FRANKLY, I WAS HOPING

THAT YOU WOULDN'T NOTICE:

AN EXPLORATION OF THE SOCIAL ROLES OF ART

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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by

Bradley Clyde Keech, Bachelor of Arts

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Approved by

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Art is a response to the world in which the artist lives. It is an expression of the artist's world view in a medium that attracts the artist. Judging by the evidence of the history of art, in most times and places the world the artist has been concerned with is the physical world as perceived through the eyes and ears. These impressions have been modified in response to associations existing in the artist's mind. The evidence of the senses has been made to conform to the artist's world view. In more recent times, the relationship of the mind and the external world seems often to have been reversed. The artist is paying more attention to what is happening in his mind, and less attention to what is happening in the physical world. Commonly now artists start with the mind, make changes there, and then move the physical world in relation to these mental changes. The ease with which this shift has been made, suggests that this approach has a longer history than is generally acknowledged.

The shift in method, and the attention it calls to the workings of the mind, has led us to the inescapable conclusion that all art is conceptual. We seem to construct our worlds with ideas, and fill them in with facts and impressions. Just as all art is conceptual, all art is social. Few of us are capable of maintaining a world view that is denied by those around us. Those that do, tend to be institutionalized. We depend on the social other to reinforce and correct us.

An artist, as a sharer of perceptions, tends to be more aware of his world view because he is always examining and testing it. In my case, the artist tends to be catholic in interests and eclectic in tastes and media. Because of this, I find it difficult to delineate my world, although it is probably no less limited than any other. Most of my art deals with information, and the systems by which it is selected, transmitted, and digested. These are the major features of my world view.

My world is without question late twentieth century intellectual, and that world is the profoundest influence on my work. It dictates the issues to which I give the most attention. They are abstract issues, with noticable implications for the society in which I live. It feeds my tendency to deal artistically with political events and social concerns on the cultural level, instead of the personal level. As an intellectual, I tend to be more comfortable with information and mental constructs than with feelings and actions.

The discovery and manipulation of information are my greatest strengths and weaknesses. I am an information junkie. Having read a morning newspaper and a weekly newsmagazine, I look forward to watching an hour of television news as I eat dinner, and relaxing with a work of nonfiction in the evening. In most cases, only the latter presents a deep and complex enough account of its subject, to satisfy my thirst for information. I find that I cannot give up the less serious sources. They often call attention to events and details that I otherwise would not notice. Occasionally each source presents unique information, allowing me to construct a composite picture of an event which is better than the view that any one source presents.
The construction of a composite news picture is similar to the construction of art based on events. The materials are often the same, but the structuring of the materials is designed differently. When constructing a news composite, I reject reports that seem impossible, discount reports that seem unlikely, and value accounts that are repeated, with slight variation, from source to source. If a report agrees virtually verbatim with two others, I do not trust it (I tend to believe that it is a planted story instead of a reported account). I look for elements that seem to make a cohesive, but fragmented, whole and let the elements suggest their own logical order.

In making art, a different kind of order is employed. In the composite news picture, the elements are gathered together because they are accounts of the same event. In art making, they are put together because I see the events as being conceptually connected. The reports are clearly connected but not focused. I like to take isolated elements and extrapolate from them. Like Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op, I mix the information together, essentially unevaluated, and see what happens. Selection begins as I notice which events resonate together, which ones buffer each other, and which ones just exist, neither contributing nor distracting. From the mix, the basic building blocks for a work are drawn. Organization is far more important in the final work, but it does not enter in until the basic elements are isolated and formed.

My tools are derived from training and experience with literary and scholastic traditions. The approaches were learned from appreciating and manipulating words and sentences, but they work as well using images and performers. The tools are ways of thinking about materials, rather than techniques for manipulating them. When I decided to make my work more accessible, I found that these conceptual tools provided solutions to this problem as well. The range of things that I have done, using a conceptual approach, suggests to me that the same range, in a general sense, can be generated working from a material base. Working from conceptual, literary, and material starting points, artists can easily confront the same issues and come up with similar and closely related works.

I have noticed that the history of art is replete with examples of artists dealing with social, political, and philosophic issues. The tendency is more visible in literature, if only because there is less opportunity to miss the clues. In the visual arts, some of the impact can be lost because the meaning of the clues have become obscured by change, or because the perceiver is following a vogue of giving greater emphasis to the forms than to the symbols. Raft of the Medusa is an excellent example of art dealing with social issues, art whose statements can easily be missed. When I first saw a reproduction of the painting, I could only appreciate its formal qualities. The subject matter was noticeably out of the ordinary, but not compelling. I had no clear idea what the significance could be of all those people floating on a raft. As I learned about the painting and the incident that inspired it, the meanings of the elements became clearer. I could begin
to experience its narrative and conceptual qualities. I can not experience it as Gericault's contemporaries did; their social context and world view are not my own. I can approximate their reactions and experience it more fully in my own contexts. The historical knowledge opened my mind to possible contemporary metaphoric interpretations of the painting. I can now experience social aspects of the work, before I could only suspect their existence.

Wanting to communicate with contemporaries, I survey the literature, thought, and events of my time to find the materials for my art. It seems presumptuous to attempt to make timeless works; we all hope for change and improvement in the human condition. I can only guess what conditions will be like 100 years from now. At the same time, I have Gericault's example to remind me of the dangers of my close attachment to my times. It seems more sensible to attempt to affect contemporary society, with comments, criticism, and inspirations, then to worry about the chance of affecting my great-granddaughter.

The love of discussion is a trait I share with most members of the intellectual milieu. Making art, instead of writing essays, has not lessened it. In my case, the taste for discussion developed long before I was capable of becoming an intellectual. Although I have decided to work in the studio tradition, my greatest conscious influences are writers with whom I strongly disagree. Whether out of intellectual arrogance or a penetrating ability to analyse their writings, I find that there are almost no writers of stature whose thoughts I can accept with total agreement. I begin to worry that a writer has nothing to say, if he does not inspire questioning.

Early on, I was swayed by the science fiction of Isaac Asimov, Arthur Clarke, and Robert Heinlein. I still read them with pleasure, but I find that I can not accept their basic assumptions about human nature and the value of technology. They taught me to think in possibilities, and that is something that I will always value. I have especially prized Heinlein, because I found his endings so unacceptable. These endings forced me to confront and wrestle with the issues he raised. Since then, I have argued with Plato and Hume, Peckham and Weitz, Arnheim and Freud, and many others. In each case, I found much that was valuable and much that I could not accept.

These arguments are probably the sources from which my taste for diverse opinions has grown. It is this hunger for "give and take" and informed argument, which has fueled my desire to become an artist, and suggested the directions in which my art has grown. Despite the many examples to the contrary, I still believe that one can say anything, as long as he has reasons and evidence to support him. (It was only later that I learned the importance of having people who are listening.) I want to create art that participates in discussions, not art that shouts down opposing views or acts as closing statements. By making my comments as art statements, they seem to command more careful and multileveled consideration. This would not be the case if they were political, or some other kind of, statements.
Just as the shift, from the physical world to the workings of the mind, has made people aware of the conceptual nature of all art, the attention that I have paid to discussion has convinced me of the inherent social aspect of the role of artist. One cannot have a discussion if there is no one else with whom to discuss things. This social aspect becomes clearer if we view it in terms of the noticeable trend toward specialization in contemporary society. Although it is formally admitted only in the work place, it extends into avocations and leisure activities as well. We have three separate terms to designate recognized types of superior expertise in a field. The titles are Expert/Master, Celebrity, and Opinion Leader.

Expert is generally reserved for a specialist with a comprehensive knowledgable command of his field, who makes recognizable contributions to its growth and development. An archaic but more exact term would be Master. The status of Expert is bestowed by fellow members of the field. A Celebrity is an individual who, because of his perceived level of expertise, is widely recognised and admired. There are also Celebrities who are not masters of fields, but are perceived as being Experts. Public perception bestows the status of being a Celebrity. Opinion Leader is the least distinct and visible of the three. An Opinion Leader is an individual whose opinions a significant number are willing to accept and to give greater than average attention. It is a sociological term often used in poll analysis. Experts and Celebrities tend to be Opinion Leaders, but there are many Opinion Leaders who are neither Experts nor Celebrities.

Problems come when Experts act as Opinion Leaders outside their field of expertise. Cross field communication is often beneficial. It can introduce new evidence and generate new ways of processing evidence. It can provide insights on the relationships between specializations. Unfortunately it can also produce and reproduce serious problems. Often Experts, acting as Opinion Leaders outside their own fields, reintroduce resolved problems so forcefully that the resolution process must be re-enacted. More commonly, they face communication problems and are reduced to making meaningful analogies instead of direct communication.

Analogies facilitate understanding by creating selective misunderstanding. By selecting important elements of a situation and dealing with them, we tend to see them more clearly and understand them more fully. We can do this because the less important aspects are not constantly distracting us. When an Expert uses an analogy, he knows the relative importance of the elements not included in it. This is less often the case if he is working outside his area of expertise. As the obviousness of the public impact of an issue grows, the use of analogies becomes increasingly attractive. Effective communication, or its appearance, often becomes more important than precise communication.

People begin to identify so strongly with the analogy that they lose sight of the issue under consideration (the mental construct displaces the original object). By the end of the American involvement in the Viet Nam conflict, the use of sports analogies had grown to the
point that supporters of the continuation of American involvement were heard to say, "You don't change the rules of a game after it is half played." This is obviously absurd. There are games that involve the regular changing of rules, at the discretion of one or more of the players. There was no time limit on the Viet Nam conflict, and therefore no half way point. No one was playing in Viet Nam (although there were many who seemed to be keeping score). War is not a game (it is not a silly game and it is not a serious game - it is war). The game vision had grown to the point that many, on both sides of the struggle, had lost sight of the events that were taking place.

It is my belief that artists are always Opinion Leaders and are always, when acting in the role of artist, functioning within their field of expertise. Art demands the attention and reflective appreciation that individuals give to the utterances of Opinion Leaders. Art demands more than this; it needs to be experienced to have its full impact. The artist's specialty is the studied attention to the impact of events and sensations on individuals. The perception of art becomes a dialogue between the perceiver's experiences and an artwork. An artist is the most democratic of Opinion Leaders, one who invites questioning and disagreements. It is the active nature of the relationship between art and perceiver that works against the destructive aspects of Opinion Leadership. An individual who simply accepts the statements of art is not fully experiencing it.

Just as the artist cannot escape the social aspect of his role, it seems that all art plays social roles. The social roles of art are not as clear as the social role of the artist. Because social roles and social relations are a dominant element in my work, I want to call attention to the social roles that all art plays. For this reason, I have devised the following broad outline of the social roles that art fills. It is inspired by John Herman Randall's account of the history of philosophy in How Philosophy Uses It Past. In these lectures, Randall discussed the tasks that philosophy has performed for other fields, notably theology and physics. My account is not as dramatic as Randall's. The outline is the suggestion of a system rather than a system. It demonstrates that we can approach art from a social base, and by so doing, call attention to certain aspects of art.

The only claim is that these are major social attractions of the arts. In the interests of brevity, this survey will isolate only broad areas of function and attempt no chronology. The social roles of art seem to fall into four general and often overlapping categories. (The overlapping is tolerated because the separation allows for shifts in focus.) I have named these roles "Art as Communication", "Art as Play/Practice", "Art as Historification", and "Art as Exploration".

"Art as Communication" contains the major subgroups of "Illustration", "Education," and "Propagation". These groups are reflections of the force with which statements are made, and the ease with which the perceiver can verify the statements. They are united by the assumptions that the art contains straightforward factual statements,
and the artist is not attempting to trick or deceive the perceiver. "Illustration" communicates information that is common knowledge for the audience and the artist. It may be common because the "Illustration" is imbedded in the body of the source text, or because the information is commonly known in that society. The "Illustration" portrays easily verifiable elements and conveys additional supporting details. "Education" communicates information that is not as easily verifiable because it is not common knowledge. It makes statements in an accessible manner, but requires an effort to understand the statements that the art contains. "Education" art asserts things in a more forceful manner, often because it is making more complex statements than "Illustrations" do. "Propagation" communicates information that is essentially unverifiable. In extreme cases the statements must be taken on the artist's word. The works are the most forceful of "Art as Communication." In "Propagation", bits of information often become overwhelmed by the total view portrayed.

"Art as Play/Practice" presents us with activities which we can participate in without fear of lasting influence, or significant winning and losing. "Ordering" art presents clear patterns which we can observe repeating within a work, and with that practice perceive in the 'natural world'. It assists us in making sense out of potential chaos by presenting us with compelling examples of regularity. "Distracting" art consists primarily of decorative works and entertainment. They distract us from mundane experiences by presenting a lively but comfortable alternative on which to focus. "Disrupting" art actively violates patterns. A problem with recognizing patterns is that the elements which make up the pattern tend to lose their individuality. Disruption consists of the introduction of elements that appear as if they should be part of the pattern, yet obviously are not. The interruption of the pattern brings our attention back to the individual elements.

"Art as Historification" is, in many ways, similar to "Art as Play/Practice" and "Art as Communication". The primary differences are the focus on a single element or event, the attitude projected (which is always serious), and the rendition of the subject as larger than life. "Immortalization", which includes portraiture, is the most common form of "Art as Historification." In "Immortalization" the artist invokes the mythical ability of art, to stand outside of time and place, to provide a lasting representation of an event. (Documentation is a weak form of "Immortalization" in which the associations which bestow a quality of perceived preciousness are kept to a minimum.) "Heroicization" expands on "Immortalization" by adding icons and associations until the additions become the dominant elements of the work. The professed subject seems to act merely as an object being modified. Both "Immortalization" and "Heroicization" are claims that the subject is larger than life, believed by both audience and artist. "Foma" are similar statements, believed only by the audience. (Foma is one of Kurt Vonnegut's made-up words. He defined it as "harmless untruths intended to comfort simple souls." I have expanded Foma to include heuristic lies. We end up with the definition, "An artist's knowing
lie which he believes to be not destructive but rather constructive, or at least comforting.")

"Art as Exploration" focuses on the social role of art ignoring its representational qualities. Works that most noticeably fall into this area are those with little or no obvious relationship with objects outside the art context. This role is an outgrowth of our tendency to identify an artwork first by its medium, and then in relation to similar works in similar media. All art fills this role but the subgroups are clearer if we examine the extreme examples. The three subgroups of "Art as Exploration" are all essentially the same, the divisions being dictated by the work's most active property. "Experimentation/manipulation of media" includes works that appear at first to be striking technical exercises (paintings about "the inherent flatness of painting"). "Experimentation/explication of perceptual phenomena" includes works that could be executed in any medium and focus on our perception of the interaction of elements (colors or notes or words...). "Investigation/demonstration of technique" includes works where the method of construction/fabrication is the dominant element.

I can think of no artwork that would not fit comfortably into several of these function groups. The groups are a trifle simplistic, but considering the range of things that I am attempting to deal with, I think that this is an inescapable situation. Of the four groups only "Art as Exploration" is difficult to see as a social function. Like the others it is social by association, but unlike the others the associations are less blatant. The context that makes it social is clearer in the artworld and the social role of the artist than in the individual works.

The contexts of the social role of the artist and the social role of art seem to be inescapable. I can attempt to ignore them, but their existence and make-up are outside my control. In my own work, most of the decisions are mine to make. One of my decisions has been to play with the social roles of art. Virtually all of my work deals with preconceptions. I stick close to people's conceptions of art in my choice of materials, styles, and subject matter, in order to increase the accessibility of the less 'traditional' elements more central to my reasons for making the art. I want the perceiver to be an active participant in my work. One of his invitations is the visible association with the social roles of art. I am uncomfortable giving people shocks (I don't like to do it in day-to-day life and I don't like to do it in my art), but I love tricks and surprises. I try to generate polite disturbances.

In my thesis exhibition, "Frankly, I Was Hoping That You Wouldn't Notice", I made little use of artist's statements to set a general context for the works. The only general artist's statements I employed were the exhibition title and our collective subtitle, "Just Another Thesis Exhibition". The subtitle was a pointless jab at the University Gallery of Fine Art's official support of thesis exhibitions and a light playing of the artist as bad boy role. The main title was
Fig. 1. Exterior view of Last Known Artifact from 1234 and 1236 Pennsylvania Avenue, 18 x 21 x 19 inches (above).

Fig. 2. Interior detail of Last Known Artifact from 1234 and 1236 Pennsylvania Avenue (below).
a direct communication by attempting "Art as Historification", with a
mock heroicization of my professed subjects. The works composing my
portion of the show were:

1) Last Known Artifact from 1234 and 1236 Pennsylvania Avenue
2) Facades
3) Bye Bye Dime
4) Graphics (consisting of elements from Cite Specific Gra-
phics, Phase I, Site Specific Graphics, Phase II, and
Sight Specific Graphics, Phase III)
5) Collaborative Self Portrait
6) Costume Documentation (January - June 1980)
7) Untitled (aka "Hand Stamped Wall Graphic")

The unity of the art I showed was provided by the many themes and issues
that were common to these works.

The art dealt all with some aspect of community, although no two
works dealt with the same aspect in the same way. Last Known Artifact
and Costume Documentation were renditions of the basic elements of a
community. Last Known Artifact focused on the individual home as a
basic unit of the city (community), and the home's lack of sacredness
through the mock attachment of value to its remains. Costume Documenta-
tion focused on the individual human and his control of his public
persona through the use of clothing as costume. Facades and Graphics
addressed aspects of the physical community (environent) and its mal-
leability. Facades explored a fictional, but too believable, manipula-
tion of the urban environment by a faceless organization. Their
manipulation resulted in a less interesting and more homogenous neigh-
borhood. Graphics consisted of the proposals of identified individuals
for the manipulation or modification of the environment, with an eye to
making the community more individualized and more interesting.

Bye Bye Dime, Graphics, Collaborative Self Portrait, and Untitled
all enunciated communities of creators in more or less explicit ways.
In Bye Bye Dime the individuals and their connections were explicitly
identified, and the community clearly implied by their association. The
internal cross referencing, in some of the 'reply cards', reinforced this
conception. Graphics displayed no specific community, but again implied
one by the inclusion of the proposal letters and the ideas in their texts.
The audience was given no specific means of determining the closeness or
looseness of the community of creators (other than by cross reference to
Bye Bye Dime and Collaborative Self Portrait, which would only have
helped in a few cases). The proposal letter for Collaborative Self
Portrait clearly stated that the individuals constituted a community
through their association with the artist. The use of a 'standard form'
gave the work a visual sense of community. Untitled was communal in
execution but only blatantly collaborative by attribution in the title
card. The activity of constructing it, at the opening of the exhibition
(presented as a play activity), was the most compelling aspect of the
work. Associations and reactions, during the week that it was up, were
less interesting.

All the works in the show indirectly approached the subject of
The immediately identifiable manifestations of the observed systems varied on the basis. If one saw the represented elements as the subject matter, the majority of the work could be classified as abstract. The Rye Rye project, Collaborative Self-Portraits, and Collectible Documentation all displayed some aspects of portraiture. Last Known Artifact, radare, and computer language components of architecture were included. Graphics, text, and digital images created instances of a set of personal biographies, although Last Known Artifact, Rye Rye Mine, Collectible Documentation, and Investigating address and biography more directly. For some pers-
representation. There was no single representational style employed, instead a wide range of styles were used. Often two or more styles were utilized in the same work. Untitled’s large symbols (the internationally known but arbitrary interdiction symbol and Robin Bhatia’s less artificial murder symbol) were built up using a variety of much smaller symbols (letters, words, drawings in a variety of styles, half tones, and elements combined to make up intermediate units). Much of the enjoyment of the work was derived from creating juxtapositions of the smaller elements and discovering other people’s juxtapositions.

Facades juxtaposed pseudo-documentary photographic constructions, less natural photocstructions, and quasi-architectural renderings, to create thematic focuses. Further contrast point was created by the sparse use of official-looking phrases and symbols. Last Known Artifact combined a simplified three dimensional representation of a shed-like house with photographic reproductions, words, and conventional symbols. The most striking representation in the work was the artifact referred to in the title. It stood for all objects of its class, the class of human residue known as trash. Because of the kind of trash that it it, it also introduced multiple other associations.

Contrasts in representation were present in all the other works. Because of the less controlled collaborative context, the variety is striking but no clear patterns emerged. In all three (Bye Bye Dime, Graphics, and Collaborative Self Portrait) the only constant element was the starting point. In many of the individual responses, the provided 'standard form' was totally obscured or eliminated by the collaborator. By having such a wide range of combinations of styles present (with each style of representation present in many individual works) no style ever seemed out of place. The shock that any might have had in another context was not possible in this one.

The final and most important common element was the acknowledgment and use of systems. All the art was manifestations of systems that I designed, to examine systems or manifestations of systems which I had observed operating in our culture. The use of these systems was a reflection of the fact that I see no system as sacred, least of all my own. None of my systems were designed and set running, with any and all of the results being accepted and publicly presented. Each system designed was modified while in operation, and selections/choices were made after a system had run its course.

The immediately identifiable manifestations of the observed systems merged on the banal. If one saw the represented elements as the subject matter, the majority of the work could be classified as classical. Bye Bye Dime, Collaborative Self Portrait, and Costume Documentation all displayed some aspect of portraiture. Last Known Artifact, Facades, and Graphics dealt with aspects of architecture and landscape. Graphics, Collaborative Self Portrait, and Costume Documentation involved costume and costume rendering. All the works approached the subject of personal biography, although Last Known Artifact, Bye Bye Dime, Costume Documentation, and Untitled addressed biography more directly. For many per-
extensive exploration of the socio-economic and cultural factors that were associated with the least amount of collaboration and the greatest amount of in-person responses and physical work by the artist. Collaborative Self Portraits utilized the greatest vision and range of collaborators. It was also the least satisfied, after the process system was set in motion.

Facing

Fig. 4. Installation view of Bye Bye Dime (8 x 13 feet).

The scale on which many of these projects are executed also interests me. I personally find it impossible to conceive of the amount of money, labor, and materials necessary for a project such as a Ryan Homes development. This is not to say that I can not place it on a scale running from a garden shed to the World Trade Center. I am overwhelmed to the point of confusion by the quantities of single-units involved in the manipulation of elements on this grand scale as has its own fascination.
ceivers, these elements were the themes of the art; for me, they were only devices for focusing on our cultural associations with portraiture, architecture and landscape, costume, and biography (I see these as the dominant elements of our personal conceptual worlds and the public indicators of our world views).

The belief that we collaboratively create and enforce these conceptions was mirrored by other collaborations in all of the works. Collaboration was invited and openly exhibited in the execution of the elements that made up Bye Bye Dime, Graphics, Collaborative Self Portrait, and Untitled. The same type of collaboration, no less effective although apparently mindless, was evident in Costume Documentation. (The artist could not possibly have made the camera, film, and paper himself. The shooting of the photographs implied an assistant, which in fact was a mechanical device. The artist could have but did not develop and print the film—a machine developed it and a stranger printed it. The artist's direct control of the steps in the process was actually very limited.) Last Known Artifact and Facades portrayed the results of actions or possible actions that an individual artist could not reasonably be expected to complete without assistance. Collaboration was a sometimes weak, sometimes strong, traceable, common thread. I believe that collaboration is the essential aspect of community.

Switching the focus from the common elements to the individual works, it seems most productive to examine the works that stand at the extremes of methodology and form. Facades and Last Known Artifact were executed with the least amount of collaboration and the greatest amount of in-process response and physical work by the artist. Collaborative Self Portrait utilized the greatest number and range of collaborators. It was also the least modified, after the process system was set in motion.

Facades

Facades grew out of my observation of specific events in Columbus, and seemingly similar events happening nationally. The events all involve the composition of our physical environment and its impact on our psychic environment. The desire to save parts of the physical history of American cities is modified by a desire to make the constituent structures modern in usage and facilities. The results often display severe contradictions, conceptually and architecturally. The conflicts, between the saving system and the utilizing system, interest me endlessly.

The scale on which many of these projects are attempted also interests me. I personally find it impossible to conceive of the amount of money, labor, and materials necessary for a Capitol South of a Ryan Homes development. This is not to say that I can not place it on a scale running from a garden shed to the World Trade Center. I am overawed to the point of confusion by the quantities of single units involved (be they man-hours, dollars, or board-feet). In such a project, the manipulation of elements on this grand scale has its own fascination.
Fig. 5. Image side of element for *Bye Bye Dime* (above).

Fig. 6. Information side of element for *Bye Bye Dime* (below).
The third jumping off point was the research that I did in an attempt to better understand the physical history of the American city and the thinking processes of the people who make the decisions which shape its future. The research gave me many ideas for the art and a little insight into how strangely real decisions are made.

Once I decided that the work would appear to be a plan, which was the manifestation of a master plan, the physical constitution of the art started falling into place. Facades was designed as four long panels of prints, to increase the nonspecificity of the visual references and broaden the applicability of the embodied perceptions. Conceivably the prints that make up these panels could be rearranged to form any number of variations on the 'proposed plan'. The work could be displayed as individual prints, individual independent strips, or, as they were in the show, panels hung on parallel surfaces. This arrangement of parallel surfaces presented the prints as four, 3-block sections of both sides of two back-to-back streets. It is the arrangement that generates the greatest number of cross references and external implications. Each panel is unified by its function. There are urban strips panels (two restoration variations of the commercial strip), a panel of multi-family apartment housing, and a panel of single family housing.

The techniques of photocollage and blue-line print were selected because of previous successes with their application. Photography is the form of representation which we are most exposed to, the form that people seem to find most convincing. The large units of individual photographs, pasted together in the top pseudo-documentary strip, gave a natural appearance to the larger constructions (the panels), despite the overlapping and rearranging of the collage technique. Once this natural appearance was established, the added collaging of the two 'later' strips seemed less forced. Blue print added to the ease in identifying and responding to the prints as architectural plans.

The method of representation facilitated the isolation of key issues. The juxtaposition of relatively rich photographs with stark line renderings conveyed the focus of the 'planner', on physical buildings and logistical problems instead of social communities and support facilities. Photographs with no people in them were used, so that the two instances where nuclear families appeared, in the final 'completion' stage of the plans, would stand out with greater contrast. The blue of the blue print and the blue of the rubber stamps were similar but not identical. This increased the sense of separation between the people and the trees, and the buildings.

The strips were arranged so that they could be read spatially (horizontally) or temporally (vertically). Each panel is a static model of a dynamic system. The progression of events is keyed by superscript 'footnote' stamps and the progressive deindividualization of the structures making up the urban landscape. In the two commercial strips, the variety of pre-existing buildings, vacant lots, and streets is obscured and transformed, first by fencing and finally by the repetition of three similar facades. The homogenization is further typified by the strongly
The use of metal plate and paper produced an effect which gave the appearance of transparency despite the durability and strength that are the direct result of the use of these materials. Too visceral fragility and inner strength are combined to such a degree the fragility and toughness of all things are fused. The single or double family house is probably the easiest of non-constant structures to destroy. It can be reduced to a pile of rubble in four hours by a skilled bulldozer operator. All evidence of its existence can be removed in four more hours with the addition of two large trucks and their drivers. There is something awesome and tragic in this. The same structure, abandoned and condemned, can stand vacant and neglected for years before it will collapse of its own weight.

The parallel with the family did not occur to me until after the work was completed, so I do not want to make too much of it. I can not.

**Fig. 7.** Detail from *Graphics*. Each element is 8 1/2 x 11 inches.
similar archetypes for the two facade styles (Victorian and Ethnic).

As in most urban rehabilitation, the most dramatic changes were made in the commercial sector. In the multifamily strip, the changes consisted primarily of the construction of additional units. These new rental units are smaller and simpler than the older pre-existing units. A token effort is made to 'clean up' the existing structures, but only those structures showing noticeable decay. In the residential strip the changes are minimal, but they have a dramatic tension missing in the other changes in the work. The three blocks of the residential strip roughly correspond to lower, middle, and upper class housing. In the completed plan the lower class block has been demolished, but the others remain essentially unchanged. In the piece, no mention is made of the residents of the missing homes, or of the use of a nicer home from the lower class block to fill a vacant lot in the middle class block. The elimination of the houses reveals another unimproved commercial strip beyond them (this is one of the many suggestions of the arbitrariness of the boundaries of this work and of the processes portrayed). The revealed strip and lack of humanizing elements suggest the inadequacy and artificiality of such a solution to contemporary urban problems.

Last Known Artifact from 1234 and 1236 Pennsylvania Avenue

Last Known Artifact was the most noticeably crafted work in the show, although the style and results suggest that the term "anti-craft" might better describe it. Each of the several hundred business cards employed in the construction was hand stamped three times. The stamped cards were carefully assembled into the total unit. The three stamps (international interdiction, half tone photograph of the portrayed, and nuclear family symbol), each had relatively precise placement restrictions. As the process of hand stamping is not very precise, quality control inspection played a major part in the construction of this work. A great deal of mindless activity was required in each stage of the construction of the one-piece house representation.

The use of wheat paste and paper produced warping which gave the appearance of fragility, despite the durability and strength that are the direct results of the use of these materials. The visual fragility and inner toughness paralleled, to my mind, the fragility and toughness of all homes and families. The single or double family house is probably the easiest of contemporary structures to destroy. It can be reduced to a pile of rubble in four hours by a skilled bulldozer operator. All evidence of its existence can be removed in four more hours with the addition of two large trucks and their drivers. There is something awesome and tragic in this. The same structure, abandoned and condemned, can stand vacant and neglected for years before it will collapse of its own weight.

The parallel with the family did not occur to me until after the work was completed, so I do not want to make too much of it. I can not help noticing how little "weight" it takes to crush and destroy some families, and how much "weight" others take without displaying serious
Fig. 8. Installation view of Collaborative Self Portrait. Elements vary from 3 1/2 x 5 inches to 24 x 36 inches (above).

Fig. 9. Installation view of Collaborative Self Portrait (below).
strain. I cannot help but wonder if that outside push might not be the determining factor. The nonhuman remnants of these crushed families often seem to have about the same value (to the family members) as the artifact that I found and incorporated in Last Known Artifact. A home is dependent on both structural strengths, that of the house and that of the family.

Last Known Artifact was the "prettiest" object in the show. The ordering of the repeated stampings, printings, and drawings, formed simple decorative patterns, which stood in contrast with the complex information of the individual elements. Predominantly white, the regularly repeated blue, red, purple, and black interruptions gave it a restful appearance; this belied the work's origins and statements. The unity of house and family, portrayed by their common blue color on the interior surfaces, was only lightly denied by the blue houses and purple families on the exterior; the existence of commonality was still acknowledged but a separation was effected by this simple color change. Purple, as a mixture of blue and red, moved the family a step away from the house and a step toward the "no" of the international interdiction of the no painting symbol on the business card.

As with Facades, the moment portrayed was "after the fact". The "critical moment" has passed unrecorded and only the results are presented for public scrutiny. Unlike Facades, Last Known Artifact refers to a specific historic incident. The incident is of personal importance to the artist; it can not be expected to have the same importance for the audience. For the perceiver, it can only act as a touchstone for recalling similar experiences, and as a starting point for the association. The artifact discovered, a December, 1976, issue of Cavaller magazine, is so full of social associations that it would be difficult to not respond to it in this context. The contrast of the pristine appearance of the construction and the weather beaten appearance of the artifact is one starting point. For me the most intriguing free association begins with the comparison of contents. The parallels of the obsolete judgments of the house (therefore demolished) and the artifact (therefore discarded) is amplified by the pragmatic obsolescences (the house no longer shelters and the magazine no longer sells products; viewed as tools neither fills its original function). The attitude of using and discarding women, embodied in the magazine and its editorial policy, is only slightly different than the using and discarding of the house by the landlord. It is impossible for me to decide which attitude is the more dangerous socially. (This is personal both in judgment and in information. The key to the political situation, embodied in the address, is repeated in the object but its meaning is not revealed in the work. The perceiver has to either be familiar with the situation, or do some research to discover this key's meaning.)

Collaborative Self Portrait

Collaborative Self Portrait was the result of the consideration of most pervasive and timeless of conceptual issues, the image of self. Given the broadest of interpretations, all art is self-portraiture. The
Fig. 10. Installation view of Costume Documentation (January - June 1980). Each element is 4 x 6 inches.
artist can not portray things that he does not see and react to. The artist, as a practiced observer and digester of the world, is probably more aware of what he is observing than the average perceiver. At the same time, his self-image is constantly being redefined by the perceivers of his art. All people are exposed to this group control, but the artist is more nakedly exposed to it. In Collaborative Self Portrait, I stole a little of that control by putting the process in the open, and by dictating the class choices that collaborators could make. I broadened the impact by making it a group portrait, and I called attention to this social process with my formal invitation and the number or participants.

I tend to believe that most classes on which struggles are said to be based are arbitrary classes; they are expressions of self-definition instead of organic, natural, economic, or physical, distinctive characteristics. Robert Benchley wrote, "There may be said to be two classes of people in the world; those who constantly divide the people into two classes and those who do not." This seems as proper a distinction as any other that I have seen advocated. Collaborative Self Portrait divides the world into groups, those who have participated directly in my life and those who have not. Like most class distinctions this is a false but workable one. There are many who have participated that I have lost touch with, was not aware of, or have forgotten. There are also some who did not choose to participate in this project. The first professed distinction failing, a workable one that remains is the division between collaborators and noncollaborators. The experience of collaborating affected each individual's perception of the work.

Along the same line, I have often thought that the difference between artists and nonartists is primarily a matter of self-definition. The quality of the output is really a separate if related issue; quality is dependent on so many things (practice and feed-back being just two of the major ones). The response to the proposal for Collaborative Self Portrait supports this notion. There is virtually no difference between the two groups in percentage of response, ability to follow instructions, media employed, matching of skill with difficulty attempted, perceptiveness and honesty of portrayal, or any other category which I considered significant.

The central theme was self portrayal in any form. The general aspect of self-portraiture, a lasting means of presenting oneself beyond the mundane accidental features one displays physically, is particularly interesting to me. Collaborative Self Portrait, taken as a whole, was a portrait of B. C. Keech. It was not a very good "likeness", but elements that I can see in myself showed up in every image/contribution. Unexpectedly, I learned about myself from the responses. Comments that the collaborators seemed to be making about themselves, I found applied as easily to me. Tendencies that I avoid noticing in myself were voiced by others, who could not know that they were true. All these impressions seem like cases of "reading in" to the art, but this work provided a rare chance to read them. If there is a message there it becomes a personal one; the results were far more revealing to me than I ever expected them to be.
Finally, the significance and value of the art exists in the interaction of elements in the mind of the perceiver. The intentions and statements of the artist are shifted by the perceiver to match the perceiver's world view. Art and its valuation are the ultimate expressions of cultural valuation. Each perceiver judges the value of each work in his own individual manner. The artist's valuation, as that of the most informed perceiver, is given special significance, but it cannot be treated as the final word. In art it is better to not have a final authority; the individual's personal individual response is the critical to the success of the whole enterprise. My art is a questioning of conceptions and an investigation of patterns. As such, the results and responses are bound to be as individual as the things that go into them. As expressions of doubts, it is only fitting that I doubt the predictability of the ultimate results of my work.

Fig. 11. Installation view of Untitled (7 x 7 feet).
The only clear original intent was to share the discoveries and surprises that are central to my enjoyment of postal art. Each day I have no idea what delights and disappointments are waiting for me in the mail. Although the installation could not reproduce my day to day anticipation, the number and variety of images involved presented the opportunity to experience similar surprises and the sense of discovery.

Ultimately the method of "reading in" may be the basis for our social responses to art. If an artwork cannot act as a touchstone and starting point for associations we feel cheated. It is too literal, too restricted, or too specific. If it presents us with too little stimulation or suggestion of directions we feel the same disappointment. It is too broad. Art is a declaration of possibilities that makes some of them seem more probable than others, but makes no possibility a certainty. We start with contexts and end with ramifications. The middle seems to be where the art lies.

All the important actions and decisions that I take in making art occur between the initial inspiration and the public presentation. The art of the artist consists primarily of these decisions and decisions about their realization. When I am done, it is only in a limited sense that the art can be said to be in the product. The product is the repository which acts as a stimulus, we find it convenient to refer to the object as art. But the artwork without responses is just a product that exists in our world. We turn it on and off at will with our perception. The experiences that we look for in art take place between the artwork and the perceiver.

The complete artwork and its constituent elements fall between the extremes of the range of representational possibilities. They are neither as precise and specific as documents, nor as vague and general as gut feelings. They are specific enough to give form and structure to the perceiver's response to the art, but open enough to comfortably allow the perceiver to incorporate his own history in his experiencing of the art. This mixture of statements, suggestions, and sensations gives art its special attractions and satisfactions.

Finally, the significance and value of the art exists in the interaction of concepts in the mind of the perceiver. The intentions and statements of the artist are shifted by the perceiver to match the perceiver's world view. Art and its valuation are the ultimate expressions of cultural relativism. Each perceiver judges the value of each work in his own individual manner. The artist's valuation, as that of the most informed perceiver, is given special significance, but it can not be treated as the final word. In art it is better to not have a final authority; the individual's personal individual response is too critical to the success of the whole enterprise. My art is a questioning of concepts and an investigation of patterns. As such, the results and responses are bound to be as individual as the things that go into them. As expressions of doubts, it is only fitting that I doubt the predictability of the ultimate results of my work.
Fig. 12. Design document for Untitled (8 1/2 x 11 inches).
BIBLIOGRAPHY


