception,” nominally seeking funding for the sort of professional expenses funders found reassuring but actually reserving the money for direct program costs, making it stretch a long way. In our current social Darwinist arts economy, it requires extraordinary strength of purpose to do this. Survival alone has become an all-consuming task. If an organization is perpetually soliciting and cultivating donors, projecting for their reassurance the signifiers of competence, stability, and safety, precisely how and when will it find the will and energy to “alter the established structure of the art world itself”?

One possible answer is to reinvigorate a particular value of past alternative art rebellions, *prefiguration*, in which groups behave so as to prefigure the social change they wish to help bring about, patterning their operating principles on their ideals rather than on dominant models. It would be a worthy enterprise for alternative arts groups to assert that there are more ways to band together in the interests of art and democracy than to reproduce miniature versions of major corporations. Alternative market-related models—co-ops, partnerships, share-based enterprises—are possible, for instance. It would also be real progress toward restoring democracy to nonprofit corporations’ boards of directors if they filled their seats with people who strongly share the egalitarian, liberatory cultural and political values of progressive artists and who are willing to stand up for those values. There are also ways to keep leaders on track, such as adopting working agreements and principles against which their actions will be evaluated. Such approaches would have to be underpinned by a critique of past practice, a first step that is easily within the grasp of any artists’ group operating today.

The potential gain in opting out of the organizational expectations imposed on nonprofit corporations would be freedom to construct the best organizational tools for the jobs people care about most deeply, without undue constraint by gatekeepers and funding sources. With greater flexibility, with the ability to select a team of leaders inspired by a common vision and common values, who knows what artists might do? Because so few artists’ groups have pulled away from the conventional approaches they perceive as requisites for support, we really can’t say with any certainty what activist artists would be doing today if they allowed their programs to be shaped entirely by their own deepest truths about what needs doing and how to make an impact.

But the risk in finding the answers to these questions could be loss of resources.

If funders say no to groups that fail to ante up with bankers on the board, how will those groups be supported? If they experiment with market-based approaches such as co-ops, how will they insulate themselves from the pressures of the marketplace?

Markets are infinitely absorbent structures, super-sponges of cultural material. The creators of *Star Trek* invented a hivelike civilization called the Borg whose message to other species is “you will be assimilated”—obviously, a metaphor for late-twentieth-century capitalism. Another naive assumption of alternative artists of earlier decades was that certain types of work could not be assimilated, that their oppositional content or transgressive form would render them unpalatable—that the Borg might even choke on them, that Goliath might be brought down by David’s well-placed pebble. There have always been hints that this might be merely wishful thinking. Consider this response to Colab’s *Times Square Show* of 1980:

One problem—the rebels have attracted patrons of their own. “The members of this collective are dedicated to the principle of art in the context of everyday life,” writes Henry Geldzahler, in a letter to potential sponsors. “They have shown themselves to be . . . committed to presenting an art exhibition both relevant and attractive,” adds the 42nd Street Development Corporation. “Any support which you could offer would . . . aid in the revitalization of Times Square.”¹⁴

Or this, from a 1982 NEA-supported study of New York’s alternative spaces:

The support of these organizations is vitally important for they serve as the research and development arm of the larger world of visual arts. . . . In addition, their impact on the economy of New York is significant: in terms of tourism and the expanding real estate market; commercial trade and the lively growth in contemporary art.¹⁵

We know now that markets can assimilate anything that can be made. There is no stronger message of political opposition than that marketed by rap-music moguls. There is no image of sexual transgression more powerful or shocking than that marketed by porn merchants through every adult bookstore and personal computer on the planet. This climate, in which any oppositional or transgressive impulse can be patted and tweaked into an advertisement for the status quo, threatens to swamp artists’ insurgency. At the very least, it requires reexamination and redefinition of what it means to work for change.

What is the meaning of an alternative arts establishment? It is a sector of the established structure of the art world that is built around a kernel of insurgent ideas the way a pearl is formed around a grain of sand. It is a network of organizations successful in its most fundamental and modest aim of creating outlets for work that could not survive the filters of the prestige arts apparatus. And it is being assimilated into that apparatus.

What's Next?

In order to withstand the severe shock of the crisis, artists have had to seek a new grip on reality. Around the pros and cons of “social content,” a dominant issue in discussions of present day American art, we are witnessing determined efforts by artists to find a meaningful direction. Increasing expression of social problems of the day in the new American art makes it clear that in times such as we are living in, few artists can honestly remain aloof, wrapped up in studio problems.¹⁶

The effort to organize artists in the United States is almost as old as the nation: so far, every single attempt to organize artists as a social force akin to a union or lobby has been wiped out by political or economic obstacles or merely by the brevity of its founders' attention spans. Is there a way for a truly effective alternative art insurgency to survive today, adding to the cultural mix notions of how artists might work, of what art might be about, of how it might be used, and of the buried or obscured power of cultural manifestations to shape perception and behavior? Honestly, I have no idea. But for those who have the energy and inclination, I think a few things worth trying can be extracted from recent history.

Follow the money a little further: as public arts funding has been cut, dominant thinking in artists' organizations has been that some form of public education, lobbying effort, or mega-advertising campaign is needed to persuade people to support them. More than a third of the thirty members of the “artists' space movement” asked by NAAO in 1991 to identify the most significant thing they have yet to achieve called for some such initiative. One of them, Arlene Rakoncaj, executive director of the Chicago Artists' Coalition, wrote:

Artists' organizations have not yet conveyed to their communities a united, articulate position on why the arts are essential to a well-balanced society. . . . This larger public includes the funding community, which has yet to grasp the validity of our various missions.¹⁷

Since an outpouring of public support has not yet resulted, I imagine the chorus of similar pleas I hear at every arts meeting will continue to be sung for some time.

One flaw in “support the arts” thinking is that what is generically referred to as “the arts” is, I think, rather an arrogant shorthand for “nonprofit arts organizations that cannot earn enough in our distorted market economy to stay afloat.” It almost always stresses an extremely weak market argument—for example, “the arts” are good for “tourism and the expanding real estate market,” as if the same thing couldn't be said for boutiques or restaurants or other categories of enterprise; or vague do-good utterances such as “the arts are essential to a well-balanced society,” as if there were the slightest indication that a “well-balanced society” is a

popular social goal. It is special pleading—a plea to “support us,” rather than to support a broadly resonant social aim that nonartists could wholeheartedly endorse, such as protecting public space for expression and exchange in a culture that is otherwise choked by the dominance of market values and market mechanisms.

This way of thinking also ignores pervasive social realities. Americans spend a huge portion of the gross national product on music, films, and other mass-produced entertainments and cultural products that fill perceived needs for sounds and images. Public sector support for the arts has been so deeply eroded during the past two decades that there is no realistic hope of achieving decent public cultural-funding levels that are comparable to, say, those of France. Most people doubt that support can be returned in the foreseeable future to even the anemic levels of the pre-Reagan years. Passionately felt, well-organized opposition to expressions of cultural, political, and sexual freedom has become a reliable feature of political life, one that most politicians lack the moral courage to oppose.

After nearly two decades of attack on the public sector and values of inclusion, participation, and equity, even advocates of cultural change find their social imaginations have been downsized. In the public arena, the most one hears advocated by alternative arts spokespeople is a humble program of incremental gains—a few more dollars, a little more room for free expression. Transforming “the established structure of the art world itself” is not even on the agenda any longer.

It seems to me that without intending to, those of us who participated in alternative art groups have contributed to this state of affairs by failing to recognize what we were up against and to assess realistically the relatively modest power of the tools at our disposal. Arts activism in the 1970s and 1980s was unable to perform its promised magic trick, changing the world by changing certain characteristics of the art world. I would say the fault lay in too large a goal and too grandiose an assessment of our own powers, and that the lesson might be a greater presence of mind, a greater linkage of ideals with actualities. Indeed, our grandiosity helped to create a mood of defeatism. Everywhere we turned, the market was being put forward as the one true tool and end of social action, ratifying the status quo. It seems to me a great many of us took away the lesson that if we couldn't change the world, the world cannot be changed, and we had better figure out how to prosper under status quo conditions.

With that in mind, if a new insurgency arises, here's some free advice: make your mission larger than getting a slice of the art-world pie, yet more achievable than total social transformation, less dependent on essentialist fantasies about the artist's special powers, and more forthrightly opposed to the corporatization of absolutely everything. I'd say the most useful lessons to be gleaned from the alternative art rebellions of the 1970s and 1980s are accuracy of analysis, precision of aims, and patience in the service of systemic change. I wonder if my 1970s self would have listened to that sermon?

Notes

1. This unsigned self-description appeared in *Upfront*, no. 4 (February–March 1982), a publication of Political Art Documentation/Distribution. This was a special issue prepared for the “February 26th Movement,” a national conference of activist artists and arts organizations held in New York City.

2. Lowell Downey, director of Programs and Development at the Hatley Martin Cultural Forum and Institute for Living Artists, San Francisco, quoted in “Testimonials,” in *Organizing Artists: A Document and Directory of the National Association of Artists’ Organizations*, ed. Lane Relyea (Washington, D.C.: NAAO, 1992), 12. Speakers in “Testimonials” were responding to the question, “What for you represents the most significant achievement of artists’ spaces?” (The organizational affiliations cited here were accurate at that time but may since have changed.)

3. Andrea Gilats, director of Minnesota’s Split Rock Arts Program, quoted in “Testimonials,” in *Organizing Artists*, ed. Relyea, 17.

4. Lucy R. Lippard, “Too Close to Home,” *Village Voice* (June 14, 1983), a column on Political Art Documentation/Distribution’s exhibit *Not for Sale: A Project against Displacement*.

5. Glen Harper, “Alternative Futures,” in *Organizing Artists*, ed. Relyea, 60.

6. Jacki Apple, introduction to *Alternatives in Retrospect: An Historical Overview 1969–1975*, exh. cat. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1981).

7. In *Upfront* no. 4. NAPNOC was the Neighborhood Arts Programs National Organizing Committee, which Don Adams and I codirected from 1979 to 1983.

8. David Trend, quoted in “Testimonials,” in *Organizing Artists*, ed. Relyea, 31.

9. Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard, “Lost and Found: Artists’ Organizations in the ’80s,” in *Organizing Artists*, ed. Relyea, 39.

10. Thomas Lawson, “Attempting Community,” in *Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement, NYC*, ed. Julie Ault (New York: Drawing Center, 1996), 15.

11. Martha Wilson, founder of Franklin Furnace Archive, quoted in “Testimonials,” in *Organizing Artists*, ed. Relyea, 35.

12. Richard Goldstein, “Three Chord Art Anyone Can Play,” *Village Voice*, June 16, 1980.

13. Mark Lilla, “A Tale of Two Reactions,” *New York Review of Books*, May 14, 1998.

14. Goldstein, “Three Chord Art Anyone Can Play.”

15. Sally Webster, *A Report: Alternative Spaces and the Crises Threatening Their Survival* (New York: RoseWeb Projects, March 1982).

16. This is from Davis’s address “Why an American Artists’ Congress?” at the first meeting of the American Artists’ Congress in New York in February 1936. Davis served as the organization’s secretary. To those interested in the history of artists’ movements, I recommend Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams, eds., *Artists against War and Fascism: Papers of the First American Artists’ Congress* (Rutgers, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986).

17. Arlene Rakoncaj, quoted in “Testimonials,” in *Organizing Artists*, ed. Relyea, 27.

Polarity Rules: Looking at Whitney Annuals and Biennials, 1968–2000

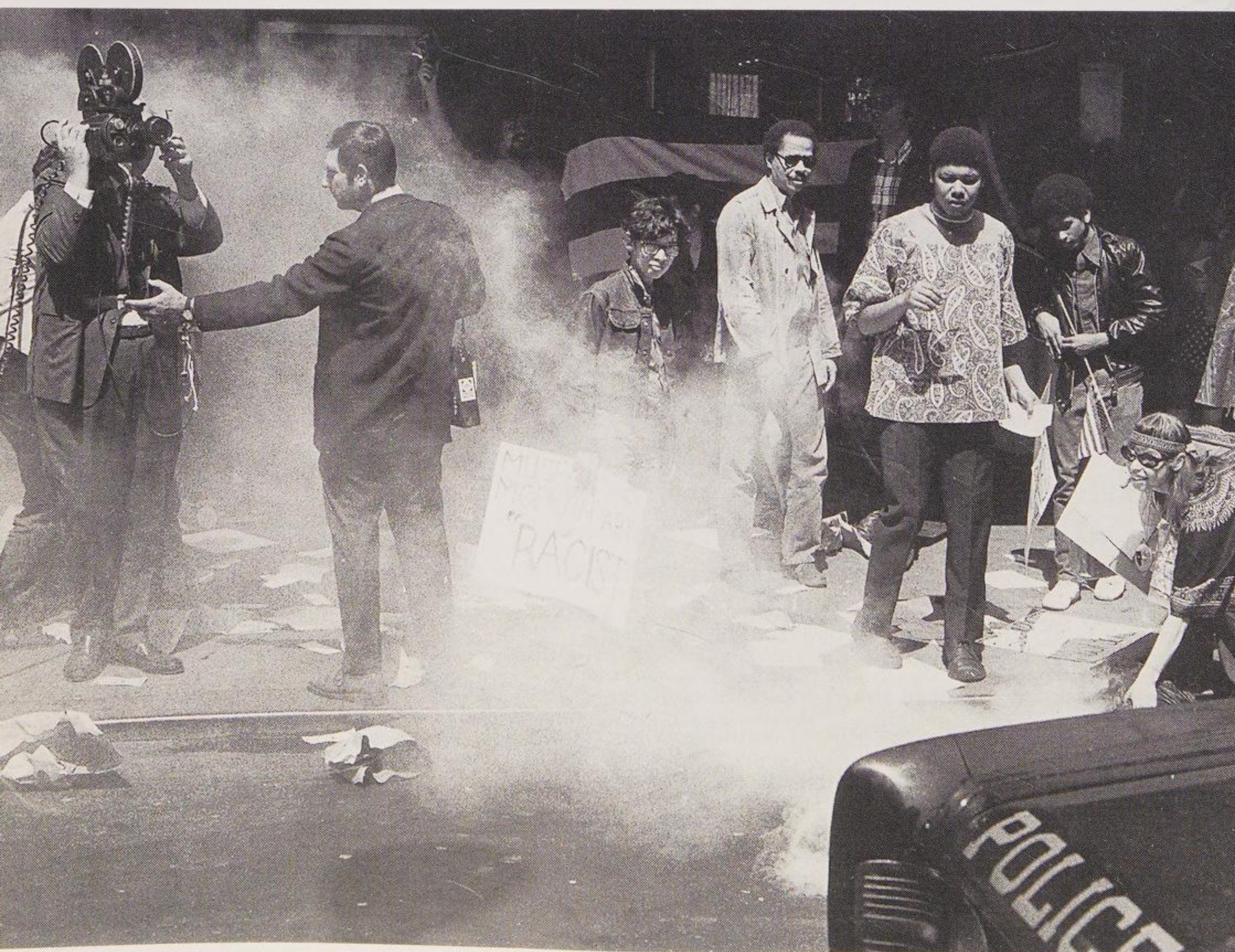
David Deitcher

Whitney Annuals and Biennials have always been an effective index of the museum's administrative philosophy, just as they have also been an effective gauge of the tenor of contemporary American art at any given time. The process of setting that tone, and of identifying that tenor, is legible in dialectical terms, as each Annual or Biennial assumes its place along a continuum that extends between different—indeed, opposing—views of art. At one (admittedly abstract) extreme is the idealist view of art as a transcendent repository for human values that may otherwise be lacking from people's lives: harmony and coherence, frivolity and agency, freedom and emotional self-presence. At the other extreme is the frankly political view of art as embedded—and therefore implicated—in the social relations of everyday life. Historically, this political view has been associated with the Left and the avant-garde, for whom it corresponded with the utopian aspiration that aesthetic experience would shape social relations to such an extent that art as we know it (the fetishized art object) would become redundant and cease to exist.¹ Despite the fact that these “positions” are abstractions, their traces have been and continue to be felt as intractable coordinates in a perpetually polarized debate in which Whitney Annuals and Biennials have so often figured prominently.

Early in 1970, an exchange involving a colorful cast of characters took place within the pages of the *New York Times* that was remarkable for the clarity with which it outlined both sides of this debate in terms that highlighted the pressing cultural

and political concerns of that period. On one side were the artists Hans Haacke and Frazier Dougherty and the activist and critic Lucy Lippard. As members of the barely eight-month old Art Workers' Coalition (AWC), they had drafted a lengthy letter to the editor of the "Arts and Leisure" section of the *Times* in response to a previously published article by the newspaper's art critic, Hilton Kramer—the same critic who, as editor of the *New Criterion*, would become an incendiary promoter of neoconservative cultural politics throughout the "culture wars" of the 1980s and 1990s. Titled, "Do You Believe in the Principle of Museums?" Kramer's article (his second to address the AWC) was itself a response to—or an attack on—the "thirteen demands" the AWC membership had just issued to the administration of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).²

Kramer focused on one AWC demand. Convinced that MoMA should function more as a contemporary art center than as a museum (a "Kunsthalle," as distinguished from a "Kunstmuseum"), the AWC recommended that the museum



"Students and Artists United for a 'Martin Luther King Jr./Pedro Albizu Campos' Study Center for Black and Puerto Rican Art at the Museum of Modern Art" demonstrating in conjunction with GAAG in front of the Museum of Modern Art, May 2, 1970. Photograph copyright Jan van Raay.

institute a program of selling all the art in its permanent collection that was more than thirty years old to other museums that were devoted to the preservation and display of such historic treasures. Believing that this demand posed a more serious threat than the AWC's cautious wording suggested, Kramer represented it to his readers as a direct challenge to the idea "that we should have permanent museum collections of twentieth-century art, or indeed permanent art collections of any kind. . . . The advocates of dispersal would command our respect," he maintained, "if not our assent, if they were only willing to come clean on this point. Do they, in fact, believe in the principle of museums?"³ In their letter to the editor, Dougherty, Haacke, and Lippard accused Kramer of misrepresenting the AWC's position. Of greater interest was their response to the call to arms with which Kramer concluded his article. "The time has come," he wrote, "for all of us who believe in the very idea of art museums—in museums free of political pressures—to make our commitments known; to say loud and clear that we will not stand for the politicalization of art that is now looming as a real possibility."⁴ The AWC's representatives accused Kramer of ignoring the fact "that what radical critics are opposed to is the present *conservative* politicalization of the Museum."

Nor do conservative politicizers ever question the propriety of an esthetic institution which considers negligible the fact that much of its money comes from the profits of the Vietnam war, of South African Apartheid, of Latin American colonization. If the men now controlling the Museum of Modern Art are not politically involved, who the hell is?⁵

This statement's direct identification of wealthy museum trustees with war, racism, and exploitation exposes the political implication of even the most aloof art museum. It also clearly reveals the turbulent political backdrop of the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement, and the anticolonial, feminist, and gay struggles against which this cultural conflict was taking place. It was in a dynamic relation to those struggles that such conflicts, between advocates of art's transcendence and those who insisted upon its political significance, had erupted in American and European culture once again.

In this context, some of the other demands that the AWC first directed at MoMA, but then applied to other museums, relate directly to challenges then being made to the Whitney Annual. For example, the AWC demanded the decentralization of the museum and its activities to "Black, Puerto Rican and all other communities"; devoting a portion of the museum's programming "to showing the accomplishments of Black and Puerto Rican artists"; and the "encourage[ment] of female artists to overcome centuries of damage done to the image of the female as an artist by establishing equal representation of the sexes in exhibitions and museum purchases and on selection committees."⁶

The historic disparity between the representation of art by white males and that by women and people of color surfaced as a focal point in the planning and reception of the 1970 Whitney Annual, a sculpture show that included a noticeably larger than usual number of works by women.⁷ Of 103 artists, 22 were women—a ratio of five men for every one woman that nevertheless represented an almost fourfold improvement over the nearly eighteen-to-one ratio of the previous Annual.

For much of the year prior to the Annual's December 12 opening, tense negotiations took place between members of the museum staff and representatives of such activist organizations as Women Artists in Revolution (WAR), the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee, and from even smaller groups such as Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation (WSABAL), whose principal representatives were Faith Ringgold and her two daughters, Barbara and Michele Wallace.⁸ At these meetings, the activists demanded 50 percent female representation—a demand that the museum's administrator, lawyer Stephen Weil, summarily dismissed. He explained the museum's rejection as a refusal to "impose a quota system," emphasizing that such a system would "inflict a deliberate injustice on those artists whose work we think it important to show but who do not fall within the quotas which you and other groups seek to impose."⁹

Dissatisfied with the museum's denial of its demands, the activists called for yet another meeting before the Annual's opening. On December 1, 1970, Weil informed his staff, "We have taken the position that our curatorial staff will be too deeply engaged with the Annual to meet until after it opens." The reluctance to schedule such a meeting before the Annual's opening may well have had other causes, including exasperation with the activists. For example, on November 9, the press received a document on Whitney Museum letterhead purporting to be the press release for the 1970 Annual but bearing an unlikely headline: "Whitney Sculpture Annual to Be 50% Women." A photocopy of this document in the Whitney archive is vigorously x-ed out, its margin emblazoned with "Fake Release." So credible was the look and the language of this fake—from the letterhead to its reasoned explanation of the decision to organize a 50 percent female Annual, to its final paragraph promoting upcoming exhibitions of art by women (Louise Nevelson and Lee Lozano)—that the museum, in the name of John I. H. Baur, director, had to issue a rebuttal:

URGENT: TO ALL EDITORS:

Press release mailed to you, dated 11-9-70, purporting to be from the Whitney Museum of American Art, headlined "Whitney Sculpture Annual to be 50% Women" is a complete forgery—repeat a forgery. Facts are totally untrue.¹⁰

The Annual's December 11 opening party was disrupted by demonstrators, some of whom picketed near the museum's entrance, while others gained admis-

sion with invitations—both real and forged. After the show opened, its increased female representation was duly noted in the press, where it was attributed to the activists' efforts.¹¹ Marcia Tucker (Whitney curator from 1969 to 1976), who recalls working “on the inside” with the Whitney's curator of prints, Elke Solomon, to improve the museum's record on the representation of art by women, maintains that their efforts were very nearly sabotaged by the activists' many interventions.¹² Internal documents in the collection of the Whitney library attest to the curators' efforts to familiarize the museum's staff with contemporary art by women in order to be able to improve on a record that WAR had judged “lousy.”

Creating change in any large institutional setting is difficult at best, especially when resistance is as deeply structured and ingrained as the neglect of art by women and people of color. In this regard, it is worth noting that Tucker was fired from her post at the museum in 1975, early in the administration of Tom Armstrong, who replaced John I. H. Baur in 1974. The immediate pretext for her dismissal was Hilton Kramer's scathing review in the *Times* of a Richard Tuttle exhibition that Tucker had organized. Her difficulties at the Whitney led Tucker to open The New Museum in 1977, founded on the progressive mandate of helping to bring new art, and new perspectives on art, to light.

Since the early 1930s, in the days of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and the Whitney Museum's first director, Juliana Force, the Annuals had presumed to present the best contemporary American art. The first Biennial, a 1932 painting show, was followed by a survey of contemporary “sculpture and the graphic arts,” thus setting in motion the alternating rhythm of painting and sculpture surveys that continued (annually, for the most part) until 1973, when the museum adopted the multimedia Biennial format that survives today.¹³ “In a broad way,” Force wrote in her foreword, the first Biennial demonstrated “some of the most notable characteristics” of contemporary American art. By representing “the best work produced in this country in the plastic and graphic arts,” it promoted American contemporary art at a time when there was very little other support. Indeed, when this curatorial tradition began, there wasn't much contemporary American art. Baur's foreword to the 1968 Annual acknowledged that the cultural context for the surveys had changed dramatically over time. “An exhibition of this size,” he wrote, “can no longer even approximate a cross section of the creative trends of the moment.” As a consequence, he adjusted the curatorial cross section to focus more specifically on “presenting new directions which seem to be generating the most creative excitement.”¹⁴

In the same foreword, Baur also noted that painting and sculpture were increasingly tending to “escape their traditional self-contained limits and become events in the environment.” Typical of the caution and inertia that can inhibit change in even a relatively progressive administrative environment, Baur did not address the challenge of artists who blurred the boundaries between painting and



Opening reception of the Whitney Annual, 1970. Museum of Modern Art library. Photograph by Amy Stromsten.

sculpture until 1973, when the Whitney Annual became the Whitney Biennial and dispensed with the single-medium focus. Contrary to what some have maintained (that the new policy did not represent an unqualified embrace of works in new and marginalized media), the 1973 Biennial was a multimedia show, although principally in the sense that this first museum-wide extravaganza included both painting and sculpture.¹⁵

Even before adopting this format, Whitney curators had managed to accommodate the artistic innovations of the 1960s. The 1968 Annual, a sculpture show, included “site-specific” (i.e., fabricated on location) works by Michael Heizer and Dennis Oppenheim as well as other challenging works by Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, Richard Artschwager, Walter De Maria, Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Richard Serra, and Robert Smithson. While the 1969 Annual, a painting show, included works by such Whitney perennials as Raphael Soyer and George Tooker, it also accommodated work that could not, strictly speaking, be considered painting at all. Joseph Kosuth identified his own contribution—*Fifth Investigation (Art as Idea as Idea)*—as an “art investigation” and took the opportunity of its inclusion in the Annual to protest the continued categorization of art as either painting or sculpture as “contrary to the nature of art in our time.”¹⁶ The 1970 Annual highlighted the late-1960s minimalist and conceptualist vanguard, including works by Carl Andre, Richard Artschwager, Mel Bochner, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Barry Le Va, Robert Morris, Dennis Oppenheim, Dorothea Rockburne, Allen Ruppersberg, and Jackie Windsor, as well by Louise Bourgeois, Vija Celmins, Chryssa, Mel Edwards, Jackie Ferrara, Rafael Ferrer, Mary Frank, Nancy Graves, Marilyn Lerner, Mary Miss, Ree Morton, Betye Saar, Lucas Samaras, Marjorie Strider, and Anne Truitt. That Annual also claimed important works that did not appear in the museum at all: Richard Serra’s *To Encircle Base Plate Hexagram Right Angles Inverted* was realized at 184th Street and Webster Avenue in the Bronx, Keith Sonnier’s untitled sound piece was located on the roof of 105 Mulberry Street, and Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* was gradually sinking beneath the rising waters of Utah’s Great Salt Lake.¹⁷

The catalog accompanying the 1972 Annual listed for the first time a film curator (David Bienstock) as part of the museum’s curatorial staff, thereby hinting at a dawning administrative awareness of film, if not yet of video, as a legitimate artistic medium. That Annual did not feature either film or video, but the multimedia Biennial of 1973 included three works in video (or incorporating it) by Joan Jonas, Robert Morris, and Keith Sonnier.

Responding in 1973 to the transformation of the Annual into a considerably larger Biennial, the critic Lawrence Alloway declared that the exhibition no longer made historical sense: “The large sample of art from a single moment of time, with no rationale beyond contemporaneity, has lost much of its point.” Recalling that the

original purpose of the exhibition was to serve as a patriotic showcase for contemporary American art at a time when there was almost no support for it, Alloway maintained that it had “outlived its past usefulness.” He recommended that the show either be discontinued or be taken out of the hands of the museum’s curators. Alloway proposed that the exhibition be “handed over to minority groups, some of whom are professional artists, some of whom are lay artists.” He based this suggestion on the decline of the once unchallenged status of Greenbergian modernist aesthetics, which he attributed, in part, to the “unanticipated upsurge [of artistic activity] from ‘outside’ or ‘below’ the narrowly defined professional art world,” which “raised doubts about the absoluteness of the identification of art with the educated.”¹⁸

Notwithstanding Alloway’s awareness of the challenges posed by “black and Puerto Rican artists,” as well as by women, the only show he could cite as a model for the kind of pioneering curatorial venture he had in mind was *Women Choose Women*, organized by Women in the Arts for the New York Cultural Center (January 12–February 18, 1973). Had Alloway written his essay six months later, he might well have proposed as a model the exhibition *Blacks: USA, 1973*, at the New York Cultural Center (September 26–November 15, 1973). The African American artist and activist Benny Andrews described this show as the “first major exhibition of Black art chosen by an all-Black selection committee,” and he considered it a measure of how much had been accomplished by an organization he had helped found, the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC). The BECC came into being as African American artists decided to protest the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s large-scale, multimedia, documentary exhibition *Harlem on My Mind* (January 18–April 6, 1969). Trouble between black artists and the museum regarding its plans for that show became public on November 22, 1968, when the Harlem Cultural Council held a news conference to announce the withdrawal of its support for the exhibition because of its “lack of Negro scholarly participation and the projected use of photographs in place of original art.”¹⁹ BECC was officially formed on January 9, 1969, at an emergency meeting at Andrews’s studio. A group of about twenty artists met to decide how to respond to the museum’s intransigence regarding the show. Their anger was fueled by the refusal of the Met’s director, Thomas P. Hoving; the show’s guest curator, Allon Schoener, of the New York State Council on the Arts; and NYSCA’s executive director, John Hightower, to seriously consider demands by Andrews and his colleagues that the show be cocurated by an African American; that there be more input from the black cultural community, and that the exhibition feature contemporary African American art.

While *Harlem on My Mind* formed the focal point of early BECC activities, the broader mobilization of black artists constituted a response to the historic absence of African American art from mainstream museums and galleries and the chronic failure of museums to hire African Americans to work in anything other than custodial positions, such as janitors or guardians of the colonial legacy in art.

BECC also targeted the Whitney Museum. Andrews and Henri Ghent met with John Baur on several occasions, beginning with a cordial meeting at the museum during the spring of 1969 and leading up to the more substantive discussions between Whitney administrators and the BECC Negotiating Committee (Anderson, Ghent, Vivian Browne, and Mahler Ryder) concerning four BECC demands. (“They call them proposals,” Andrews observed of the museum’s representatives.) These included organizing a major group exhibition of African American art, “with a Black guest curator”; inviting more African American artists to participate in the Whitney Annuals; hiring “Black curatorial staff to coordinate these endeavors”; and staging “five or more solo exhibitions of Black artists during the year.”²⁰ In a meeting with Baur, Whitney curator Robert (Mac) Doty, and Weil at the museum on September 18, 1969, it was agreed that the Whitney would increase the number of purchases of African American art for the permanent collection, stage “five or more solo exhibitions in the first floor lobby gallery,” and consult “with Black art experts in putting the exhibitions together.” However, the museum did not agree to make African American appointments to the curatorial staff, and the 1971 exhibition *Contemporary Black Artists in America* was organized solely by Doty, a white man. As a consequence, BECC members mobilized a nationwide boycott of the exhibition, which they considered an insult, and planned *Black Artists in Rebuttal* for the Acts of Art Gallery (April 6–May 10, 1971). On January 31, 1971, BECC demonstrated in front of the Whitney to protest Doty’s upcoming exhibition. “We protested for two hours. Very effective,” noted Andrews, who went on to sound a more somber note while working on the rebuttal show. “It was a sad ending to such a well-intentioned beginning; nevertheless, we were determined to return to our studios and communities to take up the next battle and fight and then fight some more.”²¹

In his foreword to the 1975 Biennial catalog—the first of the Armstrong era—the director declared that the exhibition would have a unifying theme: “new aspects, directions and talents,” which he further defined in terms of artists who had “not become known through one-person shows in New York City or participation in previous Whitney Museum Biennials or Annuals.” Notwithstanding the plan to move beyond the most familiar figures in New York’s clubbish gallery scene—a plan that arguably still reflected the ideals of the early 1970s—the show proved to be a disappointment. Its new directions and talents were largely confined to the display of paintings by artists identified with the emerging eccentric abstract and figurative styles and with the style known as “pattern and decoration.” Although the artists may not have been known for solo exhibitions in New York, many were known through their participation in New York group shows or solo shows elsewhere (i.e., Ross Bleckner, Charles Garabedian, Ron Gorchov, Allan McCollum, Judy Pfaff, David Reed, Judy Rifka, Barbara Schwartz, Alexis Smith, and Andrew Spence). The Biennial included a video program for the first time, and in 1977

THE BLACK EMERGENCY CULTURAL COALITION

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During the spring and summer of 1969, six months of negotiations between the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition and the Whitney Museum of America Art, resulted in an agreement between the two organizations which was to have a profound effect upon the Art Community in general, and upon Black Artists in particular. The agreement, which reflected one of several demands put forth by The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, was that the Whitney Museum would stage a major exhibit of the works of Black Artists, National in scope. It was further agreed that the museum would schedule the exhibit to take place during the art season's "prime time," beginning late 1970 and extending to 1971.

The exhibit, in the words of the museum's director, John H. Baur, would be, "designed to assess the contributions that the best black artists are making the creative life of America today." Speaking for the Whitney Museum, Mr. Baur further stated, "We've taking these steps because we feel that Black Artists have suffered more handicaps than other artists, particularly in bringing their work to the attention of collectors and dealers. But our final judgement of what we buy and show, will rest on quality."

Ignoring an earlier agreement that the work for the exhibit would be selected by a two-man committee consisting of one of the museums curators and a qualified Black art expert acceptable to both parties, the museum declared that its own curators would choose the show, utilizing the advice of Black Art experts "wherever feasible." We are dealing here with evidence that neither the museum's stated commitment to stage a black Art show during the art seasons prime time 1970-1971, nor its grudging promise to draw upon the advice of Black Art experts have been honored.

Because of the Whitney Museum's discourteous handling of the matter, The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, with whom the agreement to stage a Black show was reached, had to learn through other reliable sources of the museum's rescheduling of the exhibit date to April 1971; a period that could hardly be considered "prime time." As to the selections for the show, our fellow artists across the nation have reported being subjected to such humiliating experiences as having Mr. Robert Doty, apparently the museum's lone selector, enter their studios and demand to see only this or that piece of which he had heard or with which he was previously familiar, at the exclusion of all others. Many Black Artists of outstanding ability have reported being by passed altogether, and no Black curatorial assistance has to our knowledge been drawn upon to date. An overall air of confusion and mistrust has resulted from the lack of information regarding the Whitney's preparations for the show.

With exceptionally competent Black curators such as Edmund B. Gaither, at the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts; Dorchester, Mass. and such capable Black Art specialists as Randall J. Craig, of Philadelphia, Evangeline Montgomery, of the Oakland Museum, Dr. Sanella Lewis, of the Los Angeles County Museum, Floyd Coleman, of the Atlanta University center and Prof. Riddleys of Fisk University, and with forward-looking, sensitive art institutions such as the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Civic Center Museum at Philadelphia; both with successful Black shows behind them, we must seriously question our need to tolerate the palousness of such as the Whitney.

BECC flyer.

there was a lucid presentation of works in that medium under the guidance of the museum's new curator of film and video, John Hanhardt.

In 1975 and 1976, BECC and a diverse coalition of artists known as Artists Meeting for Cultural Change (AMCC) mobilized to criticize the Whitney yet again. The museum was planning to commemorate the nation's Bicentennial with a traveling exhibition of historic American art gleaned entirely from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III. The artists were offended by the decision

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Doty's and the Whitney's response to the community's urgent demand for complete and wholesome cultural nourishment, has from the beginning been characterized by a reluctance unbecoming an institution charged with the responsibility of providing and preserving its community's cultural health. It has thereby proven its irrelevance to the community.

We of The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, being dedicated to the principle of upholding the community's cultural integrity, see it as our responsibility to respond to these gross failures on the part of the Whitney with vigorous and relentless protest action.

The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition is constituted as an action-oriented and watchdog group, to implement the legitimate rights and aspirations of individual artists and the total art community. It is founded on the belief that those persons most intimately related to and profoundly influenced by relevant problems affecting the art community, should have the ultimate responsibility for the establishment and executions of policies to deal with these problems.

The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition adheres to the principle of direct action, to be taken whenever and wherever necessary, to effect changes in any and all policies and practices which are alien to art and to Artists. One must only comprehend the power inherent in art to motivate the human spirit toward social change and freedom; to grasp the desperation with which the system works to obscure the beauty of Blackness in art in these revolutionary times.

Overcoming present and future obstacles to truly significant recognition of the Black artist's serious involvement in and valuable contributions to the world art community will require the active and often sacrificial participation of fellow artists; supported by the concern and cooperation of sympathetic friends.

We are calling for massive boycott of the Whitney Museum's Black show by all concerned Black Artists. All sympathetic members of the art community and all people concerned with cultural freedom. We call for this action in protest of policies and practices on the part of the Whitney Museum of America Art, in relating to Black Artists and the Black Community, which typify it as a racist institution, fully knowledgeable of the fact that it could live down a bad Black show, while its sadly displayed participants might not.

THE BLACK EMERGENCY CULTURAL COALITION

of both museums to commemorate the American Bicentennial by exhibiting the private collection that the Rockefeller family had assembled, which constructed American art history "from the complacent viewpoint of the newer elite . . . as though the last decade of cultural and social reassessment had never taken place." That conclusion finds support in the absence of any African American artists and of only one woman in the show.²² Armstrong resisted the activists' requests for meetings, as well as their pickets, protests, and threatened boycotts. AMCC

published a formal response to the exhibition, *an anti-catalog*. This ambitious social theory of American art—an early, yet highly evolved form of “institutional critique”—addressed many details about the history of American art, and about American history, that the official exhibition catalog deemed irrelevant.

The impact of these developments on the 1977 Biennial only resulted in deeper institutional entrenchment in this shamelessly blue-chip affair. Since Armstrong still considered thematic focus an essential Biennial device, in this case he pinpointed artists “who were decisively influential in the 1970s.” Consistent with its em-

an *anti-catalog*

Because it calls the neutrality of art into question, this Anti-Catalog will be seen as a political statement. It is, in reality, no more political than the viewpoint of official culture. The singularity of that viewpoint—the way it advances the interests of a class—is difficult to see because in our society that viewpoint is so pervasive. In this Anti-Catalog, we have attempted to elucidate some of the underlying mechanisms and assumptions. Our effort is not intended simply as a critical exercise. Culture has the power to shape not only our view of the past but also the way we see ourselves today. Official culture can only diminish our ability to understand the world and to act upon that understanding. The critical examination of culture is thus a necessary step in gaining control over the meaning we give our lives.

phasis on connoisseurship and with the conservative aesthetic philosophy of the Armstrong years, for the first time artists in the Biennial were represented by more than one work. Also consistent with that emphasis, the exhibition became the first corporate-sponsored Biennial, with the Fallek Chemical Company serving as an underwriter. One positive practical consequence of corporate sponsorship was the show's somewhat weightier catalog, which contained a separate section devoted to video. Hanhardt introduced that section with a thoughtful essay in which he broke with the show's otherwise narrow aesthetic purview. In noting the importance of the show's single-channel, nonbroadcast video programming, he credited this work as "both an acknowledgment of and alternative to commercial television's forms, messages, and public myth."²³ This was the first acknowledgment by a Biennial curator that contemporary art was shifting away from the modernist project of critical reflection on the material properties of each artistic medium to reflect critically on representation in all its forms and its role in shaping individual identity, experience, and belief.



Photography installation, 1981. Biennial exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art. Courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements.

In addition to contemporary video, photography made a tentative Biennial debut in 1977. It was limited to formally elegant images by Lewis Baltz, implicitly narrative images by Robert Cumming, and explicitly narrative ones by Duane Michals. Photography was no more prominently or adventurously displayed in the 1979 Biennial, and although it became somewhat more prevalent in 1981, the emphasis on direct formalism, setup, and narrative persisted. In other ways as well, the 1979 Biennial promoted the pluralist idea that anything goes, a striking development given the revival of the polarizing critical debate concerning art's social implications in relation to the ascendance of Ronald Reagan.

When Lawrence Alloway criticized the Whitney Annuals and Biennials in 1973 as obsolete—products of a remote period when there was little or no support for contemporary American art—he might have added that the exhibitions had not only pursued their promotional mandate by staging prominent showcases for American art but also offered that art for sale. The catalog accompanying the 1973 Biennial (the one that prompted Alloway's critique) contained the following notice: "Many of the works in the exhibition are for sale. For prices and information visitors are requested to inquire at the Information Desk." The only difference between this notice and those that had appeared in Annual catalogs dating back to the 1930s was the use of the qualifier "many," which that year replaced "most"—as in "most of the works are for sale."

That a prominent American museum could so openly acknowledge its function as an agent in the promotion and sale of the art displayed in its galleries seems unthinkable today, perhaps because we cannot conceive of circumstances in which the sale of contemporary American art would require such institutional assistance or because our museums for so long represented themselves as aloof from crass commercialism.²⁴ One might deduce from the statement in the Whitney catalogs that it reflected an increasing encroachment of commerce and capital into the hitherto sacred precincts of art, but that conclusion is incorrect. Given that the Whitney had consistently offered Annual art for sale since the exhibition's inception, it would be more accurate to consider this tradition a remnant of earlier and more innocent times.²⁵ Indeed, until 1960 the catalogs included the stipulation that "no commission is charged by the Museum on sales made." Thereafter, until abandoning its sales policy in 1975, the museum charged a 10-percent commission on sales, which became part of the Whitney's "purchase fund."²⁶

What finally caused the Whitney to relinquish its role as a site for the sale of art after the 1973 Biennial? The museum's historic candor regarding that role appears to have existed in inverse proportion to the economic stakes involved. It is not coincidental that the museum abandoned this policy immediately after the taxicab magnate and pop art patron Robert Scull sold his famous collection of contemporary American art at Sotheby Parke-Bernet for \$2.5 million, thereby

definitively proving that the stakes were now rather high.²⁷ That sale, given wide press coverage, signaled that contemporary art collecting was something more (and something other) than just a symbol of bourgeois sophistication. Art collecting now took on the unmistakable allure of a lucrative investment opportunity. In this way, the Scull sale effectively encouraged middle-class American art patronage, whose roots arguably date back to the educational (and retailing) schemes of the Federal Arts Project of the 1930s as well as to the first Whitney Annuals. Compared with today's art market, in which wealthy collectors virtually take a number and stand in line to flatter and cajole "gallerists" for the privilege of spending outrageous sums for something (anything) by the latest hot young thing, the base of support for contemporary American art during the 1970s was very small indeed.²⁸ By the end of the decade, with the support of public arts funding, alternative exhibition spaces and artists' collaboratives were energizing contemporary cultural practices in ways that Biennial curators largely ignored until the early to mid-1980s. In 1979 the critic Douglas Crimp proposed one way of understanding why museum curators might be inclined to overlook at least some of these new developments. In response to the Whitney Museum's 1978 exhibition, *New Image Painting*, Crimp issued a critical indictment of museum culture. Curator Richard Marshall, an Armstrong hire, had organized the show to herald the reemergence of a quirky form of figurative art. Crimp dismissed *New Image Painting* as yet another cynical attempt to "prolong the life of outmoded forms"—that is, the "modernist aesthetic categories" of painting and sculpture, "which museums themselves have institutionalized." Crimp concluded that "if we now have to look for aesthetic activities in so-called alternative spaces, outside the museum, that is because those activities . . . pose questions that are postmodernist."²⁹

This understanding of the museum as a modern institution that resisted adapting to the challenges of postmodernist art constituted one facet of a broader cultural and ideological conflict that would erupt after the election of Ronald Reagan. On one side were defenders of the vanguard cultural and political legacies of the 1960s and 1970s, while on the other were neoconservatives who, like Hilton Kramer, were eager to celebrate the return to art of more easily marketable "signs of passion."³⁰ Along with Kramer, Frank Hodson and Lynne Cheney, Reagan's NEA and NEH chairs, and his "drug czar" William Bennett did their best to bury all vestiges of the 1960s and 1970s cultural and political vanguard. Crimp's theory was satisfying and insightful as a way of understanding the museum's omission of cultural practices that threaten, or at least fail to coincide with, dominant cultural values that the museum had itself helped to enshrine. But his theory failed to appreciate the viability of "outmoded forms," not just to members of the ruling class but also to economically and culturally marginalized groups. Furthermore, it did not take into account the capacity of museums, galleries, and collectors to embrace novelty and in so doing neutralize cultural resistance. The dogmatic edge



Jenny Holzer, William T. Wiley, Jasper Johns, 1983. Installation view at the Biennial exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art. Courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements.

of Crimp's argument was nonetheless consistent with the messianic fervor on both the intellectual left and right at the dawn of the Reagan presidency, and it reinforced the polarity of the debate between those who viewed art as a factor in effecting or inhibiting social change and those who regarded it as an aesthetic haven from social conflict, masking a conservative agenda. Only a few years later, people of color, women, and "out" lesbians and gay men forcibly opened up the terms of the postmodernist critique of representation to reflect the unavoidably political consequences of modernist, or for that matter postmodernist, cultural values that continued to marginalize difference.

The alternative spaces and organizations that flourished on shoestring budgets during the mid- to late 1970s and into the early 1980s produced a wide range of challenges to the kind of late modernist museum culture that dominated the Biennials of the late 1970s. These challenges included art that repudiated, or pretended to repudiate, all pretenses to art-school standards of professionalism as well

as curatorial practices that formed a sometimes playful, sometimes anarchic and politically rebellious parallel universe of artistic display. The diverse artists who came together in 1977 to form Collaborative Projects, better known as Colab, worked in painting, sculpture, photography, video, film, publication, public-access cable TV, performance, fashion, and dance. What they shared was a “sensitivity, a commitment to group work, and an interest in new venues and new audiences.”³¹ They were also united in their disaffection with the parochial concerns and elitist rituals of the commercial gallery and museum scene and in their impatience with alternative spaces that paid lip service to diversity but remained unresponsive to young, punk-inspired artists like themselves.

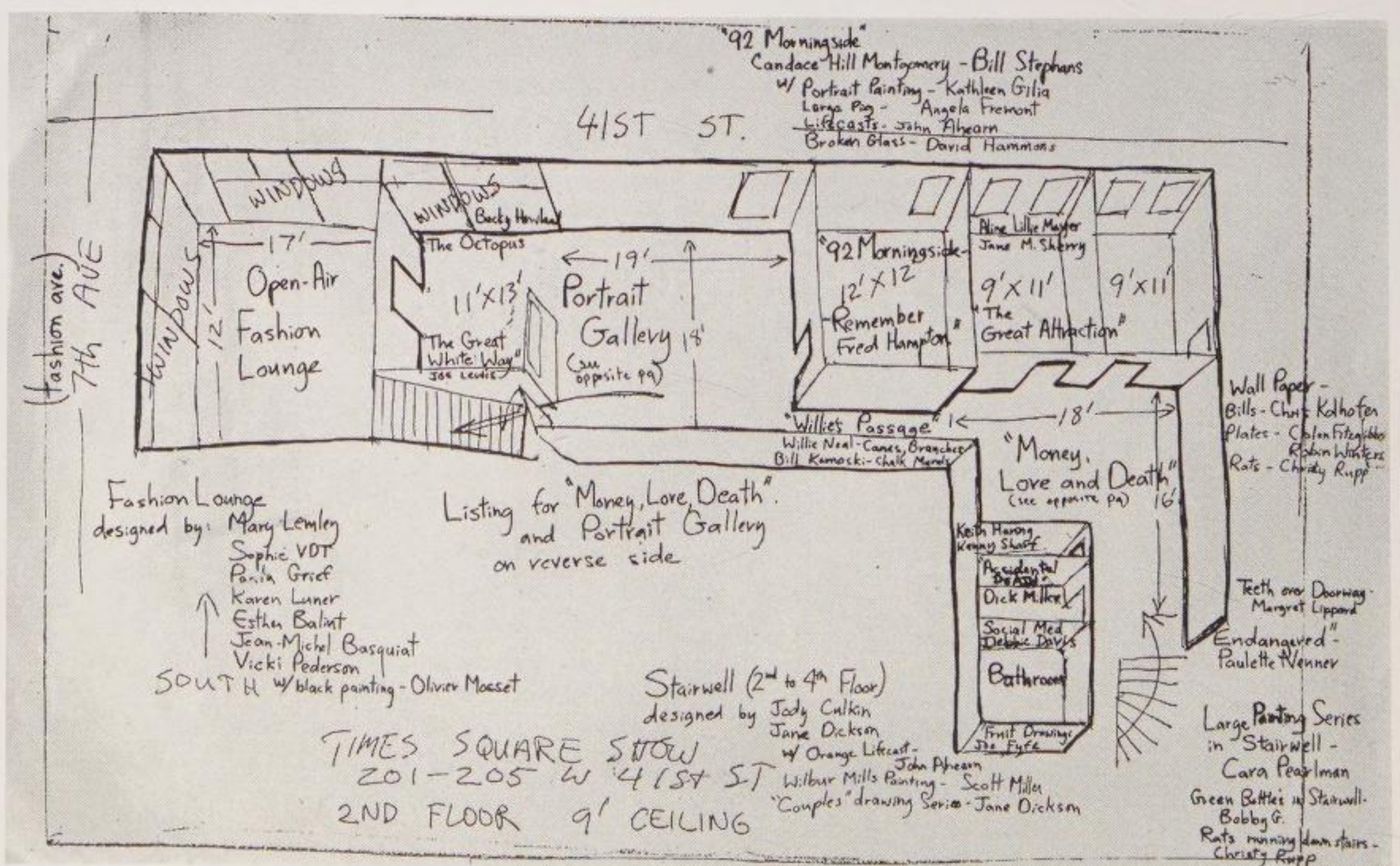
Colab incorporated as a nonprofit in 1978, which enabled its members to apply for “organization grants” from such funding sources as the NEA. By successfully securing such grants, Colab could stage theme shows in which members and nonmembers alike contributed works addressing real-world concerns in unconventional settings consistent with the organization’s commitment to bridging the



Lockout at the *Real Estate Show*, visited by Joseph Beuys, 1980. Photograph by Barbara Brooks.

gap between artists and working people.³² The *Real Estate Show* (1980) was illegally installed in a vacant, city-owned building at 172 Delancey Street. Lucy Lippard described the event as a combination “exhibition and guerrilla action,” a “vital, if uneven, mess of art, including wall drawings and graffiti by neighborhood kids” in a space that further departed from convention by being neither especially clean nor well lit.³³ Given its direct concern with tenants’ rights, speculation, warehousing, and “arbitrary city planning”—and the city’s suppression of the show the morning after it opened—it is not surprising that Colab framed its project with more than a little old-left rhetoric. One flyer for the *Real Estate Show* reads like a manifesto, including references to “greedy white developers,” “solidarity with oppressed people,” and “solidarity with the struggles of Third World and oppressed people.” But Colab mitigated this attitude with graphic evidence of its youthful optimism. “It is important to have fun,” reads one of the flyers. “It is important to learn.”³⁴

Colab reached a turning point in June 1980 with the opening of the *Times Square Show*, a boisterous spectacle that combined art, film, video, performance, and music in a tenement building at 201–205 West Forty-first Street, which previously housed a massage parlor. Colab invited artists to submit work that commented freely on Times Square. Although the exhibition included thematic sections (the second floor featured “Money Love & Death,” “92 Morningside: Remember Fred Hampton,” and “Portrait Gallery”), the show evoked its subject more impressionistically through the sensory overload of its radically nonhierarchical selection and installation of art and artifacts. Adding immensely to its effect was the building it-



Floor map for the *Times Square Show*, drawn by Tom Otterness, 1980.

self. Floors were rough and stairs creaky. Windows replaced by painted wood panels brought the sights, sounds, and smells of Times Square inside. Works of art—many of them aptly described by Richard Goldstein as “three chord art anyone can play”—climbed the stairways, were crammed into hallways, lurked in the cellar, and decorated the malodorous toilets. And in keeping with the crass commercialism of its setting and subject, Colab offered art for sale at bargain-basement prices in the exhibition’s gift shop.

The *Times Square Show* attracted masses of critical praise, and in the summer of 1980, it was *the* must-see contemporary art event in New York. Although it may have attracted some of the “working people” that Colab had claimed it wanted to reach, it unquestionably attracted denizens of the contemporary art world, now including prominent uptown art dealers who readily grasped this embodiment of alternative culture as the research-and-development phase of an impending marketing blitz.



The *Times Square Show*, installation by Tom Otterness and various anonymous respondents, 1980. Copyright 1980 Lisa Kahane.

Colab's occupation of the former massage parlor differed from its illegal use of the city-owned building on Delancey Street in more ways than one. In contrast to the guerrilla tactics it used to mount the *Real Estate Show*, Colab requested and received permission from the building's landlord, Mark Finkelstein, to use his vacant property temporarily. That the previous tenant was a massage parlor was a compelling detail in light of the revitalization efforts that were just then getting under way in the Times Square area. In fact, Colab even received a letter of support for its fund-raising efforts from Joseph Morningstar of the 42nd Street Development Corporation; after noting Finkelstein's "generous donation" of the building, Morningstar wrote, "Any support which you could offer would not only insure the success of the show, but also aid in the revitalization of Times Square."³⁵ The 42nd Street Development Corporation, a nonprofit supported by the Ford Foundation and numerous business interests, was the leading independent advocate of the city's effort to transform the tawdry old Times Square into a glitzy yet antiseptic family tourist attraction. Although this giant development scheme would take the better part of two decades to be realized, even before the *Times Square Show* opened, the 42nd Street Development Corporation and its ally, Midtown Enforcement, had laid a partial foundation for the corporate behemoths soon to come. Already they had shut down a hundred or so sex-related businesses, more than a few of which were massage parlors.³⁶

The fifteen artists, writers, and activists who initially formed Group Material in 1979 were somewhat younger than the members of Colab. Besides being disaffected with the state of American culture and politics, they were convinced that aesthetic experience and political activism could be joined in such a way as to revitalize both. Where Colab functioned as a support system for its artist members, in Group Material collective identity superseded individual artistic identity. Although Group Material's creative process was built on a foundation of internal dialogue and study, this was no ordinary study group. Of paramount importance to the process was finding ways to translate the collective's ideas and insights into bold visual terms. Group Material evolved a visual poetics of montage in installations that generated public discussion about their ideas, and their work was informed and shaped by public issues.³⁷

In 1980 Group Material rented a storefront on East Thirteenth Street and converted it into a hybrid gallery/social space. There they staged exhibitions with a pointedly political focus, for example, on electoral politics, consumerism, alienation, gender, and the social construction of taste and prestige. They also held art classes for neighborhood children, screened films, and held lectures and dances. Group Material employed the familiar discursive and spatial conventions of art galleries (press releases, labels identifying individual works, checklists, a clean and well-lit space), thereby ensuring that the political implications of their program-

ming would challenge the discursive framework of contemporary art. Conversely, by establishing a base of operations in the midst of a working-class, largely Latino Lower East Side neighborhood, they ensured that the aesthetic implications of their activities would also be considered within, and challenge the conventions of, political activism. Their visually engaging exhibitions combined design, pictures and words, commercial and popular artifacts, works of art, and craft to create a radically democratic and public art in a privately rented setting. Their display methods did not so much secularize art—by equating it with a panoply of other social products and cultural practices—as demonstrate the cultural significance of all social products and cultural practices when juxtaposed and situated in suggestive ways.

In the fall of 1981, a year after inaugurating its storefront on East Thirteenth Street, Group Material decided to leave that space. A press release issued that September attributed the decision to the burden of maintaining the space and its ambitious programming and to the desire to reclaim the time, energy, and creative freedom to function once again as a working group, rather than as an alternative space.³⁸ Even before the collective vacated the storefront, there had been signs of change in the area. In February of that year, for example, the aesthetic that would soon be associated with East Village art—a combination of “wild style,” cartooning, punk-inspired montage, and neoexpressionism—became the subject of Diego Cortez’s monumental exhibition at P.S. 1, *New York/New Wave*. During the summer of 1981, Patti Astor opened the Fun Gallery on East Eleventh Street, where she showed the work of graffiti artists and other certified practitioners of wild style. By the end of 1982, all the essential elements in the stylistic mélange of the East Village art scene had commercial bases of operation; as a result, localized forms of subcultural expression were commodified for sale to collectors, who trolled the tenement-lined streets in their limousines accompanied by private “art advisors.” Drawing a distinction between the alternative-space movement of the 1970s and the East Village scene in 1984, the critic Craig Owens introduced a note of much-needed skepticism into the hype surrounding the East Village “vanguard.” “What has been constructed in the East Village is not an alternative to, but a miniature replica of, the contemporary art market—a kind of Junior Achievement for young culture-industrialists.”³⁹

In 1985 the organizers of the Whitney Biennial embraced that miniature replica, and a great many other forms of cultural expression, in presenting their official survey of American art at mid-decade. Following the gradual introduction of the postmodernist and neoexpressionist art of the early 1980s in the tasteful, tentative Biennials of 1981 and 1983, the much livelier 1985 Biennial earned the Whitney’s curatorial staff condemnation that was unusually incendiary. Robert Hughes declared it “the worst in living memory,” maintaining that “what finds favor here is

young, loud and, except for its careerism, invincibly dumb.”⁴⁰ Indeed, the Biennial prominently displayed East Village art (Kenny Scharf, Keith Haring, Rodney Alan Greenblat, David Wojnarowicz), sometimes in provocative ways. Perhaps in an attempt to evoke the flavor of an East Village gallery or club, the curators invited Scharf to decorate the Whitney’s second-floor telephone booths and bathrooms, which he did with his usual blend of Day-Glo™ candy colors and neopop-surrealist figuration, all enhanced by ultraviolet (club) lighting. “Invincibly dumb,” of course, but given the context, refreshing as well. The Biennial also documented the international ascendance of artists formerly associated with Colab (Tom Otterness and Jenny Holzer) and of artists associated with critical postmodernism (Barbara Kruger, Richard Prince, and Cindy Sherman). Notwithstanding Hughes’s indictment, the exhibition included work by many artists who could hardly be considered dumb as well as work by others who could hardly be considered young (besides those just named, John Baldessari, Eric Fischl, Morgan Fisher, Jasper Johns, Donald Judd, Mike Kelly, Bruce Nauman, John Newman, Susan Rothenberg, and Terry Winters). The six curators understood their mission as one of making “qualitative judgments at a moment of multiple critical standards.”⁴¹

Adding to the 1985 Biennial’s unmistakable difference from its predecessors was the inclusion of four divergent manifestations of installation art. In addition to Scharf’s bathroom and phone booth decorations, there was TODT’s melodramatic pseudoscience project, Bill Viola’s somber *The Theater of Memory*, and Group Material’s *Americana*. Installed in the museum’s lobby gallery, *Americana* posed the greatest challenge to Biennial convention and generated the most revealing critical response. Various referred to by critics as the “other Biennial,” the “anti-Biennial,” and the “Salon des Refusées,” *Americana* was, more accurately, a classic deconstruction of the Biennial itself. As such, it replicated the entire apparatus of its museological object, tweaking the latter to expose conventions and to underscore exclusionary cultural effects. For example, the installation critically summoned the architectural protocols of high art display—the neutralizing purity of the ubiquitous “white cube”—by decorating the lobby gallery’s walls with broad bands of miscellaneous commercial wall coverings, including such affronts to modernist decorum as wallpapers pretending to be exposed brick or ceramic tile.

On its face, *Americana* was a playful, simultaneously ironic and sincere sampler of the American way of life four years into the Reagan-Bush era. The collective gleefully included art that ought to have been, but was not—and in some cases could not have been—included in the big show that contained it. In addition to strong works by, among others, Jane Dickson, Faith Ringgold, John Ahearn, Nancy Spero, Julie Wachtel, and Edgar Heap of Birds, there was a characteristically schlocky Native American scene by Fritz Scholder and a brassy interior by LeRoy Neiman of New York’s own Harry’s Bar. These pieces were juxtaposed with such fixtures of America’s consumer paradise as Wonder Bread, New Freedom Maxi-

pads, Almost Home Cookies, and an array of brilliantly packaged detergents. Establishing a monumental center of gravity for the ensemble like a misbegotten Donald Judd was a deluxe washer and dryer. The ever-popular Mr. Coffee also made an appearance, as did a console TV—turned on, of course, and tuned in to



Kenny Scharf, Black-light installation, 1985. Biennial exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art. Courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements.



Tom Otterness, *The Old World*, 1985. Biennial exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art. Courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements.

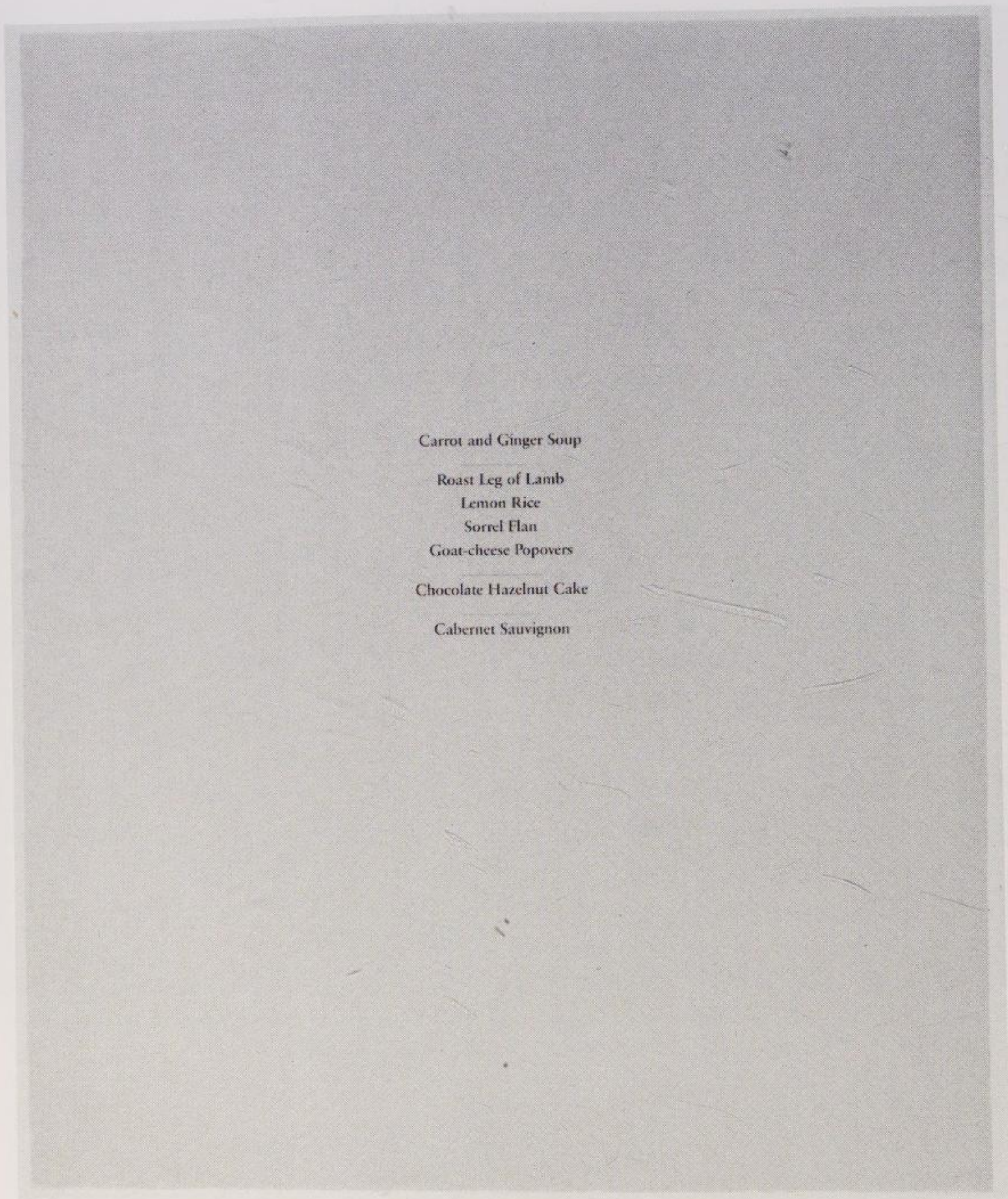
the outside world, as our world is represented by the programming of a commercial television station.

In her review for the *Village Voice*, Kim Levin insisted that the 1985 Biennial was so cosmically dreadful that it was necessary to transcend the usual litany of



Group Material, *Americana*, 1985. Biennial exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art. Courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements.

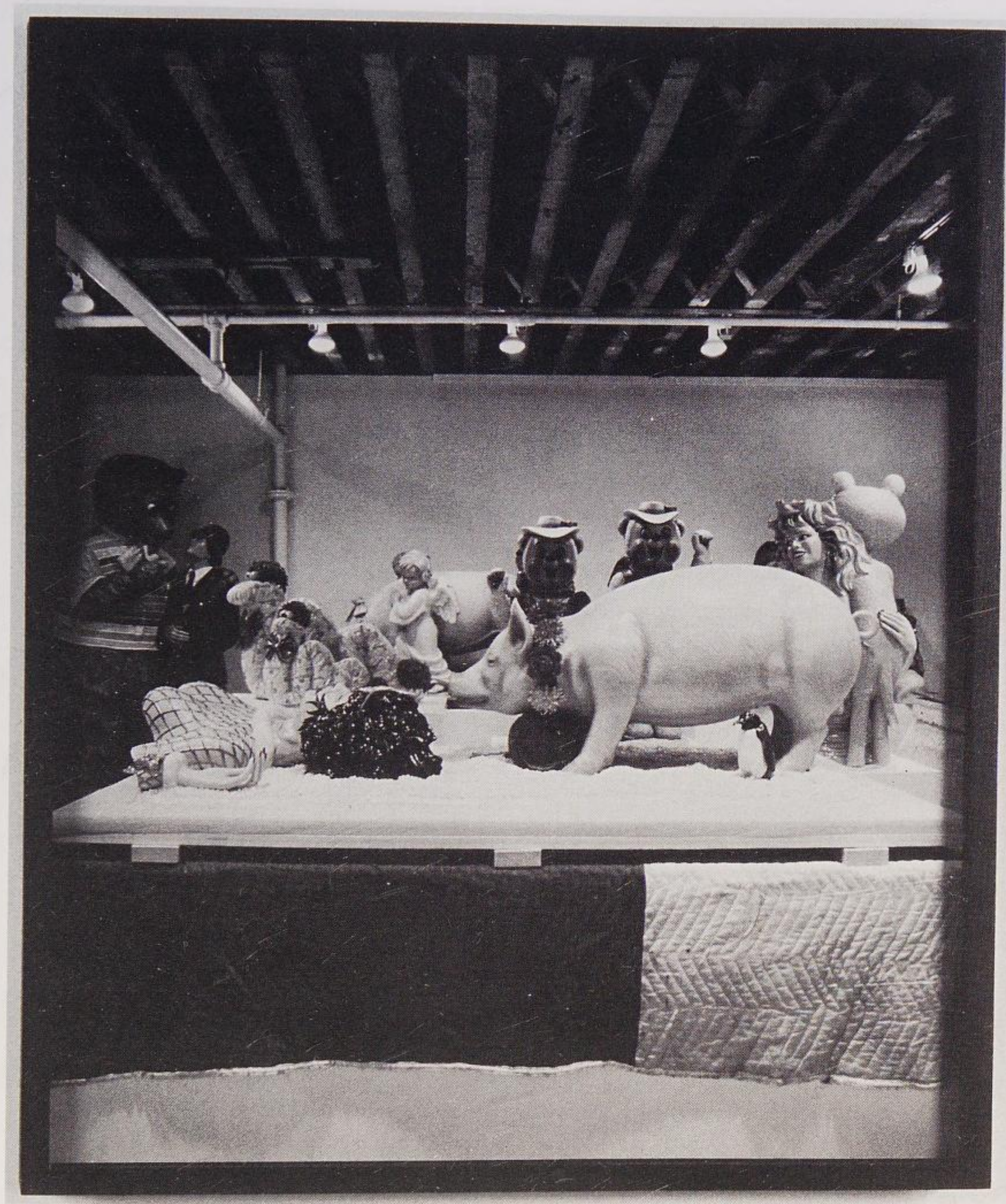
critical complaints about “curatorial timidity or laziness” or about the exhibition’s predictable inclusions and disgraceful exclusions. Levin then proceeded to critique the Biennial in precisely those terms, but within a broader condemnation of the show’s trivial (and trivializing) function as a mere compendium of recent trends. Searching for an appropriate metaphor, she seized on the washer and dryer in *Americana* to indict the exhibition as a laundry—or perhaps she meant a laundry list. The Biennial’s format “needs a thorough overhaul,” she insisted, “a radical shakeup.” Responding to Levin in a letter to the editor, Group Material interpreted her critique as protesting too much—coming, as it did, from a writer of bi-weekly columns that amount to “a little Biennial every other week: a compendium of picks and don’t-likes, clutching for the new hit.” More significantly, Group Material’s letter contained an angry expression of the sense of hope and purpose that guided their project (and that of many other resistant cultural practices of the early 1980s). It wasn’t the Biennial that needed a radical shakeup, the collective



Louise Lawler, *Between Reagan and Bush*, 1989. Courtesy of Louise Lawler and Metro Pictures.

maintained. “Why stop at the Biennial? The entire culture industry needs to be overhauled. ‘Americana’ is but one small demonstration toward a program of cultural change.”⁴²

Perhaps chastened by the virulent criticism, the Biennials of 1987 and 1989 were altogether more domesticated, market-oriented affairs—a development that accurately reflected the fate of so much art that critics on the left had lauded for its capacity to challenge, if not subvert, market structures. By the mid- to late 1980s, even the most challenging postmodernist art was circulating effectively in the hyper-inflated cultural economy. Setting aside the record sums being spent by Japanese collectors eager to trade \$40 million in deeply discounted yen for a dis-



colored *Sunflowers* by Van Gogh, the frenzied pursuit of contemporary art by American collectors was garnering front-page coverage in mass circulation magazines. “Art Fever” trumpets the headline of the April 20, 1987, issue of *New York Magazine*, its subtitle invoking the breathless prose of an Aaron Spelling production: “The Passion and Frenzy of the Ultimate Rich Man’s Sport.” Smiling arm in arm in the cover photograph, collectors Eugene and Barbara Schwartz are seen against the gruesome backdrop of their Anselm Kiefer, *Deutschlands Geisthelfen*—a trophy so large, we read inside, that it had to be rolled up in order to be (partially) installed in their living room. “Every week, they make a list of about 30 galleries to visit,” enthuses the article’s author, future *Times* culture columnist Dinitia Smith. “On Saturday mornings, they hire a car—‘You can’t move fast enough with

a cab'—and head south from their Park Avenue apartment. 'We zooze [*sic*] in and zooze out of galleries. We even have a sandwich in the car,' says Eugene."⁴³ The fact that the Biennials of the late 1980s were so mesmerized by the stratospheric spectacle of the art market was especially conspicuous because of other social factors that also defined that period in American art and life: the spiraling AIDS crisis, the militant activist response to it, the growing challenge of multiculturalism, the culture wars, the assault on public arts funding, and the continued privatization of the culture.

Coinciding with the 1987 Biennial, and demonstrating both the persistence of problems that cultural activists had addressed during the late 1960s and early 1970s and the revival of cultural activism during the mid- to late 1980s, was an installation that the Guerrilla Girls opened at the Clocktower in lower Manhattan on April 16, 1987. Dense with information and enlivened by the righteous indignation and wry graphics of the group's anonymous members, *The Guerrilla Girls Review the Whitney* featured a slide show, large-scale charts, graphs, lists, and "playful games which invite viewer participation," all of which illustrated "the declining representation of women artists and artists of color in the Whitney Biennial" from 1973 to 1987.⁴⁴

Curators Richard Armstrong, Richard Marshall, and Lisa Phillips introduced the 1989 Biennial on a note of desperation. They lamented in the accompanying catalog that the closely interwoven interests of galleries, collectors, and museums were preventing contemporary art museums from fulfilling their mission as independent arbiters of quality, and they fretted about whether that nexus of cultural influence had combined with the degraded state of promotional art criticism to impinge on the ability of artists to create thoughtful, focused work. "Wealth is the only agreed upon arbiter of value," the curators decried. "Capitalism has overtaken contemporary art, quantifying and reducing it to the status of a commodity. Ours is a system adrift in mortgaged goods and obsessed with accumulation, where the spectacle of art consumption has been played out in a public forum geared to journalistic hyperbole."⁴⁵ Having registered their extreme discomfort with these conditions, the curators nonetheless presented a show that reflected and authorized them as only a big museum show can.

For an exhibition that remained safely within the confines of recent market trends, its installation was oddly didactic. Some works were aligned to demonstrate the formal coincidence of works by Joel Shapiro and Andrew Spence, Ross Bleckner and Brice Marden, which were thereby reduced to functioning as illustrations in a rudimentary lesson in art appreciation. Works that were clustered to demonstrate the prevalence of "critical" trends (Sherrie Levine, Cindy Bernard, and Allan McCollum) had their already questionable edge further dulled by their treatment and context. The 1989 Biennial managed to sidetrack all but the most ironic or subtle signs of social disgruntlement.⁴⁶



Joseph Kosuth et al., 1987. Installation view, Biennial exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art. Courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements.

One of the few positive effects of the exhibition was the stunning critique it provoked from the usually mild-mannered poet and critic John Yau. "If you are white and upper middle class and have been following the art world for the last few years," he wrote, "this year's Biennial probably had something for you. However, if you are Black, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, or recently arrived from another culture, then you probably left the museum alienated, dissatisfied, and perhaps even angry."⁴⁷ Yau's essay provides the clearest assessment yet of the historic inability of the Biennial to accommodate forms of social and cultural differences that are not masked by assimilation to cultural conventions with which the Whitney's curators, trustees, art dealers, and collectors are familiar and, therefore, comfortable. Although he targeted the assimilationist demands of the cultural elite, Yau was decidedly not calling for the abandonment of the "aesthetic categories" of



Jeff Koons, Michelle Zolopany, 1989. Installation view, Biennial exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art. Courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements.

painting and sculpture that Crimp had declared incompatible with postmodernist art. “During the 1980s,” Yau wrote, “the only young black artist to get in a Biennial was Jean-Michel Basquiat. Moreover, while no black, Asian, Hispanic, or Native American woman painter or sculptor was shown in a Biennial during the 1980s, the Whitney did include Duane Hanson’s sculpture of a black *Cleaning Woman* in its 1981 Biennial.” Yau called the bluff of the museum’s directors and curators, who claimed to welcome innovation and individuality, by identifying the boundaries beyond which innovation and individuality cannot go when institutionalized standards of cultural viability remain intact:

During the 1980s, the Whitney Museum . . . upheld the illusion that it is interested in the “new,” which is not the same as “different.” Translation: This institution is interested in the new as long as it is not truly different. Do something that extends *our*



Christopher Wool, Jeff Koons, 1989. Installation view, Biennial exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art. Courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements.

notion of history and you may be chosen to be part of the Biennial. Pray to *our* god and we might even accept you.⁴⁸

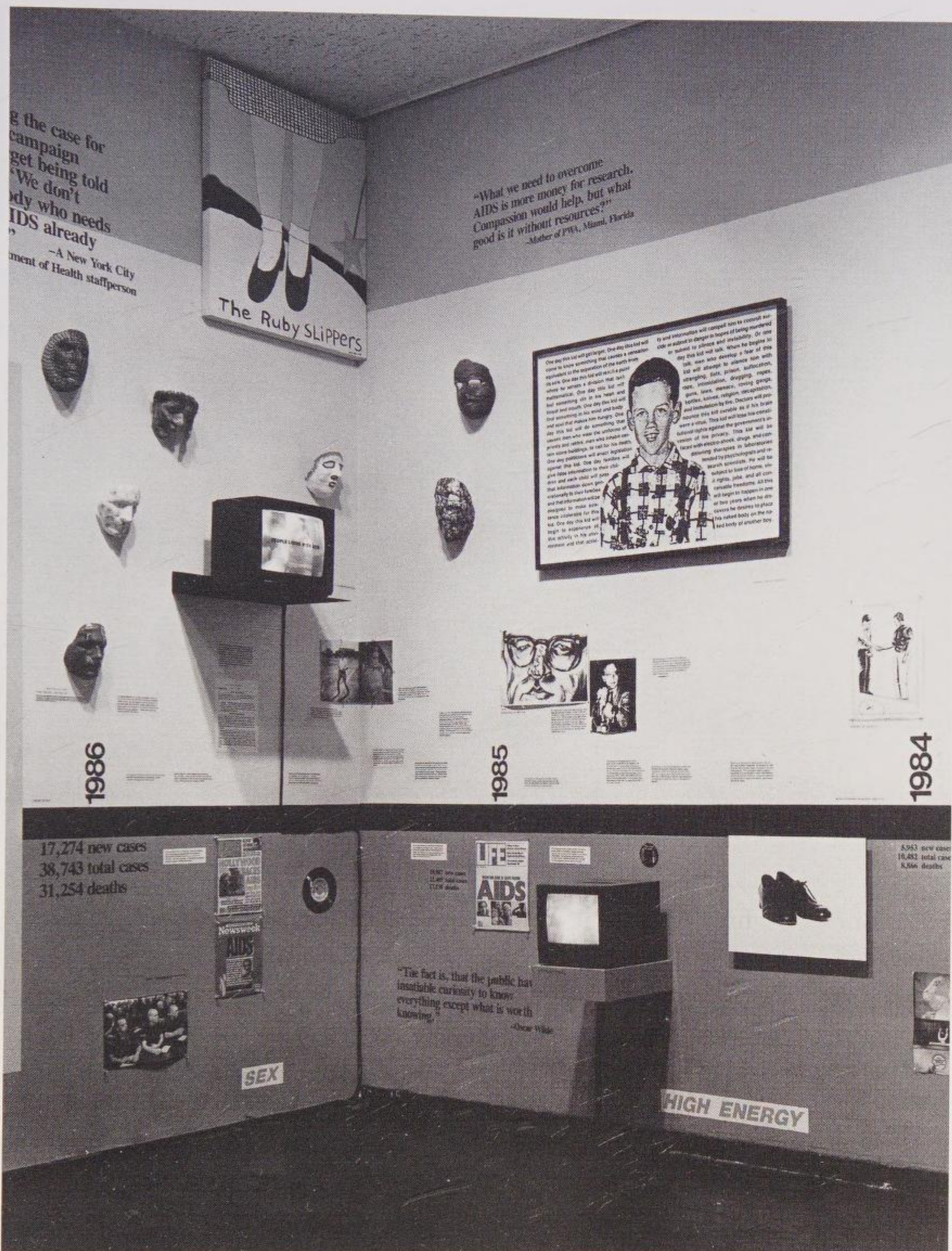
The insistence that “quality” is the ultimate criterion for inclusion in the Biennial—the Whitney’s alibi for rejecting activist demands for increased minority representation from the early 1970s—fares no better in Yau’s analysis. From his perspective, quality is little more than a tautological myth, one that condemns the “other” to an untenable double bind. In a culture that identifies quality with mastery of institutionally sanctioned cultural standards, the rewards of visibility and recognition can be attained only at the price of one’s soul.

Yau’s critique was an impassioned expression of the powerful insurgency within American culture that Cornel West called the “cultural politics of difference.”⁴⁹ As such, it contributed to the forces that made the Biennial of 1991 somewhat

different in tone from its antecedent in that it included noticeably more art by members of historically underrepresented communities as well as more art that suggested the possibility of realizing the synthesis of politics and beauty that curator Bill Olander had called “social aesthetics.”⁵⁰ For example, it included strong work by, among others, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Glenn Ligon, Celia Alvarez Munoz, Tim Rollins + K.O.S., Lorna Simpson, Kiki Smith, Carrie Mae Weems, and David Wojnarowicz. And for the first time, the Biennial’s curators responded to the AIDS crisis and to the role that cultural activists were playing in trying to end it. They invited Group Material to occupy the museum’s lobby gallery once again, only this time it was understood that the collective would install a revised version of its *AIDS Timeline*.⁵¹ In contrast to hanging an elegiac painting by Ross Bleckner in the 1989 Biennial, *AIDS Timeline* employed a device that Group Material had used effectively in 1984 (*Timeline: The Chronicle of U.S. Intervention in Central and Latin America* at P.S. 1) to provide an in-depth, real-time analysis of AIDS as a politically motivated health crisis.⁵²

In addition to the AIDS crisis and a burgeoning interest in multiculturalism, other factors contributed to the differences between the Biennials of the late 1980s and those of the early 1990s. The 1980s art boom came to an abrupt halt in 1989, a development that made way for the consideration and display of art that would have been dismissed before. For the first time since 1976, a Democrat, Bill Clinton, was elected president of the United States. Furthermore, the early 1990s marked a new administrative era at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Its board of trustees fired Armstrong from his post as museum director in 1990 and appointed David Ross. Soon after becoming the Whitney’s new director, Ross described his cultural outlook in terms that suggested a different direction for the museum: “I do see art in a social context, to some extent, but I find myself on the line between those who believe in the transcendent power of art and those who question it. I think art has both the power to delight and the responsibility to question.”⁵³

The catalog accompanying the 1991 Biennial included something other than the standard-issue curatorial boilerplate. Lisa Phillips addressed the exhibition’s context in terms of the assault on contemporary art and popular culture that erupted in 1989. “The crisis of culture under siege,” she wrote, “helped re-politicize the art world and link art making to other areas of social responsibility.”⁵⁴ John Hanhardt’s introduction to the Biennial’s film and video component—and the programming itself—captured the multicultural tenor of the early 1990s and, in the process, anticipated the direction that the Biennial would take in 1993. The character of avant-garde film and video, he argued, was being radically redefined. Media artists are altering “discourses that are redefining cultural practices.”



Group Material, *AIDS Timeline*, 1991. Biennial exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art. Courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements.

One crucial discourse concerns the changing definition of representation, in particular how the self and other are encoded within social and cultural images and institutions. This investigation is renegotiating the boundaries between gender and sexuality through a deconstruction of the binary opposition between homosexuality and heterosexuality, a deconstruction that questions the very invention of those terms. The politics of history also informs a powerful struggle to invest theory with history

1991 BIENNIAL EXHIBITION

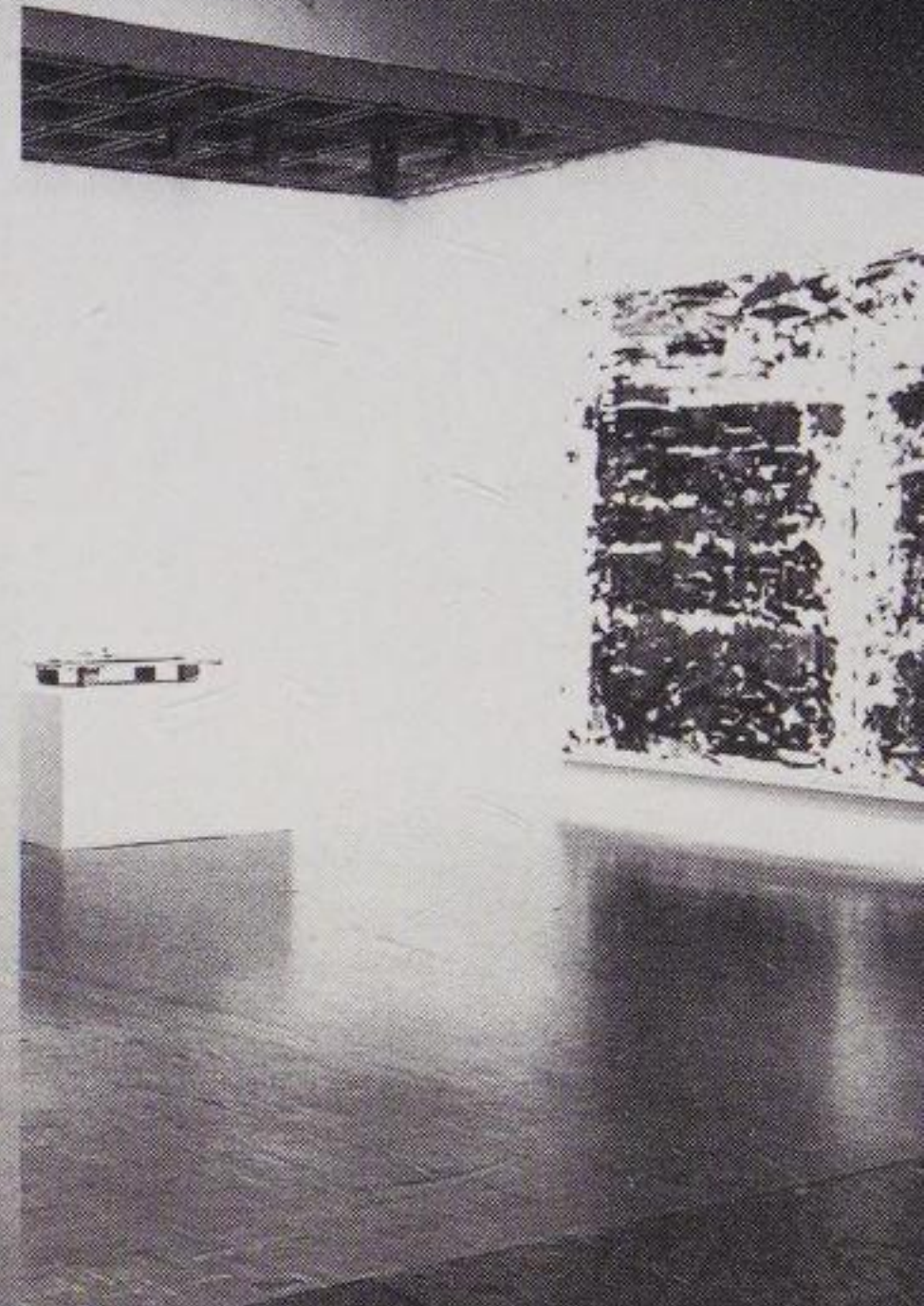
The 1991 Biennial Exhibition is the sixty-sixth in a series of *Annals and Biennials* begun by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in 1932, shortly after the Museum was established. The historically stated purpose of these exhibitions, one of the longest continuous series on contemporary art in the United States, is "to represent in a broad way some of the most notable characteristics of American art today." They continue to be non-juried, invitational exhibitions that feature new art produced within the previous two years by artists of all ages, career levels, and styles throughout the United States. The 1991 Biennial Exhibition includes the work of one hundred painters, sculptors, photographers, and film and video artists who reside in more than twenty cities and three countries and range in age from twenty-seven to seventy-one.

To reaffirm the Museum's commitment to contemporary art, it was decided to expand the 1991 Biennial by devoting all the Museum's exhibition space to it. The consequent increase in the number of artists and art works necessitated a different organizational logic to ensure a clear and meaningful presentation. Accordingly, the installation of the exhibition on three successive floors of the Museum has been loosely organized by generations. Fifteen artists who came to prominence in the 1950s and 1960s are exhibited on the Second Floor; twenty-six artists who emerged in the 1970s and 1980s are installed on the Third Floor; and twenty-nine younger artists, most of whom had their first shows in the late 1960s and have not been in previous Biennial Exhibitions, appear on the Fourth Floor. In addition, the Lobby Gallery will exhibit the *AIDS Timeline*, an installation by the artists' collaborative Group Material, which explores socio-political aspects of the disease and its ever-increasing and deadly effect on American society and culture.

The generational framework of the exhibition is not, on each floor of the Museum, a device of relaxed acceptance and impact, joining as it does artists of related accomplishment and aesthetic inclination. This type of organization makes apparent the way different generations of artists respond—through the form, format, and content of their art—to the changing attitudes about aesthetics, society, politics, and sexuality that have emerged over the last forty years. While this installation plan separates generations of artists, an overview of the exhibition reveals that certain tendencies are consistent across generational divisions. Among these are the ongoing interest in a geometric abstraction that derives from and refers to recognizable subject matter; abstract paintings which exploit the expressive gesture of paint to allude to landscape and natural phenomena; the focus on the human figure or body parts for both formal issues and surreal, psychological content; the continuous appeal of Pop imagery, especially cartoon-derived subject matter; works that directly confront socio-political issues including racism, sexism, and homophobia; and, in sculptural expression, a revived interest in the associative use of urban detritus with its inherent cultural symbolism.

The Biennial continues to serve as an important forum for the observation, evaluation, and discussion of contemporary art. It provides a framework for better understanding the diverse creative vitality that characterizes the art of this period and acknowledges the crucial position that art holds in society.

This exhibition is supported by a grant from Emily Fisher Landau. Additional funding has been provided by the National Committee of the Whitney Museum.



Installation view, 1991. Biennial exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art. Courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements.

and vice versa, revealing in the process how and why we frame social and political ideologies, whether from the left or right.

Hanhardt selected pioneering works in film and video (by Peggy Ahwesh, Gregg Araki, Tony Cokes and Donald Trammel, Zeinabu Irene Davis, Su Friedrich, Tom Kalin, Victor Masayesva Jr., Yvonne Rainer, Marlon Riggs, Rea Tajiri, Janice Tanaka, and Francesc Torres) that challenged the Eurocentric conception of American culture, recasting it instead as "a site of multiple cultures, as well as gay and lesbian communities."⁵⁵

This understanding of American culture as the totality of diverse, often conflicting expressions of a fragmented collectivity established the theme for the 1993 Biennial, the first one fully organized under Ross's direction. For the first time in

Biennial history, the majority of the show's participants were members of marginalized groups. Where the 1991 Biennial suggested a harmonious model of multiculturalism, the 1993 Biennial proposed a more radical, discordant model of cultural democracy, establishing a context in which virtually all the art on view could be read in political terms.

The exhibition's confrontational tone was even evident through the museum's Madison Avenue windows, where viewers could see Pat Ward Williams's *What You Lookn At?* (1992), a billboard-size photomural of several young black men "hanging out." Each man looked directly, yet with cautious neutrality, at the viewer. Distinctly at odds with their facial expressions was the title phrase, artlessly spray-painted across the image, which didn't seem like a verbal challenge that any of the men was likely to make. Instead, this rhetorical question read as the projection of an apprehensive (white?) beholder. The subject of this forceful, carefully calibrated work was the dehumanizing, socially imprisoning effects of racism; specifically, the combined fear of, and fascination with, the young black male.

Although the Biennial's installation was respectful of the work on display, it had a crowded, sometimes even assaultive feel. Perhaps this was an effect of how much of the work on display was in the form of installations, an accurate reflection of the then growing international popularity of this idiom.⁵⁶ In parts of the exhibition, there seemed little room for visitors to navigate their way from one work to another, either because the art occupied so much space or because of the intensity of its sensory assault—or both. This did not necessarily detract from a rewarding aesthetic experience, as was demonstrated by Pepón Osorio's full-gallery tableau, *The Scene of the Crime (Whose Crime?)*. He transformed all but a narrow corridor along one side of a large gallery into an exuberantly kitschy domestic interior redolent of a stereotypical Puerto Rican dwelling in an American city. The only literal evidence of "crime" was the shattered debris on the floor, the presence of television cameras, and the police-tape cordon that kept viewers from intruding on the simultaneously exuberant and desolate scene. The claustrophobic abundance of decor and detail intensified the vague sense of menace that pervaded the installation, as did the experience of gazing into the scene of a "crime." Ultimately, the nature of the crime remained a mystery. So did the representational status of the tableau. Had Osorio replicated an actual scene of domestic violence? Or was he merely invoking the fictional violence and melodrama of popular Spanish *telenovelas*? Uncertainty and the discomfort that it causes were apt responses to a work whose ultimate subject was not the confrontation between the average middle-class (white) visitor to the Whitney and this spectacular display of cultural difference. *The Scene of the Crime (Whose Crime?)* provided a necessary means of crossing over the lines of cultural difference that it so vehemently inscribed as it played on the viewer's intimacy with familiar forms of terror: the terror that threatens to



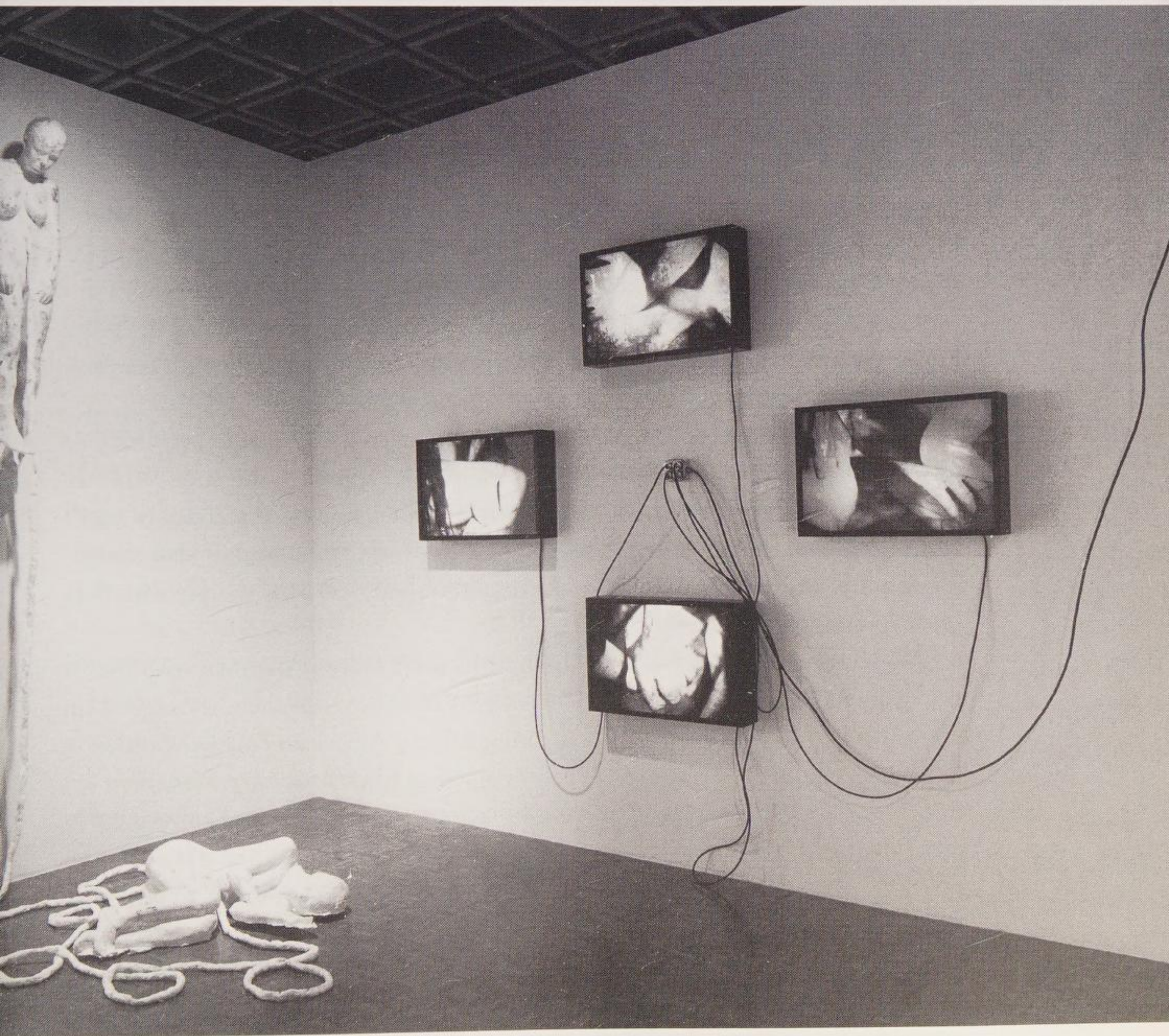
Pepón Osorio, *The Scene of the Crime (Whose Crime?)*, 1993. Biennial exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art. Courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements.

disrupt the brittle decorum of all family life, and the more purely psychic terror of the unconscious that threatens to overturn conscious thought.

The high level of poetic attainment in Osorio's work suggested the importance of poetics in facilitating identification across lines of difference, which so often impede the connection between works of art and diverse beholders. But must signs of difference function in this way? In his essay for the Biennial's catalog, Homi Bhabha postulates the importance of confronting incommensurable difference in realizing the "poetics of the open border." Bhabha argues that acts of "cultural translation" can occur between individuals from different—and differently privileged—social backgrounds. For such poetic acts of translation to occur, the beholder must first confront what seems "incommensurable or strange" in the cultural expression of the "other." That uncomfortable confrontation makes it possible for the viewer to

recognize his or her own cultural (and by inference political) priority and to dis-identify with it. In that moment of alienation, the individual can achieve greater openness to, and comprehension of, the other.⁵⁷

The 1993 Biennial stood apart from all others because it was so tightly focused and so forcefully motivated that it sacrificed aesthetic decorum to get its points across. Its chief organizer, Ross-appointed Elizabeth Sussman, made this dramatically clear through her willingness to incorporate material that would otherwise never have been included in a Biennial. For example, America's most harrowing home video, *George Halliday's Videotape of the Rodney King Beating* (1991), is simply listed in the catalog as one work among many.



Kiki Smith in collaboration with David Wojnarowicz, 1993. Installation view at Biennial exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art. Courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements.

Not surprisingly, critical response to the show was largely negative, at times fiercely so. Those critics who praised the museum's greater openness to art by members of marginalized groups frequently condemned the art itself—for its “strident tone,” for being “numbingly didactic, easily summed up in a sentence or two,” for reducing complex social themes into “the dichotomy of victim/oppressor,” or for being devoid of sensual pleasure.⁵⁸ Such criticism offered new variations on the old theme of the conflict between aesthetics and politics, some of which managed to be complex and perceptive. The critic Eleanor Heartney, for example, offered a political defense of the aesthetic position: “In a curious way this tendency to privilege social message over esthetic considerations parallels the attitudes of the religious right in its demand that art be morally uplifting.”⁵⁹

The 1993 Biennial marked the climax in the exhibition's protracted and often painful history of attempting to go beyond the exclusionary cultural standards it traditionally represented and reinforced. But having crossed those limits, it turned back from the official embrace of the “new cultural politics of difference,” which the show's organizers had clearly hoped to advance as well as acknowledge. Although subsequent exhibitions at the Whitney would maintain the show's multicultural mission, later Biennials would not—a fitting reflection and affirmation of the marked decline in the political orientation of contemporary art that began in the mid-1990s. Moreover, the administrative era that had welcomed the cultural politics of difference to the Whitney ended abruptly in 1997, not unlike the profound shifts that were about to take place outside the cultural and political confines of the museum.

Among the many challenges Maxwell Anderson confronted after becoming director of the Whitney in September 1998 was how to approach the 2000 Whitney Biennial. In reaching a solution, he not only provided an official account of contemporary American art at the threshold of the new millennium, but also established a new administrative tone for the museum that contrasted sharply with the one that had marked the Ross era.

To be sure, Ross had followed up the controversial 1993 Biennial with the decidedly more traditional installments of 1995 and 1997, but then he assigned the 2000 Biennial to Thelma Golden. A young African American curator, Golden had made a name for herself in 1994 by organizing *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art*, a groundbreaking theme show even more sharply focused than the 1993 Biennial, which had established a provocative political context for contemporary art.⁶⁰ However, less than a month after Anderson's arrival, Golden realized that the new director would not name her to any specific curatorial post within the new historically segmented administrative structure that he was imposing on the museum, and Anderson took the 2000 Biennial out of her hands, demoting her to assisting her senior colleague Lisa Phillips.⁶¹ Both women resigned and left the Whitney.

With Golden and Phillips gone and little more than a year remaining before the Biennial's opening, Anderson appointed six regionally disparate curators to organize the show under his leadership. In his foreword to the Biennial catalog, the director wrote that he wanted the exhibition to be "not exclusively for the art world, but equally, if not more, for the benefit of the broader public," an exhibition that would "pay heed to cities and communities other than New York and Los Angeles" and champion "what we believe is the best and strongest work produced in America since the 1997 Biennial."⁶²

The notion of expanding the exhibition's focus beyond the cultural confines of metropolitan New York and Los Angeles made for good journalistic copy, but it was hardly an original idea.⁶³ However, Anderson's decision to delegate the organization of the 2000 Biennial to six curators outside the museum's staff (with himself in charge) was a departure from tradition.⁶⁴ So was Anderson's decision to contribute the principal essay to the exhibition's catalog—a historical overview titled, with academic felicity, "Whitney Annuals and Biennials: Themes and Variations." Never in the nearly seventy-year history of the exhibition had a Whitney director contributed more than a brief statement—usually little more than boilerplate recitation of the exhibition's purpose as originally articulated in 1932 by Juliana Force.

Anderson describes the 2000 Biennial as rooted in tradition that reaches back to Force's original curatorial vision. His essay dutifully surveys changes in the structure, selection process, and scheduling of the exhibition but is limited in its purview to changes that were formal and technical in nature: the blurring of boundaries between painting and sculpture during the 1960s and 1970s; the development of art in new media. Altogether missing from his account is any discussion of the frequently tumultuous cultural, social, political, and economic circumstances that transformed the character and significance of contemporary American art, as well as its episodic showcases at the Whitney Museum. But then such an account would have disturbed the uninterrupted flow of curatorial tradition he sought to construct. "The features that distinguish this display from past Biennials will likely be forgotten," he writes, "while the power of select works presented in it will grow over time."⁶⁵

There are any number of reasons why Anderson might have wanted to contribute such an essay. Press reports tracking his first year as the Whitney's director had created the impression of an institution beset by administrative upheaval that alternately suggested a purge and an exodus.⁶⁶ Golden's resignation was only the most visible manifestation. It was, therefore, to the director's advantage to project an image of leadership and dignified authority, which donning the historian's mantle can afford. To the extent that Anderson's historical overview is informative (and it is, in its own parochial way), it served the exhibition's nonspecialist target audience for whom the Biennial represents a rare occasion for direct encounters

with contemporary art. The essay imparted an aura of calm and dignity to contemporary art, which the American public has always regarded with suspicion, if not scorn, and never more so than after twenty years of “culture wars.” Similarly, Anderson’s institutional history imparted the legitimacy of tradition to a curatorial project that had long been criticized as a pawn of the market culture, a slave to intellectual fashion, or both. Finally, in creating the impression of the Biennial’s lasting adherence to a seventy-year-old curatorial principle, Anderson’s essay established a distinctive tone for his administration.⁶⁷ With its legitimizing historicist framework, Anderson’s first Biennial signaled a return to order, or at least to more traditional cultural values in which art could once again be revered for its capacity to transcend the social fray, rather than being considered merely an elaborately sanctioned participant within it. Following Ross’s resignation and soon after Anderson’s appointment, it appeared to the public that the Whitney trustees had decided to hire an anti-Ross. In the wake of the exodus of so many Ross appointees and after the businesslike 2000 Biennial, it seemed as though the trustees had found their man.

Although it is tempting to note a correspondence between Anderson’s appointment at the Whitney and the election of George W. Bush to the U.S. presidency, the observation may not be valid. A survey of recent Whitney Biennials reveals that however culturally conservative the institution may be, it has not caved in to the reactionary political agendas of elected officials. As a rule, contemporary American artists do not act in lockstep with the values of the occupants of the White House. Judging from the Reagan years, quite the contrary seems to be true; that is, the more reactionary the political regime, the more likely that vanguard cultural practices will be revitalized. During the waning years of the Clinton presidency, the art world was again awash in speculative capital, and collectors, curators, critics, and museum trustees were content to replace the challenges of multiculturalism with the eclectic curios of corporate globalism.

To assume an equation between Anderson and Bush at this time would be an act of bad faith and would only contribute to the polarization that already dominates the contemporary discourse on art. Critics, curators, collectors, and museum trustees routinely oversimplify the positions of those perceived as adversaries; that is, they act like just about everyone else in this culture. We construct straw men and women—beauty-hating ideologues and reactionary aesthetes—as suitable targets for our rage, even at the cost of more complex and subtle truths. These understandable reflexes are deeply rooted in the profoundly unstable project of fashioning self, identity, career—an undertaking that too often entails the construction of an “other” in opposition to whom we define our selves. Contributing immensely to this alienating reflex is the fact of living and working in a competitive market culture that operates as a zero-sum game, and in which whoever

comes across most clearly and incisively wins. It is a culture, in other words, in which polarity rules.⁶⁸

Notes

1. "Reopened," inasmuch as this represented an eruption of the age-old conflict between modernist art-for-art's sake and the political engagements associated with the historic avant-garde. See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

2. Kramer wrote his first article about the AWC after attending the "Open Public Hearing on the Subject: What Should Be the Program of the Art Workers' Coalition" on April 10, 1969, at the School of Visual Arts. See "Artists and the Problem of 'Relevance,'" *New York Times*, May 4, 1969, D23. The second article is "Do You Believe in the Principle of Museums?" *New York Times*, January 18, 1970, D25.

3. "Whether, under this 'plan,' the collection would be transferred to the Metropolitan Museum or scattered to the winds—I've heard both proposals made in all seriousness—is, apparently a matter of indifference." Evidently, it was a matter of indifference to Kramer that some remarks made during AWC meetings did not survive to become part of the AWC's final document. Kramer, "Do You Believe in the Principle of Museums?"

4. Ibid.

5. "Why MoMA Is Their Target," *New York Times*, January 18, 1970, D24.

6. According to Lucy Lippard, the thirteen demands were "boiled down from thirteen to eleven in June [1969] and revised slightly to the nine-plus . . . to apply to all museums in March 1970." Lucy R. Lippard, "The Art Workers' Coalition: Not a History," in *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984), 12.

7. Archives recently made available to the public at the Whitney Museum of American Art's Frances Mulhall Achilles Library document the pressure that activists applied to the museum's curatorial and administrative staff, and suggest some of the dynamics at work in effecting institutional change. As of this writing, archival materials pertaining to the Whitney Annuals and Biennials are available only through the mid-1970s and are inconsistent and fragmentary. Nevertheless, their availability marks a distinct improvement over the past, when the library offered no archival materials to scholars. My thanks to library staff members Carol Rusk, Julie Shinn, and especially Zimra Panitz for their valuable assistance.

8. This account of the composition of the committee is drawn from a letter from the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee (Poppy Johnson, Lucy Lippard, Brenda Miller, and Faith Ringgold) to Stephen E. Weil, administrator, Whitney Museum of American Art, November 9, 1970, as reprinted in *Women Artists in Revolution, A Documentary: Herstory of Women Artists in Revolution* (Pittsburgh: Women's Interart Center, 1973), 39.

9. Stephen E. Weil, letter to Lucy Lippard, October 19, 1970, "WM Protest Movements," Frances Mulhall Achilles Library, Whitney Museum, American Art files, New York.

10. Mfaith [sic] Ringgold and Michele Wallace, letter to Marcia Tucker, October 14,

1970. In the letter, Wallace is identified as “Chief Representative of WSABAL.” Frances Mulhall Achilles Library, Whitney Museum, New York, box 685, file 2.

11. “Museum officials concede somewhat reluctantly that pressure from women’s groups was effective. ‘We have been bending over backwards not to ignore requests from women,’ said Mr. Weil. Mr. Baur noted, ‘I think we always try to respond to things that seem to be a genuine appeal.’” Grace Glueck, “Women Artists Demonstrate at Whitney,” *New York Times*, December 12, 1970, 23.

12. Marcia Tucker, interview by author, November 15, 2000. In a telephone conversation with the author (November 17, 2000), Jim Monte, associate curator at the Whitney from 1969 to 1973, and curator until his departure in 1974, concurred with Tucker’s account of the curators’ efforts to promote change from within. He neither supported nor contradicted her assertion that activists very nearly subverted these efforts.

13. One exception to the rule was the 1956 Annual, which included painting and sculpture.

14. John I. H. Baur, “Foreword,” *Whitney Annual Exhibition of American Sculpture*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1968).

15. “In 1973, the shifting character of American art led the Whitney to abandon the Annual-by-medium system in favor of Biennials that welcomed all media—those once marginalized and those newly defined.” Maxwell L. Anderson, “Whitney Annuals and Biennials: Themes and Variations,” in *Whitney Biennial: 2000 Biennial Exhibition*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2000), 22.

16. *Whitney Painting Annual*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1969), n.p.

17. In addition to being documented in the Whitney Annual, *The Spiral Jetty*—or rather, Smithson’s thirty-five-minute color film of that title—was the subject of an exhibition at New York’s Dwan Gallery from October 31 to November 25, 1970.

18. Lawrence Alloway, “Institution: Whitney Annual,” *Artforum* 11, no. 7 (March 1973): 32, 33–34.

19. “Benny Andrews Journal: A Black Artist’s View of Artistic and Political Activism, 1963–1973,” in *Tradition and Conflict: Images of a Turbulent Decade, 1963–1973*, exh. cat., ed. Mary Schmidt Campbell (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1985), 73, 69.

20. *Ibid.*, 70.

21. *Ibid.*, 72. According to Lawrence Alloway, between 1965 and 1973 the Whitney staged solo exhibitions of African American art in the lobby gallery with such regularity that black artists took to calling the space the Nigger Room. See Alloway, “The Great Curatorial Dim-Out,” *Artforum* 13, no. 8 (May 1975): 32–34. The article is reprinted in Reesa Greenberg et al., eds., *Thinking about Exhibitions* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 222.

22. “*American Art from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd* opens Whitney Season September 16,” press release, Frances Mulhall Achilles Library, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, box 733, file 1.

23. John Hanhardt and Mark Segal, “Video,” in *1977 Biennial Exhibition*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1977).

24. Clearly, museums have since abandoned even the pretense of aloofness from commercial interests, as is evident in numerous exhibitions that have demonstrated that museums can be bought, or at least rented. For example, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Fabergé in America* (1997), sponsored by Fabergé, and *Cartier 1900–1939* (1997), sponsored by Cartier; at the Grey Art Gallery, the appalling *Face to Face: Shiseido and the Manufacture of Beauty* (2000), sponsored by Shiseido Cosmetics; and at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Armani show, sponsored by the fashion magazine *In Style*, but probably secured by Armani's promised gift to the museum of a reported \$15 million. For a discussion of some of the issues this practice raises, see Roberta Smith, "Memo to Art Museums: Don't Give Up on Art," *New York Times*, December 3, 2000, sec. 2, 1, 35.

25. So intent was the museum on encouraging art patronage that the catalogs also offered the following helpful information: "The number in parenthesis following an artist's address indicates his dealer as listed under 'Galleries.'"

26. Margaret McKellar, the museum's executive secretary, letter to Mr. Ashman, February 14, 1972, regarding the sale of a painting by Jimmy Ernst (Max Ernst's son), acknowledging receipt of a check for \$450, 10 percent of the \$4,500 sale price (Whitney Museum archive, box 693). In the archival materials for the 1960 Whitney Annual (the first in which the "no commission" notice did not appear), there is no evidence of commissions earned on sales. (In fact, box 610 contains no documentation of sales from that exhibition at all. The contents of the boxes in which archival materials pertaining to the Whitney Annuals and Biennials can be found are notably inconsistent from year to year.)

27. Scull's sale of Robert Rauschenberg's *Double Feature* (1959) and *Thaw* (1958) for a total of \$175,000 on October 18, 1973, convinced the artist of the AWC's demand that artists, and artists' estates, benefit from the resale of their work.

28. I want to reflect briefly here on the pretentious neologism "gallerist," which strikes me as infinitely more vulgar than the quaintly commercial connotations of the "art dealer."

29. Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (spring 1979): 88.

30. Hilton Kramer, "Signs of Passion: The New Expressionism," in *The Revenge of the Philistines: Art and Culture, 1972–1984* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 366–74.

31. Collaborative Projects, Inc., (Colab), "Summary Project Description" (organization grant application, National Endowment for the Arts, September 1980), in *Collaborative Projects, Inc.*, bound photocopies of Colab documentation, n.d., n.p.

32. "It is important to try to bridge the gap between artists and working people by putting artwork on a boulevard level." See untitled flyer/manifesto (1980) in *ibid.*

33. Lucy R. Lippard, "Real Estate and Real Art à la Fashion Moda," in *Get the Message?* 179. Alan Moore, a founding member of Colab, takes issue with some details. The show took place at 123 Delancey, not 172; it was organized by "the Committee for the Real Estate Show," not Colab; and there was no "graffiti by neighborhood kids." Moore, e-mail to Julie Ault, June 7, 2002, forwarded to the author.

34. Collaborative Projects, Inc., n.p.

35. Joseph Morningstar, letter "To Whom It May Concern," May 1, 1980, *ibid.*

36. See Richard Goldstein, "The First Radical Art Show of the '80s," *Village Voice*, June 16, 1980, 32.
37. In a limited sense, the educational aspect of Group Material's process recalls an initiative by a subcommittee of Artists Meeting for Cultural Change that the group's weekly Sunday-night meetings function as a forum for study and discussion of social, political, and cultural issues that framed and informed their varied artistic practices. Concerned that AMCC would disintegrate once the brouhaha over the Whitney Museum's Bicentennial programming subsided, members of the Position Paper Committee issued a proposal for the collective study and discussion of such issues as "art and feminism, collaboration, imperialism, artist as intellectual, the culture industry, the role of museums." Position Paper Committee, "A Tentative Position Paper," February 22, 1976, PADD Archive, Museum of Modern Art Library.
38. "We had to cease being a space and become a working group once again." Quoted in Jan Avgikos "Group Material Timeline: Activism as a Work of Art," in *But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, ed. Nina Felshin (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 98.
39. Craig Owens, "The Problem with Puerilism," *Art in America* 72, no. 6 (summer 1984): 163.
40. Robert Hughes, "Careerism and Hype amidst the Image Haze," *Time*, June 17, 1985, 78.
41. Richard Armstrong et al., preface to *1985 Biennial Exhibition*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1985), 10.
42. Kim Levin, "The Whitney Laundry," *Village Voice*, April 9, 1985, 82; Group Material, "Whitney Wringer," *Village Voice*, May 21, 1985.
43. Dinitia Smith, "Art Fever," *New York Magazine*, April 20, 1987, 37.
44. Flyer, *The Guerrilla Girls Review the Whitney* (1987).
45. John Hanhardt provided his own sober and focused assessment in an "Introduction to Film and Video." See Armstrong et al., introduction to *1989 Biennial Exhibition*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art and W. W. Norton, 1989), 10.
46. This is from my own surprisingly angry review. See David Deitcher, "1989 Biennial," *Artforum* 28, no. 1 (September 1989): 143–44.
47. John Yau, "Official Policy: Toward the 1990s with the Whitney Biennial," *Arts Magazine* 64, no. 1 (September 1989): 50.
48. Ibid.
49. Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson et al. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 19–36.
50. Olander coined the term and used it as the title of the introduction to the publication accompanying his exhibition, *Art & Social Change, U.S.A.* See *Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (Oberlin, Ohio: Allen Memorial Art Museum, 1982–83), 61–69.
51. Group Material first installed the *AIDS Timeline* at the University Art Museum, University of California at Berkeley, in 1989.
52. The term, "real-time" derives from Hans Haacke's use of it in the titles of two

works, *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971), and *Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971). Built into Group Material's *AIDS Timeline* was a similar concern for the precise temporal extent of the time frame employed. For an incisive analysis of Haacke's real estate pieces, and of their suppression by Thomas Messer, director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 1971, who canceled the Haacke show rather than exhibit these works, see Rosalyn Deutsche, "Property Values: Hans Haacke, Real Estate, and the Museum," in *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, exh. cat., ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 20–37.

53. Ross, quoted in Grace Glueck, "New Director at Whitney Looks Ahead," *New York Times*, January 12, 1991, A14.

54. Lisa Phillips, "Culture under Siege," in *1991 Biennial Exhibition*, exh. cat., Richard Armstrong et al. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art and W. W. Norton, 1991), 15.

55. John Hanhardt, "Redefining Film and Video Art," in *ibid.*, 311.

56. For a discussion of the pros and cons of this development, see David Deitcher, "Art on the Installation Plan," *Artforum* 30, no. 5 (January 1992): 79–84.

57. Homi K. Bhabha, "Beyond the Pale: Art in the Age of Multicultural Translation," in *1993 Biennial Exhibition*, exh. cat., ed. Elizabeth Sussman et al. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art and Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 65, 64.

58. Eleanor Heartney, "Identity Politics at the Whitney," *Art in America* 81, no. 5 (May 1993). Also see the articles by Hilton Als, Glenn O'Brien, Bruce F. Ferguson, David Rimanelli, Jan Avgikos, Greg Tate, Dan Cameron, David Deitcher, Thomas McEvilly, Liz Kotz, and Laurence Chua in *Artforum* 31, no. 9 (May 1993): 7–17.

59. Heartney, "Identity Politics at the Whitney," 17.

60. "The 'Black Male' show at the Whitney Museum is one of the liveliest and most visually engaging exhibitions to have appeared in New York this season." Linda Nochlin, "Learning from 'Black Male,'" *Art in America* 83, no. 3 (March 1995): 86–91.

61. Golden's and Lisa Phillips's resignations are noted in Carol Vogel, "The Whitney Goes Outside for Curators of Biennial," *New York Times*, March 1, 1999, E1, 3.

62. Maxwell L. Anderson, foreword to *Whitney Biennial: 2000 Biennial Exhibition*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2000), 8–9.

63. In his foreword to the catalog for the 1968 Whitney Annual, museum director John I. H. Baur noted that the exhibition was "more national in scope, as were those of 1966 and 1967. This was made possible by a grant from the Ford Foundation, which enabled the museum's staff to visit art centers throughout the United States." See John I. H. Baur, *1968 Whitney Annual*, n.p. Anderson notes the "earlier five year [Ford Foundation] grant" and dates the beginning of NEA support for the same purpose to 1975. Maxwell L. Anderson, "Whitney Annuals and Biennials: Themes and Variations," in *Whitney Biennial: 2000 Biennial Exhibition*, 22.

64. However, this decision did not constitute a radical break with tradition. The 1995

Biennial, mounted during David Ross's tenure, had an outside curator (Klaus Kertess), while Louise Neri, the Australian-born U.S. editor of the Swiss art journal *Parkett*, collaborated with Lisa Phillips in organizing the 1997 Biennial.

65. Anderson, "Whitney Annuals and Biennials," 26.

66. See Stephanie Cash, "Anderson Shakes Up the Whitney," *Art in America* 86, no. 12 (December 1998): 31–33.

67. The *New York Times*, for one, was not sorry to see Ross go. Michael Kimmelman, the *Times*'s senior art critic, had sounded the alarm about Ross even before the 1993 Biennial. See Michael Kimmelman, "The Whitney Continues Its Search . . . for Itself," *New York Times*, April 19, 1992, C1, 33. Nor did the *Times* withhold its welcoming embrace of the new director for long. See Deborah Solomon, "A Low-Key Rebel at the Whitney," *New York Times*, November 8, 1998, C43–48.

68. The occasion for these remarks is the conflict that occasionally erupts between critics who, like Dave Hickey and Peter Scheldahl, champion "beauty" while sniping at politically and theoretically engaged critics whom they blame for the "hectoring" art of the late 1980s and early 1990s (as if that activist culture were not then politically warranted), or for the reduction of art to the undistinguished status of cultural production. (At a public lecture on December 6, 2000, at the New School for Social Research, New York, Hickey bowdlerized practitioners of cultural studies by equating a Pollock painting with a washing machine.) Nor should it be overlooked that critics on the left take every opportunity to lash out at the "beauty" sect for depoliticizing art as if attentiveness to formal, sensual, and poetic qualities necessarily implicated them in the most contemptibly reactionary political agenda. If all the "othering" could just be put on hold for a spell, it might well become apparent that there is a good deal of overlap between the two positions.

Part III



Space, Place, and Community

Alternative: Space

Martin Beck

On the second to last day of the 1960s, the Museum of Modern Art in New York published a catalog featuring an image of “outer space” on its cover. A blue-tinted, slightly abstract photograph shows an accumulation of differently sized stars and galactic dust. A transparent plastic wrapper overlays the image and bears the title of the exhibition this catalog accompanied, *Spaces*. The show consisted of six specially developed installations by Michael Asher, Larry Bell, Dan Flavin, Robert Morris, the artist group Pulsa, and Franz Erhard Walther. In the catalog’s acknowledgments curator Jennifer Licht wrote that “An exhibition in which the installation becomes the actual realization of the work of art and rooms must be planned and built according to the artists’ needs, challenges the usual role of the Museum and makes unaccustomed demands of its staff and resources.”¹

Seldom before had the museum staged an exhibition the outcome of which was unclear until a few days before its opening. Licht later described *Spaces* as being the result of political pressure placed on the museum by artists who, among other things, advocated exposure to nontraditional practices.² The institutional challenge was also manifest in the exhibition catalog, which, because of time constraints, contains no depictions of any of the installations; instead, the publication presents the proposals, photographs of previous work by the artists at other locations, and photographic documentation of the installation process. Interestingly, the intriguing cover image has no direct relationship to the works in the exhibition or to information provided in the catalog. The only (indirect) reference to it is

made toward the end of Licht's introduction, which concludes by noting, "In this 'Space Age,' space is no longer an abstraction."³

"Space" had become a buzzword during the 1960s and captured the collective imagination in a powerful way. Formerly a word primarily associated with architecture and geography, "space" began to be used in the context of various fields, including social theory, culture, politics, media, and technology. Throughout the decade, NASA's Apollo program had fueled the increasingly popular obsession with images and facts about the Moon and beyond, culminating in the moment when the astronaut Neil Armstrong took his first step on the lunar surface in July 1969.

Television and film disseminated images of space—real and imagined—and further embedded them into hugely popular fictional narratives. Each episode of Gene Roddenberry's NBC television series *Star Trek*, which debuted in 1966, is introduced with the phrase "Space: the final frontier." Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey* linked the idea of exploring new spaces to the ancient development of tools. One of the film's key iconic scenes cuts from a bone flying up into a blue sky to a spaceship in orbit; the bone has been thrown in the air by an ape who had grasped its usefulness as a weapon. Ironically, the odyssey through space is then launched by an encounter with a perfect geometric slab that might as well be a minimalist sculpture.

Throughout the 1960s, artists, architects, and social theorists reconceptualized



Cover of *Spaces* catalog, 1969 (includes a transparent overlay with the word SPACES printed on it).

the traditional meanings of space and shifted its referential frame to an understanding of space that also included notions of the political and social. Space became a simultaneously abstract and concrete concept, only, to quote Licht again, “qualified by boundary or incident.”⁴

Coinciding, with the expansion and redefinition of space, the political, social, and material boundaries of the museum—specifically, the Museum of Modern Art—were being heavily contested by the protests and demands of the Art Workers’ Coalition, other artists’ groups, and individual artists. One consequence of these protests was the proliferation of artists’ initiatives seeking to explore and create new spaces for the presentation and distribution of artworks. These spaces needed to reflect the changes taking place in art and society at large while also meeting the expectations and challenges posed by such an undertaking.

Responding to a “need for radical changes in the art-showing process,” in the fall of 1970 artist Jeffrey Lew made two floors of his Greene Street building available to a wide circle of artist friends for exhibiting and producing artwork, dance performances, poetry readings, and other events.⁵ Sometime in early October, 112 Workshop—or 112 Greene Street, as this space also became known publicly—opened the doors of ground-floor and basement spaces of a cast-iron building at that address in SoHo.⁶ Although there was an exhibition on view, the opening of 112 Workshop was not formally announced, nor does it seem to have occurred on a specific date; the record only states that it happened.

112 Workshop’s physical space can be described as two large loft spaces structured by a row of cast-iron columns with decorative capitals on the ground floor and more pillarlike columns in the basement. Photographs of 112 Workshop’s first exhibition show the space in an unpolished state, the result of decades of industrial usage; although Lew had owned the entire building for some time, the lower two floors were occupied by a rag-salvaging business until mid-1970. The ground floor and basement were reconfigured as a cultural venue, but the floors, walls, ceilings, and fixtures appear to have been left in their original state. The walls were not painted white, a practice becoming ubiquitous for gallery spaces; instead, they remained covered in older paint treatments of various colors and shades. The basement walls were partially paneled in wood, which also apparently had various coats of colored paint on it. The pipes and electrical works and other fixtures—whether defunct or in use—were not cleaned, painted, or removed. Damaged parts of the wooden floors were left as found, unsanded and unpolished.

The first public event at 112 Workshop, an exhibition of works by more than fifteen artists, was on view from October to December 1970. According to Robyn Brentano’s comprehensive book *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street: History, Artists, and Artworks*, seventeen artists exhibited work in that three-month period: Bill Beckley, Bill Bollinger, David Bradshaw and James Brown, Rafael Ferrer, Lee

Jaffe, Barry Le Va, Jeffrey Lew, Gordon Matta-Clark, Brenda Miller, Larry Miller, Richard Nonas, Doug Sanderson, Alan Saret, Marjorie Strider, George Trakas, and Richard van Buren.

In *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street*, Brentano suggests that the artists' contributions utilized the space in various ways. The works ranged greatly in format and media; besides traditional art materials, artists used bamboo, foam, timber, recycled bottles, and rubber, among other things. Several artists treated the physical structure of the exhibition space as primary material for their work; some even altered or extended the space's material framework. For example, Alan Saret hung from the ceiling a sculpture made from sheet-metal cornices, installed a work made from bamboo trunks that stretched from floor to ceiling, and in the basement showed a work made from rubber, raffia, cloth, tube, and wire. Whereas David Bradshaw and James Brown "exhibited photos of a black man and a white man hunting," which were presumably placed on a wall, Marjorie Strider installed a work made from "brightly colored plastic foam" in the windows of Lew's upstairs living area, thus expanding the gallery space to the building's exterior as well as into Lew's private space. Although Lew initially denied George Trakas participation in the show because there were already too many artists, Trakas simply showed up with two of his artworks on the back of a truck. His \updownarrow *The Piece That Went through the Floor* was a structure made from steel, wood, glass, and rope surrounding a large hole the artist cut into the floor; never mind that "Lew didn't like the piece," which remained on display with Trakas's promise to "restore the floor to its original condition." Gordon Matta-Clark "dug a hole in the basement floor and planted a cherry tree in it and grass seeds on the mound of earth beside the hole." After the tree died, Matta-Clark installed "a grave for the tree with a silver line dug out of the cement in the space of the tree."⁷ He also accumulated old bottles in a sidewalk elevator shaft where he grew mushrooms, a work titled *Winter garden: mushroom and waistbottle recycling cellar*. During the course of the show, he also applied gold-leaf to one of 112 Workshop's column capitals.

112 Workshop's first show challenged several conventions about the staging of an exhibition. Without a fixed opening date, the show began gradually with the construction or installation of the first artworks; in fact, the installation process was considered part of the exhibition. In a 1978 interview, Lew noted that "there wasn't really a first show because everybody just arrived."⁸ There were no set hours at 112 Workshop, which was accessible twenty-four hours a day to audience and artists alike. During the three months when the ever-changing exhibition was on view, artworks were taken down, collapsed (as one of Trakas's pieces did), or they were of limited duration to begin with, such as Matta-Clark's *Incendiary Wafers*. New works were added and existing ones changed, thus continuously transforming the show as a whole. The exhibition was a process hosted and enabled by 112 Workshop.



Marjorie Strider, *Building Work #1*, 1970. Installation at 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street. Courtesy of White Columns.



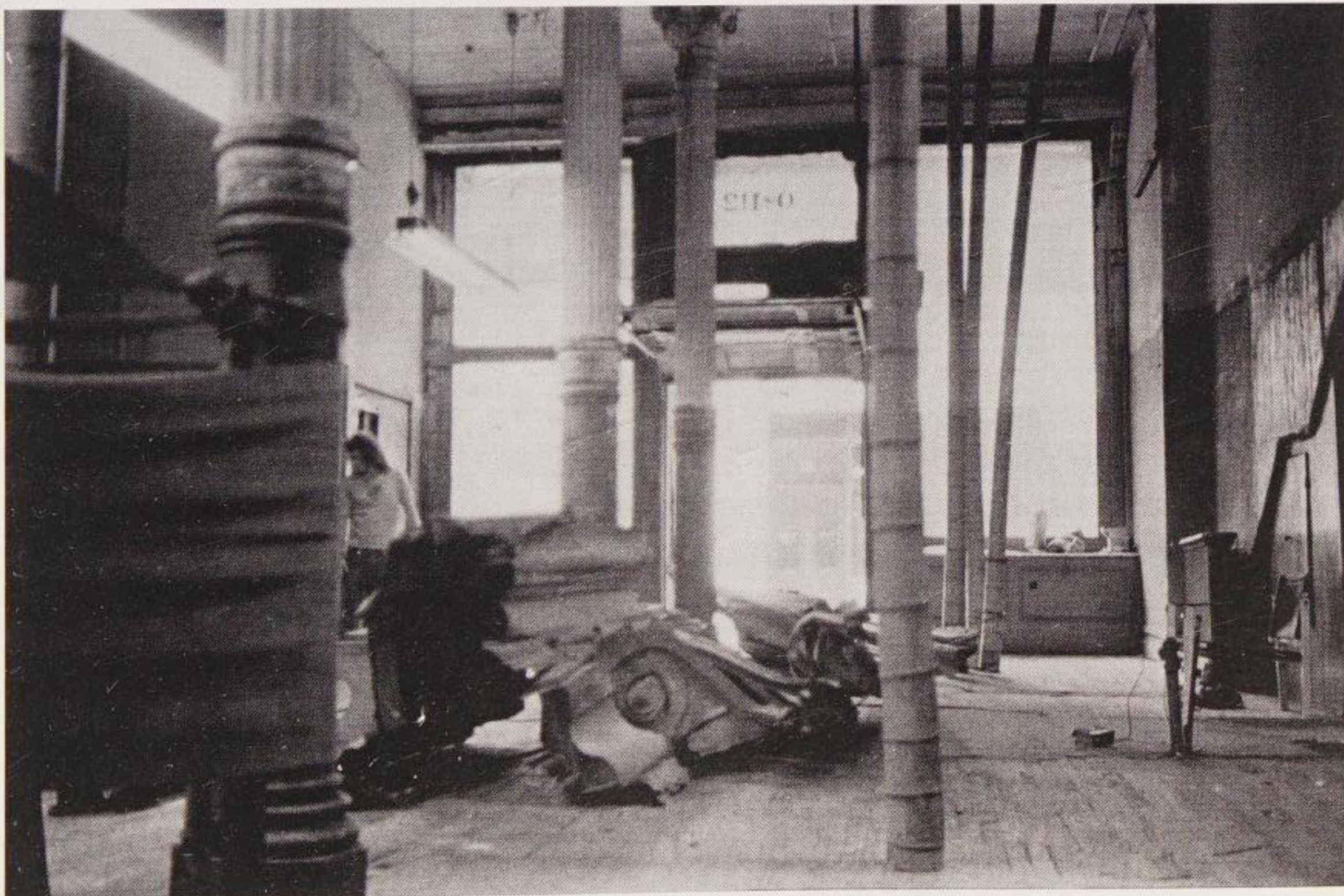
Gordon Matta-Clark, *Cherry Tree*, 1970. Installation at 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street. Courtesy of White Columns.

The black-and-white installation photographs reproduced in Brentano's *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street* convey the close relationship between the material "rawness" of most of the artworks exhibited and the surface textures generally encountered in industrial spaces or fabrication shops. Without reading descriptions of individual artworks, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the space's fixtures and the exhibited artworks; presumably, those who walked through the exhibition were aware of how the artworks were integrated into the space.

"In the beginning," Lew recalled, "we were reluctant to fix [112 Workshop] up, not wishing to disturb the raw power of the space." The word "raw" figures prominently in descriptions both of 112 Workshop's space and some of the activities that occurred there: "raw space" and "raw experience" are repeatedly invoked in *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street* and other accounts.⁹ The features of an unfinished, unpolished, or "as-is" architecture with traces of industrial history are generally associated with the possibility of doing things that can't be done elsewhere. "In most galleries you can't scratch the floor," Lew said. "Here you can dig a hole in it."¹⁰ Artists were free to use the space, its fixtures, and raw materials as their primary medium. "Raw"—with its connotations of natural, crude, unrefined, unprocessed, rough, unfinished—became a metaphor for freedom from restrictive definitions of art making, alluding to a frontier state where boundaries are negoti-

ated and challenged and where space is explored and extended. “Raw space” refers to a specific physical state of an architectural structure; “raw experience” denotes a social dimension excluded from the generic white-cube gallery space, and it impacts the artists’ encounters with the physical space, with each other, with the immediate community, and with the audience at large. The use of such terminology established a particular relationship between 112 Workshop and the regular gallery system, which, because it is generally antiseptic, elitist, manufactured, manipulated, and so on, is the antithesis of raw. Through this opposition, a distinction is constructed between the space of the establishment qualified as static, homogeneous, and bourgeois and the space of the alternative as process oriented, experimental, and working class. The details of this distinction are played out on the levels of physical space and social experience.

The link between the physical and the experiential was significant in the early history of 112 Workshop. Although Lew initiated the project, in its formative years it was a community endeavor—basically a circle of friends and colleagues engaged in art making as a process. Its embrace of raw space and raw experience defined an architectural as well as a social position, which developed a particular version of what then became known as an “alternative space.” The “alternative” developed within the framework of 112 Workshop was that of a place where a group of people interacted to further their process of art making. One could almost say that their endeavors amounted to a specific form of collective production: the framework of 112 Workshop was the “work” produced.



Alan Saret, 1970. Installation in progress at 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street. Courtesy of White Columns.

Closely related to 112 Greene Street—not only because the same individuals were involved but also because they shared similar goals for the downtown art community—was Food, an artist-run restaurant at 127 Prince Street in SoHo that opened in October 1971. It was the brainchild of Caroline Goodden and Gordon Matta-Clark, who organized and set it up with the help of Tina Girouard, Suzanne Harris, and Rachel Lew. This group operated Food for three years.¹¹

Food built a tangible support system that fulfilled basic everyday needs for a community of artists. Inexpensive food was prepared and served by artists, and formal and informal events and discussions took place during lunches, dinners, and casual coffee breaks. And it provided jobs to artist friends, who, according to Goodden, “could be free to suddenly drop out as needed to produce their show and still have a job when they were through. . . . Food supported 300 artists during our reign.”¹²

For a limited number of people and during a brief period of time, 112 Workshop and Food offered a viable alternative to the presentational apparatuses and support systems of the traditional art world. Their integration of physical space and social experience produced a spatial alternative that conceived space as “neither a mere ‘frame’ . . . nor a form of container of a virtually neutral kind, designed simply to receive whatever is poured into it.”¹³ The spaces at 112 Workshop and Food became, at least for those actively involved, a means of production.

In his 1974 book, *The Production of Space*, French Marxist thinker Henri Lefebvre outlines a theory of space in which he breaks with the geometric or architectural understanding of the term as an empty area enclosed by a material shell and moves to an understanding of space as a social category and a means of production. For Lefebvre, “space is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things.” His intricately layered and dynamic model is based on the concept of social space, which he defines as follows: “Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others.” Social space becomes “simultaneously, both a *field of action* (offering its extension to the deployment of projects and practical intentions) and a *basis of action* (a set of places whence energies derive and whither energies are directed).”¹⁴

The manifestation of 112 Workshop as an alternative space coincided, especially in its first year, with Lefebvre’s notion of space as a field and basis of action. It was not simply a venue for the presentation of artists’ works; it was also a space that artists manipulated, penetrated, and attacked in the process of producing artworks. The physical space thus became an integral condition for the artworks to emerge. The group of artists involved with 112 Workshop did not think of it as a space for showing “marginalized,” “difficult,” or otherwise underrepresented cultural practices, although this was one aspect of the *Group Indiscriminate* exhibitions of 1974 and 1975. “We didn’t think of it as an alternative space at the time,” artist Suzanne

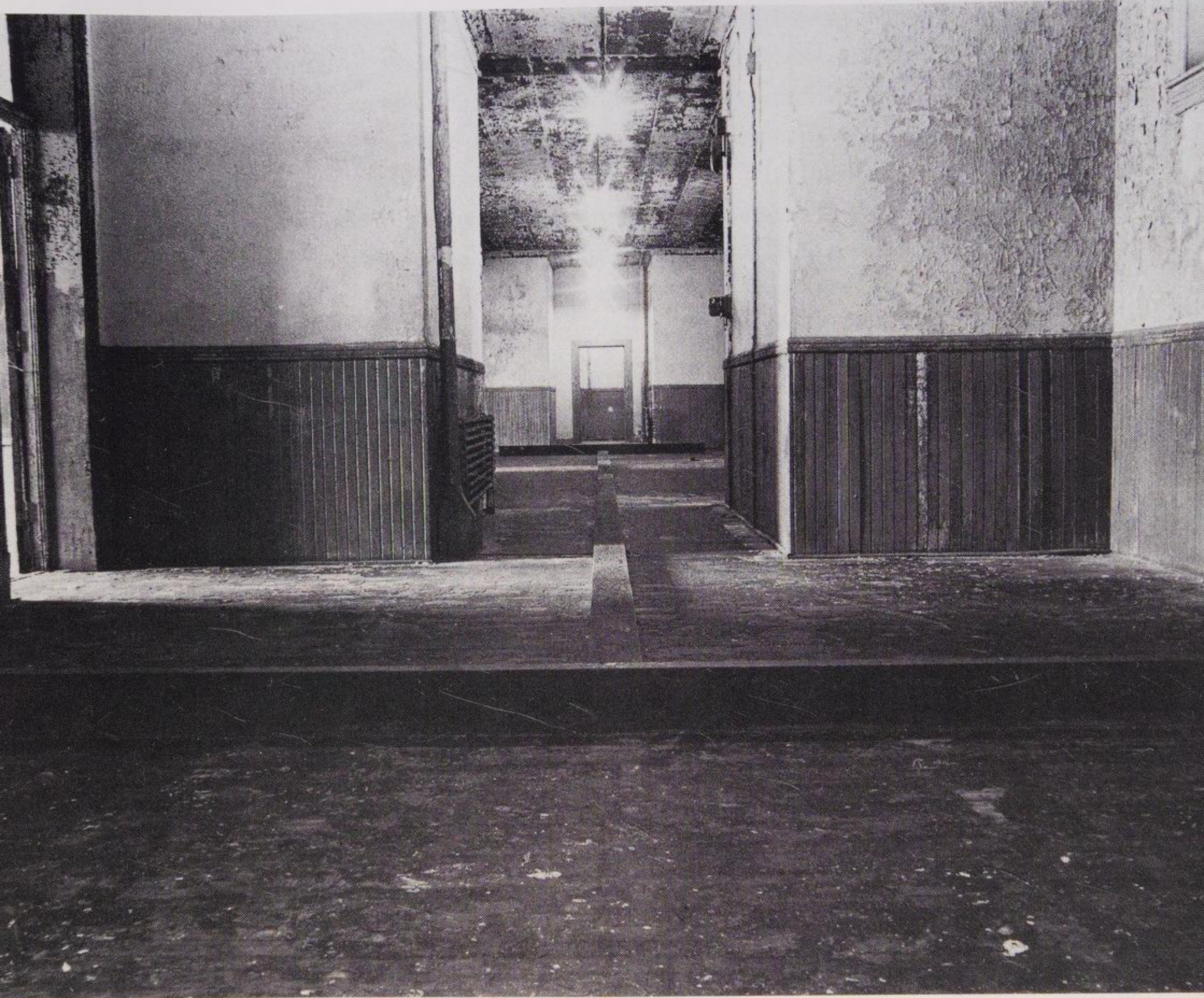
Harris later recalled.¹⁵ What distinguished 112 Workshop as an alternative to the regular gallery system was that it allowed artists to work with and in the space.

Around 1973, 112 Workshop and its way of functioning underwent a transformation. For the first time it received public funding, which forced it to take a more structured approach in terms of scheduling and finances. In addition, as the space's stature in the art world grew, more artists approached Lew and other "core participants" about the possibility of showing there; these requests made it increasingly difficult to maintain the rather casual selection process. Finally, it was no longer practical to allow artists to make dramatic physical alterations of the space. What did not change, however, was 112 Workshop's commitment to the space's raw architecture. Although sections of the walls were painted white during the first few seasons, the walls and most of the floors and ceilings were not repaired. Artworks on view continued to compete with fixtures, paneling, and other crude features of the architectural space.

For process-oriented and postminimal art practices that developed in the early 1970s, the industrial spaces of SoHo lofts became, aesthetically and ideologically, the spatial blueprints for a break with the gallery establishment and, consequently, constituted a real alternative.¹⁶ Several artists showing at 112 Workshop, among them Gordon Matta-Clark, Barry Le Va, and Richard Nonas, were either prominent within the postminimal movement or had strong aesthetic allegiances to it. Interestingly, in an almost reciprocal move, postminimal art actively "began to seek out the alternative space, which, as it turned out, offered considerable challenge. It made much slick art look terrible. The artists were forced to produce work that could survive its surroundings, rather than relying on them to 'authenticate' it."¹⁷

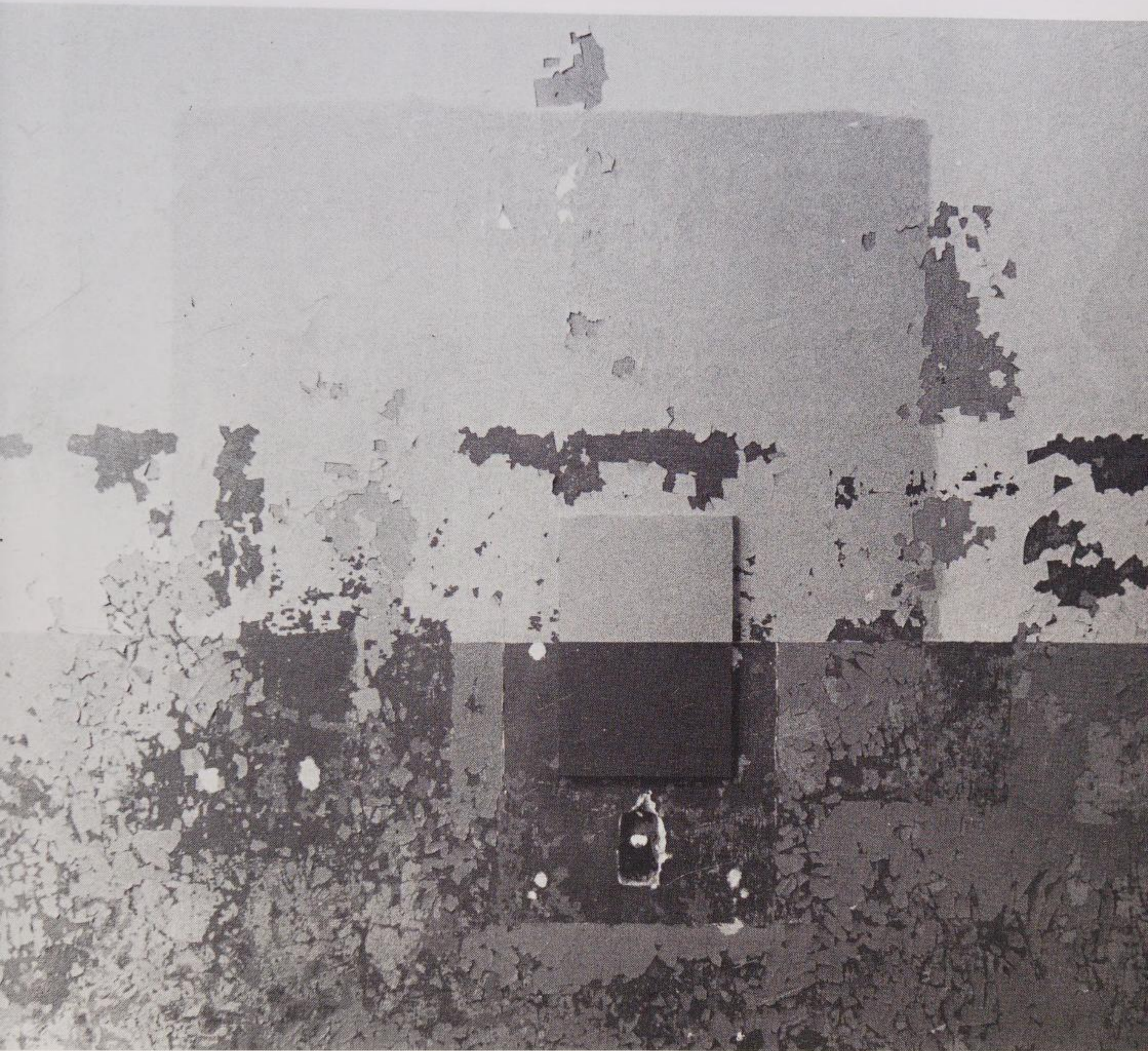
The postminimal movement's interaction with the raw space peaked with a show titled *Rooms*, on view during the summer of 1976 at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center in Long Island City. This was the inaugural exhibition at a former public school building that the New York City Board of Education had closed in 1963 and that had been transformed into a cultural venue in 1976 under the guidance of Alanna Heiss. Since the early 1970s, Heiss had organized a series of challenging projects and exhibitions in abandoned and underutilized buildings throughout the city, including the Clocktower Gallery; she also used spaces such as the environs of the Brooklyn Bridge on a single-project basis. These projects were initiated under the organizational umbrella of the so-called Institute for Art and Urban Resources, founded by Heiss and incorporated in 1971 as "a significant counterforce to the urban bureaucracy with which she continually had to deal."¹⁸ P.S. 1 (Project Studios One) was an endeavor to convert the massive school building "into exhibition, performance and studio spaces for contemporary artists whose work was often overlooked by the city's museum establishment."¹⁹

Rooms presented on-site works and other installations by almost eighty artists from the United States and abroad, among them familiar names from 112 Workshop,



Richard Nonas, *Alligator*, 1976. Installation in *Rooms* exhibition at P.S. 1. Courtesy of P.S. 1 Museum.

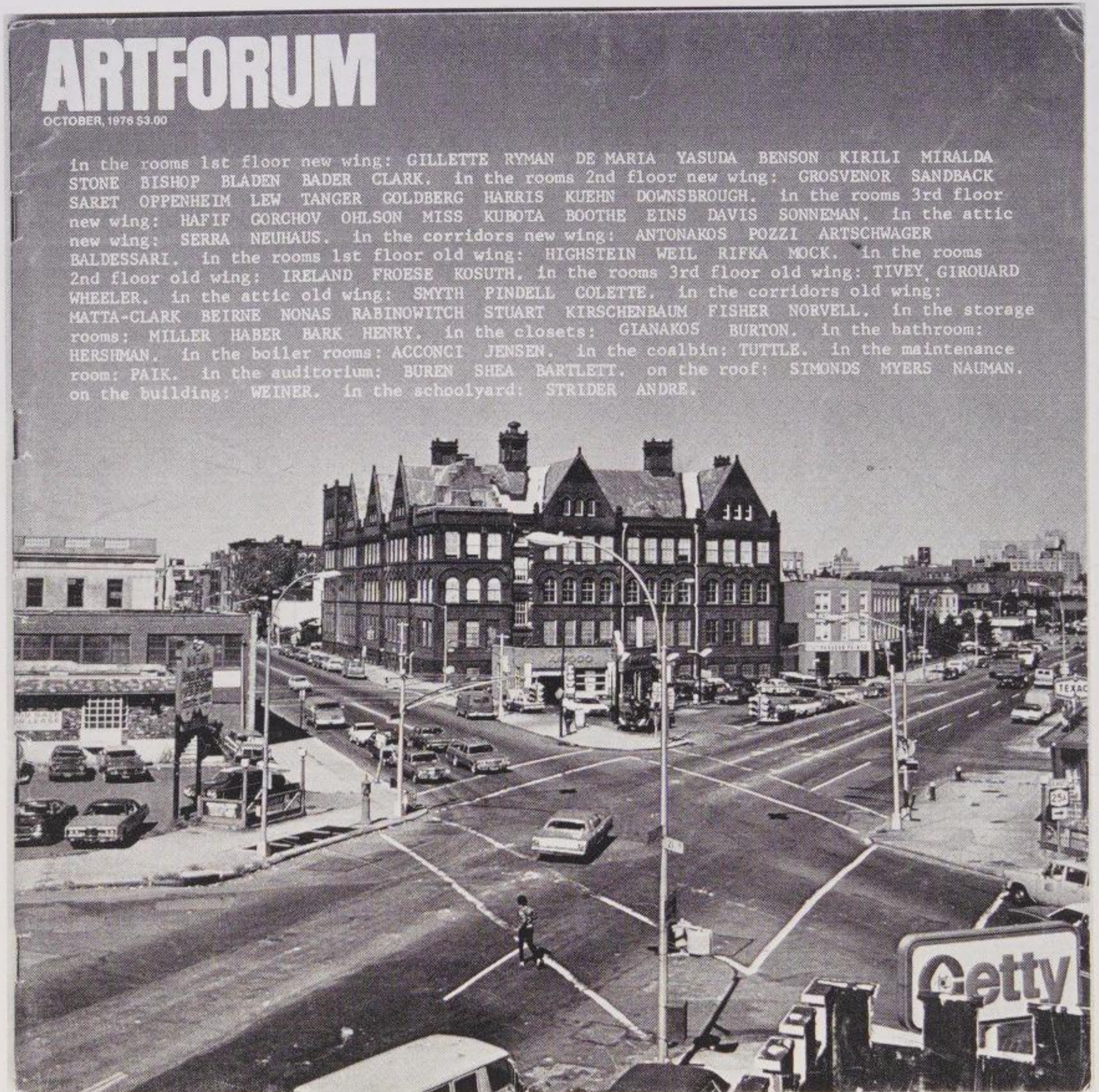
such as Tina Girouard, Suzanne Harris, Jeffrey Lew, and Gordon Matta-Clark. The building housing P.S. 1 was only slightly renovated for the exhibition; repairs were confined to such basic safety issues as the heating, wiring, and plumbing systems, but the building's decrepitude and the material traces of long-term neglect remained visible. Paint was peeling, plaster was falling off the walls, and floors and ceilings were in disrepair. Furthermore, various school-specific fixtures were left in place throughout the building. The artworks occupied every square foot of space, from roof to basement and in classrooms and closets. Most artists were informed by and actively integrated the building's dilapidated state and specific history into their artworks. For example, Lucio Pozzi placed his small rectangular panels in the colors that matched the peeling paints across those places in the wall where intentional color changes met in straight lines (as opposed to the irregular peeling spots). Matta-Clark cut a hole through all three floors of the building, while Joseph Kosuth integrated his *Ideology/Artifact* into a classroom chalkboard.



Lucio Pozzi, *Untitled*, 1976. Installation in *Rooms* exhibition at P.S. 1. Courtesy of P.S. 1 Museum.

The opening of P.S. 1 in the summer of 1976 was a major event in the New York art world. The October issue of *Artforum* featured a cover story, “The Apotheosis of the Crummy Space,” about the site and the *Rooms* show, written by Nancy Foote. “In the ‘Rooms’ show,” Foote noted, “at least 50 of the 80 artists hacked, gouged, stripped, dug, poured and picked away at [P.S. 1’s] rotting hulk—to their art’s content.” She appreciated the overall spatial effect of the “disaster area ambience” and welcomed the fact that “[t]he space can be brutalized, destroyed, completely restructured; it can be ‘amended’ subtly by small additions that comment on its nature and adapt their posture to its own; it can serve as medium, directly or indirectly, also as subject.”²⁰

By the time *Rooms* opened, postminimalism had become a highly visible—almost dominant—force in New York’s art world. Ironically, the very spaces from



Cover of *Artforum* (October 1976).

which the movement emerged were being reframed as aesthetic environments. While in 1970 exhibiting in a raw space constituted an alternative position to the art establishment, just a few years later, the immediate association between a raw space and an alternative space was no longer valid. Maintaining the material rawness of the bare loft space—which, for numerous artists, remained part of their creative process—was no longer perceived as oppositional; instead, it was considered an aesthetic choice tied to a specific artistic movement that had gained prominence in the gallery system. An alternative space was no longer defined by a “disaster area ambience,” and “voluntary shabbiness” had become part of an aesthetic allegiance—or was just another style.

In 1979 the artist Rudolf Baranik asked arts professionals a series of questions, such as “Is the alternative space a true alternative?” and “What other forms of ‘alternatives’ are/could be available?” The answers were published in *Studio International* in 1980. Based on the responses he received, Baranik noted: “There is also the focus on surface appearances and trappings instead of content. 112 Greene pro-

claimed its alternate state with a carefully regulated dinginess, a kind of studied poverty, where the enemy became not philistine leveling but white walls and a contemplative space—precisely what most contemporary art needs.”²¹

Baranik’s comments retrospectively frame 112 Workshop’s embrace of the “raw space” as a stylistic pose, and he asks for a reconsideration of what kind of physical space is appropriate for an alternative exhibition venue. Baranik articulates a need for spaces that are neither “dingy” nor “philistine,” thus implicitly proposing a spatial model capable of mediating between the unrenovated industrial loft space and the pristine white cube. This “white” and “contemplative” space would not be the art’s subject or medium, but instead would function as background against which the art is shown; certainly, it would not force artists to compete with rotten utility fixtures and layers of peeling paint. A potential alternative state of such a space cannot rely on the materiality of this space’s physical architecture. Although 112 Workshop was heavily invested in the potential of its raw space, what distinguished it as alternative was the way it integrated physical space and social experience. When the founding group moved on, however, as it had by the time of the *Rooms* exhibition, 112 Workshop’s social aspect had mostly waned, leaving behind its raw physical space as its primary claim to “alternativeness.” Baranik’s comments are most likely directed toward this particular period, and they illustrate how much the concept of an alternative space changed within a few years: “[T]he art of the seventies locates its radical notions not so much in the art as in its attitudes to the inherited ‘art’ structure, of which the gallery space is the prime icon.”²²

One of the artists who participated in the *Rooms* exhibition, as well as others at 112 Workshop, was Patrick Ireland, who is also known under his writer alias as Brian O’Doherty. As director of the Visual Arts Program for the National Endowment for the Arts, he had facilitated public funding for the space. In 1976 O’Doherty published three widely read and discussed essays in *Artforum* under the general title “Inside the White Cube.”²³ “Notes on the Gallery Space,” “The Eye and the Spectator,” and “Context as Content” pose important questions regarding the sociopolitical and aesthetic functions of the gallery space. O’Doherty locates ideology in the codification of modernist display practice, which he regards as an interlocking development of the reproduction of the gallery space as a white cube, a space that seeks to transcend specificity of time and location. For O’Doherty, art as “portable currency” necessitates the stripped-down controlled context of the white cube within which “the wall becomes a membrane through which aesthetic and commercial values osmotically exchange.” The white cube has become “the single major convention through which art is passed. What keeps it stable is the lack of alternatives. . . . Genuine alternatives cannot come from within this space.”²⁴

Given Ireland/O’Doherty’s aesthetic allegiances, it is reasonable to speculate that his conception of “genuine alternatives” to the white cube was informed by

1970s-era art's emphasis on process rather than product, in addition to post-minimalism's inclination to actively integrate architectural situations as subject and medium of an artistic practice. For O'Doherty, the space of the alternative space—he was in fact instrumental in creating a category for such spaces in his role as representative of a public funding institution—was a reclaimed industrial or factory-like setting that allowed for active manipulation of the space itself and—since such settings were formerly work environments—referenced “work.”

In her 1994 essay “The Exhibited Redistributed: A Case for Reassessing Space,” Reesa Greenberg points out that the embrace of the industrial space in the early 1970s can also be seen in gendered terms, inasmuch as the workplace has historically been designated as masculine. She argues that the interest in spaces connoting work

at the moment [when] feminism was asserting itself in the United States is not coincidental. Women artists, realizing that their double careers as artists and homemakers left them at a disadvantage when compared to their male colleagues, were making demands on the system for more exposure and claiming more space in museums and gallery exhibitions. The move to factory exhibition spaces can be seen as a reclaiming of the spaces of and for work as masculine—even if the particular workplaces chosen had been used primarily by women employed in sweatshops.²⁵

Greenberg's “reassessment” further complicates the question of what kind of space would be an appropriate alternative to the presentational apparatuses of the art world establishment. Not only did the cover-worthy “disaster area ambience” quickly become a “spatial style,” but also, the alternatives produced by the “raw spaces and experiences” did little to counter the art world's tendency to exclude women artists. O'Doherty's question—“Is the artist who accepts the gallery space conforming with the social order?”—simply is not relevant for artists overlooked by the system because they are not in a position to contemplate accepting the traditional gallery space in the first place.²⁶ For women artists in the 1970s, fantasies about a space that was alternative to the gallery system centered on the possibility of showing their work at all, in any venue, regardless of its specific architectural features.

A.I.R. is a room of our own, a space of our own, a window of our own through which the world can look in at us and from which we can proudly look back at the world.²⁷

In response to “the difficulties women artists encounter in trying to show their work,” A.I.R. Gallery opened on September 16, 1972, in a storefront at 97 Wooster Street in SoHo. Its founding members, including Dotty Attie, Susan Williams, and Barbara Zucker, had begun meeting the previous fall to address the “pressing



A.I.R. Gallery under construction, 1972. Courtesy of A.I.R. Gallery. Photograph by David Attie.

and obvious need for more exhibition space given over to the work of women artists” and a “need for models and encouragement which a greater body of women artists’ work would provide.”²⁸ As a result of their meetings, they decided to found a cooperatively run exhibition space that would show and represent the work of about twenty women artists. A.I.R. was conceived as a gallery professionally run by artists for artists, and it was set up as a nonprofit. The press release for the inaugural exhibition announced: “The A.I.R. Gallery will offer exhibitions in an environment independent of commercial pressures through which the member artists expect to redefine existing attitudes about the quality and importance of women’s art.”²⁹

The inaugural exhibition included works by ten of the twenty A.I.R. co-op members: Judith Bernstein, Maude Boltz, Rachel bas-Cohain, Daria Dorosh, Loretta Dunkelman, Laurace James, Nancy Kitchel, Rosemary Mayer, Patsy Norvell, and Nancy Spero. The other ten co-op artists, among them Dotty Attie, Agnes Denes, Harmony Hammond, and Howardena Pindell, were in a group show



A.I.R. members hanging wallboard at A.I.R., 1972. Courtesy of A.I.R. Gallery. Photograph by David Attie.

at the end of the season. Two simultaneous one-person exhibitions by members, as well as exhibitions featuring works by nonmembers, were presented during the year.

For the space's opening, A.I.R. produced and mailed a foldout poster that also served as an exhibition announcement. Alongside a brief essay covering A.I.R.'s goals and the necessary factual information (address, hours, etc.), the poster featured a large photograph of the gallery's facade, reproductions of artworks by each of the co-op members, and especially relevant to this discussion, a set of photographs shot during the adaptation of A.I.R.'s physical space.

A.I.R. Gallery's space was a loftlike storefront, which, when it was first rented, was in a fairly raw physical state; like other unrenovated SoHo lofts, it bore traces of previous industrial use. In addition to the images reproduced on the invitation, A.I.R.'s archive contains photographs, all taken by Dotty Attie's husband, David, that sequentially document the process of renovating the storefront for use as an exhibition space. Photographs early in the sequence show its original condition, including peeling paint, electrical wires that run across walls, and an irregular floor with holes in it and littered with rubbish. The initial cleanup efforts were photo-

graphed first and then the actual renovation process. The pictures show Judith Bernstein, Nancy Kitchel, Loretta Dunkelman, Dotty Attie, and others as they secure wooden studs to walls and ceilings to support the wallboard used for new walls and ceilings. The women attached, spackled, sanded, and painted to ultimately transform the overall space into a “white and contemplative” space, with



A.I.R. members building space, 1972. Courtesy of A.I.R. Gallery. Photograph by David Attie.

all irregular surfaces and preexisting utility fixtures concealed behind a shell of wallboard built in the loft. The final coat of white paint produced a pristine container revealing no traces of the space's former use.

These photographs illustrate, step by step, the transformation of one kind of space into another; they document the process of inserting a clean spatial shell into a masculine-coded working space. Although A.I.R. Gallery's unrenovated space resembled the alternative embodied by 112 Workshop or P.S. 1, A.I.R.'s participants did not believe that raw, unaltered space would necessarily increase the visibility of women artists. Instead, their conception of an alternative to the gal-



A.I.R. members building space, 1972. Courtesy of A.I.R. Gallery. Photograph by David Attie.

lery system was based on participation in that system rather than on producing works not suited for the pristine gallery container (as was often the case with works shown at I12 Workshop).

A.I.R. sought to create an opening for women artists within the regular system, not to create a venue outside it. As Lucy Lippard put it, "A.I.R. participates (perhaps of necessity) in the art world's promotion and power games, competing for reviews and attention and sales with the rest of the gang and doing well at it."³⁰ The aim to participate and to compete necessitates a presentational framework that appears comparable to those of the competitors. The space of such an alternative is consequently informed by the parameters of the regular gallery system. A.I.R.'s white container was the ideal alternative; by duplicating the spatial conditions of the established gallery system, it took advantage of the implicit legitimizing power of the "neutral" gallery space to put forward works by artists previously excluded from it. The "invisibility" of that kind of space allows the art exhibited there to be the primary attraction and the female artists whose works are being shown to be more visible. This acknowledgment of the regular gallery system dictates that other expectations must be met. For example, exhibitions are professionally put together and produced, and information about artists and their works are distributed to the wider art community. A.I.R.'s model of an alternative space was based on mimicking the conditions of the art market and thus attempting to create an alternative *inside* the system.

Significantly, this alternative was built as a space inside the existing space of an unrenovated industrial loft, which at the time was codified as the space of the alternative. A.I.R. Gallery's model of an alternative space refutes O'Doherty's later idea that "genuine alternatives cannot come from within [the white cube] space." O'Doherty's (and, before him, postminimalism's and I12 Workshop's) idea of an alternative is in part based on an alternate concept of the artwork, work that is to be produced in the context of a very specific physical relationship to the space within which it is presented. According to O'Doherty—and to I12 Workshop—space is a medium that takes on a productive role in art making.

A.I.R.'s conception of alternative was based on a different model, one that understands space primarily as a contested political arena. In this viewpoint, the physical condition of that space is less important than the social inclusion and exclusion processes that regulate access to and representation within it. Thus the main purpose of an alternative space is ability to produce visibility. The relationship between artwork and space is one of foreground to background—the space is there as a venue for the artwork. The role of space is, in Lefebvre's sense, still a productive one, but what is produced is not so much the artwork as the artist herself.³¹

Patented in 1916 under the name Sheetrock by the United States Gypsum Company, wallboard was prominently featured during the 1933–34 Chicago World's Fair, and the product achieved its commercial breakthrough in the postwar building

boom embodied by Levittown. Wallboard, which is made from gypsum and cardboard, can be processed on-site relatively easily compared to previously used methods of plastering where seamlessness depended on skilled labor. By the 1960s wallboard had become a standard material for dividing the interior spaces of modern office towers because it offered low-cost flexibility unavailable with traditional wall-building methods.

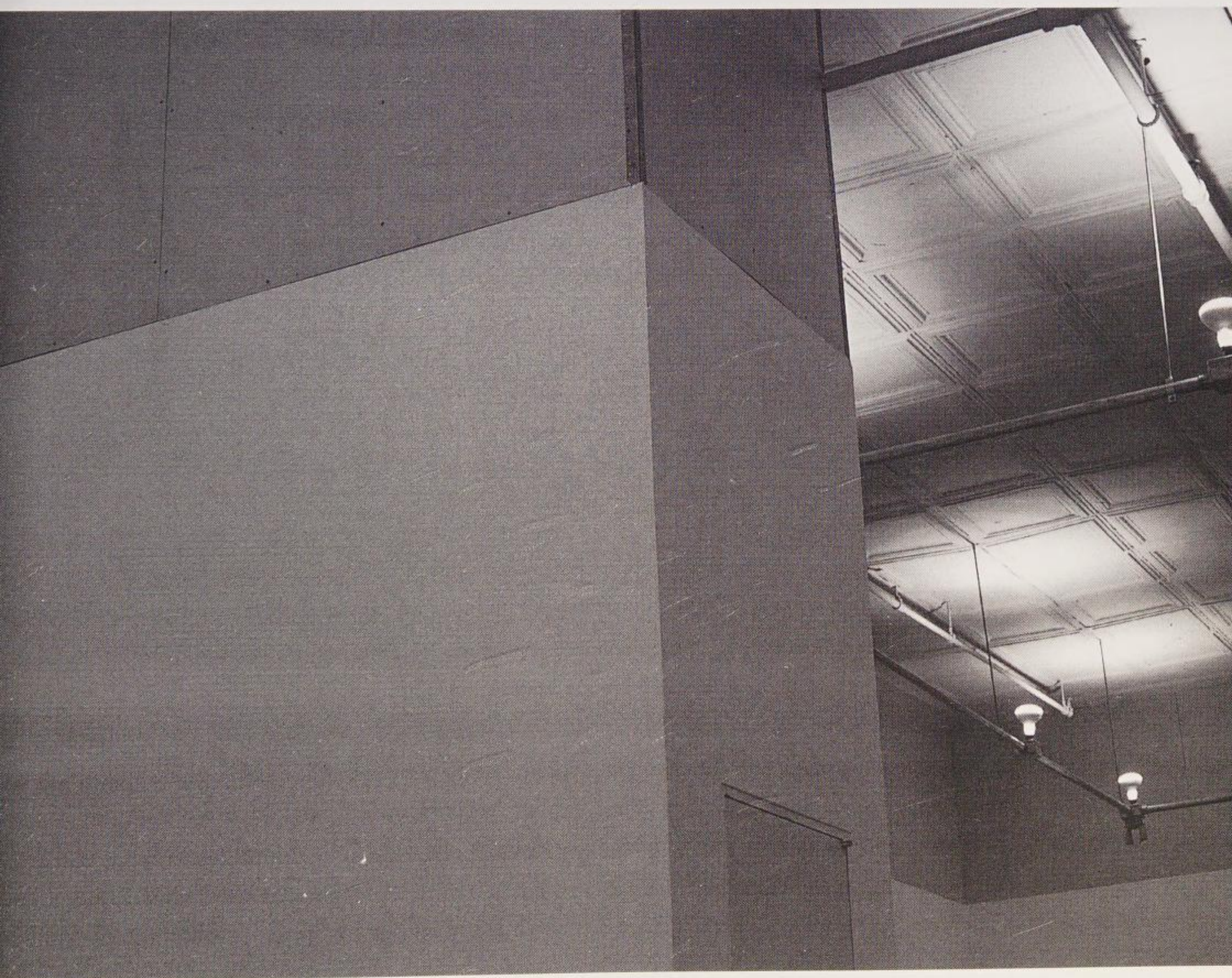
As a lightweight, easy-to-process, fire-retardant material, wallboard also proved to be very functional for adapting SoHo's industrial lofts into living, studio, and gallery spaces. It made it affordable to cover up every existing irregularity in both structure and surface of the otherwise raw cast-iron buildings. Producing and maintaining the "invisible" container that became the basis of, for example, A.I.R.'s alternative space was enabled by the proliferation of wallboard as a low-cost building material; at the time its use dominated construction methods for interior spaces. It enabled the creation of clean and seamless exhibition spaces that were easy to maintain and could always be returned to their original condition after a show closed. Month after month, every mark an exhibition might have inscribed as a trace of its existence into the walls of a gallery space could be erased easily with a spatulaful of spackling compound. Wallboard made it possible to create spatial capsules that could stay eternally virgin: it enabled the creation of "innocent spaces" with no trace of history or location.

Brian O'Doherty traced the concept of the white-cube exhibition space back to the origins of modernism, but one could argue that its prevalence in the 1970s was simply the result of the affordability and availability of wallboard. Although artists embraced the raw structures and surfaces of SoHo's industrial spaces as a material and symbolic alternative to the art establishment, it was the conversion possibilities offered by wallboard that had important consequences for the future of the alternative space.

The dynamic between the two physical models of alternative space previously discussed—raw space as antidote to the traditional gallery space and the white cube as duplication of it—is evident again in an exhibition held at Artists Space. Initiated in 1972 as a pilot program in the form of a service organization for artists by the New York State Council on the Arts, Artists Space started operating as an alternative exhibition venue in 1973. Over the years, Artists Space inhabited several locations in SoHo and TriBeCa: its first space was at 155 Wooster, above the Paula Cooper Gallery; in 1977 Artists Space moved to 105 Hudson Street; in 1984 it opened at 223 West Broadway in TriBeCa; and today it's at 38 Greene Street. Like A.I.R. Gallery, Artists Space was conceived of as an alternative to the gallery establishment, with an emphasis on participation within the system. But unlike A.I.R. Gallery, which was founded on the political premise of battling the exclusion of women artists from the art world, Artists Space lacked a political, social, or formal foundation on which its "alternativeness" was grounded (although artists' groups

organizing around political issues were routinely provided with space in which to meet). From its earliest incarnation—but especially under the directorship of Helene Winer in the late 1970s—Artists Space was an important port of entry for young artists into the New York art world. Continuing through the 1980s, a significant number of artists who made their debut there were able to establish themselves successfully in the gallery system, thus transforming Artists Space into an important research-and-development outlet for the New York art market.

From June 2 to July 2, 1988, a two-person exhibition at Artists Space featured installations by Michael Asher and James Coleman. The exhibition, curated by Valerie Smith, was accompanied by a small publication in which director Susan Wyatt pointed out that the show was “unusual” for Artists Space because “it offers two major and elaborate works by established artists.”³² James Coleman’s contribution to the show was a narrated slide projection titled *Seeing for Oneself*, which was presented in a self-contained space in the rear area of Artists Space. Michael



Michael Asher, *Untitled*, 1988. Detail of installation at Artists Space. Courtesy of Michael Asher and Artists Space.

Asher's was a site-specific installation that involved physically altering the architecture of the space.

Although Asher's situational work was widely exhibited outside New York and was considered highly influential for a younger generation of artists, he had not shown locally during the 1980s, so his installations were known to New Yorkers mostly through publications. In fact, his last exhibition in the city had been at another alternative venue, the Institute of Art and Urban Resources' Clocktower Gallery, in 1976; on that occasion, he had metaphorically linked the urban environment to the exhibition space by removing all the Clocktower Gallery's exterior doors and windows for the duration of the show. "I wanted to merge interior and exterior conditions, that is, exterior noise, air, light, and pollutants with the conditions existing in the interior," Asher explained. "Yet from the inside, as well as the outside, the Clocktower installation . . . revealed the way in which it was situated within the reality of the cityscape in contrast to its former isolation as an exhibition space."³³

By May 1984 Artists Space had moved into a ground-floor space in what had been an industrial building on West Broadway around the corner from White Street, an area situated south of the increasingly crowded SoHo. Similar to SoHo, TriBeCa—as this "triangle below Canal Street" had been christened—had for years provided artists with studio spaces and lofts, but by the mid-1980s the area was being transformed into an investment opportunity for restaurant owners and real estate developers. To adapt the new space for exhibition purposes, the architect and sculptor Ross Anderson defined it with an arrangement of partial twelve-foot-high wallboard walls, which basically followed the structural perimeter of the open loft space. In certain areas, these walls also extended outward, thereby dividing the overall space into distinct areas to be perceived as separate but interconnected rooms. Along the space's perimeter, the newly inserted walls partially obscured the fixtures, textures, and other interruptions that were an integral part of the space's existing structural walls. Because the space was approximately sixteen feet high, the new walls left exposed the top quarter of the existing structure, where the surfaces and utilitarian details of the old building were visible. Anderson's design was intended to establish a dialogue between the raw industrial structure of the existing building and the clean and seamless environment of the new exhibition architecture. The distinction between existing space and architectural scheme also transformed the arrangement of new walls into a sculptural feature of the very exhibition space it was supposed to articulate.

Michael Asher's exhibition proposal called for altering the architect's partial-wall scheme by extending the walls forty-four inches vertically so they would connect with the ceiling. Using the same drywall materials as those already in place, Asher extended the supporting beams and precisely aligned and attached the wallboard with screws. The surfaces were left untreated, showing the printed-on prod-



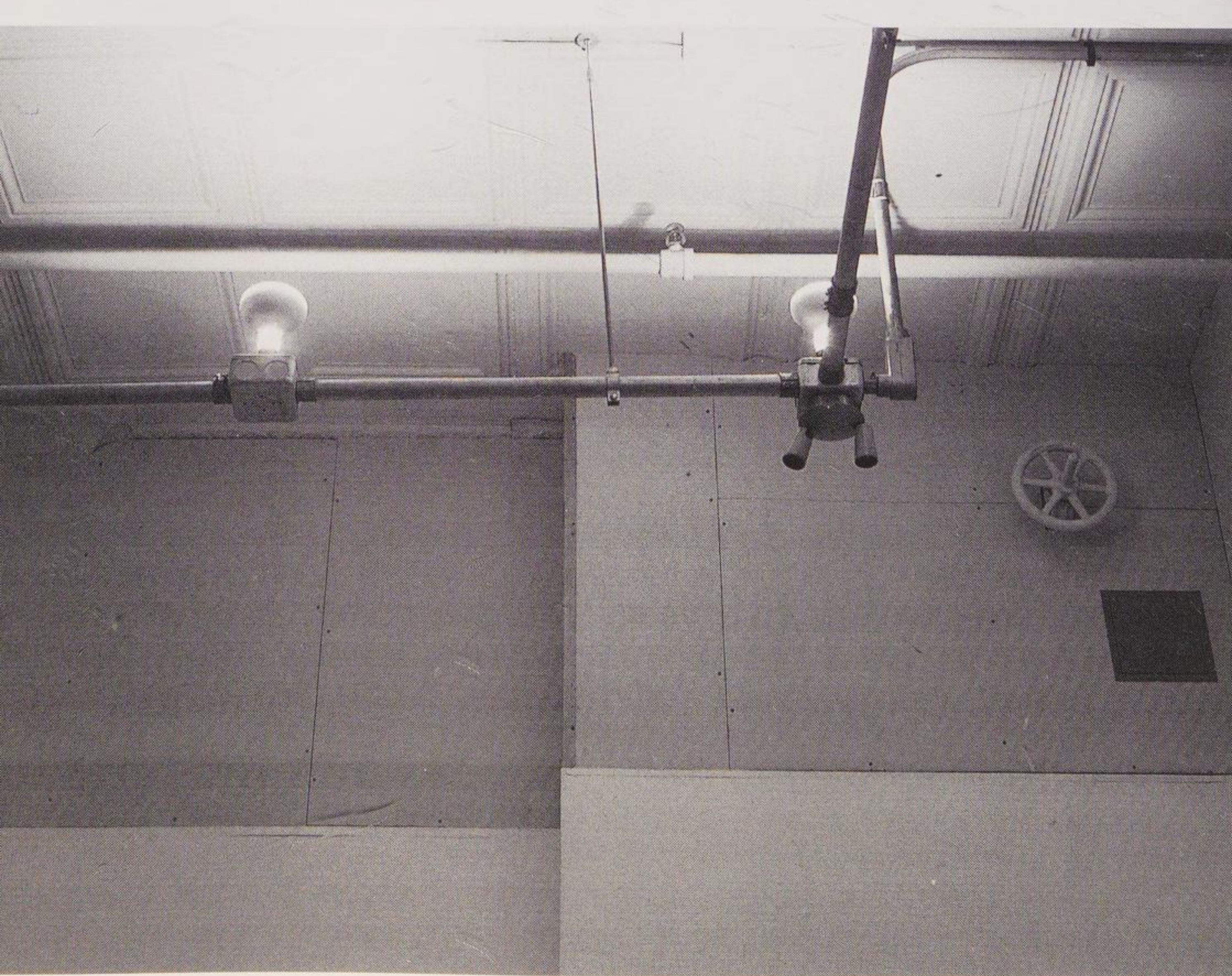
Michael Asher, *Untitled*, 1988. Installation view at Artists Space. Courtesy of Michael Asher and Artists Space.

uct logo and the grayish paper of the wallboard, which was not taped, spackled, or painted. Because the surfaces of the existing walls were seamlessly spackled and painted white, the contrast between the top and bottom sections of the same wall underscored the difference between Anderson's exhibition architecture and the intervention that was Asher's project. The exhibition space enclosed by these walls was left empty.

Because the architect's original concept was geared toward highlighting the relationship between the building's raw substance and its contemporary use, Asher's project, which extended the walls to the ceiling, erased that scheme. His intervention covered up the still-exposed parts of the building's original wall structure by

“completing” the “partial” job of the architect; by leaving that process of “completion” exposed, Asher directed the viewer’s attention to the process of wall building itself. The relationship between the two wall areas did not, as the architect intended, juxtapose new with old, but instead emphasized that the walls of an exhibition space are a construction themselves. Asher’s extension of the hanging space of the wall points, in a complex manner, toward the material and symbolic function of walls in the presentational apparatus of art.

Asher’s projects at the Clocktower Gallery and at Artists Space effectively revealed the complex systems that determine how an exhibition space functions. His interventions into the physical structure of those spaces enable the viewer to reflect on the relationships between material conditions and their ideological functions for the art institution itself. Architect Anderson’s adaptation, in which the new walls were related to the old (raw) building structure, reflected on a spatial condition of 1970s alternative art spaces, while Asher’s exemplified a 1980s transformation in the conceptualization of the space of an alternative exhibition venue.



Michael Asher, *Untitled*, 1988. Detail of installation at Artists Space. Courtesy of Michael Asher and Artists Space.

After the show closed, Artists Space made use of the option (that was part of Asher's project) of leaving his intervention in place, thus permanently altering the space's appearance. Members of Artists Space also decided (because the artist left the decision up to them) to tape, spackle, and paint the added-on wall surface, so the two different parts were fully integrated into one seamless surface. Asher's offer to leave the added wall parts in place marked the space in a complex and lasting way. It inserted a permanent trace of the project—although not the project itself—into the (supposedly ever virgin) wallboard structure that now defined the exhibition space.

The Asher Artists Space project raises a question: what happened to the space of the alternative? Architect Anderson's scheme was primarily a wall structure, the function of which was to provide Artists Space with clean, unobtrusive hanging space. Asher's project poignantly brought this issue to the foreground by making that same wall space even more serviceable—by extending the hanging space, it allowed for more generous exhibition layouts. Artists Space's conception of a spatial alternative was primarily defined by the desire to provide exposure for young and underrecognized artists. By the late 1970s, most of the art exhibited there was "wall-bound," that is to say, most art shown was hung on the wall and did not incorporate or engage with the physical aspects of the exhibition space itself. If art was considered different from the mainstream or even alternative, it was for reasons integral to the artwork itself or to the emerging status of the artist.

The first coherent group of artists emerging from Artists Space in the late 1970s came to be called the Pictures Generation, and their work was heavily associated with the idea of representation.³⁴ Artists associated with that group, such as Cindy Sherman, primarily produced artworks that are dependent on clean wall space for proper presentation. Within the framework of alternative exhibition venues, the notion that a space's primary function is to provide walls for hanging art effectively collapses the space of the alternative into that of the individual artworks presented on those walls. In this light, Asher's work for Artists Space reflects a paradigm shift that occurred during the 1980s and that transformed the conception of alternative space. From now on, an alternative space would no longer depend on the interaction between the process of art making and the physical space where art is made or the social space produced in relation to it. If the space of the alternative is relegated to the symbolic space of the artwork, and by the space that representation opens up within this artwork, then wall space—or the wall itself—becomes the alternative space's primary icon. This is where Asher's "service" of extending the walls of an alternative space becomes critical because it emblematically addresses the transformation that alternative spaces were undergoing at that time.

This paradigm shift prompts another question: once the space of the alternative is relegated to representation, is there still a conceptual possibility for an alternative space to exist? Obviously, the issues surrounding how alternative relates to

mainstream and how that relationship becomes manifest in spatial conceptions had already become fairly complex by the early 1980s, and the question cannot be reconciled with a simple yes or no.

Long Island City, NY (February 22, 1999)—Alanna Heiss, Director of P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center and Glenn D. Lowry, Director of The Museum of Modern Art, have announced that they have signed a letter of intent to merge their two institutions. . . . “This is an exciting and logical partnership because of our shared program goals, interests, and commitment to contemporary art,” said Ms. Heiss.”³⁵

Not long after this press release was issued, the merger was officially confirmed, and P.S. 1 became part of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), although it maintains a distinct programming and branding identity that is determined by P.S. 1 itself. The integration of a formerly alternative structure into one of the country’s most iconic art institutions is a perfect example of the shifting relationship between alternative and mainstream. It reflects economic tendencies that were already visible in the 1980s in other cultural sectors, such as the music industry. It is nevertheless stunning that, in the same press release, Glenn Lowry proudly states that “MoMA recognizes that in order to achieve the rich and varied program of contemporary art it wants, P.S. 1 is the ideal match.” In the late 1960s, the Museum of Modern Art had been the primary target of artists’ protests, and places like P.S. 1 were founded as direct alternatives to the constraints of such established art institutions. P.S. 1 was, despite a widely acclaimed renovation followed by a reopening in 1997, struggling economically, and was confronted with the choice of either finding a powerful financial partner or eventually going under. MoMA, on the other hand, was in the midst of an expansion campaign, including an effort to broaden its contemporary programs. With an impressive hundred thousand annual visitors after its reopening, P.S. 1 became “the ideal match” for several reasons. Challenging contemporary exhibitions and programs that MoMA would never present could be shown at a satellite venue far from the museum. P.S. 1 added a spatial and—given its exhibition history—a conceptual “edge” to MoMA’s exhibition program. Furthermore, many spaces in P.S. 1’s building maintained, even after the renovation, a fairly raw physical feel, making for an ideal contrast to MoMA’s more polished, traditional exhibition spaces.³⁶ That contrast will even be more visible after the upcoming extension of MoMA’s Fifty-third Street headquarters.

Toward the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first, the Chelsea warehouse district became the hub of New York’s commercial-gallery sector. Propelled by skyrocketing rents in SoHo and the promise of larger spaces, many existing galleries as well as new start-ups have established themselves in former Chelsea warehouses or garages and have thus, once again, transformed a formerly industrial area into a chic art neighborhood.³⁷ Adapting spatial aesthetics



Louise Lawler, *Paint, Walls, Pictures: Something Always Follows Something Else She Wasn't Always a Statue*, 1997. Installation view at Metro Pictures in Chelsea. Courtesy of Louise Lawler and Metro Pictures.

originally developed by architect Richard Gluckman for the Dia Art Foundation, the new gallery spaces in Chelsea are overwhelmingly defined by concrete floors polished to a mirror shine and walls made from wallboard spackled to perfection. The uniformity of these proliferating spaces almost creates the impression that Manhattan's West Side, from Fourteenth to Twenty-sixth Streets, is a continuous concrete floor interrupted only by loosely placed wallboard structures. Considering the kinds of exhibitions presented in this newly renovated boomtown and the way these spaces accommodate retrograde-style displays of collector-friendly artworks, it sometimes feels as if the alternative art movement had never happened.

Given this rapid expansion of cultural venues, it is difficult to determine if an alternative structure capable of making itself heard or seen could still exist. Certainly, there was a link between spatial transformation and the demise of the alternative arts movement during the mid-1980s. At the time Michael Asher produced his project for Artists Space, that transformation was already well under



Louise Lawler, *Paint, Walls, Pictures: Something Always Follows Something Else She Wasn't Always a Statue*, 1997. Installation view at Metro Pictures in Chelsea. Courtesy of Louise Lawler and Metro Pictures.

way, but many believed into the 1990s that the slow demise of the alternative space was simply a temporary time-out. In fact, some alternative venues from the early period—for example, A.I.R. Gallery and Artists Space—are still active, but their modus operandi and their position in the New York art world have changed dramatically. It is now readily apparent that the alternative space movement, with its roots in the tumultuous upheavals of the 1960s, was contingent on the aesthetic, social, and political positions developed thereafter, and the tight interrelations between the material and symbolic spaces produced as part of that movement are clear indicators of that contingency. The alternative space as we have known it was, first, a time-based phenomenon, and second, it has, due to existing economic, political, and social conditions, become a thing of the past. This apparent obsolescence doesn't mean, however, that there is no longer a need to push the existing boundaries of the established gallery and museum system, especially given current developments in Chelsea. Under the current economic, political, and so-

cial conditions, the questions of what an alternative space is and what form it might take remain to be answered.

Notes

1. Jennifer Licht, *Spaces*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1969), n.p.
2. Licht retrospectively described the situation as follows: "This was a period when many pressure groups, representing various constituencies, were active. (The Art Workers' Coalition, which was a powerful lobby, had . . . already been formed.) Pressure from vocal sources in the art community was probably a significant factor in enabling me to achieve an exhibition that departed from traditional practices at MoMA and was artist oriented." Quoted in Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 87–88.
3. Licht, *Spaces*.
4. Ibid.
5. Robyn Brentano, introduction to *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street: History, Artists, and Artworks*, ed. Robyn Brentano with Mark Savitt (New York: New York University Press, 1981), viii.
6. 112 Workshop and 112 Greene Street were both used as names, as well as the abbreviated 112. For consistency's sake here, I'll use 112 Workshop.
7. The descriptions of artworks in 112 Workshop's inaugural show here are drawn from *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street*, ed. Brentano with Savitt, 3–12.
8. Jeffrey Lew, quoted in *ibid.*, 2.
9. References to "raw" or "rough" in descriptions of 112 Workshop's space can be found in, for example, Brentano with Savitt, eds., *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street*, vii–xi; "112 Greene Street: An Interview with Alan Saret and Jeffrey Lew," *Avalanche* (winter 1971): 12–13; Stephanie T. Edens, "Alternative Spaces—Soho Style," *Art in America* (November–December 1973): 38–39; and Reiss, *From Margin to Center*, 112–20.
10. Brentano with Savitt, eds., *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street*, viii.
11. Catherine Morris, introduction to *Food: An Exhibition by White Columns*, exh. cat. (Münster, Germany: Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, 1999), 12.
12. Caroline Goodden, "The History of Food: Letter from Caroline Goodden to Corinne Diserens, September 5, 1992," in *Food*, 46.
13. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 93.
14. *Ibid.*, 83, 73, 191.
15. Brentano with Savitt, eds., *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street*, vii.
16. Robert Pincus-Witten coined the term *postminimalism* in his essay "Eva Hesse: Post-Minimalism into Sublime," *Artforum* 10, no. 3 (November 1971): 32–44. In contrast to classic minimalist positions such as those articulated by Donald Judd or Dan Flavin, Pincus-Witten pointed out the more embellished and pictorial approach taken by Richard

Serra in his cast-lead pieces and Eva Hesse in her pliable hangings. Among the artists associated with postminimalism are Richard Nonas, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Robert Smithson.

17. Nancy Foote, "The Apotheosis of the Crummy Space," *Artforum* 15, no. 2 (October 1976): 30.

18. Mary Delahoyd, "Seven Alternative Spaces: A Chronicle, 1969–1975," in *Alternatives in Retrospect: An Historical Overview, 1969–1975*, exh. cat. (New York: New Museum, 1981), 16.

19. P.S. 1 press release, February 22, 1999; it announced that P.S. 1 and the Museum of Modern Art signed a letter of intent to merge.

20. Foote, "The Apotheosis of the Crummy Space," 30.

21. Rudolf Baranik, "Is the Alternative Space a True Alternative?," *Studio International* 195, no. 990 (January 1980): 70.

22. Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 77.

23. Brian O'Doherty, "Inside the White Cube: Notes on the Gallery Space," *Artforum* 14, no. 7 (March 1976); "Inside the White Cube: The Eye and the Spectator," *Artforum* 14, no. 8 (April 1976); "Inside the White Cube: Context as Content," *Artforum* 15, no. 3 (November 1976).

24. O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 70, 80.

25. Reesa Greenberg, "The Exhibited Redistributed: A Case for Reassessing Space," *Exhibited*, exh. booklet (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, 1994), 18.

26. O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 81.

27. A 1981 quote from Lucy R. Lippard printed in an A.I.R. Gallery brochure from around 1986.

28. A foldout poster produced for A.I.R. Gallery's inaugural exhibition, September 1972.

29. Press release for A.I.R. Gallery's inaugural exhibition, September 1972.

30. Lucy R. Lippard, "A.I.R." (looseleaf essay accompanying a portfolio of artworks published by A.I.R. Gallery around 1976).

31. This same conception of an alternative space was also relevant for artists excluded from the gallery system because of their ethnicity. It became a basis for New York spaces such as the Studio Museum in Harlem and the Alternative Museum.

32. Susan Wyatt, acknowledgments, in *Michael Asher/James Coleman*, exh. cat. (New York: Artists Space, 1988), 3.

33. Michael Asher, "March 20–April 10, 1976. The Clocktower. The Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Inc. New York, New York," in Michael Asher, *Writings 1973–1983 on Works 1969–1979* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1983), 126, 135.

34. The term "Pictures Generation" was associated with an exhibition titled *Pictures* that was organized by Douglas Crimp for Artists Space and an essay of his that was also

titled "Pictures." The exhibition was on view at Artists Space from September 24 to October 29, 1977, and included works by Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith. The essay was published in *October* magazine (*October* 8 [spring 1979]) and also included the work of Cindy Sherman and others. Eventually, the term was applied as well to other artists showing their work in the context at Janelle Reiring and Helen Winer's gallery, Metro Pictures.

35. P.S. 1 press release, February 22, 1999.

36. The 1997 renovation created a series of spaces that ranged from seamless white galleries to, in some areas, still raw ones. For example, peeling paint in the stairways was not covered up but was instead stabilized, and for the reopening Lucio Pozzi's 1976 panels were reinstalled. Also, several other works originally made for *Rooms* were reinstalled, among them Gordon Matta-Clark's hole through three floors of the building.

37. The Dia Art Foundation opened a four-story exhibition complex in Chelsea in the late 1980s. By the mid-1990s Pat Hearn, who had opened her gallery on the Lower East Side and later moved to SoHo, and Matthew Marks opened the first prominent commercial gallery outlets in the immediate vicinity of Dia. Since then, numerous galleries have moved in—and out—between Fourteenth and Twenty-sixth Streets west of Ninth Avenue.

Sitings of Public Art: Integration versus Intervention

Miwon Kwon

At the juncture of Jerome and Gerard Avenues and 169th Street in the South Bronx, across from the Forty-fourth Precinct police station on one side and facing the elevated subway tracks cutting through the sky on another, exists a small piece of no-man's-land. If not for the conspicuous row of three large concrete cubes flanking one perimeter, this traffic triangle might remain indistinguishable from other slivers of similarly odd-shaped, leftover urban spaces found throughout the city. The cubic plinths are, in fact, the pedestals for three public sculptures by John Ahearn, sponsored by the Percent for Art program of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. Originally designed to serve as the bases for life-size bronze casts of Raymond Garcia (and his pit bull, Toby), Corey Mann, and Daleesha—all Ahearn's neighbors around Walton Avenue in the Bronx from the mid- to late 1980s—the pedestals have remained empty (except for the accumulation of trash and graffiti) for about ten years, since September 25, 1991, to be precise, when the artist himself had the sculptures removed only five days after they were installed, in response to protests raised by some residents and city officials who deemed the works inappropriate for the site.¹

In downtown Manhattan at the juncture of Lafayette and Centre Streets, as they converge to become Nassau Street, exists another more or less triangular plot of public land, officially known as Foley Square. Framed by several formidable government buildings—U.S. Customs Court, Federal Office Building, New York County Court House, and U.S. Court House—the eastern perimeter of Foley Square faces



View of pedestals for sculptures by John Ahearn, South Bronx Sculpture Park site, c. 1992. Photograph by Nancy Owens.



Martha Schwartz, 1997-98. Jacob Javitz Federal Building Plaza. Photograph by Seong H. Kwon.

26 Federal Plaza. This expansive plaza is a set of large green mounds, perfect half-spheres that look like grass-covered igloos. Wrapping around the mounds and reiterating their grassy circular form is a series of serpentine benches, painted bright apple green. Designed by the well-known landscape architect Martha Schwartz, Federal Plaza today is a site with a playful and decorative mix of street furniture and natural materials, a clever reworking of the traditional design elements of urban parks. Seen from above, the plaza is an abstract composition in green, with yards of seating rippling through the space like highly contrived ribbons.

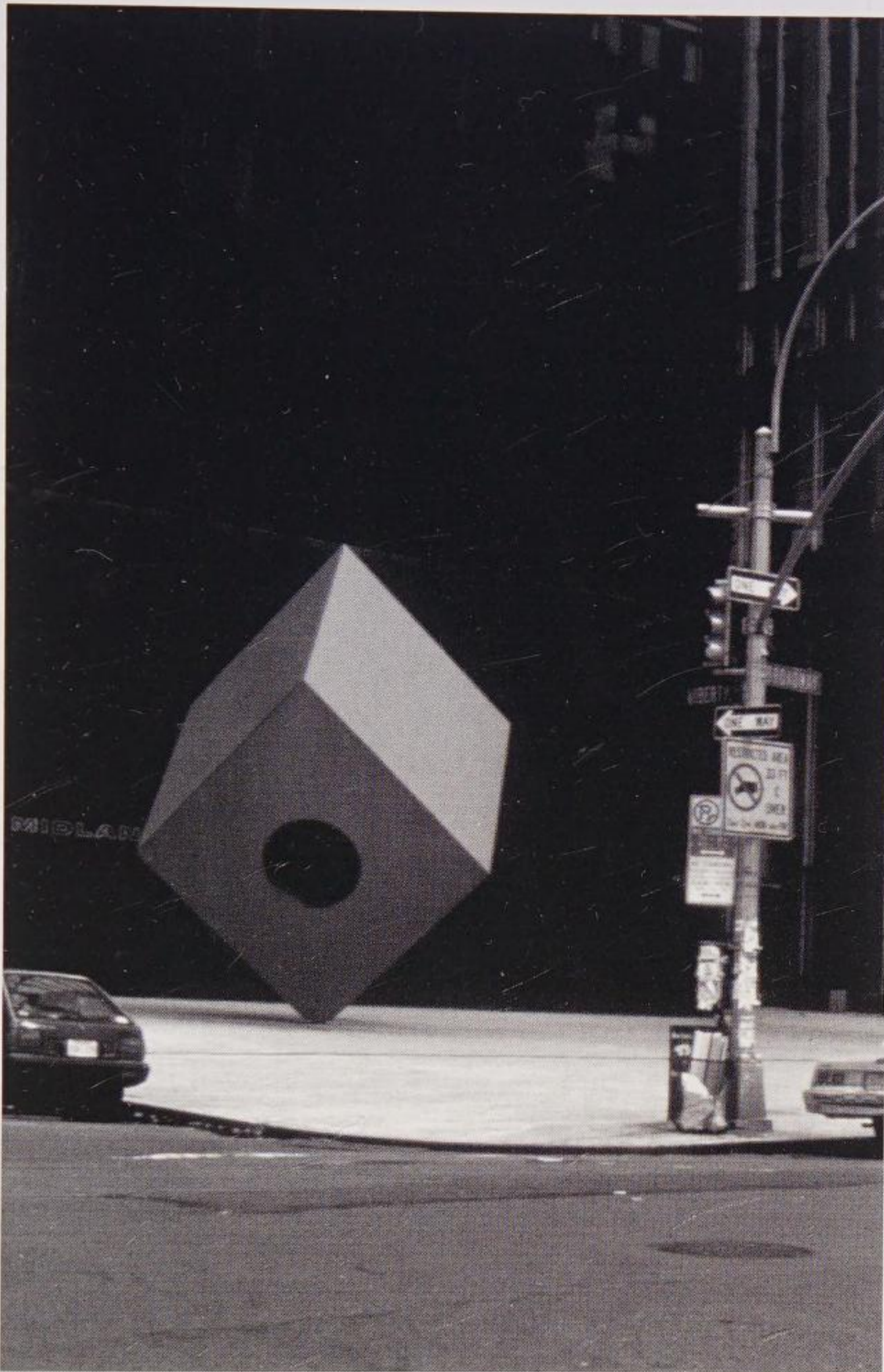
As many will recall, Federal Plaza, full of dynamic colors and user-friendly forms today, was once the site of a rancorous and vehement controversy concerning Richard Serra's steel sculpture *Tilted Arc*. Commissioned by the U.S. General Services Administration in 1979 and installed in 1981, the 12-foot-high, 150-foot-long sculpture was removed on March 15, 1989, after five years of public hearings, lawsuits, and extensive media coverage concerning the legality and appropriateness of such an action. Now, a little over ten years later, the site has experienced a complete makeover. Schwartz's redesign of Federal Plaza has erased all physical and historical traces of *Tilted Arc*.

So I begin here, with the "empty" sites of two "failed" public artworks. The forlorn vacancy of the traffic triangle in the South Bronx and the specious pleasantness of Federal Plaza in lower Manhattan bracket my consideration of the issues surrounding site specificity in the mainstream public art context.² One point to stress at the outset is that even though site-specific modes of art emerged in the mid- to late 1960s—roughly coinciding with the inception of the Art in Architecture Program of the General Services Administration (GSA) in 1963, the Art in Public Places Program of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in 1967, and numerous local and state Percent for Art programs throughout the 1960s—it was not until 1974 that concerns to promote site-specific approaches to public art were first registered within the guidelines of these federal agencies, especially the NEA. This lag indicates that while the term *site-specificity* might move fluidly through various cultures of artistic practice today—museums, galleries, alternative spaces, international biennials, public art programs—the history and implications of the term can be profoundly inconsistent from context to context. One task of this essay, then, is to chart and clarify the trajectory of site specificity within public art. Additionally, I hope to reveal how changing conceptualization of site specificity in public art indexes the transforming criteria by which an artwork's public relevance and its democratic sociopolitical ambitions have been imagined over the past three decades. Our story will concentrate on Ahearn and Serra's cases, to contemplate the meaningfulness of their respective "empty" sites, especially as they signal the limits and capacity of site specificity today.

Three distinct paradigms can be identified within the roughly thirty-five-year history of the “modern” public art movement in the United States.³ First, there is the art-in-public-places model, exemplified by Alexander Calder’s *La Grande Vitesse* (1967) in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the first commission to be completed through the NEA’s Art in Public Places Program. The second paradigm is the art-as-public-spaces approach typified by the design-oriented urban sculptures of Scott Burton, Siah Armajani, Mary Miss, Nancy Holt, and others, which function as street furniture, architectural constructions, or landscaped environments. Finally, there is the art-in-the-public-interest model, so named by the critic Arlene Raven and most cogently theorized by the artist Suzanne Lacy under the rubric “new genre public art.”⁴ Various projects by artists such as John Malpede, Daniel Martinez, Hope Sandrow, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Tim Rollins and K.O.S., and Peggy Diggs, among many others, are distinguished for foregrounding social issues and political activism, and/or for engaging “community” collaborations.⁵

Initially, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, public art was dominated by the art-in-public-places paradigm—modernist abstract sculptures that were often enlarged versions of works normally found in museums and galleries.⁶ These artworks were usually signature pieces by internationally established male artists; Isamu Noguchi, Henry Moore, and Alexander Calder were among those who received the most prominent commissions during this period. In and of themselves, these works had no specific qualities to render them necessarily “public,” except perhaps their size and scale. What legitimated them as “public” art was quite simply their sitings outdoors or in locations deemed to be public primarily because of their “openness” and unrestricted physical access, for example, parks, university campuses, civic centers, entrance areas to federal buildings, plazas off city streets, parking lots, and airports.

In the early 1970s, Henry Moore spoke of his relative indifference to the site, a position representative of many (though not all) artists working in the art-in-public-places mode: “I don’t like doing commissions in the sense that I go and look at a site and then think of something. Once I have been asked to consider a certain place where one of my sculptures might possibly be placed, I try to choose something suitable from what I’ve done or from what I’m about to do. But I don’t sit down and try to create something especially for it.”⁷ So that whether they be voluptuous abstractions of the human body in bronze or marble, colorful agglomerations of biomorphic shapes in steel, or fanciful plays on geometric forms in concrete, modernist public sculptures were conceived as autonomous works of art whose relationship to the site was, at best, incidental. Furthermore, just as the conditions of the site were considered irrelevant in the conception and production of a sculpture (because they functioned as distractions rather than inspirations), they needed to be suppressed at the point of reception as well if the sculpture was to speak forcefully to its viewers. Again in Moore’s words: “To display sculpture to



Isamu Noguchi, *Red Cube*, 1968. Marine Midland Bank Plaza (now HSBC) at Broadway and Liberty Street, New York. Photograph by Miwon Kwon.

its best advantage outdoors, it must be set so that it relates to the sky rather than to trees, a house, people, or other aspects of its surroundings. Only the sky, miles away, allows us to contrast infinity with reality, and so we are able to discover the sculptor's inner scale without comparison."⁸

Thus, the central issue preoccupying the artists of such public commissions (as well as their patrons or sponsors) was the proper placement of the discrete artwork so as best to enhance and showcase its aesthetic qualities. The particular qualities of the site—in this case, “site” refers mainly to a physical, architectural entity—mattered only to the extent that they posed formal compositional challenges. For the architects involved, the artwork was usually considered a beneficial visual supplement, but ultimately an extraneous element, to the integrity of a

building or space. For their part, many of the artists regarded the site as a “ground” or “pedestal” on which, or against which, the priority of the “figure” of the artwork would be articulated. Such thinking was predicated on a strict separation between art and architecture (synonymous with the site) as two autonomous fields of practice, and it promoted a complementary visual contrast as the defining (formal) relationship between the two.

By bringing the “best” in contemporary art to a wider audience, by siting examples of it in “public” places, endeavors like the GSA’s Art in Architecture Program, the NEA’s Art in Public Places Program, and the local and state Percent for Art programs sought to promote the aesthetic edification of the American public and to beautify the urban environment.⁹ Public artworks were meant to play a supplementary but crucial role in ameliorating what were perceived to be the ill effects of the repetitive, monotonous, and functionalist style of modernist architecture. The inclusion of artists within architectural design teams for the development of urban spaces in the art-as-public-spaces mode of practice, our second paradigm, continued to be based on the belief that the artist’s “humanizing” influence could rectify the sense of alienation and disaffection engendered by the “inhuman” urban landscape of modernism.¹⁰ In other words, public art at this point was conceived as a direct antidote to modernist architecture and urban design.

Such expectations fueled the art-in-public-places phenomenon across the United States by the late 1970s.¹¹ Art historian Sam Hunter described the proliferation of monumental abstract public sculptures in cities nationwide in these terms:

In the seventies the triumph of the new public art was firmly secured. Almost any new corporate or municipal plaza worthy of its name deployed an obligatory large-scale sculpture, usually in a severely geometric, Minimalist style; or where more conservative tastes prevailed and funds were more generous, one might find instead a recumbent figure in bronze by Henry Moore or one of Jacques Lipchitz’s mythological creatures. Today there is scarcely an American city of significant size boasting an urban-renewal program that lacks one or more large, readily identifiable modern sculptures to relieve the familiar stark vistas of concrete, steel, and glass.¹²

Yet despite the initial enthusiasm, the art-in-public-places approach began receiving criticism as early as the mid-1970s for offering little in the way of either aesthetic edification or urban beautification. Many critics and artists argued that autonomous signature-style artworks sited in public places functioned more like extensions of the museum or gallery, advertising individual artists and their accomplishments (and by extension their patrons’ status) rather than truly engaging the public.¹³ They further argued that despite the physical accessibility, public art remained resolutely inaccessible since the prevalent style of modernist abstraction was indecipherable, uninteresting, and meaningless to a general audience. The art-

work's seeming indifference to the particular conditions of the site and/or its proximate audience was reciprocated by the public's indifference, even hostility, toward not only the foreignness of abstract art's visual language but also its "aloof" and "haughty" physical presence in public places. Instead of being a welcome reprieve in the flow of everyday urban life, public art seemed to be an unwanted imposition completely disengaged from it. Many critics, artists, and sponsors agreed that, at best, public art was a pleasant visual contrast to the rationalized regularity of its surroundings, providing a nice decorative effect. At worst, it was an empty trophy commemorating the powers and riches of the dominant class—a "corporate bauble" or "architectural jewelry." And as the increase in private corporate sponsorship of public art became associated with the expansion of corporate real estate developments motivated by profits, dividends, and tax write-offs rather than with any genuine interest in the public good, pressures to rehabilitate the art-in-public-places programs increased.¹⁴

One of the key solutions to these interconnected problems of public art's public relations and its minimal improvement of the urban environment was the adoption of site-specific principles. Indeed, it was in reaction to the glut of ornamental "plop art" and the monumental "object-off-the-pedestal" paradigm, that, for instance, the NEA changed its guidelines in 1974 to stipulate, even if somewhat vaguely, that public artworks needed to be "appropriate to the immediate site."¹⁵ Two of the NEA's initial goals in 1965 had been (1) to support individual artists of exceptional talent and demonstrated ability and (2) to provide the public with opportunities to experience the best of American contemporary art. The new mandates at all levels of public art sponsorship and funding now stipulated that the specifics of the site should influence, if not determine, the artistic outcome.¹⁶ Thus, despite the numerous pragmatic and bureaucratic difficulties inherent in commissioning new artworks (certainly it is simpler to purchase existing ones), the support for site-specific approaches to public art, favoring the creation of unique and unrepeatable aesthetic responses tailored to specific locations within a city, became fairly quickly institutionalized.¹⁷ In the minds of those intimately engaged with the public art industry at the time, including artists, administrators, and critics, establishing a direct formal link between the material configuration of the artwork and the existing physical conditions of the site—instead of emphasizing their disconnection or autonomy—seemed like a very good idea. Such an approach was advocated as an important step toward making artworks more accessible and socially responsible, that is, more "public."

Interestingly, the issue of modernist abstract art's interpretive (in)accessibility was defined as a spatial problem by many in the public art field in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For example, Janet Kardon, the curator of the 1980 exhibition *Urban Encounters: Art Architecture Audience*, claimed in her catalog essay that

The way the abstract artwork relates to the space of the passer-by is one key to the negative reception that has become a kind of certificate of merit among modern artists. . . . It unsettles perceptions and does not reassure the viewer with an easily shared idea or subject. . . . Entry [into a work] is facilitated when the public perceives the work as performing some useful task, whether it is simply that of shade and seating, or something even remotely associated with the sense of leisure. To be guided through space in a way that rewards the passer-by is of prime value to the public.¹⁸

Another contributor to the same exhibition catalog, Nancy Foote, took the notion of “entry” more literally, going so far as to assert that only site-specific works that “invite the audience in,” both physically *and* iconographically, reveal a public commitment.¹⁹ Similarly, critics Kate Linker and Lawrence Alloway believed that art that becomes integrated with the physical site offers the greatest sustainability as well as potential for fluid communication and interaction with a general non-art audience. According to Linker: “To the absence of a shared iconography, it suggests the shareable presence of space. . . . Just as use insures relevance, so the appeal to space as a social experience, communal scope, individual response, may insure a larger measure of support.”²⁰ In the writings of these critics’ from the early 1980s, physical access or entry *into* an artwork is imagined to be equivalent to hermeneutic access for the viewer.

The move toward a programmatic enforcement of an integrated relationship between the artwork and its site, however, continued to be based on a kind of architectural determinism that is endemic to most urban-beautification efforts. Such deterministic thinking reinforces the belief in an unmediated causal relationship between the aesthetic quality of the built environment and the quality of social conditions therein. Consequently, the type of site specificity stipulated by the NEA, GSA, and other public art agencies was directed toward spatial integration and harmonious design.²¹ By now, artists were asked not only to focus on the conditions of the built environment but also to contribute their “humane” influence toward the design of unified and coherent urban spaces. This is partly why, by the end of the 1970s, the NEA endorsed a “wide range of possibilities for art in public situations”—“any permanent media, including earthworks, environmental art, and nontraditional media, such as artificial lighting”²²—in order not only to accommodate the changing artistic trends of the period but also to align public art more with the production of public amenities and site-oriented projects. Essentially, this was a mandate for public art to be more like architecture and environmental design.

This integrationist goal was further strengthened when the NEA guidelines were modified once again in 1982; its Visual Art and Design Programs officially combined their efforts to encourage collaboration between visual artists and design professionals. Public art would no longer be just an autonomous sculpture



I. M. Pei and Partners, lobby atrium of the Wiesner Arts and Media Building at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Bench and railing by Scott Burton, color pattern design on interior walls by Kenneth Noland, exterior plaza paving design by Richard Fleischner, 1985. Copyright Steve Rosenthal.

but would be in some kind of meaningful dialogue with, maybe even be coincident with, the surrounding architecture and/or landscape. This approach to site-specific public art was readily adopted by a number of artists, including Athena Tacha, Ned Smyth, Andrea Blum, Siah Armajani, Elyn Zimmerman, and Scott Burton. Unsatisfied with the decorative function of public art in the earlier art-in-public-places model, and excited by the opportunity to pursue their work outside the confines of museums and galleries at an unprecedented scale and complexity (and with the expectation of addressing a much larger and broader audience), many artists were eager to accept, or at least test, the design-team directive. Ideally,

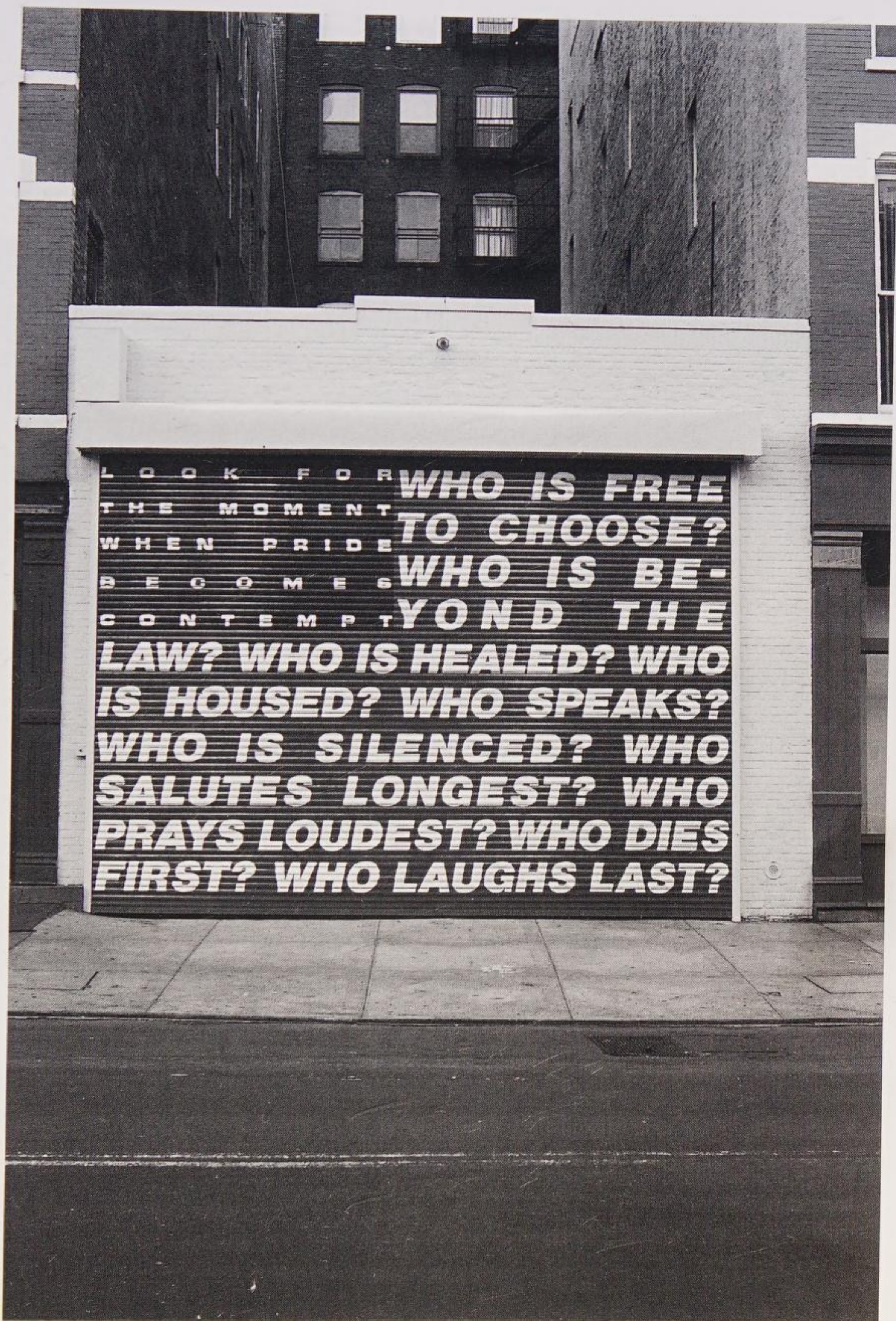
they would now share responsibilities on equal footing with architects and urban planners in making design decisions about public spaces.²³

Adopted in the process was a functionalist ethos that prioritized public art's use-value over its aesthetic-value, or measured its aesthetic-value in terms of use-value. This shift, predicated on the desire of many artists and public art agencies to reconcile the division between art and utility—in order to render public art more accessible, accountable, and relevant to the “public”—conflated the artwork's use-value, narrowly defined in relation to such simple physical needs as seating and shading, with social responsibility. As the critic Rosalyn Deutsche has argued, physical utility was reductively and broadly equated with social benefit with this kind of art, and “social activity [was] constricted to narrow problem solving so that the provision of useful objects automatically collapsed into a social good.”²⁴

This collapse was explicit in much public art of the 1980s that used the collaborative design-team model, and it was especially notable in the work and words of Scott Burton and his supporters.²⁵ Many artists and critics alike seemed to think that the more an artwork “disappeared” into the site, either by appropriating urban street furniture—benches and tables, street lamps, manhole covers, fencing, and so on—or by mimicking familiar architectural elements—gateways, columns, floors, walls, stairways, bridges, urban plazas, lobbies, parks—the greater its social value. At the same time, artists such as Les Levine, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Group Material, Guerrilla Girls, and Dennis Adams, among many others, were exploring alternative strategies of adopting existing urban forms as sites of artistic intervention. But their appropriation of different modes of public address, particularly those of media and advertising, including billboards, newspapers, and television, usually for the purposes of deconstructing or redirecting their familiar function, did not garner the same kind of official support within the public art industry until later in the 1980s.²⁶ Meanwhile, the more an artwork abandoned its distinctive look of modernist art to assimilate into the site (as defined by the conventions of architecture and urban design), the more it was hailed a progressive artistic gesture.

It was against this prevailing definition of site specificity—one of unified and useful urban design, simultaneously imagined as a model of social harmony and unity—that Richard Serra proposed a counterdefinition with his massive, wall-like steel sculpture, *Tilted Arc*. As early as 1980, several years before he was forced to consolidate his thoughts on site specificity to defend his sculpture for the Federal Plaza site, he explicitly rejected the then widespread tendency of public sculpture to accommodate architectural design. He declared:

There seems to be in this country right now, especially in sculpture, a tendency to make work which attends to architecture. I am not interested in work which is structurally ambiguous, or in sculpture which satisfies urban design principles. I have always found that to be not only an aspect of mannerism but a need to reinforce a



Barbara Kruger, 1991. Installation at Mary Boone Gallery. Courtesy of Mary Boone Gallery, New York.

status quo of existing aesthetics. . . . I am interested in sculpture which is non-utilitarian, non-functional . . . any use is a misuse.²⁷

Considering such an aggressive statement in light of GSA's guidelines of the same period—"Such [public art] works are intended to be an integral part of the



Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled*, 1991. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Photograph by Peter Muscato.

total architectural design and enhance the building's environment for the occupants and the general public"²⁸—it's surprising that Serra was even considered for the Federal Plaza commission in the first place. But the incongruity only reminds us of the discrepancy at the heart of the selection process at the time, that is, the discrepancy between the values of the committee of art experts, who responded to Serra's established international reputation as an artist, and the criteria guiding the GSA administrators, who deferred to the experts on questions of artistic merit.

In any case, as the critics Rosalyn Deutsche and Douglas Crimp have separately affirmed, Serra indeed proposed an interruptive and interventionary model of site specificity, quite explicitly opposed to an integrationist or assimilative one.²⁹ Deutsche has argued that public art discourse's use of the term *site specificity* to connote the creation of harmonious spatial totalities is close to a "terminological abuse," insofar as site-specific art emerged from "the imperative to interrupt, rather than secure, the seeming coherence and closure of those spaces [of the artwork's display]."³⁰ In her view, *Tilted Arc* reasserted the critical basis of site specificity, countering its neutralization in the public art of the 1980s. As such, Serra's work revealed the incompatibility of site specificity with the objectives held by the GSA.

My concern here, however, is not so much to establish the right or wrong definition of site specificity as to examine how competing definitions emerge and operate in the public art field, and to assess their varied artistic, social, and political implications and consequences. The terms of Serra's "critical" or "political" site specificity, in fact, remain more ambiguous than one might expect.³¹ This is largely due to the emphasis placed on permanence as a foundational attribute of site specificity during the *Tilted Arc* controversy. Serra himself mounted his argument against the "relocation" of his sculpture on the premise that, first and foremost, site-specific art has an inviolable physical tie to its site. Hence, to remove the work is to destroy it. He insisted throughout and after the controversy that

Tilted Arc was conceived from the start as a site-specific sculpture and was not meant to be "site-adjusted" or . . . "relocated." Site-specific works deal with the environmental components of given places. The scale, size, and location of site-specific works are determined by the topography of the site, whether it be urban or landscape or architectural enclosure. The works become part of the site and restructure both conceptually and perceptually the organization of the site.³²

This is an oft-quoted passage from his article "*Tilted Arc* Destroyed," originally published in *Art in America* in May 1989, soon after the sculpture was removed from Federal Plaza. But while the insistence on permanence during the court hearings might have had some legal exigency, the priority given to the issue has obscured certain other aspects of *Tilted Arc*'s site specificity.³³ For instance, Serra seems to emphasize the physical relationship between the artwork and site in comments

such as the following: “The specificity of site-oriented works means that they are conceived for, dependent upon, and inseparable from their locations. The scale, the size, and the placement of sculptural elements result from an analysis of the particular environmental components of a given context.” But, he continues, “The preliminary analysis of a given site takes into consideration not only formal but also social and political characteristics of the site. Site-specific works invariably manifest a judgment about the larger social and political context of which they are a part.”³⁴

In other words, the site is imagined as a social and political construct as well as a physical one. More important, Serra envisions not a relationship of smooth continuity between the artwork and its site but an antagonistic one in which the artwork performs a proactive interrogation—“manifest[s] a judgment” (presumably negative)—of the site’s sociopolitical conditions. Indeed, rather than fulfilling



Richard Serra, *Tilted Arc*, 1981–89. Copyright 2001 Richard Serra/Artists Rights Society, New York. Photograph by Susan Swider, New York.

an ameliorative function in relation to the site, *Tilted Arc* aggressively cut across and divided it. (No seating, shading, or other physical accommodations here.) In doing so, as its proponents pointed out, *Tilted Arc* literalized the social divisions, exclusions, and fragmentation that manicured and aesthetically tamed public spaces generally disguise. In destroying the illusion of Federal Plaza as a coherent spatial totality, Serra underscored its already dysfunctional status as a public space.

According to Serra, it is only by working against the given site in this way that art can resist co-optation.

Works which are built within the contextual frame of governmental, corporate, educational, and religious institutions run the risk of being read as tokens of those institutions. . . . Every context has its frame and its ideological overtones. It is a matter of degree. But there are sites where it is obvious that an art work is being subordinated to/accommodated to/adapted to/subservient to/useful to. . . . In such cases it is necessary to work in opposition to the constraints of the context so that the work cannot be read as an affirmation of questionable ideologies and political power. I am not interested in art as affirmation complicity.³⁵

Thus, in Serra's practice, site specificity is constituted as a *precise discomposure* between the artwork and its site. And this discomposure—which is antithetical both to the notion of art and architecture's complementary juxtaposition (as in the art-in-public-places model) and to that of their seamless continuity (as in the art-as-public-spaces model)—is intended to bring into relief the repressed social contradictions that underlie public spaces, such as Federal Plaza, rendering them perceptible, thus knowable, to the viewing subjects of the sculpture.

In Serra's case, this critical function of site-specific art is directly tied to a critique of the medium-specific concerns of modernist art.³⁶ As Serra explained, "Unlike modernist works that give the illusion of being autonomous from their surroundings, and which function critically only in relation to the language of their own medium, site-specific works emphasize the comparison between two separate languages and can therefore use the language of one to criticize the language of the other."³⁷ So in addition to working against the physical and socio-political conditions of the site, the artwork simultaneously addresses the site itself as another *medium*, an "other language." Put a little differently, working against the site coincides with working against the modernist illusion of artistic autonomy. In Serra's case, the "other" to his own language of sculpture is architecture. And architecture, in turn, serves as the material manifestation of "questionable ideologies and political power," which Serra seeks to expose and subvert. So in the end, working site specifically means working against architecture.³⁸

To opponents of *Tilted Arc* in the mid-1980s, however, the nuances of such aesthetic concerns did not matter much. In fact, supportive testimonies voicing

the importance of this “great work of art,” or advocating the right of the artist to pursue free expression without governmental interference or censorship, were countered by resentful commentaries of varying animosity.³⁹ Some regarded the sculpture as ugly and brutal, without any artistic merit. Some found its presence on the plaza physically and psychologically oppressive. And a few waxed nostalgic over the past uses of a (falsely remembered) vitally active public plaza (an “oasis of respite and relaxation”),⁴⁰ accusing *Tilted Arc* of destroying this past, of violating a public amenity.⁴¹ A security expert even testified on the ways the sculpture created an impediment to surveillance, encouraging loitering, graffiti, and possible terrorist bomb attacks.

Complaints of this type were presented as the voices of “the people” during the 1985 hearings, and government officials in charge of the proceedings presumed to speak for the public—on behalf of its needs and interests—in their call for removal of the sculpture. They characterized *Tilted Arc* as an arrogant and highly inappropriate assertion of a private self on public grounds. The sculpture was viewed, in other words, as another kind of plop art. At the same time, despite the artist’s ardent efforts to maintain a certain “uselessness” for his sculpture (or actually because so), *Tilted Arc* was instrumentalized by its opponents as a symbol of the overbearing imposition of the federal government (which sponsored the sculpture) on the lives of “ordinary” citizens and “their” spaces. In the end, the removal of *Tilted Arc* was characterized as tantamount to the reclaiming of public space by the “community”—narrowly defined as those living or working in the immediate neighborhoods around Federal Plaza.⁴²

While similarly intense debates have accompanied the unveiling of numerous public artworks in the past,⁴³ the *Tilted Arc* episode vividly demonstrated that public art is not simply a matter of giving “public access to the best art of our times outside museum walls.”⁴⁴ In fact, much more was riding on the *Tilted Arc* case than the fate of a single artwork. Unlike previous public art disputes, this controversy, one of the most high-profile battles in the broad-based culture wars that began in the 1980s, put to the test the very life of public funding for the arts in the United States.⁴⁵ This is why critics like Deutsche have insisted that conflicts such as the one over *Tilted Arc* reveal the extent to which public art discourse functions as a site of political struggle over the meaning of democracy.⁴⁶

Perhaps recognizing the political stakes more self-consciously than ever, public art practitioners and administrators undertook major soul-searching after the *Tilted Arc* debate, reexamining the fundamental questions regarding the goals and procedures of public art. For even if the various testimonies against *Tilted Arc* could be dismissed as just a bunch of uninformed populist thinking, or as motivated by corrupt reactionary politics, or as simply wrongheaded, some complaints had to be taken seriously for at least two reasons.



Richard Serra, *Tilted Arc*, 1981–89. Copyright 2001 Richard Serra/Artists Rights Society, New York. Photograph by Anne Chauvet, Paris.

First, it was a matter of survival. In the tide of neoconservative Republicanism during the 1980s, with the attack on governmental funding for the arts (on the NEA in particular) reaching a hysterical pitch by 1989, public art programs had to re-strategize in order to avoid elimination or complete privatization (which might amount to the same thing). Second, even those public art professionals most sympathetic to Serra's cause had to recognize there was a bit of truth in some of the criticism. For the point of contestation that mattered most was not so much the artistic merit of Serra's sculpture but the exclusionary (some said elitist) commissioning procedures of public art agencies such as the GSA and the NEA. Congressman Theodore Weiss had testified against *Tilted Arc* during the hearings in these terms:

Tilted Arc was imposed upon this neighborhood without discussion, without prior consultation, without any of the customary dialogue that one expects between government and its people. The National Endowment for the Arts panel of three selected the artist and a three person group from the General Services Administration in Washington, D.C., approved the design. No one else—not from the community or its representatives, not the architects, not even the Regional Administrators—was ever consulted. These panels, no matter how expert or how well-intentioned, are not so omnipotent or infallible in their judgments that they cannot be challenged or improved upon.⁴⁷

Arguably, the seeds of this argument—that *Tilted Arc* was inappropriate to its site because the top-down decision-making process, dictated by small review panels of art experts and bureaucrats did not involve the members of the local community—has had the most far-reaching impact on the direction of the public art discourse of the 1990s. Even before the blowup over *Tilted Arc*, some artists and administrators had recognized that the site of a public artwork had to be imagined beyond its physical attributes and that, ideally, the work should engage the site socially, instigating “community involvement.” But at first, this concern for the community was primarily motivated by the need to forestall a potentially hostile reception of certain public artworks. In 1979, for example, when the NEA requested that its grant recipients provide “methods to insure an informed community response to the project,” the community was still conceived as an inadequately prepared audience.⁴⁸ The community, in other words, needed to be engaged in order to soften its members to the “best art of our time,” to educate them in its proper interpretation and appreciation (not unlike the way audience groups are commonly treated in museums).⁴⁹

But by the late 1980s, and certainly by the time *Tilted Arc* was removed, community involvement meant more. At the bureaucratic level, it meant the expanded inclusion of non-art community representatives in the selection panels and review

committees of public art commissions. More significantly, it suggested a dialogue between the artist and his or her immediate audience, with the possibilities of community participation, even collaboration, in the making of the artwork. For many artists and administrators with long-standing commitments to community-based practices since the 1960s—or what the artist Suzanne Lacy has retroactively called “new genre public art”—an intensive engagement with the people of the site, involving direct communication and interaction over an extended period of time, had been a well-established tenet of a socially responsible and ethically sound form of public art. That such a model of public art was marginalized, even denigrated, by the official public art establishment for more than three decades⁵⁰ must have made the *Tilted Arc* debate a point of profound ambivalence for many community-oriented practitioners. Even though some public artists and administrators were traumatized by the *Tilted Arc* controversy and its outcome, the sculpture's removal from Federal Plaza, when viewed as a triumphant rejection of “high art” by “the people,” also signaled an implicit validation of the community-oriented approach to public art.⁵¹

The discursive emergence of new genre public art in 1989, in fact, coincided with the removal of *Tilted Arc*,⁵² and Lacy refers to the *Tilted Arc* case as an instance in which “office workers’ demands to remove the sculpture from the site in a civic plaza led to calls for greater public accountability by artists.” The controversy is cast as an exemplary instance of “the conventions of artistic expression . . . com[ing] into conflict with public opinion” and public opinion winning.⁵³ Of course, such a reading of the *Tilted Arc* incident unquestioningly accepts the terms of the debate as defined by the sculpture's opponents. It challenges instead Serra's critique of conventions of artistic expression as itself conventional. In the view of many public artists and administrators, Serra did little to complicate, for instance, the security of individual authorship; in fact, during the hearings, he seemed to argue for its inviolability against the wishes of “the public.” Moreover, they saw that Serra's artistic pursuit, no matter how complex and genuine its critical engagement with the site and its sociopolitical issues, was still driven primarily by art-specific concerns that had little bearing on the lives of the people who constitute the actual, rather than abstract or metaphorical, reality of the site. Therefore the radicalizing effects of his artwork remained narrowly confined to art discourse only, legible to a limited, art-educated audience, appreciated most notably by a small group of influential voices professionally ensconced in art criticism, art history, and the museum world.

Indeed, Lacy implicates Serra in such statements as: “Although the move to exhibit art in public places was a progressive one, the majority of artists accommodated themselves to the established museum system, continuing to focus their attention on art critics and museum-going connoisseurs.”⁵⁴ The critic Jeff Kelley also implicates Serra when he says, “Site specificity was more like the imposition

of a kind of disembodied museum zone onto what already had been very meaningful and present before that, which was the place.”⁵⁵ Contrary to the arguments presented by numerous art experts confirming the radical nature of *Tilted Arc*'s aesthetic and social critique, then, those aligned with community-based public art did not find the work radical enough.⁵⁶ Insofar as Serra never opens up the creative process to a collaborative or dialogical exchange with the “community” (he has in fact disdained the need for art to please its audience as well as its sponsors), and insofar as the sculpture's particular form of criticality coalesces as Serra's “signature,” his work is held to have no impact on the hermetic boundaries of the art world and its institutionalized hierarchies of value. From this point of view, works such as *Tilted Arc* are unwanted encroachments of “art world” values into the spaces of everyday life and people, and an individual's artistic concerns are, by definition, antithetical to a socially progressive way of thinking. In this way, a peculiar alignment developed between the “authoritarian populism” on the right and the community advocacy of the “new genre public art” type on the left.⁵⁷ Both rejected a certain kind of “critical” art in the name of “the people.”⁵⁸

By spring 1986, a little over a year after the *Tilted Arc* hearings, the directive to involve the community in the public art process was being taken more seriously in New York City and elsewhere; the NEA had already assumed the lead in 1983 with instructions to include “plans for community involvement, preparation, and dialogue.”⁵⁹ So that when it came to choosing an artist for the Percent for Art commission at the Forty-fourth Precinct police station in the South Bronx, John Ahearn was an “obvious choice” for the selection panel, which now included several representatives from outside the art world.⁶⁰ According to Tom Finkelpearl, former director of New York City's Percent for Art program, “[Ahearn] was an obvious choice because he lived close to the station, enjoyed a good critical reputation, and had already spent many years interacting with the community. . . . He was well acquainted with the specific nature of the community within which the commission was sited, and worked in a figurative style that is considered accessible.” Ahearn represented the antithesis of Serra, or in Finkelpearl's words, he “fit the mold for the ‘post-Serra’ artist perfectly.”⁶¹

Certainly, the differences between the two artists are striking. Serra rose to prominence in the late 1960s, with the emergence of postminimalism and process art in particular, as part of the American neo-avant-garde generation. Art historians and art institutions worldwide consider him one of the most important sculptors of the twentieth century. Ahearn found an audience in the late 1970s and early 1980s during the rise of the alternative art movements in the East Village and the Bronx. He remains biographically linked to the South Bronx and is modestly self-described as an “itinerant portrait painter.”⁶²

The most significant difference relevant to our discussion, however, is the fact



Closing party for *South Bronx Hall of Fame*, by John Ahearn, at Fashion Moda. Copyright 1979 Lisa Kahane.

that whereas Serra intended an aggressively interruptive function for his sculpture on Federal Plaza, Ahearn sought an assimilative one for his trio of bronze figures at the Jerome Avenue traffic triangle. He imagined a continuity rather than a rupture between his sculptures and the social life of the neighborhood where the works were to be displayed and to which they “belonged.” This is not to say that Ahearn ignored the potential for conflict with, specifically, the Forty-fourth Precinct police officers. After all, few of them had hoped for an artwork depicting the local police presence as congenial and welcomed. But Ahearn’s acknowledgment of the police as a key audience group only deepened his commitment to creating an accurate and humane representation of the site’s reality as he knew it. He wanted to counter the prevalent negative stereotypes of the Bronx (harbored by the police and promoted by the mass media) as a place of urban decay and economic devastation, as a dangerous and violent place infested with drug dealers, criminals, prostitutes, gangs, and disease.⁶³ Instead, he wanted his work to embody what he called the “South Bronx attitude”—resilient, proud, unpretentious, and “real.”⁶⁴



John Fekner, *Decay*, 1980. Photograph from South Bronx (August 5, 1980). Original caption read: "Already famous for its visiting politicians, the Charlotte Street urban ruin in the South Bronx gets still another visitor—GOP presidential candidate Ronald Reagan. Reagan picks his way through the rubble of Charlotte Street." Courtesy UPI/Corbis-Bettmann. Photograph by Norman Currie.

In attempting to capture the authenticity of the site in this way, Ahearn in effect intended a different model of site specificity, a community-based realism that countered the example of Serra's *Tilted Arc*, which itself was a counter position to the art-as-public-spaces model of public art.

Clearly, Ahearn understood that to produce a mural or any other architectural embellishment for the new police station, as was suggested to him at an early stage of the commission, would be a terrible mistake.⁶⁵ In fact, it was his decision, and not that of the Department of Cultural Affairs or the Department of General Services (DGS), to work with the dead space of the traffic triangle facing the station precisely in order to *confront* it rather than be part of it. At some level, he had internalized Serra's earlier observation that "Works which are built within the contextual frame of governmental, corporate, educational, and religious institutions run the risk of being read as tokens of those institutions."⁶⁶ But while Ahearn resisted making his artwork a token of various institutions of power, privilege, and

authority—that is, the police, the Department of Cultural Affairs, the art world—he actively sought ways to submit his artwork to, to put it in service of, the largely African American and Puerto Rican community of his neighborhood. He attempted to resist the function of site-specific public art to support the ideologies and political power of dominant social groups, affirming instead his allegiance to those groups disempowered and marginalized by these ideologies and power.

The artist's identification with the local community of blacks, Hispanics, and Latinos developed more or less organically over a decade. Since 1980 Ahearn had been living on Walton Avenue between 171st and 172nd Streets, just a few blocks from the traffic triangle. Even as his artistic career ascended through the decade, with exhibitions in legitimate art-world venues, he maintained the center of his art and life there in a sixth-floor slum apartment. He produced most of his art right on the street: he regularly set up shop on the sidewalk outside his studio, casting portraits of neighborhood residents, including many children and teenagers, who often contributed comments on how they would like to be represented. By making two copies of every portrait, one for him to keep and the other to be taken home by the sitter, Ahearn devised a very specific economy of intimate exchange and local distribution of his art. Even as he exhibited and sold some of the portraits as fine art through his SoHo gallery, he also made sure they became part of the everyday culture of his neighborhood, proudly displayed by individuals in their living rooms, bedrooms, kitchens, and dining rooms.

In many street-casting sessions, Ahearn collaborated with Rigoberto (Robert) Torres, an artist from the neighborhood whom he met in 1979 after an exhibition of his relief sculptures at Fashion Moda, an alternative gallery space that had opened the year before at 2803 Third Avenue in the South Bronx.⁶⁷ Between 1981 and 1985, Torres and Ahearn together produced four very popular sculptural murals for the sides of tenement buildings—*We Are Family* (1982), *Life on Dawson Street* (1983), *Double Dutch* (1982), and *Back to School* (1985)—that depict quotidian aspects of life in the neighborhood. Even though some art critics judged these wall works and other cast pieces as overly sentimental, and even though the artist himself worried at times that they were too much like folk art, as long as the work made his neighbors “happy,” Ahearn thought of them as achieving more meaningful and difficult goals than what is usually expected of an artwork. In his words, the “discipline of ‘happy’ is just as important as the discipline of ‘strong’ or ‘tough,’” and the cast sculptures made to please a neighbor are “purer than something with too much of myself in it, something individual.”⁶⁸

After years of intimate collaborative exchanges and in situ interactions, Ahearn naturally considered himself integral to the culture of the neighborhood. As Jane Kramer put it in her lengthy *New Yorker* article on this South Bronx project (later published as a book), the artist believed that, with Torres, he was “part of what was happening in the Bronx, part of the integrity of the neighborhood, and solidly



John Ahearn, *Sidewalk Series*, 1988. Life-casting workshop, South Bronx. Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York. Copyright Ivan Dalla Tana.



John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres, Walton Avenue Block Party in front of *Back to School*, 1985. Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York. Copyright Ivan Dalla Tana.

at home.”⁶⁹ Because Ahearn’s personal history and sense of identity were linked to the location, he saw the Jerome Avenue traffic triangle site not as an abstract formal entity but as an extension of his own community. And this continuity is what made Ahearn such an “obvious choice” for the Department of Cultural Affairs as well as other city agencies and committees, including the Bronx Community Board Four, which reviewed the maquettes for the project in 1990 and gave its “community” approval without hesitation.

Ironically, the subsequent attacks against Ahearn and the sculptures, which ultimately led to their removal, were based on the argument that neither belonged to the “community” and that the sculptures were inappropriate for the site. At one end were officials from the Department of General Services who were overseeing the station building project as a whole. Arthur Symes, a black architect, who had recently become DGS assistant commissioner in charge of design and construction management, and Claudette LaMelle, a black administrator and executive assistant to the DGS commissioner, felt that Ahearn’s outstanding reputation as an artist and his track record living and working in the South Bronx notwithstanding, Ahearn, as a white man, could never understand the experience of the African American “community.” Thus he had no capacity to represent it accurately for or in the Bronx. They charged that, in fact, the sculptures were racist.⁷⁰ On the other end were the complaints of a small group of residents from an apartment building at the traffic triangle who found the sculptures an absolute misrepresentation of *their* community. They accused Ahearn of glorifying illegitimate members of the community, or “roof people,” according to Mrs. Salgado, the most vocal opponent of the sculptures. In their eyes, Ahearn had literally and symbolically elevated the derelict, criminal, and delinquent elements of the community. They argued that he promoted the outsider’s view of the Bronx with negative stereotypes (Ahearn’s two male figures especially), and that with these sculptures, he affirmed the police’s distorted perceptions of the community, exacerbating already tense relations.

In Ahearn’s view, of course, the three sculptures—of Daleesha, a black teenage girl on roller skates; Corey, a large shirtless black man leaning over a boom box, holding a basketball; and Raymond, a slender Puerto Rican man in a hooded sweat-shirt, squatting next to his pit bull, Toby—represented a certain truth about the neighborhood. Perhaps it was not a truth everyone would want to embrace, but it was an indigenous truth nonetheless. He found Daleesha, Corey, and Raymond, all of whom he knew personally, the last two as friends, appropriate subjects to commemorate as survivors of the mean streets. He wanted to capture their humanity and make its beauty visible to the policemen of the Forty-fourth Precinct as well as to the neighbors in hopes of reducing the distrust and hostility between them. As Kramer noted: “[Ahearn] wanted the police to acknowledge them, and he wanted the neighbors, seeing them cast in bronze and up on pedestals, to stop and think about who they were. . . . John wanted them to stand in something of the same relation to the precinct policemen that they do to him and the neigh-



John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres, *We Are Family*, 1982. Permanent installation at 877 Interval Avenue, South Bronx. Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York. Copyright Ivan Dalla Tana.

bors. They may be trouble, but they are human, and they are there.”⁷¹ Despite Ahearn’s earnest intentions, however, the sculptures provoked anger rather than empathy among many neighbors.⁷² In fact, the sculptures were seen as an insult to the community in that they depicted people most neighbors found menacing, fearsome, and threatening—the kind of people they would want police protection *from*. As Angela Salgado, Mrs. Salgado’s daughter put it, it was people like Corey and Raymond who made “the difference between a working-class neighborhood and a ghetto.” And as such, she also charged the sculptures of being “totems of racism.”⁷³

Within the context of early-1990s multiculturalist identity politics and political-correctness debates (“do-good” community-based public art is itself a symptom of this period), such accusations were perhaps too tricky to counter. Ahearn did not even attempt arguing against them in any systematic or sustained

way. Initially, he tried speaking to the few detractors who gathered at the site, especially Mrs. Salgado. He approached her respectfully to have a dialogue—to introduce himself and his work, and to listen to her expectations and desires. He even repainted Raymond's face the morning after installation in order to have him appear less menacing, less "Halloween," so that Mrs. Salgado might see "the other Raymond," "beautiful *and* heavy."⁷⁴ But he could not dissuade her from seeing his bronzes as evil and ugly, a "slap in the community's face." In the end, Mrs. Salgado's objections and his inability to convince her became a measure of the work's failure for Ahearn.

To the art world, my bronzes were serious, ironic. They had oomph, they were strong. They were an "artist's" pieces, and they looked good at the site, but I thought that day, "They'll never look like this again." I knew that soon they'd look terrible. Bad. Uglier than Mrs. Salgado said. So I said, "Fuck 'em, the art world!" It's not my job to be fighting these conservative progressive people—people like Mrs. Salgado. I respect these people. It's not my job to be the punk artist in the neighborhood—like, there's a lot going on in my artistic life besides this installation. There's my concept of casts in people's homes—the execution may be shoddy, but to me those casts are more valuable than a bronze, or a better piece in a collector's home, and if I've misread my people it means I've misread myself and my concept. . . . I had a choice. . . . Either I was going to be on Mrs. Salgado's side or I was going to be her enemy. I refused that.⁷⁵

Acknowledging that he miscalculated the situation, he removed the sculptures at his own expense five days after their installation. Thus, a project that began as one made with, of, and for the community, by an artist presumed to be an integral member of that community, and approved by a committee of community leaders was ultimately disowned by the community. In an interview several years ago, Ahearn remarked on the nature of the site itself as part of the problem:

[I]n previous times when we installed the wall murals, a supportive community would all come out in strength to view their friends being hoisted up on the wall. It was a family situation. Whereas the installation of the bronzes was a little bit removed from the neighborhood that I lived in, even though it was only four blocks away. It was just far enough away that it only got a stray group of onlookers that I recognized. Unlike earlier days, the few friends of mine from downtown that showed up outnumbered the local community, which made me a bit uneasy. There was a disquiet to the day. Already as the pieces were unveiled, there were arguments at the site as to the purpose of the work. That had never happened with the murals. In earlier times, the murals were seen as a private thing within the community, but this was instantly understood to be of a citywide, public nature. This was perceived as a city site. . . . People could tell the difference. People felt that this had to do with the city, not with their community.⁷⁶

Of course, the ambiguity of the term *community* is one of the central issues here. Depending on who is speaking, the community could be the people around a few buildings on Walton Avenue, where Ahearn, Daleesha, Corey, and Raymond were familiar faces; or it could be the group of people living several blocks away on Jerome Avenue, where Ahearn, Daleesha, Corey, and Raymond were viewed as outsiders; or it could be constituencies delineated by the outlines of voting districts; or it might conjure “the Bronx” as an almost mythical place. Then again, it may not be tied to a geographical area at all but defined instead in terms of a shared historical and racial background, as it was for the DGS administrators in their presumption of a singular African American community.

In Ahearn’s case, it is relatively easy to trace these various expectations at work,



John Ahearn, Corey Mann, Daleesha, and Raymond, 1991. Sculptures on day of installation at South Bronx Sculpture Park. Photograph by Nancy Owens.

both within the artist's practice as well as without. The rationale behind the selection of Ahearn for the South Bronx commission, as noted, is a case in point. But the later contestation over Ahearn's capacity and right to represent the community, and the accompanying protests against the choice of Daleesha, Corey, and Raymond as representative of the community, is also based on the same expectations. That is, while there may be disagreements among different groups over specifics, the dominant principle or operative basis of community-based site specificity is the privileging of an identificatory unity between the artist and the community, as well as between the community and the artwork. Indeed, the commonality of this belief was the *source* of the disagreements in Ahearn's case.

This ambiguity surrounding the meaning of *community*, which dovetails with the discursive slippage around *audience*, *site*, and *public*, is itself a distinctive trait of community-based public art discourse.⁷⁷ As such, claims made about and for the "community" by artists, curators, administrators, critics, and various audience groups demand extensive critical analysis. Toward that end, I will delineate here what seems to be the underlying logic of community-based site specificity as exemplified by Ahearn's South Bronx project, some aspects of which have been already outlined in contrast to the site specificity of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*.

As noted, Ahearn, like many other community-based artists, wished to create a work integrated with the site—a work that would seem to emerge so naturally from a particular place, whose meaning would be so specifically linked to it, that it could not be imagined belonging anywhere else. But unlike the physical integration of the art-as-public-spaces paradigm, which Serra likewise rejected, Ahearn's community-based site specificity emphasized a social integration. This was partly because the site itself was conceived as a social entity, a "community," and not simply in terms of environmental or architectural design. But more important, the emphasis on the social stems from the belief that the meaning or value of the artwork does not reside in the object but is accrued over time through interaction between artist and community. This interaction is considered to be integral to the artwork and equal in significance. This means that the *artist's assimilation* into a given community now becomes coincident with the *artwork's integration* with the site. The prior goal of integration and harmony in terms of unified urban design is reorganized around the *performative* capacity of the artist to become one with the community. And this "becoming one," no matter how temporary, is presumed to be a prerequisite for an artist to be able to speak with, for, and as a legitimate representative or member of the community. Simultaneously, the characteristics of this "unity" function as criteria for judging the artistic authenticity and ethical fitness of the artwork.

In most cases, community-based site specificity also seeks to bring about another kind of integration between the community and the work of art. A group of people previously held at a distance from the artistic process under the abstract des-

ignations of viewer/spectator, audience, and the public are now enlisted to participate in the creation of an artwork. Sometimes, this absorption of the community into the artistic process and vice versa is rendered iconographically readable, as in the literalist realism of John Ahearn's cast sculptures. At other times, when the artwork is conceptually oriented, with priority given to the collective process and social interaction, with or without the guarantee of any material outcome, this absorption is more difficult to track. But a central objective of community-based site specificity is the creation of a work in which members of a community—as simultaneously viewer/spectator, audience, public, and referential subject—will each see and recognize themselves in the work, not so much in the sense of being critically implicated but of being affirmatively pictured or validated.

This investment corresponds to an old imperative of public art: rather than have an artwork that is separated or detached from the space of the audience, which reinforces social alienation and disaffection, one should sponsor works that reassure the viewing subject with something familiar. In this regard, we can recall Janet Kardon's argument that in order for a public artwork to be meaningful to the public (thus, meaningfully public), it should not "unsettle perceptions" but should "reassure the viewer with an easily shared idea or subject."⁷⁸ In 1980, when those words were written, Kardon encouraged "sharing" through art that either performs a "useful task," such as providing shade or seating, or conjures an association with a "sense of leisure"—generic qualities she presumed that everyone desires and values. In contrast, proponents of 1990s community-based public art argued for the specificity of certain audience groups—that is, communities; they contended that the desires and needs of a particular community cannot be presumed to be generic or widely shared and cannot be declared a priori by an artist or anyone else outside that community. Therefore, the task of "reassur[ing] the viewer with an easily shared idea or subject" is best accomplished when the idea or subject of the artwork is determined by the community, or better yet, if the idea or subject is the community itself in some way.

This principle holds true even for public art projects based in conceptualism or performance, which do not yield concrete material manifestations—i.e., literal representations of the people of the community. For if we identify "the work" as the dialogue and collaboration between an artist and a community group, we conjure a picture of the community nonetheless, albeit in different terms (those, precisely, of work). In eschewing object (read, commodity) production, many community-based artists, often with the help of curators, administrators, and sponsors, orchestrate situations in which community participants invest time and energy in a collective project or process. This investment of labor would seem to secure the participants' sense of identification with the work, or at least a sense of ownership of it; the community sees itself in the work not through an iconic or mimetic identification but through the recognition of its own *labor* in the creation

of, or becoming of, the work. Although the concept of labor rarely appears in public art discourse, and although I can't pursue the issue in depth here, it seems crucial to note the need to consider the representative function of labor within the general context of community-based art.⁷⁹ For now, I simply propose that the drive toward the unifying identification between artist and community propelling today's form of community-based site specificity reflects a desire to model or enact unalienated collective labor that is itself based on an idealistic assumption that artistic labor is unalienated labor, or at least provisionally outside of capitalism's forces.

But if the pursuit of such unity, as I have described it, is in part an updated means to "reassure the viewer with an easily shared idea or subject," the question remains: what exactly is reassured by it? And what does this reassurance guarantee? While it is not prudent to generalize, a preliminary answer, pointing to both the hazards and hopes of contemporary public art, lies in the observation that the viewer is affirmed in its self-knowledge and worldview through the artwork's mechanisms of (self-)identification. Underlying decades of public art discourse is a presumption that the artwork—as object, event, or process—can fortify the viewing (now producing) subject by protecting it from the conditions of social alienation, economic fragmentation, and political disenfranchisement that threaten, diminish, exclude, marginalize, contradict, and otherwise "unsettle" its sense of identity. Alongside this belief is an unspoken imperative that the artwork should affirm rather than disturb the viewer's sense of self. A culturally fortified subject, rendered whole and unalienated through an encounter or involvement with the artwork, is imagined to be a *politically* empowered social subject with opportunity (afforded by the art project) and capacity (understood as innate) for artistic self-representation (equals political self-determination). It is, I would argue, the production of such "empowered" subjects—a reversal of the aesthetically politicized subjects of the traditional avant-garde—that is the underlying goal of much community-based site-specific public art today.⁸⁰

Although the complexities and paradoxes of current public art discourse remain unresolved, the need to rethink the operations of the existing models of site specificity is clear. And the seeming failure of the two most recent paradigms—as exemplified by Serra's disruptive model, based in sculpture, and Ahearn's assimilative or integrationist model, based in community interaction—isolate some of the terms of that rethinking, which I have sought to clarify. *Tilted Arc* is a seminal example of a nonassimilative, oppositional mode of site specificity that, though vilified by many, has been lauded by others for challenging the tendency of public art to cover over the many contradictions that underlie public space. And although John Ahearn's South Bronx project was, by contrast, an assimilative and integrationist effort, it yielded similar revelations about the conflicted nature of the public sphere. Thus, if we are to measure a public artwork's critical capacity in relation

to the ways the work itself becomes a site of contestation over the very question of what makes something public, then the conflicts surrounding Ahearn's South Bronx sculptures, as much as the *Tilted Arc* scandal, underscore the need for the further problematization of what we mean by, and expect from, an "interventionary" site specificity.⁸¹

Notes

A slightly longer version of this essay appears as a chapter in my book *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

1. Ahearn has a "gentleman's agreement" with the city of New York that someday, when the funds become available through the sale of the original three sculptures, he will be given the opportunity to complete the project. How this completion will be pursued remains unclear. This is according to the artist, verified through the Alexander and Bonin Gallery, New York, May 2000. The design of the traffic triangle was in collaboration with Nancy Owens, a landscape architect with the city's Parks Department.

2. Even though all art is engaged in public discourse in one way or another, by "mainstream public art," I mean the specific category of art that is typically sponsored and/or administered, whether fully or partially, by city, state, or national government agencies. It involves bureaucratized review and approval procedures that are outside the museum or gallery system and often engage numerous non-art organizations, including community groups, private foundations, and corporations. My limited working definition of the term here is provisional, however, insofar as the meaning of the "public" in public art continues to be debatable.

3. For background on public art in the United States since the early 1960s, see John Beardsley, *Art in Public Places: A Survey of Community Sponsored Projects Supported by the NEA* (Washington, D.C.: Partners for Livable Places, 1981); Donald Thalacker, *The Place of Art in the World of Architecture* (New York: Chelsea House, 1980); and Harriet Senie, *Contemporary Public Sculpture: Tradition, Transformation, and Controversy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

4. See Arlene Raven, ed., *Art in the Public Interest* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989); and Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

5. The paradigm shifts I note here are further elaborated in my essay "For Hamburg: Public Art and Urban Identities," in *Kunst auf Schritt und Tritt (Public Art Is Everywhere)* (Hamburg, Germany: Kellner, 1997), 95–107.

6. In the mid-1970s, some public art professionals used the phrase "art in public places" to distinguish location-conscious art from "public art," sculptures that were, like Calder's, simply placed in public spaces. Thus, my use of "art in public places" to designate the latter may be confusing to some, but since the NEA used the phrase as the title of its own program to promote this mode of practice, I am adopting it here.

7. Moore, as quoted in Henry J. Seldis, *Henry Moore in America* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 176–77.

8. *Ibid.*, 14–15.

9. There is an important distinction between the programs of the GSA and those of the NEA: the former administers federally sponsored commissions, while the latter administers community-initiated projects. Starting in 1963, the GSA mandated that one-half to 1 percent of estimated construction costs of all new federal buildings be set aside for art. Local Percent for Art programs, which follow the GSA model, were first instituted in cities such as Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Seattle in the early to mid-1960s. The NEA program was set up to respond to local or community proposals (from ad hoc citizens' groups, not-for-profit institutions, or organizations such as arts commissions). Once a proposal is accepted, the NEA offers a matching grant and, through a small committee of art experts, helps administer the process of selecting a site, choosing and negotiating with an artist, arranging for transportation and installation of the work, and mounting educational efforts to introduce the artist's work to the community. In many instances, these committees advise on GSA commissions. For more details, see Beardsley, *Art in Public Places*.

10. The Livable Cities Program initiated by the NEA in 1977 as part of its architecture program, for example, explicitly sought "creativity and imagination—to get it from the artist and apply it to the problems of the built environment" in order to "give promise of economic and social benefit to the community." See Louis G. Redstone, with Ruth R. Redstone, *Public Art: New Directions* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1981), vi.

11. In the eyes of the urban elite and city managers during the 1970s and 1980s, public art was also supposed to function as a lure to attract tourism, new businesses and workforces, and residential development, and it was expected to boost a city's sense of identity. Public art initiatives since the 1960s, in fact, have always been tied to urban renewal and economic revitalization efforts. On these issues, see Kate Linker, "Public Sculpture: The Pursuit of the Pleasurable and Profitable Paradise," *Artforum* (March 1981): 64–73, and "Public Sculpture II: Provisions for the Paradise," *Artforum* (summer 1981), 37–42. See also Sharon Zukin, *The Culture of Cities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1995); Erika Doss, *Spirit Poles and Flying Pigs: Public Art and Cultural Democracy in American Communities* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), especially chap. 3, "Public Art in the Corporate Sphere"; and my essay "For Hamburg: Public Art and Urban Identities."

12. Sam Hunter, "The Public Agency as Patron," in *Art for the Public: The Collection of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey* (New York: Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, 1985), 35.

13. In addition to Kate Linker's criticism, see Lawrence Alloway, "The Public Sculpture Problem," *Studio International*, no. 184 (October 1972): 123–24; and his "Problems of Iconography and Style," in *Urban Encounters: Art Architecture Audience*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1980), 15–20.

14. According to Kate Linker, in the 1960s the private sector provided a large portion of funding for public art. Corporations sponsored art to adorn office buildings, shopping

malls, banks, and so on, creating a new kind of “public” space (privately owned, publicly accessible) that became available to art. A traditional nationalist ideology of older forms of public art was replaced by a business ideology, and modern, abstract, often large-scale sculptures were the favored style. See Linker, “Public Sculpture.”

15. The term *plop art* is commonly attributed to architect James Wines of SITE. He also coined the phrase “turds on the plaza” to describe ubiquitous abstract modernist sculptures on urban plazas. The statement taken from the official Art in Public Places grant application guidelines of the Visual Arts Program of the NEA is cited by Mary Jane Jacob in her essay “Outside the Loop,” in *Culture in Action*, exh. cat. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 54.

16. A brief history of this transition is recounted in Lacy, “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys,” in *Mapping the Terrain*, ed. Lacy, 21–24. See also Richard Andrews, “Artists and the Visual Definition of Cities: The Experience of Seattle,” in *Insights/On Sites: Perspectives on Art in Public Places*, ed. Stacy Paleologos Harris (Washington, D.C.: Partners for Livable Places, 1984), 16–23.

17. According to Richard Andrews, who headed Seattle’s Percent for Art program during the 1970s, public art, from an arts agency point of view, can be divided into two distinct types: (1) those aligned with the tradition of *collecting*, which are object oriented and site transferable; and (2) those that fall within the tradition of *building*, which are involved in the designing process of public buildings and places. The scale tipped toward site-integrated and immovable works beginning in the late 1970s. See Andrews, “Artists and the Visual Definition of Cities,” 19.

18. Janet Kardon, “Street Wise/Street Foolish,” in *Urban Encounters*, 8. The exhibition, featuring documentation of projects by artists, architects, and landscape architects, was held from March 19 to April 30, 1980.

19. Nancy Foote, “Sightings on Siting,” in *Urban Encounters*, 25–34.

20. Linker sees an intimation of a solution in Robert Morris’s landscape work *Grand Rapids Project* (1973–74) in the way that durational bodily experience of a particular spatial situation defines the work. See her concluding comments in “Public Sculpture,” *Artforum* (March 1981): 70–73. See also Alloway, “Problems of Iconography and Style,” in *Urban Encounters*.

21. I refer here to the distinction Rosalyn Deutsche made between intergrationist and interventionist approaches to site-specific art. In Deutsche’s view, the former seeks to erase visible signs of social problems that might contradict the ideology of unity; the latter seeks to expose them. See her *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), especially the chapters “Uneven Development” and “Tilted Arc and the Uses of Democracy.”

22. From the official Art in Public Places grant application guidelines of the Visual Arts Program of the NEA, as cited by Jacob, “Outside the Loop,” 54.

23. This design-team model of public art was more an ideal than reality. Even in most successful cases, the conventional hierarchy of roles was maintained; that is, the architect assumed leadership and dictated the parameters of the artist’s contribution. Part of the

problem remains the established patterns of building design and construction. On the benefits and problems of artist-architect design-team collaborations, see Donna Graves, "Sharing Space: Some Observations on the Recent History and Possible Future of Public Art Collaborations," *Public Art Review* (spring–summer 1993): 10–13; Joan Marter, "Collaborations: Artists and Architects on Public Sites," *Art Journal* (winter 1989): 315–20; and Diane Shamash, "The A Team, Artists and Architects: Can They Work Together?" *Stroll: The Magazine of Outdoor Art and Street Culture*, nos. 6–7 (June 1988): 60–63. An exemplary project following this design-team model is the Viewland/Hoffman Substation (1979) in Seattle by Andrew Keating, Sherry Markovitz, Lewis Simpson, artists, and Hobbs/Fukui, architects (commissioned by Seattle Arts Commission and Seattle City Light). For another interesting case study, see Steve Rosenthal, *Artists and Architects Collaborate: Designing the Weisner Building* (Cambridge, Mass.: Committee on the Visual Arts, 1985).

Siah Armajani's 1990 comment on the design-team initiative, in which he frequently participated, reveals the dismay over the problems with such efforts. "Public art was a promise that became a nightmare. . . . In the first place, the idea of a design team just doesn't work . . . the kind of design team that just gets together around a table is like a situation comedy. It is cynical and unproductive. Genuine debate can't take place around a table in that way. You get what the real-estate developer and the arts administrator want because they control the money. The whole emphasis in most of these projects is on who can get along best with the others involved—at the expense of vision and fresh thinking." Quoted in Calvin Tompkins, "Open, Available, Useful," *New Yorker*, March 19, 1990, 71.

24. Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 65. Deutsche has provided the most thorough analysis of the universalizing logic of beauty and utility at the basis of public art discourse, which has supported urban redevelopment and gentrification projects. Some public art professionals also recognized potential problems with goals of utilitarianism. For instance, Richard Andrews wrote in 1984: "There is a danger in perceiving contextual projects as a panacea for public art—as a means to reduce controversy and make art 'useful.' . . . [L]egitimate concern exists that function should not become the primary criteria for an institutionalized program of public art. In Seattle we may provide funding for the First Avenue Street project of [Lewis 'Buster'] Simpson and [Jack] Mackie, but we would be ill-advised to generate a 'street improvement program' of benches, light poles, and so on for all artists." Andrews, "Artists and the Visual Definition of Cities," 26.

25. For instance, Burton, arguably the most prominent and vocal among artists who espoused this utilitarianism in public art, once said of his street tables and seating design for the Equitable Assurance Building in New York City: "The social questions interest me more than the art ones. . . . Communal social values are now more important. What office workers do in their lunch hour is more important than my pushing the limits of my self-expression." As quoted in Douglas C. McGill, "Sculpture Goes Public," *New York Times Magazine*, April 27, 1986, 67.

26. Such practices are predicated on the conception of the site of art as mobile. As such, the site is not only a venue of presentation, but it also constitutes a mode of distribu-

tion. I write about this kind of de-territorialized site as “discursive” in my “One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity,” *October* 80 (spring 1997): 85–110.

27. Richard Serra, “Rigging,” interview with Gerard Hovagymyan, in *Richard Serra: Interviews, Etc., 1970–1980*, exh. cat. (Yonkers, N.Y.: Hudson River Museum, 1980), 128.

28. General Services Administration factsheet concerning the Art in Architecture Program for Federal Buildings, in *The Destruction of Tilted Arc: Documents*, ed. Martha Buskirk and Clara Weyergraf-Serra (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 23.

29. See Douglas Crimp, “Serra’s Public Sculpture: Redefining Site Specificity,” in *Richard Serra: Sculpture*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1986), 40–56, and Rosalyn Deutsche, “*Tilted Arc* and the Uses of Democracy,” in *Evictions*, 257–70.

30. Deutsche, *Evictions*, 261.

31. “Political” site specificity is Deutsche’s term, used to distinguish it from “academic” site specificity. *Ibid.*, 261–62.

32. Richard Serra, “*Tilted Arc* Destroyed” (1989), in Richard Serra, *Writings, Interviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 193–213.

33. See Rosalyn Deutsche’s critique of the conflation between permanence and universal timelessness during the *Tilted Arc* hearings in *Evictions*, 264. See also Douglas Crimp’s interview comments in “Douglas Crimp on *Tilted Arc*,” in *Dialogues in Public Art*, ed. Tom Finkelpearl (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 71.

34. Serra, “*Tilted Arc* Destroyed,” 202.

35. *Ibid.*, 203.

36. On this point, see Hal Foster, “The Un/making of Sculpture,” in *Richard Serra: Sculpture, 1985–1998*, ed. Russell Ferguson, Anthony McCall, and Clara Weyergraf-Serra (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; and Göttingen, Germany: Steidl Verlag, 1998).

37. Buskirk and Weyergraf-Serra, eds., *The Destruction of Tilted Arc*, 12.

38. Serra’s apparent animosity toward architecture is well known and well documented. See, for example, his interviews with Douglas Crimp and the architect Peter Eisenman, in Richard Serra, *Writings, Interviews*. But Serra’s “working against” architecture is not a straightforward opposition. For the most provocative interpretations of his relationship to architecture, see Foster, “The Un/making of Sculpture,” and Yve-Alain Bois, “A Picturesque Stroll around *Clara-Clara*,” *October* 29 (summer 1984).

39. For the record of statements given at the hearings, see Buskirk and Weyergraf-Serra, eds., *The Destruction of Tilted Arc*.

40. U.S. Representative Theodore Weiss, quoted in Buskirk and Weyergraf-Serra, eds., *The Destruction of Tilted Arc*, 115.

41. Joseph Liebman’s testimony, for example, painted the plaza prior to the installation of *Tilted Arc* as an idyllic setting with children playing, mothers strolling with baby carriages, and so on. See Buskirk and Weyergraf-Serra, eds., *The Destruction of Tilted Arc*, 113. Douglas Crimp, a resident of the neighborhood, strongly contradicts this description. See his remarks concerning the somewhat dysfunctional state of the plaza prior to *Tilted Arc* in “Douglas Crimp on *Tilted Arc*,” 71–72.

42. But as Rosalyn Deutsche has argued, the meaning of key words deployed during

this conflict, such as “use,” “public,” “public use,” and “community” were presumed to be self-evident, based on “common sense.” Even those of the left who supported *Tilted Arc* did not contest in any effective way the essential and universalizing definitions of these terms—and their ideological uses in the very name of neutrality and objectivity—as they framed the debate. See her critique on this point in *Evictions*, 259.

43. Some prominent cases include Pablo Picasso’s sculpture at the Chicago Civic Center (1965), Alexander Calder’s *La Grande Vitesse* (1967) in Grand Rapids, Michigan, George Sugarman’s *Baltimore Federal* (1975–77), and Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial in Washington, D.C. (1982). For more on other public art controversies, see Senie, *Contemporary Public Sculpture*, especially chap. 6; and Erika Lee Doss, *Spirit Poles and Flying Pigs: Public Art and Cultural Democracy in American Communities* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

44. Initial goals of the NEA’s Art in Public Places Program as stated in its guidelines and cited in Finkelppearl, ed., *Dialogues in Public Art*, 43.

45. Of course, Andres Serrano’s *Piss Christ* and Robert Mapplethorpe’s homosexually explicit X-portfolio photographs drew as much, if not more, attention during these years. See Richard Bolton, ed., *Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts* (New York: New Press, 1992).

46. Deutsche, *Evictions*, 267.

47. U.S. Representative Theodore Weiss, quoted in Buskirk and Weyergraf-Serra, eds., *The Destruction of Tilted Arc*, 116.

48. As cited in Lacy, “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys,” in *Mapping the Terrain*, ed. Lacy, 22–24.

49. Suzanne Lacy has remarked that even with the “maturation” of site-specific public art through the 1980s, when greater attention was paid to the historical, ecological, and sociological aspects of a site, the works generally did not engage audiences in a manner markedly different from museums. *Ibid.*, 23.

50. *Ibid.*, 27.

51. Finkelppearl, ed., *Dialogues in Public Art*, 34–35.

52. According to Lacy, the theorization of “new genre public art” emerged from a lecture program sponsored by the California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, in 1989, titled “City Sites: Artists and Urban Strategies.” “A series of lectures was delivered at non-traditional sites in Oakland by ten artists whose work addressed a particular constituency on specific issues but also stood as a prototype for a wider range of human concerns.” Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain*, 11.

53. *Ibid.*, 24.

54. *Ibid.*

55. Kelley, as quoted in *ibid.*

56. Others not necessarily aligned with new genre public art also have expressed disappointment that Serra’s work wasn’t “radical” enough. See Finkelppearl, ed., *Dialogues in Public Art*, 35, and James Meyer’s critique of *Tilted Arc*’s “critical” or “negative” monumentality in “The Functional Site,” *Documents* 7 (fall 1994): 20–29.

57. The term is borrowed from Stuart Hall's critique of the cultural politics of Margaret Thatcher's England in his essay "Popular-Democratic vs Authoritarian Populism: Two Ways of 'Taking Democracy Seriously,'" in *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988), 123–49. Rosalyn Deutsche explains the concept succinctly as "the mobilization of democratic discourses to sanction, indeed to pioneer, shifts toward state totalitarianism" (Deutsche, *Evictions*, 266).

58. This undertheorized alliance set the stage for the identity-politics and political-correctness debates of the early 1990s. In terms of public art, little room was left for bold, ambitious artistic statements that did not engage social issues or the "community."

59. This directive expanded in the early 1990s to include "educational activities which invite community involvement." See Lacy, "Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys," in *Mapping the Terrain*, ed. Lacy, 24. For a case of the shift in attitude toward greater community participation in public art, see Tom Finkelpearl's assessment of the 1999 community cultural plan of Portland, Maine, in his *Dialogues in Public Art*, 43–44.

60. Finkelpearl, ed., *Dialogues in Public Art*, 81.

61. *Ibid.*, 81–82. The art historian Erika Doss points out that "Throughout the 1980s, the NEA [and state arts agencies] avoided funding public art projects that were specifically commemorative or representational," preferring modern abstract art by artists such as Stephen Antonakos, Robert Irwin, Richard Fleischner, Tony Smith, Mark di Suvero, Mary Miss, Athena Tacha, and Richard Serra. She argues that the aesthetic vocabulary of abstraction, which is not shared by the general audience, who seem to prefer easily understandable symbolism instead, is one main source of the many public art controversies of the 1980s. It is important to note that the NEA corrected itself in the late 1980s, however, with the following addition to its guidelines: "The [NEA] must not, under any circumstances, impose a single aesthetic standard or attempt to direct artistic content." Doss claims that with such a revised vision, the NEA increased funding for representational art, such as public murals, in the 1990s. Doss, *Spirit Poles and Flying Pigs*, 51 n.24.

62. Jane Kramer, *Whose Art Is It?* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 39. For a detailed overview of Ahearn's work from 1979 to 1991, see *South Bronx Hall of Fame: Sculptures by John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres*, exh. cat. (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum, 1991).

63. For an informative review of art dealing with the stereotypes and realities of life in the Bronx, see the catalog for *Urban Mythologies: The Bronx Represented since the 1960s*, an exhibition curated by Lydia Yee and Betti-Sue Hertz (New York: Bronx Museum of Art, 1999).

64. Kramer, *Whose Art Is It?* 38.

65. *Ibid.*, 74–75.

66. Serra, "Tilted Arc Destroyed," 203.

67. Torres worked first as Ahearn's assistant and then as his partner in the 1980s. Each credits the other with opening up his work and life. See Kramer, especially 58–60 and 120–25 on their relationship. Fashion Moda was an alternative gallery space founded by Stefan Eins, an Austrian artist, in 1978, that operated for about fifteen years. The

importance of this space in the burgeoning of the “alternative scene” in the early 1980s cannot be overestimated. According to Marshall Berman’s chronicle of the Bronx, “For a decade or more, Fashion Moda brought downtown artists, musicians, and writers together with uptown graffiti painters, rappers, break dance crews, and curious people who came in from off the street. Eins was immensely resourceful at working various government bureaucracies and helping artists get space to mount innovative installations in schools and parks, in abandoned apartment buildings (there were so many), and on the streets.” Berman, “Views from the Burning Bridge,” in *Urban Mythologies*, 76. Also see Betti-Sue Hertz, “Artistic Intervention in the Bronx,” in *idem.*, 18–27.

68. Ahearn, as quoted in Kramer, *Whose Art Is It?* 111.

69. Ahearn, as quoted in *ibid.*, 60.

70. Symes and LaMelle made these charges without having seen the work. Their criticism was based on a few Polaroid snapshots taken at the foundry before the sculptures were painted. Perhaps that’s why they mistakenly thought Raymond was black rather than Puerto Rican.

71. Kramer, *Whose Art Is It?* 38.

72. Thanks to Juliet Koss for helpful discussions on the history of empathy theory in aesthetic philosophy.

73. Angela Salgado, as quoted in Kramer, *Whose Art Is It?* 109.

74. *Ibid.*, 100–102.

75. Ahearn, quoted in Kramer, *Whose Art Is It?* 103.

76. Ahearn, quoted in Finklepearl, “John Ahearn on the Bronx Bronzes and Happier Tales,” in *Dialogues in Public Art*, ed. Finklepearl, 91–92.

77. For instance, in Ahearn’s case, the artist viewed the residents of the neighborhood and the police officers of the Forty-fourth Precinct, who would look directly at the sculptures on the traffic triangle, as the primary audience. In contrast, opponents of the sculptures assumed the audience would be strangers from the “outside world,” mostly white people driving through their neighborhood headed to nearby Yankee Stadium.

78. Kardon, *Urban Encounters*, 8.

79. On this important issue, see George Yúdice, “Producing the Cultural Economy: The Collaborative Art of insITE,” in his *The Expediency of Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, forthcoming). See also Luis Camnitzer and Mari Carmen Ramírez, eds., *Beyond Identity: Globalization and Latin American Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming).

80. This is a reversal because the traditional avant-garde did not seek to affirm the subject but to shake it loose from the comfort and familiarity of bourgeois complacency.

81. Rosalyn Deutsche offered this crucial insight. See her “Agoraphobia,” in Deutsche, *Evictions*, 269–327.

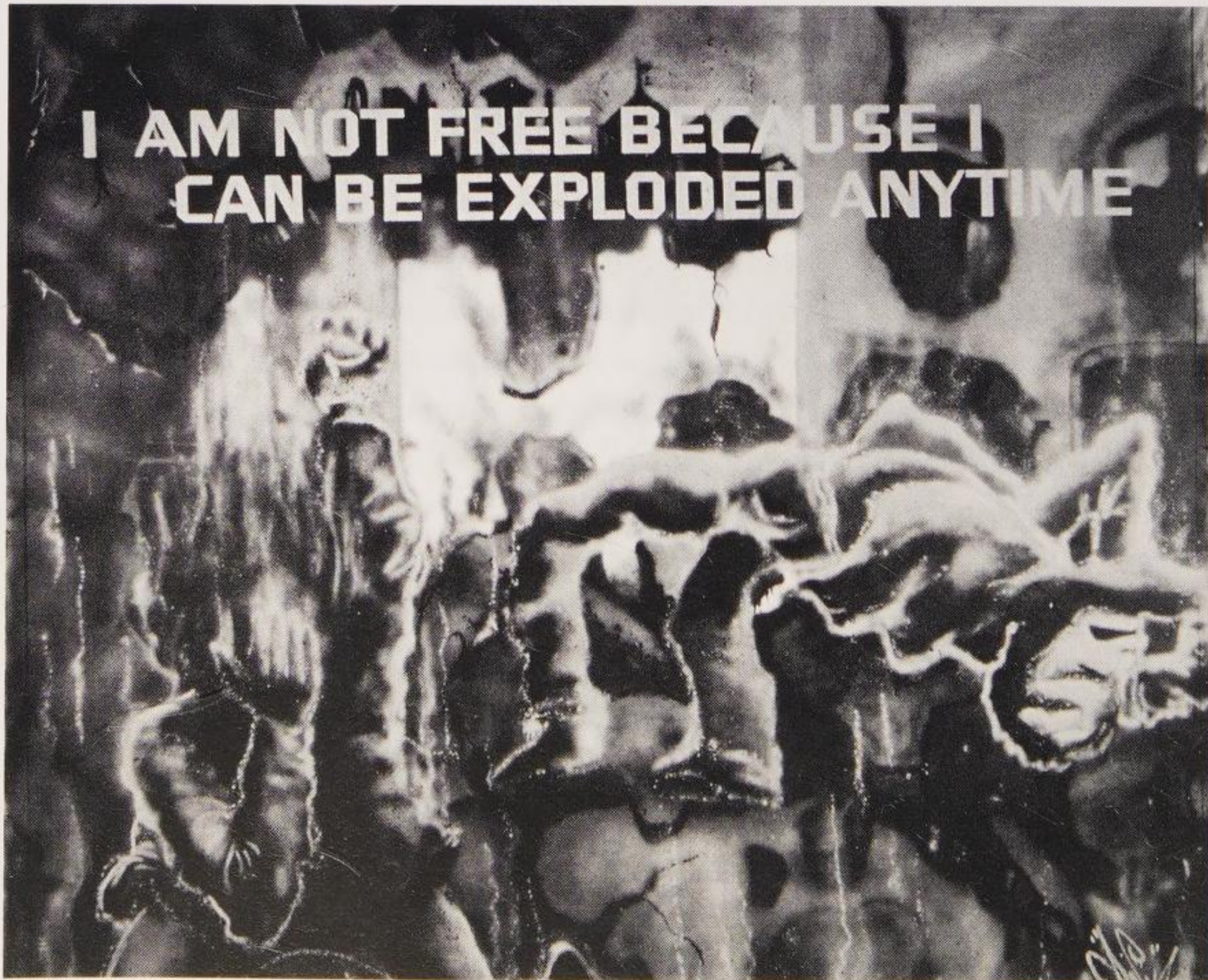
Local History: The Art of Battle for Bohemia in New York
Alan Moore with Jim Cornwell

The recent history of artists on New York's Lower East Side has been enmeshed in questions about real estate. This section of Manhattan offers a prime example of the late capitalist process of gentrification.¹ The art made on the Lower East Side and the artists whose careers started there have found themselves tainted by the charge of complicity in this process. Their presence, artistic styles, and images have been used to change the public face of a neighborhood from which many poor people were displaced.² What artists achieved there has been overshadowed by their contested role in the economic and social processes that transformed a working-class immigrant and bohemian district into a middle-class residential one.

New celebrities arose from the downtown mix of music, performance, and painting that intoxicated the New York media and enriched both popular culture and art. These emergences from the East Village into world fame may be exemplified by the brief love affair between Jean-Michel Basquiat and Madonna, the drug-soaked, hard-partying neo-Expressionist painter of Haitian heritage and the aerobic, health-food-eating New Wave Italian American singing star who met in a nightclub.³ But even this couple, taken as an emblem, points to some deep changes of long-term significance that are attributable to that surge of Manhattan bohemia during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The East Village scene was a model of a multicultural art world, including, most prominently, the participation of young graffiti artists whose vernacular movement drove the success of Fashion Moda in the South Bronx (1979), Colab's *Times Square Show* (1980), the *New*

York/New Wave exhibition at P.S. 1 (1981), and the Fun Gallery (opened in 1981), first of the East Village commercial galleries. On the Lower East Side proper, the 1980s saw collaborations between the Nuyorican group of poets established in the 1970s and the newcomer artists, alliances that continue today. In the art and performance of the East Village, a broad range of gay themes and content were foregrounded, reaching beyond the rarefied world of art into the mainstream of popular culture.

Many artists caught up in the gentrification of the Lower East Side that began in the late 1980s became politicized. The district saw prolonged and often theatrical resistance to actions by the city government that facilitated private development. Explicit politicization of art production and exhibition, a key component of postmodern cultural production, was foregrounded through a succession of organized efforts, including the *Real Estate Show*, ABC No Rio, Group Material's 13th Street storefront, PADD's *Not for Sale* project, Bullet Space, and the squatters' movement of the early 1990s. Racial integration, class crossing, and politicization have been regular features of New York's past bohemian scenes, but the short efflorescence of an East Village art scene in the early 1980s built a heterogeneous art culture on the cusp of the globalized information economy that has changed the contemporary art world.⁴



Jenny Holzer with Lady Pink, "I am not free . . .," 1983. Courtesy of Jenny Holzer and Cheim & Read Gallery. Copyright Jenny Holzer.

The politicized cultural production of the East Village is significant within U.S. art because it is so specific. It reasserts a range of urban subjects with long lineages and political valences. This makes it intrinsically an art of resistance to the postwar suburban political consensus that sets the city and its lives aside, and to the breaking up, repressing, and reordering of urban populations according to the needs of a new economy—the forging of what geographer Neil Smith terms the “revanchist city.”⁵ Now that the centers of visual arts production and exhibition in New York have moved to Williamsburg in Brooklyn and Chelsea in Manhattan, respectively, the East Village cultural district seems more explicitly historical, set to stand for an era, like Greenwich Village, Harlem, or Montmartre.

Normative art-historical assessments of the 1980s East Village scene have tended to stress the stylistic tension that existed there between the art of a populist nouveau bohemia and that of an academic neoconceptualism.⁶ But such assessments of the internal art world struggle that both opened and closed the East Village episode overlook the local story and the conditions that supported cultural production on the Lower East Side.⁷

The East Village district, unlike SoHo, was not defined by the presence of visual artists. Its culture has been primarily literary and theatrical. The Lower East Side has long been a reliable source for spicy reportage, and the plays, musicales, novels, and histories made out of these lives and this milieu reflect the district’s theatrical heritage and the outsized personalities of its artists and performers.⁸ The Lower East Side is a poet’s district, New York’s bohemia, thick with the forms and attitudes of previous cultural moments, invested with the raiment and the dreams of the bohemias of beats, hippies, punks, and their followers, including finally successive middle classes in the telos of gentrification.

Whereas the Lower East Side is a set of continuously evolving social formations and a region of the city where experimental culture has been produced in a climate of resistance to both the bourgeois order and the state, bohemia is primarily a literary object.⁹ It is an ideal, and its codes, circumstances, and events are expressed in poems and songs, stories and films. This local New York version has been by turns utopian and dystopian—willfully decadent or transgressive—emerging and refiguring itself as the byproduct, or the dialectical counterpart, of a succession of urban orders. Bohemia arises in resistance to those orders, but it is finally a kind of lived fiction redolent of historical pasts, or a social process that responds to a literary ideal.¹⁰

It may be the malleable, fictive, idealist nature of this bohemia, finally, that makes it so ready for consumption as a style of living. Bohemians constitute—or, more properly, represent—an exotic, radical urban underclass that in large measure is *not* one. Many in it are *déclassé* (downwardly mobile) middle class. Their style can be easily emulated on one’s day off through social rituals revolving around liquor, drugs, and cabaret entertainments. Bohemian pose is a model

of consumption invested with the valences of creativity and lust for life even as shepherds and farmers in the eighteenth century were invested with innocence and simple wisdom.

This cultural construction “bohemia” is continuously carbonated by music, film, television, and advertising, window-dressed for sale in cycles of generation and appropriation that, while decades old, have become increasingly sophisticated and entangled, even vivified, with irony. Nonetheless, people still live for this fugitive and oft-prostituted ideal, understanding themselves as revolutionaries, criminals, and whores. Bohemia contains real aspiration and real human stories—the raw material of narrative art. Cultural producers who achieve neither celebrity nor wealth constitute a bedrock creative community, sustaining each other and the young people who make up most of the first-line audience for cultural production.¹¹

It may also be helpful to consider the East Village as a distinctive American bohemia, since a bohemian identity is a cultural pose that persists after the notion of a historical avant-garde has been put aside. The avant-garde is academic, an artifact of modernism; bohemia, on the other hand, remains as a cultural ideal for youth—popular, broadly accessible, multiracial, and multiclass.¹²

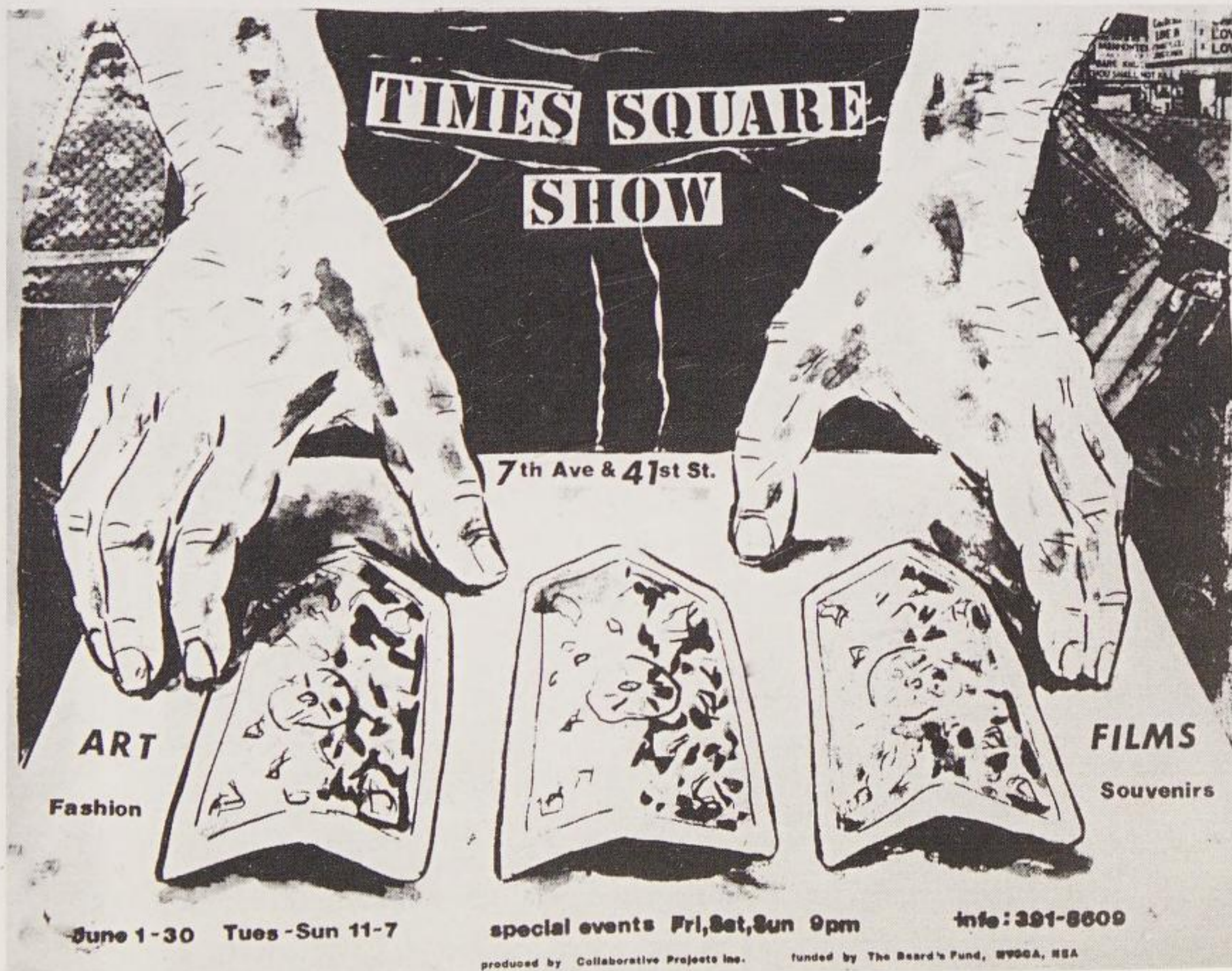
What kinds of networks constitute the Lower East Side as a system of cultural production? How does the district come to be such a flexible place, an adventure-land for creative people? As the district of difference and the choice for generations of striving young and impoverished artists, the Lower East Side retains a deep crust of support structures for creative endeavor. Layers of successive institutions, both formal and informal, sustain cultural production, including galleries, workshops, performance spaces, social clubs and nightclubs, and numerous hybrids.¹³ These institutions (“venues” is a better word) are often in different stages of activity and dormancy; because of impoverished bureaucratic infrastructures, these phases are more strikingly visible as either manic activity or a torpor akin to abandonment. The Lower East Side is a palimpsest, a landscape of new and old infrastructures, inhabited by characters both avuncular and cantankerous. This stratigraphy, how these venues came into being, subsided, or sustained themselves, is little known. How to make use of them is and has been part of the utilitarian narrative of survival and navigation through the treacherous shoals of Manhattan’s world of art and culture.

The proliferation of storefront art galleries in the early 1980s (124 opened between 1981 and 1986) was initially a business story.¹⁴ Popular media attention was drawn by insurgent entrepreneurial developments within the art market, a sector of business that had been marked by long-term stability in its places and practices, and a primary focus on the tastes and culture of urban elites.¹⁵ This “explosion of East Village galleries” was a matter of spaces and network: storefronts were cheap, and people of modest means rented and then renovated them. At first

based around the resurgence of traditional modes of painting and sculpture coincident with neo-Expressionism, this commercial art movement, as it matured, sold art that privileged self-criticism and its own commodity form as content.

The East Village gallery movement, despite being devalued as significant art history, is relatively well known through press accounts and exhibition catalogs. Little is known, however, about the preceding and succeeding networks that supported artistic culture on the Lower East Side—that is, what was there before and remained after the attention of the popular media and art press moved on. The chronological margins of this boom are where this story unfolds. This telling suggests lines of inquiry in uncovering the enduring structures of cultural production on the Lower East Side. To begin, I'll review beginnings and endings, first offering my version of the prelude to the East Village art scene, in which the *Times Square Show* of June 1980 was the key event.¹⁶ This exhibition, produced in a building at West Forty-first Street and Seventh Avenue, was a project of the artists' group Collaborative Projects (better known as Colab), to which I belonged.¹⁷ The show exposed dozens of emerging artists to public view—and to each other—in a street-friendly, ballyhooed funhouse-style installation that utilized the entire building.

The show included a “gift shop,” run by Cara Perlman and Tom Otterness, where artists sold homemade multiple objects cheaply. One window of the gift shop was a plywood flap that opened onto the street during business hours, just



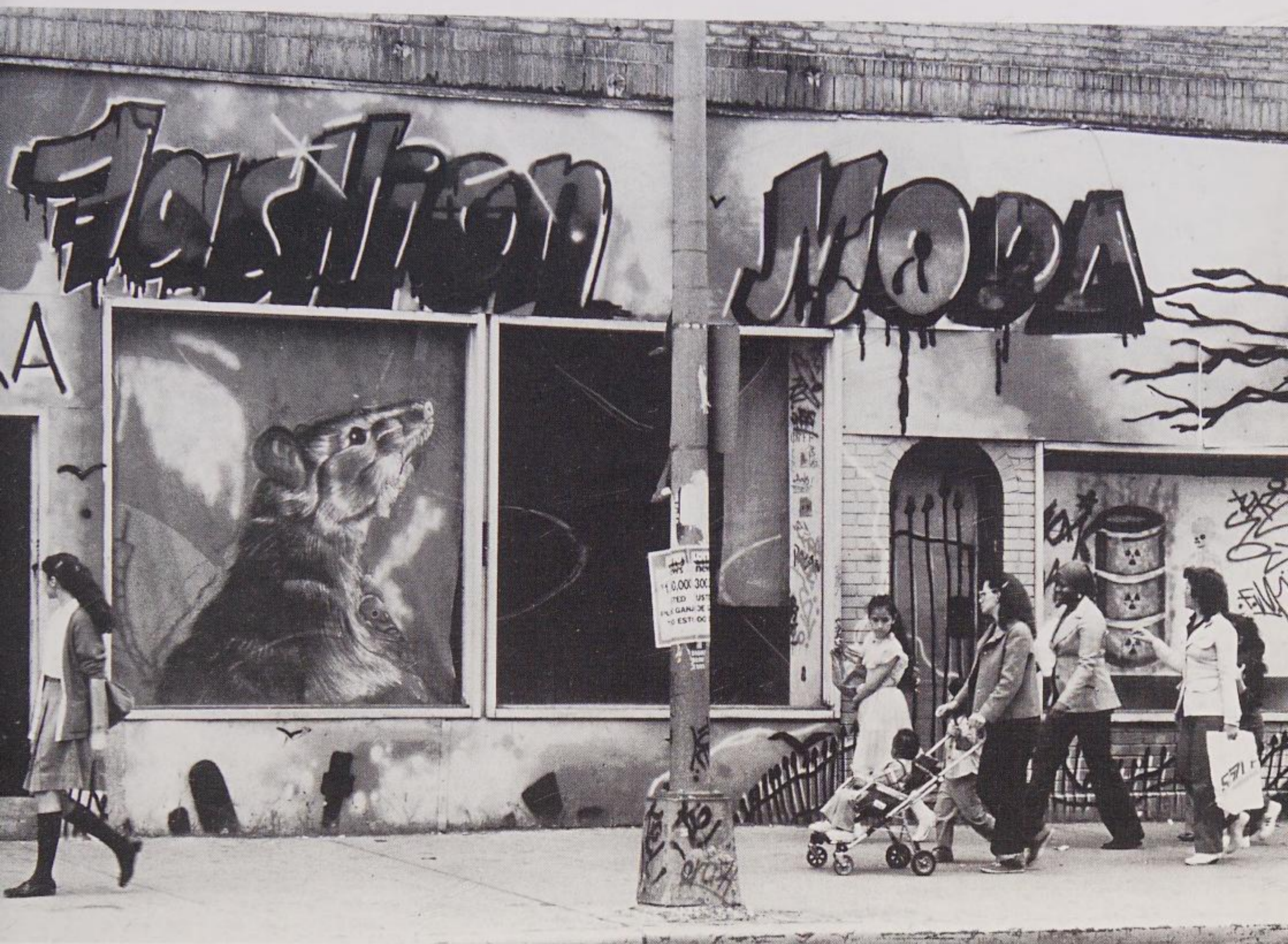
Jane Dickson and Charlie Ahearn, poster for the *Times Square Show*, 1980. Courtesy of Jane Dickson and Charlie Ahearn.

like that of the lunch counter next door. It opened out over a subway entrance that was decorated with an aerosol-painted mural by Lee (Lee Quiñones) that was among the first examples of art from the graffiti movement to appear within the context of public art.¹⁸ Similar flaps opened out from the second floor “fashion lounge.” Thus the most dramatic, physical opening of the exhibition premises took place in the space dedicated to sales and fashion. The *Times Square Show* was an entirely artist-organized exhibition mounted in Manhattan’s traditional center of working-class amusement and the sex trade, and it constituted a powerful practical manifesto for a populist art, a true turning point into the new decade.

Colab had mounted numerous small shows in artists’ studios along the fringes of SoHo starting in 1978, efforts that some critics associated with “punk art.”¹⁹ It became identified with the art-rock-band and underground-film scenes principally through the work of the New Cinema group, many of whose members lived on East Third Street near the Bowery.²⁰ These artists (who will soon return to our story) left Colab by 1979.



Exterior view of the *Times Square Show*, 1980. Organized by Collaborative Projects (Colab). Copyright 1980 Lisa Kahane.



Fashion Moda, with exterior by Crash, 1982. Copyright 1982 Lisa Kahane.

Fashion Moda, another Colab-affiliated exhibition space, fed work into the *Times Square Show*, most spectacularly that by Bronx-based artists of the graffiti movement and portrait heads of South Bronx residents by the sculptor John Ahearn.²¹ Founded in the South Bronx in 1978 by Stefan Eins and run by him and Joe Lewis, Fashion Moda saw early exhibitions by Ahearn and Otterness, who together arranged for the *Times Square Show*.

The last of Colab's early exhibitions was the *Real Estate Show*, mounted on January 1, 1980, by a group of TriBeCa artists (this author among them) in a long-abandoned building on Delancey Street near the Williamsburg Bridge.²² The show had its roots in the anger many TriBeCa artists felt at being gentrified out of their foothold in that neighborhood. The city agency responsible for the building closed the show, an event marked by the *New York Times* and the downtown weekly press. After some negotiations and an initial "relocation" the city gave us permission to use a storefront at 156 Rivington Street that we named ABC No Rio after a badly peeling business sign across the street. In fact, we hadn't anticipated this reaction by the city. They had given us a chance to make it real—to move from an act of sensational opposition to building ad hoc some kind of institution.



Rebecca Howland, *Brainwash*, 1982. Mixed-media fountain installed in the courtyard of ABC No Rio, 1981–83. Courtesy of Rebecca Howland. Photograph by Andrea Callard.

In this separation we partook of the ethnic around the alternative space, a mode of exhibiting institution for new art whose maintenance is secured by government funding or private patronage. SoHo models, especially 112 Workshop, which was sustained by both kinds of support, held themselves apart from commerce, representing to many young artists outside their circle a puritanical avant-garde feeding at the public trough.²³ At ABC No Rio we were reacting to exhibition conditions for artists in SoHo and TriBeCa—that is, to the institutionalization of SoHo’s alternative exhibition spaces. By the mid-1970s, these artist-founded spaces had become professionalized. They were in effect neo-institutions, “identified with expanding cultural provision rather than with spaces controlled by artists.”²⁴

In 1981 former Colab member Diego Cortez, who had “punked out” in 1977, curated *New York/New Wave* at the huge Queens alternative space named P.S. 1 (after the abandoned school it inhabited).²⁵ In contrast to the relatively laissez-faire style of the *Times Square Show*, Cortez’s exhibition was carefully curated and installed, though he mixed painting and sculpture with illustration and photography—an unusual approach at that time. The show brought the

downtown scene to international attention, and the stage was set for the rise of a host of new art galleries, as well as numerous huge group shows put on by artists' organizations.²⁶ One of these took place later in 1981 at another abandoned school called El Bohio and run by Charas, the politicized Puerto Rican youth gang turned community service group.²⁷ The *9th Street Survival Show*, produced by an antinuclear group, filled the halls of El Bohio with the work of artists living in the East Village, many of whom would later exhibit in its galleries.

This background leads me to characterize East Village art first as a movement conceived in the commercial terms of the art world. It was a reaction against government-funded alternative art and, at least initially, an appropriation of the idea of the gallery fraught with self-consciousness and humor. The attraction of the East Village as a bohemia had been that it was a zone for experimentation largely outside the market, free of the pressure to sell or to please patrons. It was, as Emmett Grogan observed, a place for "no-money people."²⁸ What artists chose to experiment with there in the 1980s were traditional forms of market presentation of art—that is, galleries.

The origin stories told about the first East Village commercial galleries emphasize their spirit of fun and irony, a spirit in tune with both camp and punk aesthetics. Gallery owners mimicked "straight" style (business), using stage names and assumed identities (including, of course, dyed hair).²⁹ The Fun Gallery, which opened on East Eleventh Street in the summer of 1981 and showed works by Kenny Scharf, Keith Haring, and Basquiat, grew out of a confluence of scenes that were put together by Fun's director, Patti Astor, an underground filmmaker. Third Street was the epicenter of a late-1970s underground movie scene, deeply inflected by Andy Warhol, which first brought Astor to prominence as the star of Eric Mitchell's *Underground USA* (1980).³⁰ The blonde actress gained entrée to the graffiti world through Fab Five Freddy Brathwaite, who had painted a mural of a subway train based on Warhol's soup can images.³¹ She was cast as the female lead in Charlie Ahearn's classic hip-hop film *Wild Style* (1982), which cemented her relations with the close-knit graffiti artists.³² According to Brathwaite, the graffiti artists "didn't like cold, quiet galleries with white walls," the signature space of modernist art exhibitions and the norm for art salesrooms. They wanted "a gallery that was like the work itself, a place to show and see our friends, and to play music and dance. We were a little posse. We helped put the East Village aesthetic on the map."³³

In a March 1982 press release announcing her Loo Division, Gracie Mansion explained, "Out of an aversion (albeit spurred by jealousy) to large, open well-lit spaces, she has designed a gallery where prospective buyers can view the work in an environment more closely approximating the size of a standard East Village Apartment."³⁴ The tiny room Gracie and her partner, Sur Rodney Sur, hung with pictures was, of course, a toilet. This was a joke about the small spaces available to artists in the East Village, with its tenement buildings and narrow "railroad" flats.



Collaborative Projects (Colab), *The A. More Store*, 1980. Photograph by Teri Slotkin.



Charlie Ahearn, *Busy Bee at the Amphitheater*, 1982. Film still from *Wild Style*. Courtesy of Charlie Ahearn. Photograph by Martha Cooper.

(For example, Astor's first Fun Gallery measured just eight by fifteen feet.) Gracie and Sur's inspired "loo gallery" conceit reiterated Fun's tininess, evoked Marcel Duchamp's infamous *Fountain* challenge to the Independent Artists in 1917, and gave her new business a spatial signature linked to past perceptions of the Lower East Side as dense and overcrowded, with immigrant vitality.

At ABC No Rio during this period we took money at the door for our poetry-video-music nights, promoted (after the Fashion Moda model) with announcements in English and Spanish. But our events didn't draw like those at Club 57 on Eighth Street; hosted by the performance artist Ann Magnuson in the basement of a church, these evenings were truly wild, attracting artists who later joined Fun Gallery, many of whom also frequented the Mudd Club in TriBeCa.³⁵ In the footsteps of the coffeehouses and jazz bars of the 1950s and 1960s and the Puerto Rican social clubs of the 1970s came a wave of nightclubs and social clubs (a less-regulated form of restricted-access bar), the most prominent being the Limbo Lounge,

Pyramid Club, WOW Café, Save the Robots, Darinka, and No Se No. Artists also used hybrid venues like Life Café, the Red Bar (featuring video), and the bookstore Neither Nor.

Filled with art that Diego Cortez called “neo-pop,”³⁶ the East Village gallery movement may be seen as a collective enactment of Warhol’s notion of a “business art.”³⁷ Warhol’s reputation and creative output revived early in the 1980s, when his influence on a generation of artists striving for broad audiences and commercial success became apparent. Within a few years, the East Village came to represent not only an artistic but also a theatrical and decorative arts movement, a promiscuous intercourse between diverse modes of art, entertainment, and fashion consistent with the spirit of Warhol’s *Interview* magazine and his cable television show.³⁸ As in the 1960s, East Village culturati restaged the laboratory intermedia forms of the avant-garde as cabaret, a vernacular form of popular culture. To artists committed to political engagement, this spectacle could appear more disturbing than the muggers and junkies who still haunted the neighborhood.

As this vigorous commercial movement developed to the north, ABC No Rio continued to produce themed exhibitions below Houston Street. “It’s not a space, it’s a place,” the painter Bobby G (aka Robert Goldman) told Richard Goldstein of the *Village Voice* in the fall of 1980.³⁹ Goldman was referring to the rhetoric of space that operated in the 1970s as SoHo was gentrified by artists. Aesthetic descriptions of a sculpture-based art of installation commuted easily to artists’ own lofts built in spaces vacated by light industry.⁴⁰ A similar kind of rhetoric was at work as artists moved into the East Village, erasing existing uses and inhabitants in their speech, just as the term “East Village” did to the Lower East Side in the 1960s.

We recently arrived artists felt a responsibility to the community within which we found ourselves. Consequently, we tolerated roistering drunks and thieving children with stoic cheer, trying like so many other artists who had moved into the Lower East Side in the past to negotiate our presence and ameliorate our impact. We were dedicated to interaction and took up themes we thought relevant to the neighborhood. Josh Gosciak, editor of the multicultural poetry magazine *Contact II*, organized poetry readings at ABC No Rio featuring leading Nuyorican poets. The painter Martin Wong met the poet Miguel Piñero at one of these evenings, and they began a significant collaboration.⁴¹ Other artists affiliated with ABC No Rio during this period went on to work with the Henry Street Settlement and exhibit community-based work at its Louis Abrons Arts for Living Center.⁴²

In his 1980 *Village Voice* article, Richard Goldstein also wrote about Group Material, which had that year rented a storefront on East Thirteenth Street in the East Village and converted it into a hybrid gallery/social space. Although the group stayed there only one season, the exhibitions it mounted proved to be prescient. In both theme and style, they forecast the kind of art that would overtake

the exuberant pluralist expressionism of the first wave of East Village commercial galleries yet to come. Several young members of Group Material had studied with the conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth at the School of Visual Arts; they comprised a disciplined collective that produced themed exhibitions with full-scale wall treatments and graphic signatures. As Goldstein perceived it, the central drama then being played out was the commercial assimilation of Colab; some members had been invited to exhibit in commercial galleries, and the group was planning to open an artists' store in SoHo.⁴³ Group Material, Goldstein wrote, "measures itself" against the *Times Square Show*. Unlike Colab, whose artists were largely uninterested in theory, "ideology equips these artists to control the presentation of their work, and the terms on which they court success."⁴⁴

At the same time, Goldstein quoted Group Material member Tim Rollins disparaging "New Wave art" as "reflective . . . a camp critique, the middle class making fun of itself."⁴⁵ In a manifesto, Group Material declared, "We want our work . . . to take a role in a broader cultural activism. . . . We invite everyone to question the entire culture we have taken for granted." To accommodate its working audience (and its members), Group Material opened its gallery only in the evenings, between five and ten o'clock. This brought the gallery into the time zone of the nightlife that played such an important role in building the East Village art scene.

In discussing the installation of Group Material's first show, Goldstein noted that "there is much *assemblage* of image and text, as if the artists were trying to coax you away from a purely visual interpretation. Rollins: 'If anything has to do with Group Material, it's reinventing the dialectic through art.'⁴⁶ Group Material's season on East Thirteenth Street included numerous overtly political exhibitions, the most widely reviewed of which was *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*, which opened in early 1981.⁴⁷ The artists who organized the show solicited, from their largely Spanish-speaking neighbors on East Thirteenth Street, "objects that have meaning for you, your family and your friends."⁴⁸ The diverse items offered for the exhibition included snapshots, children's art, collections, religious icons, crafts, and art reproductions, each captioned by its owner with an explanation of its significance—"a story about the object." As Thomas Lawson wrote in *Artforum*, the show "turned into a narrative of everyday life, a folk tale in which intimacies were shared without shame."⁴⁹ *The People's Choice* was the direct result of Group Material's search for "discourse." With it, they realized an ambition of both ABC No Rio and Fashion Moda—to involve the community directly and to use the gallery to display the community to itself. The exhibition was also the first to employ a radical mixture of objects in a manner that would distinguish Group Material's work in the 1980s. In this "dialectical" method, the group had found a position from which to be subtly rather than overtly didactic, to open a space in the viewer's mind for thought and argument instead of simply asserting a stance.



Group Material, *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*, 1981. Courtesy of Group Material.

Although ABC No Rio and Group Material were the first galleries to open on the Lower East Side in the 1980s, neither of them exactly fits the profile of a commercial gallery or of an alternative space.⁵⁰ ABC No Rio had been established as a cultural center, and after 1983 it became more important for performance, music, and poetry than as a center for visual arts exhibitions.⁵¹ Over time, the place and its changing management adapted to provide its constituency of young artists and activists what they required. The strategies of a politicized neoconceptual art dominated the work shown at Group Material's space.

Not long before Group Material left their storefront, a group called PADD (Political Art Documentation/Distribution) moved into El Bohio, the former school occupied by the Puerto Rican activist group Charas. PADD got the space through Artists for Survival.⁵²

ABC No Rio's origins were similar to those of El Bohio. Working on the Lower East Side, we slowly began to understand ourselves as belonging to multiple networks, one of which was the network of successful squatters who had taken over unused city property and negotiated terms for tenancy. As landlords abandoned buildings during the 1970s, the city had more property than it could maintain, and groups who took over some of it were not discouraged. This policy gave the district several active and potential bases for artists of color, including the ETC La Mama-administered group of theaters on Fourth Street and Cuando on Second Avenue at Houston Street, both within the Cooper Square jurisdiction; the Nuyorican Poets Café; El Bohio on East Ninth Street; and Solidaridad Humana on Rivington Street near ABC No Rio. Also, in 1980 Anglo dancers from the Merce Cunningham troupe moved into an abandoned school and used it as a center for performance. Appropriating unused city-owned space with the city's tacit approval, then, was a way of making cultural enclaves in the Lower East Side. This situation, which amounted to a progressive cultural policy through benign neglect, was the balance upset by gentrification, that is, by the aggressive revaluation and recommodification of property in the district.

Squatters also marked the eastern finger of the West Side alternative arts scene, which had spread from Little Italy to Sara Delano Roosevelt Park at Forsyth and Rivington Streets.⁵³ There Zen hippie Adam Purple had built his vast circular *Garden of Eden* behind his squat using compost from human night soil. Next to Purple's garden, a group of artists who called themselves the Rivington School built a towering, tangled "sculpture garden" of welded scrap metal in the vacant lot next door to the No Se No social club under the eye of the sculptor Ray Kelly.⁵⁴ He lived nearby on Broome Street with the performer and media artist Arleen Schloss, who ran a venue called A's in her loft. He had named the tiny No Se No social club for a motto painted on the wall inside, below a small mural of a tropical beach. No Se No opened in 1981 with a series of performance evenings pre-

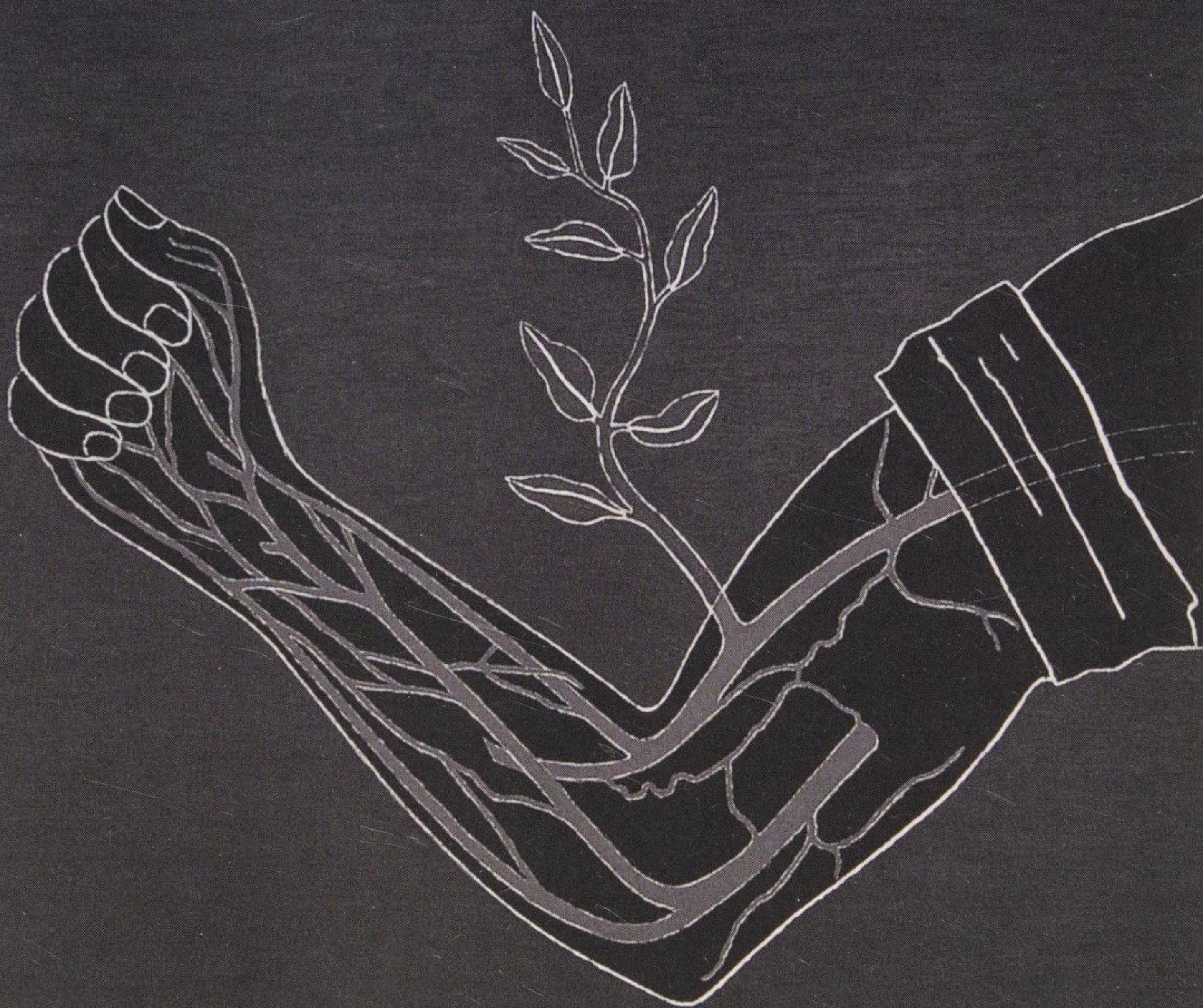
sented in collaboration with the Storefront for Art and Architecture, then located on Prince Street just east of SoHo.

What came to be called the Rivington School largely happened on the street. Like the Puerto Rican residents in their *casitas* built in empty lots, this art scene evolved by hanging out. Frequent outdoor barbecues and a party atmosphere attracted a steady stream of punks and young artists, mostly male, many from Europe and Japan. Toyo Tsuchiya stayed to photograph the scene and run the No Se No gallery.⁵⁵ Jim C's Nada Gallery and Fred Bertucci's Freddie the Dreamer space also opened on the block.

The group had to share the vacant lots on Forsyth Street with Adam Purple and his green supporters. Adam wore a long white beard and only purple clothes as he bicycled around town collecting animal manure. The two groups coexisted uneasily, an archetypal shock-mix of mechanics and organics.⁵⁶ The works of both would eventually be destroyed. Purple's mandala-shaped garden with a rare Chinese tree at its center was razed for a housing project in 1986.

The Rivington School had frequent schisms and expulsions, one of which drove Linus Corragio uptown to an abandoned gas station at Second Street and Avenue B, where he and other Rivington School veterans fenced the lot with a sculptural jungle and rented out the garage bays as artists' studios. The 2B Gas Station became a regular performance venue and a favored backdrop for hard-core punk and hip-hop music videos.⁵⁷ After the demolitions of the sculpture gardens on Forsyth Street, the Rivington School artists and their ethos resurfaced in the group of squatted buildings on East Thirteenth Street. Behind one of these, the sculptor Robert Parker in the early 1990s recreated the dialectic of garden and tool, setting up his forge as European hippies made a garden beside it. Parker moved in ducks and chickens, and his small children ran around in crash helmets and played in sandboxes that were caged to keep out the dogs.

The Rivington School was a museum of fossil behaviors—machismo, alcoholism, expressionism. It was a working-class bohemia, a vernacular collective with the social ethos of a construction crew on permanent vacation. Through its bouts of fevered creative production, and despite its drugs, alcohol, and fights, the Rivington Skool (a variant spelling) forged what Hakim Bey called a “temporary autonomous zone.”⁵⁸ It spread its graffiti emblems throughout the East Village. Both the six o'clock symbol and the wingnut (a hex nut with wings) were tags, drawn in felt-tipped marker and aerosol paint on buildings, signs, clothing, and posters and appearing on the clothes of young grunge punks who lived on the streets near Tompkins Square Park. Operating a few blocks from CBGBs Bar, the cradle of punk rock, No Se No and the Rivington School became pilgrimage places for hard-core punk rock fans. The punks were the Rivington School's core constituency. They and their suburban peers, of course, were also a *market*, which accounts



Anton Van Dalen, *Diagram for Grafting Branch to Arm*, 1983. Courtesy of Anton Van Dalen.

for the popularity of the sculpture garden at the 2B Garage as a shooting location for music videos, particularly hip-hop in the early 1990s. It was a touchstone of gritty urban authenticity, an emblem of the instantly indigenous international urban youth culture.

While a chaotic and metastasizing Rivington School surrounded by a cloud of street punks might provide foot soldiers for a war of cultural resistance during the mid- to late 1980s, theory and tactics for that war came from another quarter. As “a left-to-socialist artists’ resource and networking organization,” PADD intended to

build cultural coalitions during the period of conservative ascendancy that began with Ronald Reagan's election as president in 1980.⁵⁹ The group inherited a legacy of political activism from the Art Workers' Coalition, with Lucy Lippard, Jerry Kearns, and other experienced artists serving in leadership roles. In line with the objective of forging "a viable network of politically sympathetic exhibition outlets for activist art," PADD reached out to ABC No Rio, Fashion Moda, Group Material, and other groups.⁶⁰ Those affiliated with PADD took on the theoretical task of refining the idea of "activist art." Vanalyne Green and Margia Kramer, for example, described it as an art of "unique, compressed, intense visual constructs of experience, information and material" that responds to specific social needs, an art distinguished from "fetishized consumer commodity art."⁶¹ Lippard, for her part, characterized activist art as a paradigm for the practice of contemporary political art wherein "some element of the art takes place in the 'outside world,' including some teaching and media practice as well as community and labor organizing, public political work, and organizing within the artist's community."⁶² Greg Sholette further refined the term as "the opposite of those aesthetic practices that, however well-intentioned or overtly political in content, remain dependent on the space of the museum for their meaning."⁶³

In early 1982, PADD sponsored a national conference to build a nationwide network of activist art organizations. This networking by PADD and others culminated in issue-oriented cultural protest events, most notably the January 1984 Artists Call against U.S. Intervention in Central America (chiefly El Salvador and Nicaragua) with events in twenty-eight cities and the participation of more than a thousand artists in thirty-one New York galleries, many of them in the East Village.⁶⁴ Artists Call resulted in closer contacts between politically inclined Anglo and Hispanic artists in New York and artists in exile from Latin America. It was a milestone in the advent of a multicultural art world.

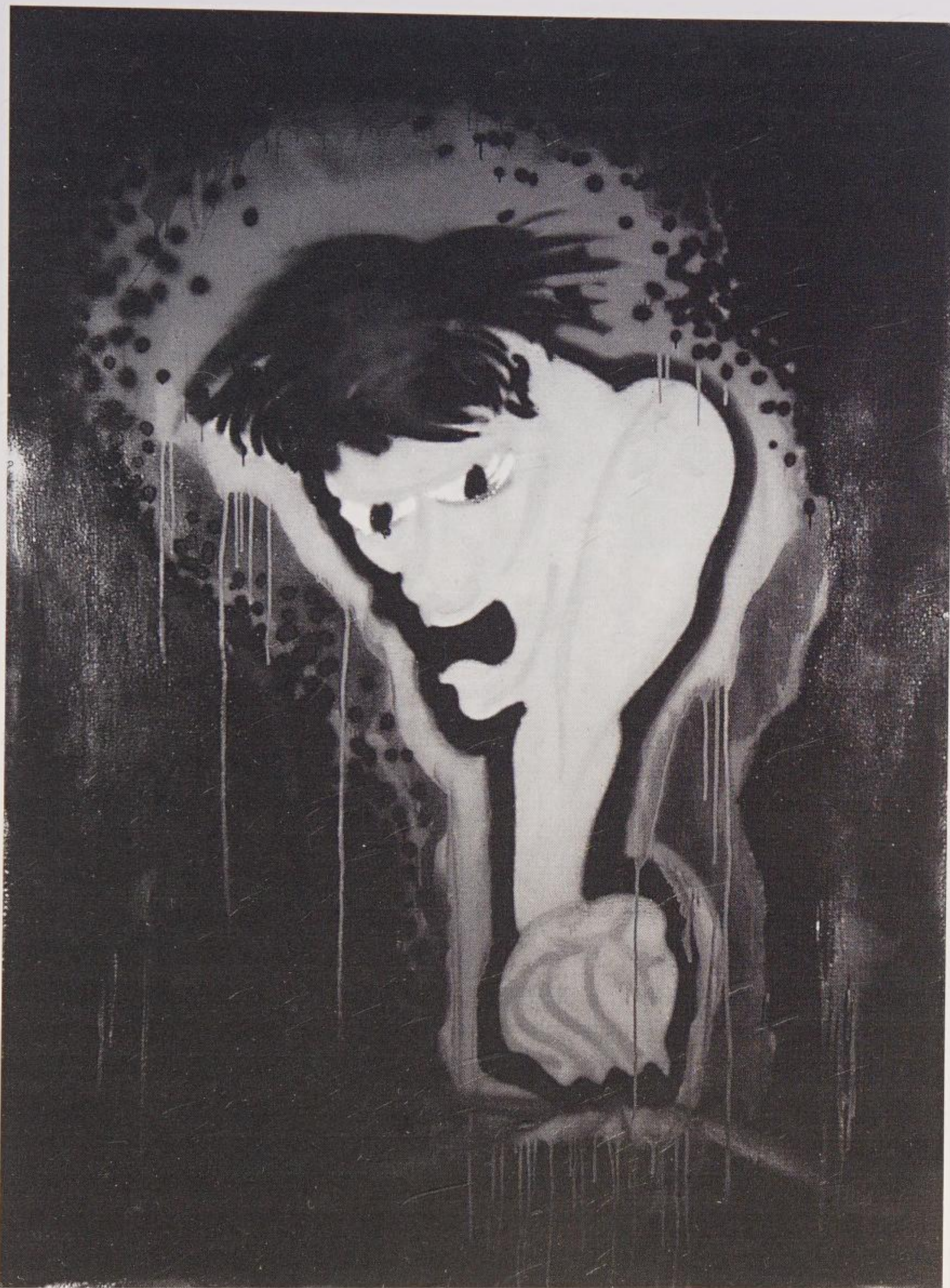
In preparing the event, Artists Call sponsored a daylong series of mini-seminars in activist art, including one on how to do so-called streetworks titled "MAKING the STREET the Hoarse THROAT of the CITY."⁶⁵ For PADD, streetworks grew out of the agit-prop of street demonstrations, a long-standing tradition of political art.⁶⁶ As they evolved from producing placards for mass demonstrations, PADD artists based the production and exhibition of their street art of posters and spray-painted stencils on bill posting and graffiti—that is, on the non-sanctioned use of public space.⁶⁷

Practitioners of the graffiti style plunged into the downtown New York art world of the 1980s, showing in numerous large public exhibitions in nightclubs and impromptu venues and executing collaborative street murals with their art school-trained counterparts. Graffiti raised new possibilities for both public art and painting. Although the style flourished in East Village galleries, graffiti as a commodity within the easel-painting market was short-lived. In his 1985 book, *Street Art*, Allan

Schwartzman declared that graffiti was the principal exemplar for contemporary street art. Artists arriving in New York in the late 1970s with “university credentials . . . turned to the graffitists for a new public identity detached from authority’s influences.” Inspired by the graffiti artists’ use of public space for private advertisements, artists “propelled themselves into the streets to communicate directly with the vast crowds of people they did not have access to in the discrete art world.”⁶⁸ The lack of commercial success and institutional ratification in the United States has obscured the art historical importance of graffiti art. At the moment of its ascendance, Schwartzman wrote that graffiti painting “let the world back into art, and changed our understandings and expectations of public art,” reinstating art’s “necessary public character.”⁶⁹

The response of politically minded artists to graffiti art was mixed. In 1989 the artist Leon Golub said that graffiti art was political in that it was an assertion of self, a manifestation of a fight against oppression: “By marking up subway cars, they assert themselves, discover a public presence, a will to power.” When graffiti was put on canvas for sale in galleries, Golub went on, “it’s not political.”⁷⁰ Among the Group Material artists, Tim Rollins was initially interested in the style, stating in 1982 that “it’s art that falls out of a social condition, and that helps us to find out about what the art means to everybody.” He noted, however, that “now it’s turning into a style, and the artists are being compromised by the lure of success . . . the social context is what gives it its meaning, and this is being ripped from it.”⁷¹

In May and June 1983, a reading group within PADD organized the first of a series of exhibitions and streetworks protesting against gentrification on the Lower East Side. Titled *Not for Sale*, the series signaled the start of visible organized resistance by artists to the inexorable transformation of their neighborhood. Through the project a disciplined political art practice began to spread through the bohemian East Village. *Not for Sale* was first of all an attempt at persuasion, an internal representation to the arts community. The project logo, a parody of the city’s official seal, showed an Indian refusing a Dutchman’s offer of cash for Manhattan. The call for proposals and the production of art was accompanied by an organizing effort that involved contacting East Village housing activists and the new art galleries. An early 1983 letter to galleries asked them to produce exhibitions that “reflect the diversity of the Lower East Side” and suggested they join the fight for commercial rent control.⁷² The first *Not for Sale* exhibition opened during the spring of 1983 at El Bohio on East Ninth Street, where PADD had its offices, and at ABC No Rio.⁷³ At El Bohio, a mural depicting the concept of real estate as a giant cockroach impinging upon the people and buildings of the neighborhood was already in place, created by PADD member Anton Van Dalen.⁷⁴ The mural was spray-painted through stencils in a mode favored by PADD artists for streetworks.⁷⁵



Lee Quiñones, *The Angry Young Man*, 1982. Courtesy of Lee Quiñones.

In its second *Not for Sale* project, in 1984, the PADD subcommittee directly attacked aspects of the East Village gallery scene in a call for work addressed to artists: “Are you sick of hearing art market hype about Lower East Side art, artists and galleries; neo-expressionism/unfocused angst; skyrocketing rents; graffiti on canvas; seeing stores and restaurants close because they can’t swing new rents; seeing the Lower East Side become SoHoized?”⁷⁶ The subcommittee pointed directly



Cover of *Post-Graffiti* catalog by Crash, 1983. Courtesy of Sidney Janis Gallery.

to the role artists played in the economic and social processes that were transforming the neighborhood, which they called by its former designation rather than the more recent appellation of East Village.

Seeking to produce a “more tactical and flexible event,” *Not for Sale* asked artists for multiple copies of posterlike artwork that would be put up on the street. In an advertisement for the show that featured a suitcase as its central motif, the street walls posterred and stenciled by PADD artists were ironically named and given graphic logos—the “Discount Salon,” the “Leona Helmsley” (after the wife



A Project Against Gentrification
 EL BOHIO
 605 E. 9th St. & 156 RIVINGTON ST.
 ABC NO RIO

- Keith Christenson
- Bill Doherty
- Jodie Fink
- Leslie Bender
- Keith Boro
- Anton Van Dalen
- Randy Petch
- Jim Syme
- David Aronberg
- Lyn Hughes
- Mel Rosenthal
- Susan Sipos
- Jill Fleischman
- Oliva Beens
- Tony Buczko
- Soo-Young Lee
- Sue Stava
- David Tomono
- Randy Petch
- John Genkin
- Tony Silvestrino
- Ruby Levesque
- Syn Maclean
- Linda Egert
- Michael Corris
- David Aronberg
- Lyn Hughes
- Barbara Gary
- Peter Melville
- Nancy Glowinski
- Eugene Fiore
- Raymond Campos
- Thom Corn
- Michael Corris
- Lyn Hughes
- Richard Nicksik
- Deborah Ossoff
- Joy Kreves
- Vincent Salas
- Rob Natowitz
- Sara Hombacher
- Melody D'Arnell
- Dona McAdams
- Penelope Goodfriend
- Laurel Hecht
- Laurel Hecht
- Penelope Goodfriend
- Tim Rollins
- Catherine Hazard
- Nancy Clark
- Oliva Beens
- Randi Chalfin
- Beverly Naidus
- Barbara Westermann
- Kevin Ferris
- Diana Osterfeld
- Nedra Newbie
- Melanie Nielson
- Laurel Hecht
- Penelope Goodfriend
- Tim Rollins
- Catherine Hazard
- Nancy Clark
- Oliva Beens
- Bill Allen
- Trevor Johnston
- Mike Vargas
- Eva Cockcroft
- Alan Hochman
- Susan Merinac
- Isaac Jackson
- Tzvi Ben-Aretz
- ATW Communications
- Felix Gonzalez
- Paul Tick
- Eric Darton

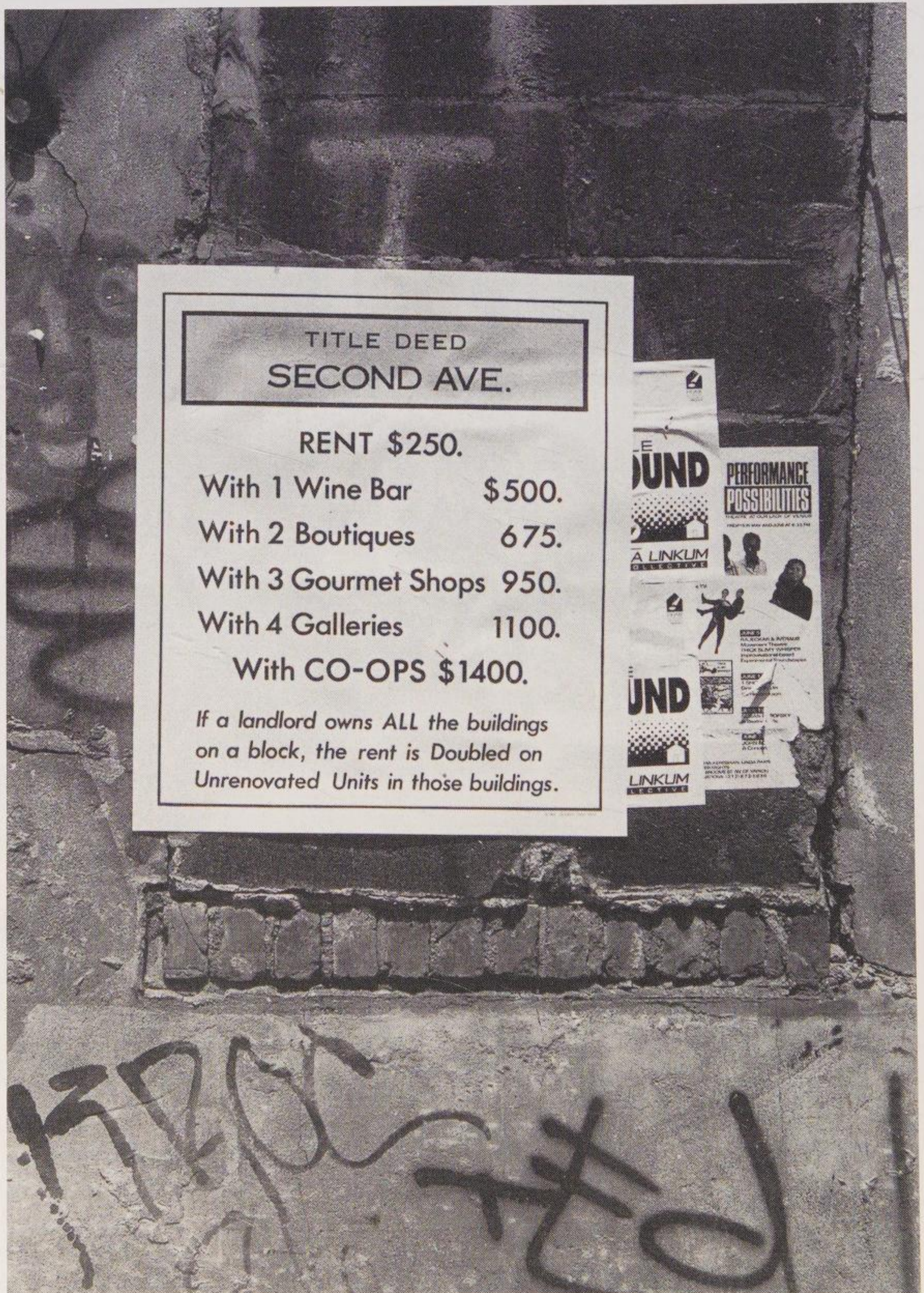
OPENING-MAY 21, SAT. 2-7pm. THURS-SUN. 12-6pm. till JUNE 19
 SUPPORTED BY PADD/GROUP MATERIAL/MET COUNCIL/ABC NO RIO



PADD flyer for the Not for Sale project, 1983.

of a senile real estate tycoon who herself underwent a sensational prosecution for tax evasion), "Guggenheim Downtown," and "Another Gallery."⁷⁷

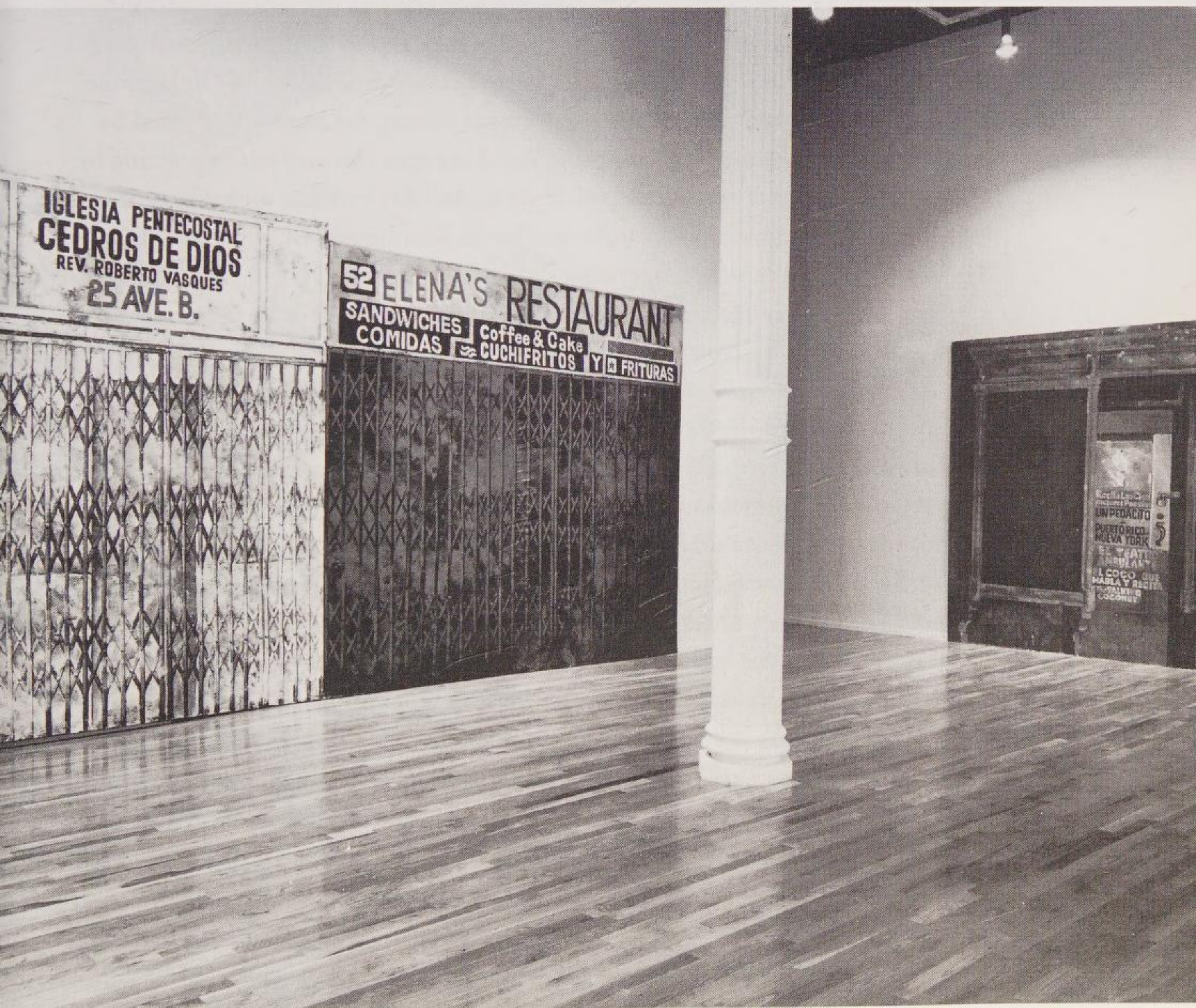
Three of the posters PADD produced were used to illustrate an article by Craig Owens that appeared as a kind of polemical coda in the same issue of *Art in America*



Dennis Thomas and Day Gleeson, *Art for the Evicted*, 1984. Courtesy of Dennis Thomas and Day Gleeson. Photograph by Dennis Thomas and Day Gleeson.

as Walter Robinson and Carlo McCormick's survey article on the East Village gallery scene.⁷⁸ Robinson and McCormick mentioned the "anti-alternative space" movement of ABC No Rio and Group Material, noting that their work had not been included in recent museum exhibitions of East Village art. Owens saw the "empty diversity" of the East Village art scene as a miniature simulacrum of the art market status quo and most of the art as an appropriation of subcultural difference that pointed the way for the leveling influence of the culture industry.⁷⁹

Although PADD's exhibits and organizing activities were regularly supported by Lucy R. Lippard's writings as art critic at the *Village Voice*, the group's work was outside commercial and institutional circuits of exhibition, and art periodicals did not give the group's work much attention.⁸⁰ Still, PADD's work was important schooling in forms and tactics for artists who played roles in the next, and



Martin Wong, *Pentecostal Church, Elena's Restaurant, and Untitled (Poetry Store)*, 1986. Installation view at Semaphore Gallery East. Courtesy of PPOW, New York. Photograph by Adam Reich.

explicitly politicized, phase of “East Village art,” producing supporting representations for the struggle against gentrification.

As galleries left the East Village, the attention of collectors and art journalists shifted away. Neighborhood activists’ battles with the city and developers over the fate of the area’s housing heated up. The most militant segment of those struggling against gentrification in the East Village were the squatters who had occupied abandoned city-owned buildings during the 1980s. Their loud, bitter encounters with the police and city officials would claim headlines into the 1990s. During the late 1980s, homelessness was a central political issue in cities as the displaced poor put themselves in the path of the middle class. The spectacle of abject people on the streets was the consequence of interlocking processes of economic restructuring, decisions not to build affordable housing for the poor (or “redundant” labor pool), and state support for gentrification.

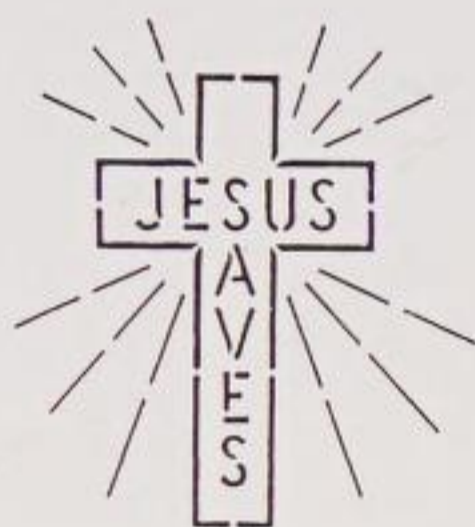
A rallying point for the radical housing struggle was the tent city encampment of homeless people in Tompkins Square Park in the late 1980s. Squatters from buildings nearby supported the encampment—some called it “Dinkinsville” after the mayor—and the emerging movement among the homeless abetted by housing activists. Many artists also supported the tent city and self-organizing by the homeless through a 1990 auction of art at the Max Fish bar on Ludlow Street, organized by Marguerite Van Cooke and James Romberger, who had run the Ground Zero gallery, which operated from 1985 to 1987.⁸¹

Graffiti, posters and stenciled signs, and demonstrations were continual reminders of the struggle on East Village streets; artists involved with the graphic journal *World War III Illustrated* produced many of these. Launched in 1980 by Seth Tobocman and the German émigré artist Christof Kohlhöfer, the journal published the more socially critical and abstract work of New York cartoonists and illustrators.⁸² The journal was edited collectively and reflected Tobocman’s work as an antinuclear activist and his subsequent involvement with Artists Call. In 1984, *World War III Illustrated* published its “Captive City” issue, containing collaborative imagery that described gentrification and the drug trade on the Lower East Side. In this issue, the bad dream, or hallucination, serves as a prevalent visual metaphor for the subjective effects of social and political conditions. When Eric Drooker, Josh Whalen, and Paula Hewitt joined the group of artists affiliated with *World War III Illustrated*, they and Tobocman posted and stenciled images and slogans on the streets.⁸³ Tobocman’s blocky 1930s-style illustrations were in tune with the East Village neo-Expressionist figuration, but their overt political content set them apart. For example, his one-page cartoon version of a thesis on urban displacement and spatial deconcentration is a succinct argument for squatting.⁸⁴

Street graffiti and outdoor performances made the postgallery East Village seem like a place where artists were waging war. The rock band Missing Founda-



TWELVE STENCILS FROM AND TO THE



LOWER EAST SIDE STREET 1980-'87



Anton Van Dalen, *Stencils for the Lower East Side*, 1980-87. Stencil print. Courtesy of Anton Van Dalen.

tion, for instance, felt-markered slogans and simple images on walls around Lower Manhattan, and its logo of an upside-down cocktail glass became ubiquitous. This was often coupled with the legend “the party’s over” or “1933 = 1988,” implicitly equating early Nazi Germany with the Reagan era. Peter Missing, the band’s lead singer, was among the more visible art-rock warriors against gentrification. Missing was locally notorious for his contempt for property, and his “shadowy” band became the subject of journalist Mike Taibbi’s sensational reports on the East Village “cult of rage” for the ABC television network.

The Tompkins Square Park riot of August 1988 exploded when police attempted to impose a nighttime curfew on the park. Most observers blamed police overreaction for the violence, and the incident politicized many local residents. The antigentrification struggle became broader and more militant. Conflicts in and around the park continued until June 1991 when the city erected a perimeter fence, closing the park for a year. The riot brought notoriety to the artist and



Nils Norman, *Tompkins Square Park Monument to Civil Disobedience*, 1997. Courtesy of American Fine Arts and Nils Norman.

TOMPKINS SQUARE PARK MONUMENT TO CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

THE SKY VILLAGE

The Tower

THE SCAFFOLD TOWER EXTENDS THE TREE HEIGHT BY APPROXIMATELY 15 FEET AND ACTS AS A LOOKOUT POSITION OVER THE PARK. THE SOUND SYSTEM STRAPPED TO THE TOP OF THE TOWER CAN EITHER BE PLUGGED INTO THE NEIGHBOURING BUILDINGS OR BATTERY POWERED IN EMERGENCIES. THIS GIVES A 24 HOUR PUBLIC MUSIC SYSTEM WITH A SOUND RADIUS OF MANY BLOCKS.

LOCKING ONESELF ONTO THE TOP OF THE TOWER HINDERS POLICE EXTRACTION FROM THE PARK CONSIDERABLY.

Tree Houses

THE LOWER AND UPPER MAKE-SHIFT TREE HOUSES OFFER SHELTER AND ARE SEMI-HABITABLE. THEY ARE ALSO GOOD LOCK-ON LOCATIONS TO HINDER POLICE EXTRACTION.

Platforms

THE SMALL PLATFORMS DOTTED AROUND VARIOUS TREES OFFER PERCHES FOR REST AND SAFETY AND ACT AS STATIONS FROM WHICH TO AIRWALK.

Airwalks

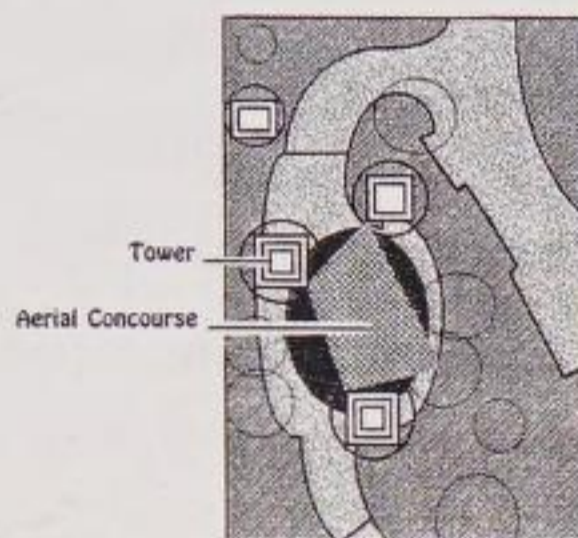
AIRWALKS MADE FROM PARALLEL CLIMBING ROPES ENABLE ONE TO MOVE FROM DISTANT TREE TO TREE WITHOUT TOUCHING THE GROUND.

Aerial Concourse

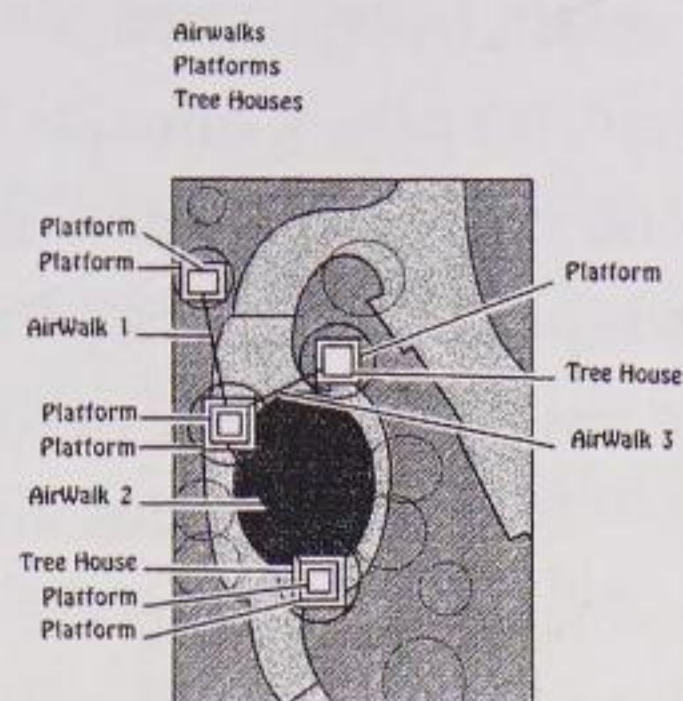
THE CONCOURSE IS A LARGE NET SUSPENDED ABOVE THE GROUND BETWEEN THE TREES. IT ACTS AS A GREAT PLACE TO HANG OUT, RELAX, AIDS FREE MOVEMENT FROM TREE TO TREE AND HELPS ONE EVADE POLICE EXTRACTION FROM THE PARK.

The Tunnels

TUNNELS A 40 ARE TWO PRECARIOUSLY SHALLOW UNDERGROUND EARTHWORKS. DUG UNDER PATHWAYS THEY PREVENT POLICE CARS AND OTHER EXTRACTION VEHICLES (IE. TRUCKS, CHERRY PICKER CRANES, BULLDOZERS ETC) DRIVING THROUGH THE PARK. THE WEIGHT OF A VEHICLE COULD COLLAPSE THE TUNNELS AND CRUSH ANYONE LOCKED-ON INSIDE UNDERGROUND.



Aerial Concourse
The Tower



EAST VILLAGE



Nils Norman, *Tompkins Square Park Monument to Civil Disobedience*, 1997. Courtesy of American Fine Arts and Nils Norman.

videographer Clayton Patterson, who had documented the event with his video recorder. Patterson's videotape was subpoenaed by city prosecutors, and the artist was jailed for refusing to hand it over. (The tape later provided the principal evidence in numerous injury lawsuits against the city. Patterson's case was an early instance of the legal role videography can play in citizen-police relations.) Other East Village video artists did work around this most urgent of community topics. Paul Garrin taped the riot, while works like Franck Goldberg's *How to Squash a Squat* (1990) and Rik Little's retrospective *Home Invasion* (1999) also documented the ensuing housing battles.⁸⁵

Art, together with posters, banners, and graffiti made by squatters and their sympathizers and shown in exhibitions in the occupied buildings during the years of conflict with police in the streets constitute what participants called "squat art."⁸⁶ Squat art had a trajectory outside the mainstream of both market and institutional art exhibition as artist squatters started workshops and opened exhibition spaces in their buildings. Just as squatters and the homeless were to some extent interchangeable, so the phenomenon of squat art was closely related to homeless art, works produced by homeless people in New York City's shelters.

Much like the art historian Roger Cardinal's term "outsider art," these awkward labels refer to social categories of artists, or spaces and situations of cultural production, rather than to an identifiable style or aesthetic.⁸⁷ Still, for a group

of artists, being named confers recognition and puts a body of cultural work into discursive play. Consequently, some artists use these terms to publicize their work, while others resist them as simplifying distortions. Foregrounding the artist presence in the squats also served political purposes, because it humanized the squatters to those neighbors who resented them as loud, dirty, and threatening.⁸⁸ Similarly, making art with homeless people and encouraging their artistic production serve to make their existence concrete. It humanizes the poor and minimizes “compassion fatigue.”⁸⁹

Most of the work I saw in the squat galleries and in exhibitions of work by homeless artists during the early 1990s had little or no political content. John Ed Croft, for example, made paintings of loosely brushed figures emerging in patches or blooms from abstract grounds. These, he explained, were representations of lost Atlantis and archetypal images of maps and crowds.⁹⁰ The gregarious Croft was the most visible *animateur* of homeless art in the squats. He ran the Chocolate Milk Gallery in a squat on East Seventh Street during 1990, organizing exhibitions and taking a six-pack of beer as commission on all sales. Working from the offices of the Coalition for the Homeless, Croft also ran an art organization and a parody political campaign, Homeless Higgins for President. In Croft’s cartoons, stiff little silhouette hobo figures listen to a hieratically enlarged Higgins offer beer in exchange for votes.

Tina White’s Art Program for the Homeless distributed art materials to the shelters and collected the results. White also worked at a SoHo gallery of outsider art.⁹¹ She visited the squat art exhibitions and her gallery exhibited work by squatters such as Carla Cubit, whose fragile assemblage constructions were first shown at Chocolate Milk. Anthony Dominguez, another homeless artist who showed in the squats, was taken on by the American Primitive gallery. He made sew-on patches using bleach stains on black cloth, work that emblemized the bleak conditions of street life, and the patch format of the work slipped into the underground image circuit of punk style.

The most frequent subject of Dominguez’s vignettes was a walking skeleton, a pervasive motif in politicized East Village art of the 1980s. It was used in the early 1980s, for example, by Michael Roman, a Chicano artist whose colorful designs feature the *calaveras*, or animated skeletons, of popular imagery for Mexico’s Day of the Dead celebrations. The skeleton policeman appeared in a street stencil by Anton Van Dalen, and Seth Tobocman drew police in his graphic narratives who metamorphosed from frame to frame between fleshly and skeletal states. And James Romberger’s *The Triumph of Death (after Breughel)*, a sweeping depiction of skeletons slaughtering all in Tompkins Square Park, is the most complex of these images, returning to the medieval theme of the triumph of death.⁹² This genre is sonorously appropriate for a depiction of the park, the contested scene

of festival and riot during a time of constant police action and epidemic, death-dealing AIDS.

Among the many spaces in squatted buildings set aside at various times for art exhibition, Bullet Space on East Third Street is the best known.⁹³ The Bullet building was originally called the 6 O’Clock Squat by the group of artists from the Rivington School who took it over in 1985.⁹⁴ The ambiguous six o’clock graffiti shared wall space with the more pointed markings of Missing Foundation. Bullet Space began as a community gallery run by members of the building; Thom Corn, an artist-in-residence at Fashion Moda during the early 1990s, played an active role in organizing its exhibitions.⁹⁵ Bullet squatter Andrew Castrucci, who had run the A&P Gallery (1987–88), joined the gallery project after the Tompkins Square Park riot. Castrucci produced a print project he called *Your House Is Mine*, after a Peter Missing slogan, between 1988 and 1993. The first phase consisted of multicolored silkscreen posters by thirty-four artists bound into a sixteen-pound book.⁹⁶ This was like a “tombstone,” he wrote, memorializing the AIDS epidemic and efforts to resist the society of control that had ended as “lost causes and dead ends.”⁹⁷ One set of posters was put up on the front of Bullet Space.

Work by artists from Bullet Space was included in *If You Lived Here*, a series of exhibitions and discussions about urban homelessness organized by Martha Rosler at the Dia Art Foundation in SoHo between 1987 and 1989.⁹⁸ The exhibition was styled as a kind of mini-exposition of the work of a variety of activist groups. Work by squatter artists was exhibited alongside art by schoolchildren in an area of the exhibit called the Shelter, which contained beds like those in public facilities. This display, linking art by squatters and the homeless, brought the squatters’ struggle to broader notice among activists, academics, and politicized artists.

In 1993 Castrucci published a one-time oversized tabloid newspaper, also titled *Your House Is Mine*, that gave sophisticated expression to the ethos of the squats. An introductory essay describes the limited-edition book of posters Bullet produced as a “collection of echoes from a decade that’s left us with a sense of permanent woe.” This elegiac tone carried over into the work Castrucci and Bullet Space artists did for the exhibition *Urban Encounters*, presented at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in 1998.⁹⁹ A “symbolic squatter’s shack,” as Tom McGlynn called it, was constructed from street materials and filled inside and out with artworks, artifacts, and signs; this room within a room could be interpreted as “a memory of a meeting place or an actual memorial to its demise.”¹⁰⁰ McGlynn wrote that Bullet Space was part of “a story about missing communal property” and the “Draconian rule of law” that had erased the diverse communities of the Lower East Side and left only “remnants of diversity.”¹⁰¹ He characterized the aesthetic of Bullet Space art as one that combined a “preoccupation about beauty evidenced in abject circumstance with metaphors for the real.”¹⁰²

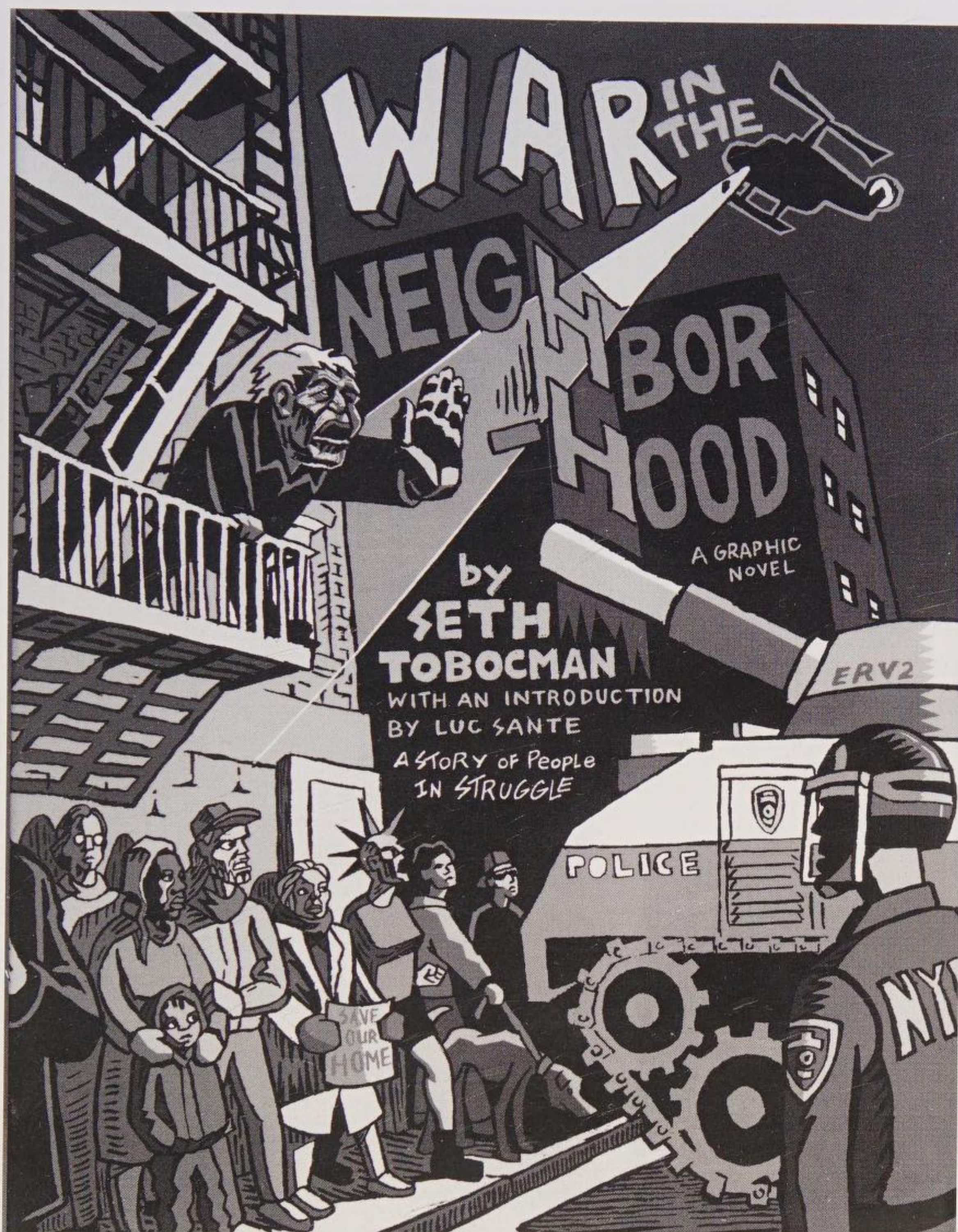
The best-known example of this aesthetic was the urine-filled bottle used in

Bullet Space installations. The significance of this piss bottle was explained to me twice: first, it's a weapon to be hurled from rooftops onto invading police, and, second, it served as a simple statement about the sanitation conditions in the squats where there are no toilets. Mounted on a pedestal or lined up along the floor, the bottles of aging urine had a lovely mellow color. "Resistance should be beautiful," Castrucci said, and part of the pleasure in regarding objects such as this lies in knowing the secret language of survival, like the hobo sign language that so fascinated Basquiat.¹⁰³ At the same time, this aestheticizing strategy is a way of backing away from extended political commitment. For Castrucci, artists become activists due to their living situation, not by political choice.

While Castrucci's projects at Bullet Space sought to aestheticize the squatters' struggle through vitrining its artifacts and abstracting its ethos, Seth Tobocman took the narrative route, making an urban fable from the materials of the struggle. His *War in the Neighborhood* (New York: Autonomedia, 2000) is a historical graphic novel that recounts a decade of struggle by the militant Lower East Side homeless through a series of straightforward narratives interspersed with portraits and surreal apocalyptic visions of destructive urban transformation. Tobocman played historian for this work, using oral recollections and videotapes by other artists to depict people involved in the struggle. Among them was the poet Jorge Brandon, a follower of Puerto Rican *independenista* Pedro Albizu Campos and called "El Coco Que Habla" by the Nuyorican poets of the 1970s. Brandon lived in the squats toward the end of his life. Some may find this graphic novel to be more comic than it intends.

In 2000 Krzysztof Wodiczko, the Polish émigré artist whose work frequently focuses on homelessness, castigated the East Village squatters' resistance to gentrification "futile and childish."¹⁰⁴ Indeed, for many in the art world this issue was a mere local skirmish that paled in comparison with the national culture wars then under way. Politically, Wodiczko is wrong: the East Village squatters were an important part of the genealogy of the contemporary antiglobalization movement.¹⁰⁵

It may be argued that "squat art" had less to do with art than with subculture. Yet the complex conjunction of art, capital, and the state apparatus within which the genre emerged remains a principal incidence in the emergence of politicized postmodern art practices in the United States. The story sketched here suggests some complications in the simple picture of the East Village gallery experiment as an instance of Reagan-era consumption, and it points to the rich unexplicated texture of historical experience during the struggle and collapse of New York City's postwar bohemia. Sad to say, that bohemia is history. The extirpation of bohemia is happening in cities around the world, and in each instance is a matter of great local concern. The New York art scene today is made up of various dispersed centers; it has, in effect, been suburbanized. Intensity, diversity, rapidity of inter-



Seth Tobocman, cover of *War in the Neighborhood*, 2000.

actions and exchanges—the lifeblood of a significant art culture—have been dramatically curtailed by this decentralization.¹⁰⁶

I made a sentimental journey to a vacant lot on January 1, 2000, the twentieth anniversary of the *Real Estate Show*. There, in a city-owned building, a group of artists had made a play for a piece of Manhattan action. On view that same day, up the street and around the corner, the fruit of that action, the cultural center ABC No Rio was exhibiting *Dangerous Remains: Revolting Artifacts of the Premillennial*



Krzysztof Wodiczko, *The Homeless Projection: A Proposal for Union Square* (detail: statue of George Washington), 1986. Installed at 49th Parallel, Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art, New York. Courtesy of Krzysztof Wodiczko and Galerie Lelong.

Urban Infiltration Twenty Years after the Real Estate Show. Here I considered the wry captions beneath wall-mounted plastic boxes containing dusty dreadlocks, patchwork hotpants, and placenta prints from a homebirth, the obscure mysticism of hodge-podge construction work signified in cheery diagrams, and a box of “bugnuts” used to tap into electrical lines. Like Bullet Space’s 1997 exhibition *A Continuation of Something Else*, this was an aestheticization of the experience of involvement in a resistance struggle.

Foredoomed and largely symbolic, squat art was in part a pageant of resistance,

a spectacle of creative riot that garnered media attention and contributed to the vilification and abuse of punks, anarchists, and squatters by authority figures. This spectacle of riot was the hot and angry counterpart to the gentler pageantry of the contemporaneous community-garden movement, which also centered on peoples' use of vacant city-owned land.¹⁰⁷

Castrucci credits the squats with delaying the process of gentrification, and Tobocman observes that they modeled creative resistance for a younger generation. If so, then some political success was achieved. But what is the significance of squat art for artistic culture? Artists caught in a mesh of historical events, like a revolution or a war, and constrained to image those conditions and feelings, are pushed toward producing correspondingly intense imagery. The squatter resistance of the late 1980s and early 1990s was a quasirevolutionary circumstance, a revolt against the rule of the absolute bourgeois. It took place under the noses of New York's cultural establishment, which, for the most part, chose to look away.

The idea of the avant-garde is bound up with historicity; an avant-garde



David Wojnarowicz, Pteradactyl painting at abandoned pier, c. 1983. Courtesy of PPOW, New York. Photographer unknown.



David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled (Clock and Ants)*, 1988. Courtesy of PPOW, New York.

understands itself as cultural production that precedes a general condition, that is, as prophecy. If there is no mission to the avant-garde, history will have to do. In the East Village of the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was no such broad mission offered to art, simply a violent agenda produced by the collision of vested capital and romantic youth, the scourge of AIDS, and the eviction of bohemia.

Notes

This piece was written by Alan W. Moore in continuous consultation with James Cornwell. Julie Ault, Greg Sholette, and Liza Kirwin have provided valuable suggestions on earlier drafts. I was an active participant in some events described and have therefore opted to mix voices, first and third person, where appropriate.

1. Among the relevant studies are Janet L. Abu-Lughod et al., *From Urban Village to East Village: The Battle for New York's Lower East Side* (Oxford, England, and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994); and Christopher Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
2. This is Mele's central argument about the 1980s art scene in *Selling the Lower East Side*. It was first raised in Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," *October* 31 (winter 1984): 91–111.
3. Their affair is detailed in Phoebe Hoban, *Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art* (New York: Viking, 1998).
4. Good histories of New York's bohemia are Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), and Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000).
5. Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
6. One such normative history is Irving Sandler, *Art of the Postmodern Era from the Late 1960s to the Early 1990s* (New York: Icon Editions, 1996). This dichotomy lies behind an *Artforum* issue on the East Village (38, no. 2 [October 1999]). This issue included an essay, "East Village in the Press," by Liza Kirwin, who wrote "It's All True: Imagining New York's East Village Art Scene of the 1980s," (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1999).
7. The East Village was so named during the 1960s, an initial period of middle-class encroachment; the name is a complement to the West Village (Greenwich Village). The area had been known as the Lower East Side when it was a center of Jewish life and culture. The distinction between the two designations also keys into the neologistic "Loisaida," from the Spanglish, as coined and used by Nuyorican poets such as Miguel Algarin, Miguel Piñero, and Bimbo Rivas. The name East Village symbolically erased both its former and present ethnic inhabitants. In common usage, Lower East Side denotes the entire area, especially below Houston Street. East Village denotes the area above Houston Street, below Fourteenth Street, and east of Third Avenue.
8. Good histories of Lower East Side bohemia include Albert Parry, *Garrets and Pretenders, a History of Bohemianism in America* (New York: Covici Friede, 1933); and sections of Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976). For the 1950s and 1960s, see Ronald Sukenick, *Down and In: Life in the Underground* (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1987); and for subculture, see Luc Sante, *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991).
9. Literature dedicated to this bohemia includes Ed Sanders, *Tales of Beatnik Glory* (New York: Stonehill, 1975), and *Hymn to the Rebel Cafe* (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1993); memoirs such as Yuri Kapralov, *Once There Was a Village* (New York: Akashic, 1998); and numerous feature films.
10. This dialectical opposition underlies Jerrold E. Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830–1930* (New York: Viking, 1986). Pierre

Bourdieu also advanced an analysis of Parisian bohemia in *Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

11. It is because they are comprised of career artists (and dedicated amateurs), writers, actors, and musicians that bohemias differ from subcultures, a dominant analytic category of cultural studies.

12. Numerous authors have announced the end of the modernist avant-garde. Yet art that understands itself as “advanced” remains, as does an informal worldwide community of antibourgeois creative people. Both “avant-garde” and “bohemian” may be obsolete concepts or historical descriptors, yet the aesthetic and social configurations they denote remain, awaiting new formulations and descriptions.

13. The East Village galleries of the 1980s are relatively well known, but earlier art spaces are not. For example, the Lower East Side Print Shop, the Millennium Film Workshop, the complex of theaters created by La Mama ETC, and University of the Streets (a jazz venue) predated the 1980s. Kekeleba House gallery was founded in 1978.

14. Liza Kirwin, working from print advertisements, lists 197 galleries and exhibition spaces that operated between 1981 and 1987 (Kirwin, “It’s All True”).

15. Independent exhibitions and alternative spaces may, ultimately, be unassimilable by commercial media. Exhibition frameworks are domesticated when they are commercialized; when numerous galleries opened, and especially when they began to advertise, promotion according to a normal model could begin.

16. My view here accords with that of Walter Robinson, interviewed in Jeanne Siegel, ed., *Art Talk: The Early 80s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1990). Robinson was a president of Colab during the early 1980s and art editor of the *East Village Eye*.

17. Colab comprised various factions and had several phases of life. See Alan Moore and Marc Miller, eds., *ABC No Rio Dinero: The Story of a Lower East Side Art Gallery* (New York: ABC No Rio with Collaborative Projects, 1985).

18. An earlier graffiti movement of “writers,” as the artists involved in it called themselves, failed to gain a steady foothold in the contemporary world of art sales and exhibition. The graffiti art movement of the 1980s, despite its first successes, met a similar fate. Hugo Martinez, an *animateur* of the 1970s scene, notes that the members of the first movement built their reputations on the streets, whereas the later artists did so in the galleries. Joe Austin, *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Art Became an Urban Crisis in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), is a fine précis of the movement.

19. Michael Shore, “Punk Rocks the Art World: How Does It Look? How Does It Sound?” *ArtNews* 79 (November 1980): 78–85, is one such example; another is Marc Miller and Bettie Ringma, eds., *Punk Art*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Washington Project for the Arts, 1978).

20. For background on this scene, see J. Hoberman, “No Wavelength: The Para-Punk Underground,” *Village Voice*, May 21, 1979. Jack Sargent, *Deathtripping: An Illustrated History of the Cinema of Transgression* (London: Creation Books, 1995), continues the story for the next group of downtown narrative filmmakers.

21. For Fashion Moda, see Sally Webster, “Fashion Moda,” 1996, at <http://talkback>.

lehman.cuny.edu/tb/fashionmoda.html. The Fales Library, New York University, holds the Fashion Moda papers.

22. These included the quartet of me, Rebecca Howland, Anne Messner, and Peter Mönnig. Christy Rupp, Walter Robinson, and Bobby G also played instrumental roles. We were inspired by Fashion Moda, and its three directors—Stefan Eins, Joe Lewis, and the young William Scott—attended *Real Estate Show* events. Howland, Goldman, and I ran ABC No Rio during its first months. Although the *Real Estate Show* included artists who were not in Colab, and several in the group opposed it, Colab quickly moved to support ABC No Rio.

23. The artists linked with 112 Workshop certainly showed their sybaritic side, at least initially. See Catherine Morris, ed., *Food: An Exhibition by White Columns*, exh. cat. (Münster, Germany: Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, 1999); and Robyn Brentano with Mark Savitt, eds., *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street* (New York: New York University Press, 1981). Yet its programs became more formal, especially at its successor, the White Columns gallery.

24. Sandy Nairne, “The Institutionalization of Dissent,” in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, eds., *Thinking about Exhibitions* (New York: Routledge, 1996). Artists reflect on alternative spaces in Tricia Collins and Richard Milazzo, eds., *An Anthology of Statements Celebrating the Twentieth Anniversary of White Columns, New York* (New York: White Columns, 1991).

25. Cortez changed his style of dress, formed a partnership with the late club habituée Anya Phillips (manager of the band James White and the Contortions), and edited the fall 1977 issue of the Canadian magazine *File* (3, no. 4), with the motto “Punk ’Til You Puke” on the cover. See also Moore and Miller, eds., *ABC No Rio Dinero*. Richard Flood, “Skied and Grounded in Queens: *New York/New Wave* at P.S. 1,” *Artforum* 19, no. 10 (June 1981): 84–87, quotes other New York critics on the show. The installation is documented in *New York/New Wave at P.S. 1* (1981, videotape, Art/New York). The public careers of Keith Haring and Robert Mapplethorpe, among others, began with this show.

26. These efforts, now mostly forgotten, took place in Brooklyn. When the history of late-twentieth-century Brooklyn artists’ communities is told, it will start with projects like the Coney Island show, Gowanus Memorial Art Yard, and the Terminal Show.

27. Syeus Mottel, *Charas: The Improbable Dome Builders* (New York: Drake, 1973), describes the work that the politicized Puerto Rican gang did with Buckminster Fuller. In 1980 the building was administered by a coalition of community groups called Seven Loaves.

28. Emmett Grogan, *Ringolevio: A Life Played for Keeps* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972). Grogan was a founder of the Diggers, the San Francisco-based group that influenced Abbie Hoffman and the Yippies in New York. The Diggers’ Free Store, which gave things away, was established in 1966 to counter the rapid commercialization of the hippie movement.

29. Although fun may have been abroad in this crowd—and Hoban states repeatedly (in *Basquiat*) that drugs flowed freely—the frequent presence in the crowd around the

artists of the incipient Fun Gallery of mainstream luminaries like Metropolitan Museum curator Henry Geldzahler and Citibank art buyer Jeffrey Deitch must have made it clear that real success would very likely ensue.

30. Mitchell's *Kidnapped* (1979), a low-budget super-8 film shot in a Third Street apartment with pages of the script taped to the walls, was a homage to Warhol's film *Vinyl* (1965). Astor starred in Mitchell's film *Underground USA*, as did the former Warhol Factory habitué and poet René Ricard, who later became a leading critical booster of graffiti, Basquiat, and Haring.

31. Brathwaite's soup can train mural, painted when he was an unknown street artist, was a kind of direct appeal through billboard homage to the art world's most famous denizen, and, through him, to the power of an established cultural community. Brathwaite went on to become a commentator on hip-hop for MTV.

32. Patti Astor, "We Are *All* Graffiti Artists!" in *Graffiti Art*, auction cat. (New York: Guernsey's, 2000), 12–15. The climactic concert scene in *Wild Style* was filmed in the abandoned East River Park amphitheater painted for the occasion by Lee (Quiñones).

33. Hoban, *Basquiat*, 153.

34. *Ibid.*, 154.

35. See Steven Hager, *Art after Midnight* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986). Club 57's themed evenings largely referenced television, hyperbolizing the already hyperbolic sketch comedy of shows such as *Saturday Night Live*.

36. Diego Cortez quoted from an interview with D. A. Robbins, "The 'Meaning' of 'New'—The '70s/'80s Axis: An Interview with Diego Cortez," *Arts* 57, no. 5 (January 1983).

37. Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975). In the East Village scene of the 1960s, Warhol launched his band, the Velvet Underground, in a hall he rented, and showed Factory-made films in underground cinemas there.

38. The heavily illustrated book by Peter Frank and Michael McKenzie, *New, Used, and Improved: Art for the 80's* (New York: Abbeville, 1987), shows this interchange of media clearly.

39. Richard Goldstein, "Enter the Anti-Space," *Village Voice*, November 11, 1980. The name of the place was derived from a faded business sign visible directly across the street through our plate-glass window: "Abogado Notario" (lawyer, notary).

40. Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

41. See Yasmin Ramirez in *Sweet Oblivion: The Urban Landscape of Martin Wong*, exh. cat., ed. Amy Scholder (New York: Rizzoli and the New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998). Miguel Piñero, the author of the play *Short Eyes*, was the best known of the Nuyorican poets and a lifelong resident of the Lower East Side he and his circle called "Losaida."

42. Grant Kester discusses similar programs in "Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art," *Afterimage* 22 (January 1995). Exhibi-

tions at the Henry Street Settlement's Louis Abrons Arts for Living Center reveal a continuous effort to use the arts in education to give imaginative vision to the growth of the neighborhood.

43. The store opened in west SoHo in December 1980. Jeffrey Deitch paid the rent, and Kiki Smith ran it. See Moore and Miller, eds., *ABC No Rio Dinero*.

44. Goldstein, "Enter the Anti-Space."

45. Goldstein, "Enter the Anti-Space." New Wave music succeeded punk as a more commercially acceptable type of rock. As the *Village Voice* nightclub columnist Michael Musto wrote, "The new wavers took punk's rebellious anger and made it more aesthetically pleasant" (Michael Musto, *Downtown* [New York: Vintage, 1986], 15).

46. Goldstein, "Enter the Anti-Space." Rollins's remark about the dialectic is repeated in a 1981 Group Material handout: in its storefront, "Group Material sought to reinvent a dialectical approach to reality through the means of art" ("Caution! Alternative Space!," in Group Material folder, PADD Archives, Museum of Modern Art Library, New York. See also Moore and Miller, eds., *ABC No Rio Dinero*, 23).

47. These included a survey of "the new cultural militancy" in the United States and abroad, the *Salon of Election 80*, and shows on alienation, gender, the aesthetics of consumption, *Facere/Fascis* (on fashion), and food and culture. Shows at ABC No Rio had more general themes: *Crime, Suicide Murder and Junk, Positive Show, Island Show*, and so on. Theme shows became prevalent in East Village galleries.

48. Letter, December 22, 1980, distributed to Group Material's neighbors, in Group Material folder, PADD Archives, Museum of Modern Art Library, New York.

49. Thomas Lawson, review, "The People's Choice: Group Material," *Artforum* 19, no. 8 (April 1981): 67. Lawson, a painter, also edited the artists' journal *Real Life Magazine*.

50. After its debut year on East Thirteenth Street, Group Material began working with existing exhibiting institutions, such as Artists Space, P.S. 1, and the New Museum of Contemporary Art, to produce thematic exhibitions and projects. See Jan Avgikos, "Group Material Timeline: Activism as a Work of Art," in *But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, ed. Nina Felshin (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 85–160, and Group Material folder, PADD Archives, Museum of Modern Art Library, New York.

51. The artists who founded ABC No Rio handed it over in 1983 to Jack Waters and Peter Cramer, performance and film artists linked with the Pyramid Club. Steven Englander presently manages ABC No Rio through a collective.

52. This chronology is from "PAD: Waking Up in NYC" and "History So Far" in the PADD magazine, *1st Issue* (February 1981), which later changed its name to *Upfront*.

53. Just as the West Village bohemian scene spread across town to the Lower East Side during the 1960s, the SoHo alternative space scene spread east through Little Italy during the 1980s. The spaces there included Public Image, Kwok's gallery, Todd's Copy Shop, and the Storefront for Art and Architecture. On Broome Street just west of Sara Delano Roosevelt Park was A's performance space, run by Arleen Schloss.

54. Nancy Grimes, "The Rivington School: New York's Plucky Art World Outsiders," *New Art Examiner* 17 (November 1989): 28–32.

55. Tsuchiya's photographs were exhibited in *Six O'Clock Observed* at the Asian American Art Centre (May 21–June 26, 1999). Other artists in this scene include the sculptors Ken Hiratsuka, Linus Corragio, Jeffrey Perren, and Luca Pizorno, and painters Ed Higgins, Kevin Wendall (aka FA-Q), and Anna Jepsen.

56. Sarah Ferguson, "The War of the Gardens," *Village Voice*, June 13, 1989.

57. The 2B Gas Station had multiple designations, such as the 2B Garage. It was demolished in 1999.

58. Hakim Bey (Robert Anton Wilson), *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1991). The poet Michael Carter, editor of *Redtape* magazine, made this connection in an unpublished essay he wrote on the Rivington School for the sculptor Shalom Gorewitz.

59. From the motto above the logo, *1st Issue*, no. 2 (May–June 1981).

60. Greg Sholette, "News from Nowhere," *Third Text* 45 (winter 1998–99): 54.

61. Vanalyne Green and Margia Kramer, "Against 'Inner Exile,'" *Upfront*, no. 3 (December–January 1981).

62. Lippard, in "Give and Take: Ideology in the Art of Suzanne Lacy and Jerry Kearns," in *Art and Ideology*, exh. cat. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 29. Nina Felshin discusses the history of activist art in *But Is It Art?* ed. Felshin.

63. Sholette, "News from Nowhere," 54.

64. Poster and press release, "Artists Call Round Two," Franklin Furnace, New York, March–April 1984, in Artists Call/PADD Streetworks folder, PADD Archives, MoMA Library, New York.

65. Poster announcing "It's Cold Here, But It's Hot in Central America: A Day of Workshops to Connect People and Cultural Projects," January 18, 1984, Artists Call folder, MoMA Library.

66. Street demonstrations are rooted in a long Western tradition of political pageantry. In the United States, this included eighteenth- and nineteenth-century "civic processions" and parades. During the early twentieth century, suffragist parades and the movement for local pageants enriched political rituals. The political demonstration and the pageant converged during the early modernist period in New York in the 1913 Paterson Strike Pageant, produced by artists and striking workers in Paterson, N.J.; see Martin Green, *New York 1913: The Armory Show and the Paterson Strike Pageant* (New York: Collier, 1988). The tradition of political demonstration was initially complemented by street theater and then by "streetworks" done by artists; see Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

67. Commercial bill posting in New York is a long-standing practice. See Sally Henderson and Robert Landau, *Billboard Art* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1980), for photographs of bill postings in early-twentieth-century New York.

68. Allan Schwartzman, *Street Art* (Garden City, N.J.: Dial Press, 1985), 5.

69. *Ibid.*, 106, 12.

70. Jeanne Siegel, "Leon Golub: What Makes Art Political?" in *Art Talk: The Early 80s*, ed. Siegel (New York: Da Capo Press, 1990).

71. Suzi Gablik, "Report from New York: The Graffiti Question," *Art in America* 70, no. 9 (October 1982): 37.

72. "Proposals to Lower East Side Galleries from PAD/D's Anti-Gentrification Committee," in *Not for Sale* folder 5/16, PADD Archive, MoMA Library, New York.

73. For an account of *Not for Sale* at ABC No Rio and elsewhere, see Moore and Miller, eds., *ABC No Rio Dinero*, 126–29.

74. Reproduced in *ibid.*, 126. Van Dalen recently performed his story of the neighborhood in a traveling show using flat, cutout, and stenciled artworks as props. See Anton van Dalen, *Stencil Inventory: Eye Speak, 1980–99* (Amherst: Art Department of the University of Massachusetts, 1999).

75. Eva Cockcroft led the *Not for Sale* "stencil brigades." Cockcroft was involved with the 1970s mural movement on the Lower East Side, which influenced activist artists in the 1980s. Greg Sholette to author, e-mail, December 13, 2000.

76. In *Not for Sale* folder 2/16, PADD Archive, MoMA Library.

77. Poster for *Out of Place: Art for the Evicted*, *Not for Sale* folder 15/16, PADD Archive, MoMA Library.

78. Craig Owens, "The Problem with Puerilism," *Art in America* 72, no. 6 (summer 1984): 162–63; reprinted in Owens, *Beyond Recognition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992). Walter Robinson and Carlo McCormick, "Slouching toward Avenue D," *Art in America* 72, no. 6 (summer 1984): 134–62.

79. Years later, Robinson would regard this polemical afterword to his article as a setup, perpetrated by Owens and *Art in America* editor Hal Foster (Robinson, cited in Kirwin, "It's All True," 131 n.54).

80. Lippard wrote for the *Village Voice* during the early 1980s. Some of this writing is collected in Lippard, *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984).

81. The Max Fish bar, named for its previous tenant, was started by Colab member Ulli Rimkus in 1989 with financial backing from other Ludlow Street artists who had also been in Colab. Throughout the 1990s (and today), Max Fish held art exhibitions, many of which were curated by Rimkus's friend the painter Harry Druzd and by Greg Woolard and John Drury.

82. Kohlhöfer was the first art director for the *East Village Eye* monthly (1979–80) and an early member of Colab, as was Ulli Rimkus, his domestic partner at the time.

83. Tobocman to author, e-mail, October 4, 2000. James Romberger and Sabrina Jones had joined the journal collective with issue number three. Peter Kuper joined later.

84. Tobocman's graphic is reproduced in Brian Wallis, ed. *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism*, a project by Martha Rosler (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 187. The thesis is based on a paper by murdered housing activist Yulanda Ward entitled "Spacial Deconcentration: Freedom of Housing Choice or Minority Removal?" presented at Grassroots Unity Conference, Washington, D.C., 1980, and cited by Andrew Van Kleunen in Abu-Lughod, ed., *From Urban Village to East Village*, 326, n.26. Frank Morales reiterates this thesis, purportedly based on the Kerner Commission findings, in an essay

in Andrew Castrucci and Nadia Coën, eds., *Your House Is Mine* (New York: Bullet Space, 1993). Ward's paper has a kind of samizdat status on the Internet. But the argument is continued by radical academics and summarized by Austin in "A Tale of Two Cities," in *Taking the Train*, 9–37.

85. A detailed account of these events is in Abu-Lhugod, "The Battle for Tompkins Square Park," in *From Urban Village to East Village*, ed. Abu-Lughod, 232–66.

86. The term *squat art* appears in an anonymous October 1994 rejoinder to actions taken by organizers of the 1994 exhibition *Inside Outside* at the Thirteenth Street squats; reproduced in Alan Moore, ed., *Inside Out: The Art World of the Squats* (New York: Solo Foundation, 1994). This research grew out of a 1994 seminar with Sharon Zukin and Setha Low at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. The city evicted squatters from these buildings in August 1996.

87. Roger Cardinal, *Outsider Art* (London: Studio Vista, 1972). Cardinal based his conception on Jean Dubuffet's *art autre*. For Dubuffet, the paradigmatic "space" of anti-cultural art production was the asylum. In discussing an exhibition organized by Tina White, however, Cardinal protested that, "aesthetically speaking [there is] absolutely no reason to appeal to a category called 'the Art of the Homeless'" (Cardinal, "Art of the Homeless," *Raw Vision* [winter 1993–94]: 42). Jennifer Borum replied in the next issue.

88. The squatter artist Sue Strande told me this in 1994. Much squat art, then, was aimed at other artists and neighbors.

89. Other homeless artists emerged through art programs operating in the New York City shelter system, such as the Artist and Homeless Collaborative, run by Hope Sandrow. See Felshin, ed., *But Is It Art?* 251–82. One homeless advocacy group in New York today is called Picture the Homeless.

90. Zeke Weiner, "Art in the Outside: John Ed and Artistic Origins of the East Village and Beyond," *Downtown*, no. 23 (March 23–April 4, 1994).

91. Aarne Anton, Tina White's domestic partner, runs American Primitive gallery; it specializes in outsider art, which became a strong market category during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Interest was fueled by a slow market in contemporary art and the relative affordability of work by nonprofessionals. The genre's success thus parallels the market success of the East Village as a "business art movement." Although White's Art Program for the Homeless was separate from the gallery (run out of a back room), she was frank about wanting to earn money for the artists, featuring work by artists like Pauline Cruz, Gertie Celestin, and Curtis Cuffie at two annual outsider art fairs (1994 and 1995). While the ahistoricizing, anonymizing taste of collectors has long ruled the outsider gallery and exhibition world, much early-twentieth-century folk art was the work of the homeless—vagabonds, wanderers, and itinerant laborers of the industrial era.

92. This work was used as the front cover of the literary magazine *Redtape*, no. 7 (1992). It is a pastel painting on paper in the collection of the Newark Museum.

93. Around the corner from Bullet Space is Umbrella House. Its founder, Siobhan, produced a cartoon titled "Pep Girlz," in which local rock star Kembra Pfahler is shown opening up an abandoned building for squatters by breaking in the door with a sledgehammer. Lawrence Van Abbema, illustrator for the anarchist newspaper the *Shadow*, lived

at Umbrella, and Seth Tobocman ran a printing press in the basement. Other art spaces in the squats included Glass House, Chocolate Milk, and the Teardrop Squat.

94. The gallery still exists and is located across the street from Tribes, the poetry and exhibition space run by the African American novelist Steve Cannon.

95. See Thom Corn, "Auto-Interview," in Moore, ed., *Inside Out*, n.p. Corn named the gallery.

96. Artists in YHIM project included David Wojnarowicz, Martin Wong, Lady Pink, Missing Foundation, Vincent Gagliostro, and Tom McGlynn.

97. Kostas Gounis and Andrew Castrucci, "Disappearances," in *Your House is Mine*, ed. Castrucci and Coën.

98. A full account of this event is in Martha Rosler, "Fragments of a Metropolitan Viewpoint," in *If You Lived Here*, ed. Brian Wallis (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991).

99. *Urban Encounters* was curated by former PADD member Greg Sholette. See Sholette, "Urban Encounters," exh. flyer (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998).

100. This construction is redolent of people's history, most recently the emergency "homeless shelters" constructed by the Atlanta group Mad Housers. The shack relates locally to the ramshackle architecture of the Puerto Rican *casita*, or little house, thrown up in lots throughout New York City. These were documented at *If You Lived Here* in the continuing Casita Project of photographer Martha Cooper and others.

101. Tom McGlynn, "The Memory of a Meeting Place," essay for Bullet Space entry in the exhibition *Urban Encounters*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, July 16–September 20, 1998.

102. McGlynn wrote this to characterize a 1997 exhibition at Bullet Space, *A Continuation of Something Else*.

103. Andrew Castrucci, interview with author, September 2000. In an aesthetic context, the piss bottles clearly echo work by Andrés Serrano and Kiki Smith—and instrumentalize it.

104. Krzysztof Wodiczko, remarks in panel discussion, held at P.S. 1 in conjunction with the 1984 exhibition, September 2000. Wodiczko at least made mention of the political context of art during the period.

105. The New York squatters mirrored squat actions in England, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. In addition, eco-protesters in the northwest United States used squatter tactics to save forests, setting up the "Cascadia Free State" in Oregon in 1995–96.

106. Stanley Aronowitz, "Artists and Gentrification: How Bohemia Was Done In by High Rents," *Found Object* 8 (spring 2000): 21–35.

107. The gardens are associated with the squats since both appropriated vacant city-owned property. But the gardeners are the cultural opposites of the squatters—hippies versus punks, pacifist versus warlike. The annual ritual performances and street parades produced by Earth Celebrations in East Village community gardens are determinedly peaceful. The garden movement also has a broader base of popular support.

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By the mid-1960s, New York's art establishment was out of step with the city's diversity and had largely ignored the decade's social, political, and cultural ferment. In response, marginalized artists created an oppositional network of organizations, exhibit spaces, and cooperative galleries that both paralleled and challenged the status quo. *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985* brings together a wide variety of artists and critics to explore the origins and evolution of this diffuse and vibrant cultural scene.

Locating the movement within both the art world and its larger social and political context, these authors decipher the shifting configurations of cultural power in this period and the complex relationship between the mainstream and the marginal. With a unique, annotated chronology of the alternative art scene from 1965 to 1985, and illustrated with 150 images of key works, installations, and exhibits; reproductions of posters, communiqués, and other ephemera; and photographs of protests and meetings, this volume is an important work of contemporary art history and a valuable sourcebook that suggests the basis for the return of an artist-driven cultural economy.

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