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WORKING CONDITIONS: A Forum on Art and Everyday Life by Younger Artists

In the spring of 1994, the editors of M/E/A/N/I/N/G invited Julia Jacquette and Lawrence Lipkin, artists living in New York City, to guest edit a forum. This forum focuses on younger artists and the issues they feel concern them most. The following questions were composed by the guest editors and sent to a diverse group of younger artists. All forms and styles of written response were welcome. The responses received are published in alphabetical order.

• How do the politics and/or experiences of everyday life affect your work? Is this the subject matter of your work? If not, how do these factors come into play anyway?
• How do you feel about being an artist in a culture whose primary forms of visual information are television, movies, and urban advertising?
• How confident are you in your work? What gives you confidence?
• Do you have a second passion after art making? How does this affect or compete with your artwork?

Douglas Anderson

The question of to what extent everyday life or politics affects my work is vexing because it ought to be easier to answer than it is. I am aware that such experiences play a part in my work indirectly, for they are part of my process rather than the subject matter. When I begin a painting, I am looking to discover something that I don't know, something I haven't experienced. What keeps me interested is what is unexpected. I rely in large part on the intuitive sense. If the experience of everyday life is a factor in my work at all, it is in this respect: the intuition acts as a filter for experience.

When I work, I am on the look-out for the kind of intuitive leap that will transform my own obsessive themes (which are often intangible) into some unexpected manifestation as paint — or the equivalent — on canvas. I don't mean to claim revelation here and this is the description of how many artists work. As Henry Miller puts it, "is it so very different, this unintentional metamorphosis of a subject, from the familiar experience of starting out to visit a friend with whom you intend to discuss Bergson or Einstein..."
and winding up in a brothel drunk as a coot?"

It doesn’t bother me that the primary forms of information in this culture are television, movies, and urban advertising. I knew before I started out to be an artist that I would never be loved by millions, but in my youthful zeal and arrogance, I thought my work would at least be known by thousands. Now I am happy to find those who look at art and especially those who can connect with my work. I also felt then, as I do now, that the popular culture of this country is almost entirely trash, and I never wanted to make trash. After painting for twenty years, I can safely say that I paint out of an inner necessity and not because I feel there is some vast audience for painting out there that has yet to be tapped. Finally, it is the certainty of the inner necessity of this enterprise that gives me confidence in my work. On this level, whether or not my work conforms to the demands of the marketplace or even to my own expectation is mostly irrelevant.


Jimbo Blachly

Clear the mind and refocus on a specific structure or idea such as following the breath.

- natural breeze
- daily maintenance
- electric light
- holes in the street
- more places to sit

Work is a response to environment and personal history, how it actually manifests itself into art is a complex admixture of the deeply unknown and the various conscious and unconsciously perceived experiences of the mundane day-to-day participation in the world. How to integrate the self-aware, self-perceiving glimpses that flash through the mind at certain moments seems the struggle. I am always creating a mental field through which I move in the world. This field dissolves and reforms every instant with the introduction of new information/experiences/emotions/sensations. Seemingly free-flowing in certain ways and yet completely bound to time and circumstance; a constant oscillation between the inside self-construction dissolving and reforming with the outside social world construction affecting everything in all directions.

churningsoup of existence.

ENVIRONMENT FOR THE MIND

When a body enters a building, a room, a field, the desert, water, trains, under the shade of trees, beneath silk canopies, into autos, along walls, the yard, down slopes, below lights, wires, gas pipes, between dumpsters filled with soiled boxes, fat and grease, let the body make a gesture and the mind as well. Then going among these things, one holds a thought/gesture in the mind and body. Reflecting back and forth this thing that might be conceived of as space or an inquiry of sorts. Noticing how this thing held or regarded changes and how it affects the mind and body’s relation to the environment and perhaps how that in turn affects the environment.

The subject of my art is how to keep working, how to spend time, how to translate this day-to-day life into work. Perhaps this is true for others as well. So I search for structures that can act as provisional situations in which I feel I can work. Practicing Zen Buddhism with varying amounts of discipline over the last few years has influenced my working process considerably. It has both reinforced and complicated dimly held intuitions and ideas of “how to proceed.” On the practical level there is a struggle between time spent at a Zen center versus time in the studio. The effect on my work has been that my working process is beginning to look more like formal Zen training. Lots of sitting and performing tasks in a somewhat ritualized manner. The connection between Zen and art making for me right now is forced and fairly awkward but a choice nonetheless.

Serena Bocchino

IN THE STUDIO

where the imagination and mind can work to expand and delight.

This is where one may wish to contemplate and discover the issues that truly matter for oneself.

The following is my response to the editors’ questions. They are questions I have asked myself many times.

- Unfortunately to be “politically correct” has penetrated deeply into the art world, probably more so than in any other “world.” It is a shame, because it is the arts that should be the most radical. Also, this is becoming a myth. If it weren’t for all the artists in their studios continuing to challenge themselves and maintain an integrity in their work we would not have art at all. So it is the artists in their studios, painting radically and freely, that are the underground art world. It is in this scenario that there is true liberty to explore ideas and be free of the “politically correct world” around us.

- It is my fantasy to say that my work is not affected by the politics of today. However, it would also clearly change my work if that were the case, especially since my work plays off of the political arena that surrounds me.

- My paintings are poetic compositions of spatial relationships based on the theory of immediacy and uninhibited expressions of metaphoric figurative. Given this “simple” definition it is clear that my work is rebelling against the politics of the day. Considering its opposition to the politics that
are acceptable today, it is the antonym of them. My work rubs everyday life in the wrong way. The politically correct way of thinking is not profound, interesting, provocative, or enlightening; therefore, to be part of that thinking with my work would be preposterous and limiting. However, to use what exists in the politically correct, mundane way of life as an opposing arena of ideas and rituals makes for a challenging and exciting catalyst for my work. My work is an extension of myself; of how and what I think, feel, taste, hear, and know. It would be impossible to create anything that is not filtered through these channels. Rather it is actually created in response to the politics of the day.

What is more important are the factors that come into play in the work, which are the expectation and elaboration of ideas and ideals poetically combined pressing on to a higher, more provocative way of thinking. This is where the excitement and energy lie. This is where the imagination and mind can work to expand and delight. This is where one may wish to contemplate and discover the issues that truly matter for oneself.

Today, so many artists regurgitate information. Sometimes this may be interesting, sometimes not. It is valid. Yet validity has nothing to do with creativity or profound truth or aesthetics. The point is, artists today are trying to compete with MTV, television, and advertising. This is nothing new. However, as Ben Shahn said, “let us see the difference between a cheap suit and an expensive one.” Is it the emperor’s new clothes or not?

I believe that as artists we are trying to create something that cannot be specified but that evokes a specific idea and feeling. Sure we involve who and what we are in our work — but isn’t it anything more than that? Is it only a therapeutic expression, a massaging of our own egos? This idea emphasizes an immature methodology. Isn’t it possible to make work that encompasses a universal idea, in a very personal and specific way? I think it is possible and I think that this makes for much more provocative and meaningful work in the long run. (If that matters anymore?)

As an artist who believes in visual communication using painting and drawing, the mass appeal of television, movies, and urban advertising can get depressing. But knowing there are millions of artists using a similar visual medium as myself, in an immediate radius of 100 miles, is comforting. I believe that artists will be innovative and sensitive enough to use these media rather than abuse them.

Actually, I am excited and stimulated by any and all visual information today. My work is not in competition with these other entertaining visual forms because we have very different objectives. For one thing, my artwork cannot be defined. This is the key issue that makes television, movies, and advertising so different from the arts, particularly the work I am trying to create. I am not interested in trying to define my work or trying to have an audience define it. My work is about having an experience. Now some media begin with this premise; however, at some point they fail because they must succumb to a certain agenda or opinion. As an artist, this does not come into play since we are not paid to do our work and we work for ourselves.

In a culture whose primary forms of visual information are television, movies, and advertising it is disconcerting when these other visual media are abused. As a culture this abuse can cause laziness and dulling of the senses, and this is a very dangerous state of mind for an artist or any human being to be in.

• I am confident that my work is genuine in what it is saying and how it is being said. This confidence is based on hours, days, weeks, months, and years of analysis, contemplation, meditation, study, training and untraining, learning and unlearning, formulation, composition, listening, discussion, guessing and second guessing, and working and reworking. This confidence comes from putting everything I have into each mark. When this is said and done the work stands on its own, and is what it is.

• Since 1982 my work has had a relationship to music and performance; in particular, the kinetic qualities of my work. I incorporate the dynamic of a total work and the abstract qualities of music. This is similar to relationships made in John Cage’s work but also to the metaphors in Arshile Gorky’s work. I am influenced by the intellectualized reality in Piet Mondrian’s Broadway Boogie-Woogie, with a long chorus of Chet Baker. It is the history of these artists along with a long list of others that I am a part of in terms of having a passion for music and bringing it into play in my work.

During the early 80s my paintings and drawings were visual arenas for Wagnerian performances, using an intense palette and dynamic visual metaphors for circus-like images ignited by compositions of Wagner. For several years the idea of Gesamtkunstwerk was critical to concepts used in this work. Then paintings became blueprints for multimedia installations. After this period, the large performance landscapes were scaled down to one instrument. And it was the energetic brush stroke that conveyed the melodic compositions of each piece. The palette was subdued and romantic. The work was dramatic and theatrical. It was in the late 80s that I worked on a series on the saxophone provocatively placed alongside bursts of intense color, which began to be the imagery that was the manifestation of passion and of poetry in motion.

I believe this other interest is clearly an important influence on my work. It enhances and inspires it; when I listen to a concert or single instrument being played my visual interpretation or response can become part of my whole experience. It is not the literal interpretation that I am interested in. Rather it is the dynamic of the entire experience that impassions me.

Richard Brown

The question concerning the effect of the politics and/or experiences of everyday life is one that I think really came into play for me during graduate school. That’s probably a bit odd given that school can be something of a buffer between everyday life and getting your work done. But actually maybe
that's why it came up at that point, because there was a little more of a gap between the two. The situation provoked questions about the relationship between what happened in my studio and what happened everywhere else.

What happened everywhere else was a job, going to galleries, going to see bands, being in a band, going to bars, hanging out with my friends. These things never directly became a part of my work as subject matter (although for some of my friends they did), but I did find myself attempting to incorporate them in some way. I still continue to. At that time I was trying to be very rigorous in my work by being reductive, but I was also producing less and less work as a kind of side effect. The problem for me remained fairly unclear until Lawrence Lipkin pointed out one day that he thought artists placed more restrictions on what they did than anyone else. Yet we all have this romantic notion that an artist is, at least in some ways, someone who is "free."

Exactly what the points of intersection are between my work and my life are difficult to describe. As I said, my daily life is not the subject matter of my work. But I try not to separate my ongoing concerns in painting from my impulses, no matter what they are. Further, I try not to restrict my activity to painting, and therefore I also seek out performance work and writing. I try to use the incredible variety of things I'm exposed to in a day as a sort of metaphor in making art.

I have a great degree of confidence in my work and it comes from the support of my friends and peers. I have little or no confidence in my work vis-a-vis the art world. While I was still in New York I never had the sense that my work could actually fit in somewhere, in the context of a gallery for instance. I have now returned to Canada and find I have the same feeling here. I actually feel like I'm doing interesting work, but I'm uncertain what that means to most galleries or curators. It's not an entirely cynical attitude, it's more like a loss of faith.

My second passion after art making is definitely listening to and playing music. I've been in bands constantly for the past fifteen years, which is also the period in which I have studied and practiced art. The two (art and music) have never really overlapped, up until recently, and in fact I used to keep my bands a secret from my artist friends. I do see a connection between rock and roll and painting, however. (When I first suggested this to Mira Schor she asked me to tell her what it was. I couldn't come up with a good answer and she said, "That's because there isn't one!") I see a band like Yo La Tengo working with their material (lyrics, feedback, and noise) in the same way that I work with mine (subject matter, paint, and surface). They are working with the same commitment and with the same difficulties. If I have an idea about a certain way of combining thick paint with thin, how do I go about making that work the way I want it to in a painting? A band like YLT is working out a similar concern with feedback and melody.

The interpersonal politics of everyday life, and my resultant self-analysis, does, in a sense, create the subject matter of my work. While it contains overlapping levels of meaning, the autobiographical subtext provides the fuel for my ongoing self-analytic drive. The conscious desire to make sense of my behavior and experience through the process of art making moves from examining the consequences of individual acts to their corollaries in the political realm. Issues of economy, drive, power, desire, transgression, and excess are part of my expanded definition of the political.

Anyone who looks at my work can recognize that I'm very influenced by pop culture and populist strategies, in the interest of extending my audience. I see no contradiction in being an artist in a media-based culture. TV, movies, and advertising are potentially just as interesting as works in the traditional fine arts. Conversely, paintings can be potentially more boring than a string of commercials.

World views are inescapably expressed in images, regardless of whether you're looking at a painting or a billboard. So I take inspiration not only from literature, philosophy and painting, but from pop culture as well. Artists must create strong images in order to compete visually with media culture. Admittedly, other media than painting suggest themselves as more suitable to this endeavor. Perhaps this is one reason why it presents me with a viable challenge.

However, I don't identify myself as a "painter," but rather as a multi-disciplinary artist. I spend just as much time writing as I do making and thinking about images. I have also made films, photographs, videotapes, and installations. There is a performative, almost theatrical element to my process. There is also the obvious connection, which is that almost all of the visual work incorporates text. Both the ongoing Liz Taylor Series and my new series based on medieval torture implements, titled as portraits based on my ex-boyfriends, rely on significant amounts of research and source materials.

I dislike the formal distinctions between disciplines. I don't subscribe to the common snobbish belief that an artist can't "serve two masters." I would prefer to be thought of as an artist, rather than as the practitioner of a single discipline. I do not see a conflict between media, but a complementary appropriateness of ideas for each. Regardless of the product, the place where the work comes from is the same, though the form might vary. Practicing several media permits me more latitude in self-expression because I can more flexibly tailor form and content.

Writing fiction and poetry allows me to deal with my experiences in a more direct and visceral way. The personal referents in the paintings and installations are present, but they are much more obtuse and removed, since painting is generally seen more often, while literature is usually read privately. I have written for as long as I have made images. I self-published a book, From Under the 8-Ball, in 1985, with the aid of a LINE grant. I'm finishing up my second, The Double Standard, a novella and collection of short stories.

Kathe Burkhart

From Under the 8-Ball, 1985, with the aid of a LINE grant. I'm finishing up my second, The Double Standard, a novella and collection of short stories.
that I've been working oninterruptedly for the past three years. I publish a little every year. I've been active reading the work publicly, for the past ten years on a fairly regular basis, both in New York and in Los Angeles where I lived from the late 70s to the mid-80s. Galleries or museums where the paintings are being shown are for me the ideal setting for a reading because of the context and proximity of the two bodies of work.

I am not always confident in my work. Like everyone else, I have doubts and bad days, months, sometimes. No matter how much of a control freak you are, or how much you believe in the necessity of your work, life intervenes. When I am feeling good about the work, I know it is because many women find my feminist message empowering. Many men find it threatening, though, and have sometimes misunderstood it as camp.

I get a great deal of support in Europe, which has been a tremendous encouragement, because Europeans approach the work as foreigners, much in the spirit of otherness in which it was created. It is a comment peculiarly American, which is nevertheless firmly rooted in artistic tradition.

Words and images can be sparks that ignite change. This possibility allows for both the political and the spiritual dimension of my project and allows a chain reaction between me and my audience. It's a kind of psycho-cultural agitprop. As I said in a catalogue statement for the Vierkant show at the Museum van Hendendaagse Kunst: "Didactic is not a dirty word." Last but not least, I have confidence because of the pleasure I experience when a completed piece really works in terms of my intentionality, and my audience bears out my hunch, through their response and critique.

Kevin DeForest

Most of my three weeks in Kyoto and Tokyo were spent on foot, wandering back streets on the way to shrines, grocery stores, record shops. There were moments when an overwhelming sensation of sadness passed through my body. I cried with my kindergarten teacher and principal in my old school. The same stone entry, playground, and hallway I could recall, my memory enhanced by Super-8 home movie footage. What I was sure of was that I had absorbed a certain introspection, a certain humility through my own silent way of looking.

I first met Barbara Ess at her visiting artist's talk at Banff. She backgrounded her presentation by a listing of her passions and influences, one of them being rock'n'roll. That phrase just stuck out like a sore thumb for me, heavy on the Brooklynese, like a screeching Johnny Thunders guitar lick. Art making was supposed to be operating at a more profound level than teenage trash rebellion. But her pinhole photographs somehow embraced that familiar energy, sucking her experience through a tiny hole in a cardboard box with a quirky, delirious intimacy.

At the moment I'm painting on record album covers. They're certainly the stuff of my daily routine, littering my studio and apartment in scattered piles. I don't know how many oceans of second-hand vinyl I've flipped through in pursuit of the nonsensical or the sublime. Call it my major vice and commodity fetish, but I continue to collect and obsess over other people's sounds and attitudes. It's in the blood for me — my mother listening to classical records in her neighbourhood coffee shop in postwar Kyoto, my dad blasting his free-jazz albums at high volumes in the northeastern States and Canada.

Maybe the l.p. paintings are in part a teenage wish-fulfillment, letting me be my own pop-star role model. I'm wanting to feel my own groove, search out my funky bad self. Re-imaging and altering the jackets gives me that permission. When I paint myself as an honorary member of Kiss, become a ghost/tourist/voyer of my own half-Japanese culture, or look for my own ideal sci-fi home, I allow myself to be as serious, as goofy, as sexy, as self-questioning as I get through the week.

There's a certain familiar image overload at work here. When I first began painting was created. It's a kind of psycho-cultural agitprop. As I said in a catalogue statement for the Vierkant show at the Museum van Hendendaagse Kunst: "Didactic is not a dirty word." Last but not least, I have confidence because of the pleasure I experience when a completed piece really works in terms of my intentionality, and my audience bears out my hunch, through their response and critique.

Working autobiographically is new for me, and I'm charged by the head-on collision course it makes between my practice and experience. Reconciling the loss of an important lover, my mixed cultural/racial identification, confronting the love/humiliation I have around rock'n'roll, my heterosexuality — these are categories that I know, wonder, dream, and worry about all day long.

I'm trying to avoid premeditating my results or setting up too many categories. Sometimes the records are ordered in groups, sometimes not. I don't see my art-making role as providing a consummate structure or organization with which to view the world. For the moment, I'm more concerned with exploring my own urgencies, and just expecting them to be as lurid, strange, and multi-layered as they are for me each day. I also need to short-circuit explanations, in order to sidestep my own stifling self-consciousness. I need to get down and kick ass.

A complaint: in part I'm responding to a glut (at least here in Canada) of work I've seen from younger artists that seems a little over-strategized, wanting to validate itself through theoretical alibis and a professional look (actually, that sounds a little like work I was making about a year ago). Whatever happened to the sensation of seeing art by experiencing the room, the object? Lately I seem to end up reading a text off a visually illiterate look (actually, that sounds a little like work I was making about a year ago).
theory also appears to have become part of the "look" and that disturbs me. The color of my skin is not a style or an abstract idea. It's also not the sum total of who I am. What I am working towards is a revision of categories like race and multiculturalism, through the representation of my own diversity of identities and concerns.

I wouldn't describe my work as activist, but I feel it still has a level of political engagement. I think the voice in my work is quiet and at times ambiguous, but it still needs to be heard. Strong work for me resonates with its own personal engagement, which is not at all to suggest a banishment of the abstractions of theory. Instead I very ideologically want the theory scene to forfeit its powers of validating authority and become another factor in everyday negotiation. I think writing from Trinh T. Minh-ha (When the Moon Waxes Red) and Barthes (A Lover's Discourse) has engaged my own life in this way because it speaks from a personal and everyday politic.

Finally, I seem to have lost interest in more art-historically focused concerns. If painting can be termed an archaic stained-glass medium in the ladder of contemporary cultural priorities that's fine by me. It can finally be let go as a prop for academic power negotiations. Painting as commodity, as fetish object, as colonial signifier, as trace of hand, as original, as pointless. Doing the laundry, drinking coffee, laughing, painting, reading. Wandering. Hearing my interval, my silence. Acknowledging the everyday as the site of wonder. "It's hot and it's cold and it's hot and it's cold . . . at the same time."

**Jason Fox**

Responses to questions:

1. "If you begin with a political stance, and your film is an illustration of Marxist propositions or Fascist propositions or whatever political theory you happen to hold, then I think you're making a propaganda film, and to me that automatically means it cannot be art. Art and propaganda are poles apart. When I start to make a film I try to completely clear my head of all the intellectual and cerebral considerations of the times I live in. I try to get in touch with something that's more basic, intuitive, and instinctive and then work outwards to details of time and culture. To me, any valid expression of that is legitimate art. Ferdinand Céline was a Fascist collaborator. That doesn't mean his works are not great." — David Cronenberg

2. Movies, television, and advertising are raw material for artists, not competition. Rauschenberg, Warhol, Koons have all used the energy generated by popular culture. The Impressionists had landscapes, we have tv. When you think of ancient Egypt you might think of the pyramids first, but that doesn't mean Egyptian figurative painting and sculpture have been forgotten. Picasso, Louise Bourgeois, Francis Bacon, Jack Kirby, Tom of Finland, ... there are so many artists from this century whose work will be looked at as long as any Rob Reiner movie will be viewed. I don't have the financial resources of a television network or an advertising agency, but I also don't have many of the same restraints. I don't have to worry about audience demographics, test screenings, or Nielsen ratings.

3. Making art is mentally athletic. Just as a basketball player needs to have confidence to make a good jump shot, an artist needs to have confidence in his or her cerebral activity. You gain that confidence through repetition.

4. My second passion is watching tv. I enjoy the spectacle and drama of televised sports. The historical, regional, and genetic complexities in sports are the same kind of complexities I try to create in my work. I even enjoy programs that produce such mind-numbing slick stupidity that you can't help but watch, e.g. "Silk Stalkings." Not only does tv provide cheap entertainment but I can also find situations that relate to my everyday life, such as "The Rockford Files." My apartment is about the size of Rockford's trailer, and like him I don't make much money and I don't get much recognition but I enjoy my work.

**Ava Gerber**

- Advertising and its images of the ideal are constantly promoting the myth of the American Dream. My art is an angry and disappointed response to discovering that the picture-perfect world presented by advertising is not attainable for the average American.

- I don't consider my other passions secondary to my art making. Basketball and African dancing coexist with my art making. They are all forms for expression. I think the more you do outside of art making the more informed your art will be.

**Hilary Helfant**

My studio is in the highly polluted, industrial waste ground of Manhattan known as Williamsburg, Brooklyn. When I first moved here three years ago I liked the fact that one could walk down my block and see the East River. The poetry that once held me romantically has now turned surreal. Looking through my window I see a large truck filled with bones, ribs, and hips flecked with bits of flesh. Up the block are drug-worn young girls trying to sell themselves to the truckers.

Disrespect for life makes me quite sad. The way we relate to nature, the distancing of realities and the abundance of sound and visual overload we experience every day is creating a greater alienation among people. To continue to grow as people we need to find a sense of community again and decentralize. There is a need for art: art can bring civility to civilization and humanity back to society. Subversion and originality have always been a catalyst in the art of the 20th century. Art is not significant in itself; its signifi-
I feel I am being more honest with my process. I am still using geometry and each to find its own weight and space. Dictate the terms. In the last year, although I have made fewer paintings, I let the work dictate the terms, instead of working ten hours a day to stay on top of my work. This left me with little satisfaction. As always I was the outsider. Not ever really buying into what has become academic and conservative art history. Having worked as an artist's assistant for three years I became influenced by the lure of mannerism. I turned to geometry, the structures of the canvas. Making successful geometric paintings, I exhibited them among high-profile artists. This left me with little satisfaction. As always I was the outsider. Not ever really buying into what has become academic and conservative modernism, abstraction holding on to dogmatic traditions rather than pushing perception ahead. I put an image of a bird in with my geometry. This lent a figurative reference and broke the rules of "hard-core," "pure" abstraction.

Now, I work more out of a need for magic in my life. My work comes more out of intuitive gestures than from conceptual thought. As subject matter I use nature and animals, the theme being a respect for life and the recognition of the inherent worth of every individual. I am now working on a series of paintings on gold leaf and have found a greater confidence in this work. Instead of working ten hours a day to stay on top of my work, I let the work dictate the terms. In the last year, although I have made fewer paintings, I feel I am being more honest with my process. I am still using geometry and animals yet I am not pitting them against one another as much as allowing each to find its own weight and space.
It's too pleasurable. Which is ironic since it is about being so un-self-confident. I am happiest when I am painting, with music playing overhead, and on a sugar high. One of the side benefits of being a visual artist is being able to listen to music, or, dare I admit it, talk radio, while working. And I do so constantly. I'll say, with a little embarrassment, that as I plunge into my thirties, my interest in rock music hasn't decreased one iota. I can say the same for most of my artist cohorts. This has meant access to a large pool of people with which to trade homemade tapes, exchange musical opinions, and see live performance. The conversations about music and art are always inextricably mixed and I see this as one of the most pleasurable parts of my life.

I've noticed that a large percentage of the visual artists I know roughly my age are in rock bands. Something about this kind of music has a grip on us and stubbornly won't let go. Sometimes I think it comes down to the fact that there's a category of people that thinks that the sound of a heavily distorted guitar is not abrasive and intrusive, but is gorgeous and sublime. We may feel silly for being so representative of our generation ("X"), but we're not going to stop listening or playing — it's too pleasurable.

In response to question #2:
I feel that the answer to this question can differ depending upon what type of art one makes. I am a painter and I feel the problem with being a painter in a time when society is being bombarded with visual information is that people have very little patience. When a person walks into a gallery and looks at a painting on a wall, they give it approximately thirty seconds of their time. The audience that is looking at paintings and appreciating what it sees is very, very small. If I were to dwell on this question in my mind, well, it would be hard to rationalize trying to have a career as a painter, but is that what making art is about? So I try not to think about this subject too much, because it can bog you down. Painting has been part of culture since way before TV, movies, and advertising, and I think it will always exist because it is so much a part of cultural history.

In response to the 4th question:
I feel that my first passion is life, my second passion is making art, a way to survive my first passion.
overwhelming dynamic creates an even greater need, in some, for a separate kind of interior verification to be found in reflective and complex craft. And, at the same time, that such a culture will most often isolate work of that character with great cruelty.

This is as it should be. Although the results of our larger culture are not just aesthetic (how many out there will be left undamaged enough to even see or hear the work?) and we therefore often feel a desire to link up with something out there, an artist remains ultimately disconnected from the wider perception of his work, assuming there is any. Paintings function as a singular expression, a one-to-one window for each viewer as an individual in a particular moment, most often alone in their own unique history. This is a situation that fundamentally undermines and sets aside any mass or political experience. And it is a form that, I would argue, is "primary" to a human existence in that it provides an opportunity to surpass those limitations. The specific expressions of each such work are unaccountable and will continue to defy translation into other structures. The painter preoccupied with vast sociopolitical purposes and a rearranged agenda of media reception is deluded.

You have asked me to respond as a "younger" artist. In sum, I would say that I look forward to fifty more years of working in this city with an urgent sense of an expressive chance at hand within my medium, on its own terms. It provides a window into the phantoms possessed of a sad willingness to lock themselves into the surface of their possibilities. On quite another avenue, I stake out the distinct significance, right now, of painting's continuing rigors, its intrinsically cogitative language and its capacity for revelation, interior dimensions found only in such an elite system of knowledge and direct experience, with a sonorous lineage extending over thousands of years. We are at a completely new confluence of history and painting's resources.

Lawrence Lipkin

About three years ago I felt that I had run into a dead end with my work. Making the same paintings again and again was extremely boring and frustrating. Having a signature style and vocabulary of abstract forms to play with just wouldn't do anymore. I tried to relax my preconceptions of what my work should look like. Narrative, humor, and self-disclosure, banned from high modernism, became my goal.

Certain works from the 70s that I had seen or read about became more interesting. Those works were often rooted in early feminist practice. The content overflowed the prescribed boundaries of color-field painting at that time. By the mid-80s much of this work with its messy linking of art and everyday life had been forgotten as second rate compared to the cool masterpieces of postmodernism. A little further down the line it is the spirit of confession or confrontation that makes those works seem vital to me. I am riveted by the sense of a real person making the work, not a faceless assistant.

The question of the tension between art and everyday life is tricky. It is a tightrope for my work to walk. On the one hand there is the danger of shallow self-aggrandizing and cynical self-exploitation. On the other hand, professional, theory-laden gambits will keep the audience small, the work decorous, and the ideas safely in-house.

For all the cheesy limitations of tabloid media, sometimes issues do filter out in ways that point out the marginality of the art world for "dis­cou­rse." All the domestic dramas that play endlessly in the media are holding our attention because of recognizability in our own lives. It forces the public to at least be aware of some of the issues running through our society. The dirty secret of the art world is just how very difficult it is to get Phil Donahue and Piers Mondragon to talk to each other. Every now and then I see objects where this surreal consciousness-raising is going on and it makes the wait worthwhile.

My other consuming passion is music. I like a lot of different kinds but I buy mostly rock and roll. As a nonparticipant I'm free to skip the tired arguments about authenticity versus selling out. However, some of the discussion amongst musicians about putting out records reminds me of artists seeking gallery representation. A striking difference is how the D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself) spirit of punk rock is still alive in the music world. Some would sneer at it but several bands have started labels for their releases and intend to stick with the label no matter how successful they get. It may be due to a more fluid distribution network and direct marketing potential than the art world has. Yet it also seems true that after a brief East Village heyday artists seemed to quickly accept the idea of others doing it for us.

Some fanaticism in the music world's abundance of self-published writing about music, life, etc. is a tightrope for my work to walk. By the mid-80s much of this work with its messy linking of art and everyday life had been forgotten as second rate compared to the cool masterpieces of postmodernism. A little further down the line it is the spirit of confession or confrontation that makes those works seem vital to me. I am riveted by the sense of a real person making the work, not a faceless assistant.

Mery Lynn McCorkle

Confidence is one of those either/or issues. Either you have a strong ego or you struggle with doubt. Often both in a single day. I remember reading an article describing how Cézanne would pronounce himself a genius one day and the next would grovel for any compliment. This seems about right. In
the studio I am a combination of a curious child and a god. Confidence isn’t an issue because I’m focused on self as a specimen. Out of the studio self-confidence routinely crumbles into cycles of depression, arrogance, or petulance, edging toward groveling.

In any case, whatever I and other visual artists struggle to produce is virtually invisible in our society, attacks from Jesse Helms notwithstanding. In the years I have involved with Amnesty International, I was always perplexed at the persecution of artists: who actually pays any attention to high art anyway? The audience for contemporary poetry consists of other poets and a select few. The audience for contemporary music consists of musicians and a select few. Visual art isn’t very different.

There is a certain freedom involved in being superficial, though. A certain permissible indulgence. My work is very indulgent: tactile, fragile, and figurative. I thread tiny beads onto thin wire. I stretch rice paper into a skin over nails and then pluck it with eyebrow tweezers to expose tiny fragments of the painted surface below. Is this subtlety, which demands attention and visual acuity on the part of the viewer, in keeping with our visual training or our expectations? Like other animals, we innately sum up visual experience quickly: danger/no danger, food/no food, mate/no mate. The average museum visitor gives each work actually viewed less than ten seconds of time, most of that on the label. A simple message, a simple category. TV and advertising reinforce this. They rely on this. I don’t have to play that way. But this leads back to the issue of confidence. Artists have freedom and little or no approval from the society at large. Can any powerless elite ever be confident?

I, LIKE, UM . . .

Michael Mikulay

My second passion after art making is the pursuit and attainment of happiness in my day-to-day life. Well, that sounds kind of funny. It’s more like an unconscious effort to fight off boredom, to keep myself preoccupied. If I’m not bored then I’m usually happy. This “happiness” normally revolves around eating and drinking, bike riding, carrying on with my friends, some sporting activities like darts or tennis, and generally just wasting time. I can blow hours in a day without even trying. Oh, but one of my favorite things to do is to linger over a late-afternoon super-premium beer with a friend in a quiet bar with good windows, where the warm sunlight makes your beer glow more golden. Wow, that just sends me.

I’m also into the music thing. That would be the purchasing and listening to music along with going to shows, reading fanzines, and the endless chatter about this or that band and who’s who and what’s good or bad. I love it, but it can get a little out of hand. During the post-graduation slack time, I spent most of my time running from store to store, looking for some old record or CD that I just had to have. I needed the cheap fix and an excuse to avoid my studio.

But I use the music. I see it as a way bigger influence on my work than TV or movies although I would like to do a drawing of David Letterman saying “Heeeesey, kids.” That’s funny. Not a portrait proper, just “Heeeesey, kids.” Anyway, I’ll play music as motivation to get myself up and working if I’m tired. There’s nothing like a little turned-up Superchunk or Cheap Trick to get me dancing from drawing to drawing. But the music means more to me than just a party of one in the studio. I find some similarities between this new-style rock’n’roll and my drawings. I hear it/see it in this Replacements-Pavement-like thing where they kind of stumble through the songs, keeping it unfussy and high energy, not worrying at the time whether it’s good or bad. The key for me is to loosen control over the drawing and accept the things that happen. When this does happen, I feel really good. I’m confident in my talents and I can have fun and take pleasure in the act of drawing. That means a lot to me.

I like to think of the words or phrases I use in my drawings as lyrics; they fade in and out of the other images depending on one’s focus, and their meaning is rarely pinned down for long. I don’t often listen for the words in a song. Only after many listens and a lot of time in between do I begin to realize what it is they’re singing about. As the lyrics emerge and mix with the music I can piece things together and “get it” almost by accident.

And what do I sing/draw about? The everyday stuff is fair game. Usually it’s the details in my experiences that I take note of and keep turning over and over in my head. Quick little things that may seem insignificant but stay with me. Things that strike me as funny-ha-ha or funny-odd seem to stand out. This point of recognition puts me on the alert and shakes me out of my beer is not so much golden as it’s gone. See you later.
Holly Miller

I am a painter. The materials I use are, like words, tools of communication. My paintings are made with wire, not canvas. I build a wooden frame/stretcher, pierce it, and weave the wire through. I use industrial enamel paint to either cover or drip from the wire. The paintings are open, which makes the wall a part of them.

My work is not political in a topical sense, but it is political in an abstract sense—the sense of politics as a system of poles, of opposites. The wire suggests industry. The bare wood frame, nature. The tension between the two is a paradox of strength and vulnerability (which is which?). Concepts and emotions conveyed by the work include energy, tension, purity, impurity, sensuality, sterility—all of which converge on the axis of nature and industry.

My work fights trends created by a culture whose primary form of visual information is television, movies, and advertising. It is not about one-liners or instant gratification—the mind’s equivalent of fast food. It is about contemplation. Although my work is direct, it is not immediate. As abstract discourse, it exists out of time, and therefore requires time—time to be absorbed. The work is both visual and tactile. It provokes one to question. To question, what is painting? And to question demands time and flexibility—two qualities destroyed by a mass-media culture.

Becoming confident about my work has taken me many years of looking at and thinking about my paintings. Having other people, especially other artists, respond positively to the work is encouraging, but ultimately my intuition determines the success of my work. Every time I begin a new piece, I create a problem for myself. A problem that needs to be solved (somehow!). Once the problem is solved, I consider the piece successful and I become confident with it. It’s taken me years to learn how not to feel myself about my work—learning to remain true and honest about it and to trust my inner feeling.

My second passion is verbal language. Growing up in Italy as an American exposed me to different languages. Language and art are communication. The need to communicate through language and art runs parallel. However, they do communicate very different aspects of experience and human reality. Art communicates through perception and experience—a visual and tactile language—rather than linguistic symbols and experience. Both, in different ways, are necessary to share and communicate life.

Gregory Montreuil

The dynamics of the daily experiences of life give me clues about how to proceed with my painting and drawing. I believe the day’s events have a correct sequence which leads one on one’s path. To find and be in each sequence is the challenge. The subject I examine in my work is the energy of the charged space one proceeds through. The work is fed by everyday experiences; structures, patterns of events, physical and mental perceptions of speed in the continuum of time. I feel this space charged with antipodes, polarities, people and things coming together or moving apart.

The order of stages in the making of a painting or drawing is important for me. Certain elements are decided on in advance after thought and experimentation. I try to choose a color that will hold and carry the space I am seeking. I work out a size and proportion that will add to the impact of the space and energize it. The image-making sequence suspends conscious thought. After the meeting the work acts as a record of that meeting and conscious thought is again employed. Decisions are made about the success of the meeting and what is needed to finalize and complete the piece.

Politics are also the result of paths and actions in sequence. The right path can lead to the correct action at the correct time. Individual decisions affect the collective and I believe it is important to exercise and respect the individual actions possible. Life is thinking, moving, breathing, deciding, and acting. The challenge for me is to become better able to discern the correct way of proceeding. Questions arise: What brings people together? What separates people? What forces come into play to create action and change?

I am content to work in a form that for me approaches the elemental. Movies, television, and advertising are mediated forms requiring specific machines to be realized. I believe that I work as a visual artist because it allows me mobility and a direct approach. I can work anywhere at any time. I also feel strongly that painting and drawing have an important role within the culture. Painting and drawing are able to trigger varied modes of thinking. With more choices and possibilities of thought come more options. Visual art can point to less-conformed modes of thought and action, while the mediated forms of information often have a conforming effect on people’s behavior and actions. I feel that painting and drawing can show by example that strong things can come from simple materials.

My confidence in my work varies from day to day. It always seems the results of the work I do are far from my ideal vision. Deep inside I know that I have a great strength and belief in my work and myself. This strength gives me the faith to continue. The confidence in the work can be reinforced by others’ response to it and by sales. The path the work itself takes also gives me confidence; when a painting or drawing seems as if I facilitated its making but did not dictate it, this keeps me surprised and gives me confidence.

My passion after art making is nurturing things that grow. I am the elected president of a community garden in Manhattan. My role both complements and at times competes with my art production. I often get cues for my paintings and drawings from the garden. A plant begins as a seed, a drawing a point. The garden keeps me in touch with the energy of nature, a plant’s will to survive and overcome adversity, while at the same time existing amidst so much diversity. The politics of leading the garden are challenging and the diverse range of members echoes the garden’s own diversity. The involvement with the garden has also given me rewarding insights into local
politics. It has shown me first hand that quality-of-life changes can happen with individual and collective effort. You plant a small seed, give it some attention, and it may fulfill its potential.

David Moreno

With sensory and ideational phenomena continuously passing through us, our psyche is like a thin permeable membrane through which the vast majority of information passes unused and unnoticed. Certain elements, however, do occasionally take hold and lodge within us. Eventually, these accumulations gather into aggregates of experience and, as with aggregates of rock or mineral found in nature, it is often difficult to determine the origin of each constituent part. Adding further to the complexity of interpretation is the fact that even these aggregates are in time subject to further transformations. I'm reminded of a drawing by Philip Guston from 1980 depicting a large oddly shaped ball of random debris, seemingly the end result of a long journey collecting the detritus of everything previously encountered. Various forms suggestive of arms, legs, feet, and other natural and man-made fragments, curiously distinct and yet resembling each other, are combined into one heterogeneous mass. This haphazard accumulation wonderfully conveys the forms of narratives and memories, and the potential for our conscious and unconscious play with the debris of experience.

One's narratives and one's relations to the world are not inert fixtures, for we both willfully and unthinkingly recompose them. Like Guston's lumpish ball of debris, one's thoughts seem to be merely provisional arrangements subject to change by the slightest movement. This evanescent quality makes a state of play possible because play itself is a joyful confrontation with themes of uncertainty and complexity. A work of art, too, can be a state of play, an attempt to engage the complexity of our experience of the world.

These transitive configurations of experience, their location within the psyche, and the process by which a nascent form becomes or does not become actualized are the focus of my work, my play. I'm interested in an architecture that continuously, in curious ways, builds and then rebuilds itself without any previous notion of the architect.

I'm quite happy being the producer of a secondary form of visual expression. To be primary implies a position of hegemony over all other forms and with this a degree of homogeneity, a repression of diversity, and a virulent desire for the expansion of influence. Being less than primary suggests the potential for aberrant forms, the pursuit of diversity and movements of thought unfettered by a singular ideology.

Political consciousness is inseparable from my own art making, but at the same time I see "political art" as having become a narrow label. The ordinary and everyday are important themes in my work, i.e., shopping, menstruation, household objects, and daily tasks. I never know where or what my work will come out of so I do not separate my art making from other activities in which I am engaged; and I like to feel free to express ideas through a variety of media. Television and other forms of mass media do not directly inform my artwork. However, I regard television, movies, and urban advertising as the major artworks of today, in terms of their influence on and reflection of our culture.

Kathryn Myers

1. Several years ago when I was first working with figurative imagery I was using nude male models because I was afraid that if I used a female, I would subconsciously think of the figure as myself and limit the possibilities of imagery. I used the nude because it was the first time I had worked with the figure and it seemed to be more challenging and interesting than using a clothed figure. I was influenced by Baroque painting and religious imagery and assumed that my viewers would understand my references when they saw the work. My naïveté was revealed when my audience saw the work much differently than I intended. The first place I had a show with some of this work was at a community college in central Connecticut. They felt uncomfortable about showing the work "because they didn't want trouble," but did let me include these works, if I put them at the back of the gallery. My audience consisted of a few artists and art students and a large working-class public that passed the gallery on the way to attend theatre events. To make a long story short, I realized that I had to deal with the politics of using two nude men in intimate situations in the late 20th century. After being stubborn for awhile and accusing my audience of being ignorant, I saw that the response was very consistent, even with other artists who, although they were not offended by the work, were unable to see it in anything but a conventional context. I was sympathetic to the issues I had raised in my own life but did not want to take responsibility for them in my work. I eventually costumed the models and, through clothed figures, was better able to communicate what I was interested in, although it did at first make me feel like I was running away from the political issues I had inadvertently raised. I was both naive and also arrogant to think that because I was an artist my audience could see the work only in a limited "art" context. My work is still influenced by religious imagery and Baroque painting but I have done a better job at this point of touching upon aspects of the past and the contemporary world at the same time.

2. As a painter of representational imagery, I don't feel a sense of
am present. I feel that the work has more of a chance of projecting itself and that my presence gets in the way. Overall I feel more confident about my work every year. It may be that eleven years of making work since grad school and the continuing seesaw effect of success and failure have made me realize that my own judgment of my work is the most important.

4. Passion may be too strong a term, but after working in the studio, the other thing that gets a great deal of my attention and interest is teaching. I always loved being a student, never wanted to be out of school. I tend to get so absorbed in my own work that I can no longer see if a painting is good or bad when I am in the studio every day. Being away teaching for three days allows me a necessary distance. Teaching gives my life a structure and exercises a different side of my brain and makes me feel that in some way I am participating in the world, even if the university is an artificial world. It can be very rewarding, although it’s harder to see it this way day to day. Correcting hundreds of beginning figure drawings keeps my own skills sharp, and I have had an opportunity to develop my own classes, such as advanced figure painting, which is very challenging. It does take away from my time in the studio, but it has proved to be a worthy distraction so far. Even if I were fortunate enough to not have to work on anything but my studio work, I would still want to continue teaching.

Paul Pagk

EXCERPTS FROM AN UNSTARTED DIARY
TIME — COLOR
MAY–JUNE '94
BLUE RED PINK GREEN YELLOW ORANGE WHITE BLACK

May 21st 12:00 pm Blue
Received a letter from M/E/A/N/I/I/N/G, a contemporary art magazine, asking young artists to respond to four questions in relation to their work.

May 30th 8:00 pm Yellow
I do not regard my work as information or a commentary on our society, and although I am keeping myself informed about sociopolitical events, national or international, and am concerned by them, there is no direct relationship between these events and my painting.

June 4th 6:50 pm Pink
The evening sunlight is stretching across the floor in the larger room of my studio, lighting up partially the yellow painting on the bottom left-hand side. For a moment it felt as if time had frozen. In painting I would like to catch the eye the same way the sun lingers across its surface. As we are confronted more and more with the flow of images and words that are produced by the cultural industry, I feel a need as an artist to pare down my pictorial elements, to dismiss the superfluous, while keeping a complexity, and to offer
something that goes beyond the image. Contrary to television and films where the experience is mediated and vision is harassed by a multitude of images, painting gives the viewer the opportunity to live a singular experience with the motionless picture. In film the body that is moving is on the screen, while with painting it is the spectator's body that dances back and forth. With painting I want to articulate the notion of time and space. The viewer will slowly gain access to the picture, while being constantly put off balance by certain subversive events in it, so that the original perception is only a starting point to the way one is going to see the painting.

June 16th 7:30 PM Light green white line

Veronique suggested that we go down and catch the last hours of the day by the river before the nightfall. Spent a long moment watching a multi-colored sail of a yacht, in the dim misty light of the evening, slowly moving north on the far side of the Hudson.

June 23rd 3:30 PM Bright lemon yellow, like a cadmium yellow mixed with a nickel-titanate yellow plus some zinc white to give it a transparent glow.

I have had a habit of taping from the radio for the last five years. Ten tapes of John Cage, ten tapes of Evan Parker, five tapes of Ornette Coleman, eleven tapes of loft jazz concerts, five tapes of Dizzy Gillespie. It is also interesting to be exposed to other forms of art. It is not necessary that the artists you feel close to work in the same field as you. There is something universal that links most art forms, that goes beyond medium of expression, culture and race.

June 25th 1:30 PM Vertical lines of earth green cut into bright red — a merccadmium light + venetian red + cadmium golden + nickel-titanate yellow + white — painted with horizontal brush strokes.

I use a flat surface for it is a mental space. One can only approach it from the front. My paintings are human size so that the volume of our body exists in relation to it. I am interested in creating certain paths along which the eye may journey — a movement giving a dimension of time and space. For me a work of art should engage mind and body together. For me a work of art should engage mind and body together.

PLASTICS.
grapple on my own with the threatening and unavoidable questions these theoretical histories have posed for painting. As a "young artist" to whom this issue of M/E/A/N/I/N/G is addressed, I am of a generation that has learned a specific politic of experiential inclusion. My work is expected to include ideally "my" but implicitly "our" experience as predicated in a lower-middle-class American pop/cultural politic. Watching artists aggressively transgress art objecthood and authorship with a bibliography-based militancy can erode confidence in my own work, which is often perceived, as one French curator commented, as completely "outside le discours." But it is not the work of these artists that produces this erosion of confidence so much as the brilliant light that exhibitions and critical inclusion sheds on it. Next to the fading future we can imagine so well in this post-80s climate, much of this work seems to be an honest but symptomatic response to an exhibition and critical situation that functions not unlike the fashion or pop music industry, or, as you put it, "television, movies, and urban advertising."

I want to talk more specifically about painting. As a young artist wanting to make work of relevancy outside of a super-subjective, mystical, or expressionist stance, one enters into a raging battlefield full of people who have devoted their lives to analyzing the position and validity of one's male colleagues, and how the death of "the father" (authorship and autonomy) is implicit in their production. Painting has become pure spectacle losing its power to do harm. It has become like the oppressed feminine: domestic, shallow, empty, ineffectual, fickle, decorative. Our Father Jean-François Lyotard writes: "virility has its price: life; the body can speak only if it can die and each time it knows pleasure, the body risks becoming lawless and speechless once again capable only of living and laughing. This is why love is for man a struggle in which his virility, that is, culture, is at stake."

I often wonder if the attack via neo-pop/conceptualism on feelings of love (there is no other word for it) toward paintings is not predicated in a desire for virility.

My experience and politics have also led me to be suspect of claims made by critics on behalf of what has recently been dubbed the "new painting": A post-nostalgic/melancholic painting whose claim is to have effectively canceled the figurative versus abstract debate by picturing itself. I think it is interesting to consider the connection between the vernacular use of the word like, especially in generation XYZ, and the prevailing tendency to distance the self in current art practice. Is it just a coincidence that this "picturing" is the product of a generation that predicates every attempt at verbalizing experience with this word? I don't know, but I think, like, new painting uses, like, what I call, "Presence as Lady Bunny" in which, like, looking at paintings has become a lot like, girl watching, which I will be the first to admit can be, like, great. The only problem is the girl is usually masculine rhetoric underneath all the trappings of painterly facility and decorative detail. In a published dialogue between Michael Corris and Robert Nickas in Artforum on the "new painting," Michael "O.J." Corris says:

A painting of quality is a picture that uses abuse, embellishment, degradation and decoration to generate complex visual malapropisms out of erasure, cancellation, acts of outright destruction of the surface and the picture, the scotomization of vision."

I can't help but, like, sense misogyny at work here. Later in the article Corris comments that, unlike Warhol, this work "admits that a contradiction between the what and the how exists in their paintings." The implication being that these artists use these techniques in their work but not in their life. Hmm. Do these techniques of abuse, degradation, and erasure come from experience? Apparently not. From politics? I think so. But ultimately it is a rather safe politics, safe in its irony which has become a theatrics of separation from the "academy."

Although I appreciate the insights of appropriation, especially in its relation to feminism, I find that picturing the picture more often than not is an angry gesture at a loss of something I think we all are better off without.

It takes real willpower to scramble out from beneath this suspended tidal wave of theory and try to recall my own short history of looking at painting, of being the subject, in order to understand where I seem unavoidably to be going.

In the 70s when I was a teenager my experience with modernist abstraction and minimalism was undeniably one attuned to Michael Fried's notion of "Presence as Grace" even though at the time I had no idea who Fried was. When I first started needing to understand and experience contemporary painting I found it distant, unattractive, and impenetrable. But then on a few distinct occasions I discovered in this lack of spectacle powerful feelings of resonance and understanding/love. It required a certain erotic leap of faith. At age 13, 14, 15 I don't think I had the agenda of "legitimating the hegemony of American-type formalism," which Fried is accused of having. I found out then that the only way to look at art if you want to experience it is with a dual trust in it and in your own perception, whether you like what you see or not.

I remember an inner conflict I had in perceiving this work. In the hygienic museum/gallery space, painting seemed to be under a hyperfocus in which even the faint residue of dust on the paint, smudges on the glass frame, and the uncomfortable awareness of my own body became distracting—ly apparent. I felt as if I were simultaneously the organism being looked at and the huge eye looking. I was unsure as to what was meant to be experienced and felt guilt for any focus that wandered from the intended target of the painting. I did not have this difficulty with pop art. It was as if these paintings stood in some kind of metaphysical profile in which the subject was peripheral, profoundly outside. If I had known that this is precisely what this work was getting at in its reference to the impotent position of the subject in pop culture at the time, I would have had trust in my response, instead of taking it as a failing on my own part as its audience.
By the time I left college the paternal was not where I was headed. I did not know it at the time, but "discourse" was already saying this with all the paternal authority it could muster. I was noticing how easily painting could be perceived as not having a presence at all, let alone a graceful one. To me however this was never a frightening thing signifying death, it was something else that needed and needs to be examined.

These experiences have led me to a particular place with my own work. I want to realize how to conflate the contradictory experiences of being either in love with or peripheral to a painting. I want to make a painting that knows it is hung on a wall next to other paintings by which its audience walks. To acknowledge that paintings are not immortal, that they die and are forgotten. To acknowledge that one painting does not imply the next. To acknowledge that the only honest way to know painting's new-found freedom as a lost authority is to disrupt its function as a target. The problem for me is how to make a painting that safely, and not ironically, receives a glance without being a target, without being an authority. To acknowledge that what you see is what you want to get, and to acknowledge that a painting does not exist in the world if no one is there to hear it fall, because it is not an idea, and it is not an object.

Everyone's head is full. They are not hungry anymore. They are not hungry in the face of plenitude. So maybe there is a way to make art that doesn't try to fill, but hangs close to the wall, not to take up too much space. Because it has no choice anyway. Death is not a choice, and emptiness is not frightening. Women and paintings know that "mere objects of visual display" have a life of their own and are included if only in a periphery, which is the space occupied by a painting in a room.

Notes
3. Ibid.

Trudie Reiss

Artists are a rarefied breed and it's always been that way. Like any other specialized field that operates within a given society as a whole, art can affect, though it be it marginally, the movement of people's lives through time. Art lovers and collectors have also always been a minority and even though global population (and with it population control via various forms of mass media) is continually growing, that privileged minority isn't growing at the same rate. So what? There's an article about some artist in every issue of "third world" Vogue magazine.

Boredom and freedom and a high standard of living (globally speaking). We're lucky here in America. But even in countries of lesser economic status the cult of the artist survives and is even revered. This must come from the fact that some people can't stand to live life working solely for survival and materialistic gain. One's decision to make art is quite existential. It could be based on "love" just as much as it could be based on "hate": you have come to see that feeling of almost "epiphany" when standing in front of certain works of art as "love" or the prospect of your own inevitable death among other unreconcilable things, drives you to "hate"/life with such passion that the only thing left to do is complain and protest in whatever medium you happen to choose to use. Then, there's that thing called obsession and the desire of a full-grown ego to change things or to leave your mark in whatever way you can. And it doesn't matter how many or how few people are interested in what you are doing when it's the only thing you really care about (even though we all know everyone wants attention).

Either way there's something appealing about secret societies, something about jokes, coded information, and rivalry for the few coveted positions at the top that keeps the whole thing moving. And no matter how futile it has seemed to make art at any given moment in history, the best artists in every generation have always found ways to acclimate and to re-create new boundaries within which to work. I hate to sound so optimistic, but as long as we're not living in a totalitarian state, I don't think the situation will change.

Sometimes I imagine I'm running through a huge funnel. I see it from the side, like a cross section, only in profile. I never see myself running head-on or from behind. It never makes me feel scared, like an anxiety dream, it just is what it is. And then I turn on some music.

Christian Schumann

1. Everything I see and experience affects me in some way and a lot of it ends up in my work. One aspect of my paintings is that they serve as ambiguous diaries whose initial personal subject matter is lost when they leave me but which gain more formal and cultural contexts when they enter into the public world. I am interested in things that serve as both formal critique and personal record.
2. What choice do I have? I'm in it and have undeniably grown up being influenced by it. The important thing is to be able to alert one's self to the mass media's information-control capabilities and techniques. In terms of visual devices, package design and the language of advertising interest me.
3. I have little confidence in a painting until the moment I decide it is finished; when everything has finally come together.
4. Nothing "competes with" but everything "creeps into" my work. I like listening to music and on occasion a song title or swatch of lyric will slip...
into a piece . . . or maybe part of an old record cover. Writing and books are also diversions that end up being a part of my paintings. Writing/describing things is just as effective to me as drawing/painting them. Words are merely a different form of visual abstraction . . . Everything is an equal passion.

Kate Shepherd

Every day I do The New York Times crossword puzzle. I would hate to admit how much time I spend on it and am embarrassed when I am caught with the dictionary open on my studio desk. I'll get just part of it on first pass. Then at the end of the day I'll finally realize that "Italian bread" isn't pane but lira and that "dig" doesn't mean pick (at) but rather like. It's a twist of the mind that I like. Being so sure that the word implies one thing and then realizing in a bolt flash that it means something very simple but contextually different. It's a brain fuck; the puzzle joggs me in ways that some art does. Layering of information with a flip.

The other idiosynchrony involving my puzzle addiction is the tendency to bypass the news articles to get right to my fix. I do this when I am especially hurried or nervous. However strong my loyalty is to the Times (I grew up in New York City and have read it since high school) I often want to turn down its volume, to make a quieter, less verbal paper. That's why I made a piece called News by painting over a copy of the Times — page by page — with the color of the paper itself, thus leaving a mere pentimento of the text. All the giant ads for new movies and department store sales were hushed. Who cares really about all those things to buy and sales ads at which you can listen to bands like Helmet, Quicksand, and Nirvana, but all the reportage and political facts in the world won't help us unless we are in touch in a tangible way with what we are striving towards. I realize that this may sound self-contradictory, but sayings like "hate racism" or "fight poverty" or "war on drugs" are like double negatives that do not mean a positive. Better to treat someone with respect, give something away, value sobriety. Same with art. Make something you like. Why add to the pile of what you're criticizing? What's the use?

Politics and Everyday Experiences: Being a devotee of the raucous and the rowdy, as well as the sublime and the contemplative, I have the task of integrating the two into one big map of the stream of my consciousness. Everything I love, hate, fuck, fear, wonder at, feel remorse about, dream about, see, eat, and laugh at — or can remember — is there in some form or another. Politics plays a part only to the extent that it comes up naturally in these urge-driven psycho-roadmaps. My work is not instructive. It's basically a story written in the first person. But I hope it functions like corrective politics if women speak loudly about themselves with flourish, expertise, fabulous beauty, raucous humor, and unquenchable, snappy, swinging fearlessness.

In many ways I think my work is about terror management, the control of phobia through humor. An example: I had a nightmare about being raped by a Basque terrorist, a guy with a heavy beard and an ultra-masculine demeanor. Later, a macho-looking character with a heavy beard appeared in a painting, but I gave him tiny hands, a huge dangling udder, and a clown demeanor. After that it occurred to me that I had demasculinized the rapist by making him into an ineffectual clown. That's the kind of therapeutic benefit and autobiography that appeals to me in doing a painting. Also the sort of (associative, dissociative) politics that I can work with.

Television, movies, etc.: I can't stop the flow of stuff that comes pouring in, but I like working with the distraction that arises from it. I couldn't be less interested in deconstructing, mimicking, mocking, or employing the forms or methodology of mass culture. I often feel like a folk artist, not an uncomfortable sensation.

Passions: Almost everything on the big screen, high and low, mainstream and experimental, including junk, melodrama, vampires, Technicolor, screwball comedies, Sirk, Marilyn, Clint, Satyajit Ray, Jack Smith, Kenneth Anger, Sadie Benning, etc. (There are certain exceptions, like slasher movies, which I hate.) Also underground comics, early Mad, Basil Wolverton, R. Crumb, Art Spiegelman, the Hairy Who artists, and Saul Steinberg. Florine Stettheimer, Indian painting, and Tantric art. Poetry, which I like to read and write. Religions, which I like to read about, see, eat, and laugh at — or can remember — is there in some form or another. Politics plays a part only to the extent that it comes up naturally in these urge-driven psycho-roadmaps. My work is not instructive. It's basically a story written in the first person. But I hope it functions like corrective politics if women speak loudly about themselves with flourish, expertise, fabulous beauty, raucous humor, and unquenchable, snappy, swinging fearlessness.

Amy Sillman

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1. When I came to New York from Yale in 1985, my paintings tended towards allegorical expression of my moral, sociopolitical views. As for my personal experiences, I often used a similar, self-conscious method to convey them. Since '85 the development of my imagery has been away from this obvious allegorical approach. Now, the process is more about sensing the appropriate imagery rather than imposing it. The images are still allegories but without a fixed moral. They remain intensely felt, personal responses to being human; only as a consequence are they political. I think political issues are transitory and art inspired by them dates quickly.

2. I enjoy pop culture, which actually inspires some of my imagery. One of the aspects of pop culture that fascinates me is how it operates as a site where society's and the individual's hopes and desires are negotiated. I sometimes consider the results of this "negotiation" while working out my imagery. These hopes and desires mix with my own experience and find expression through my chosen medium. Figurative painting is a language with five hundred years of history with all its associations of authority and truth. I paint without the safe ironic distance of appropriation or neo-isms but rather with a belief in the mastery of technique and the possibility of carving a unique position in the history of painting by drawing on artists from Giotto to Rauschenberg.

I also find it interesting how "high art's" embrace of pop culture is full of condescension. To engage popular culture, artists seem to think it sufficient to make something that looks ironic, or remote, and back it up with reams of theory. I believe great examples of popular culture can have the same resonance as examples of what is commonly agreed to be "high culture." The best artists in the realm of popular culture — TV, contemporary music, film, etc. — are comfortable with exploring and refining personal emotional content in their work. They are not confined by the strictures of the contemporary art academy. In this sense, the creators of popular culture are way ahead of the art world. 

3. I don't think it's good to feel too confident about one's work, but there's nothing like an exceptionally good passage of paint to make me feel good.

4. I wish.

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Laura Stein

I have a very active fantasy life, that may actually be my first passion, and I suppose all of my work could come out of that.

For me it is liberating to work within the dominant pop culture. It has become part of our own history and we get to explore its functionality without attempting to attain or please its audience.

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Danny Tisdale

My response to life and to being an artist:

The artist in the art of living makes little distinction between his/her work and his/her play, his/her labor and his/her leisure, his/her body, his/her mind and his/her education and his/her recreation, his/her love and his/her religion. She/he hardly knows which is which. She/he simply pursues her/his vision of excellence in whatever she/he does, leaving others to decide whether she/he is working or playing. To him/her she/he is always doing both. As an artist I want to create an art that is more than art. An art that deals with the messy particularities of life. If we can face these particularities of our life, then we can come through it better people.

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Nicola Tyson

Growing up I wasn't exposed to much in the way of pop culture and didn't really seek it out. So in its most obvious forms it has never been a comfortable or meaningful source material for me. Even now I don't watch much TV and I rarely go to the movies, unless someone makes me. I find it difficult to surrender myself to these media, I don't know why. I get bored quickly. I find the mediocrity of much so-called contemporary culture more depressing than watching the evening news. History might repeat itself, but culture, generally, is at an all-time low, and passionless. Despite living in an image-saturated culture, (which has its exhilarating side), I consider painting a valuable endeavor. In fact, painting is such a "ludicrous endeavor . . . why even question it . . . especially figure painting, which is what I do. A powerful
image is relatively self-sufficient . . . which is painting at its best. I don't speak another language, unfortunately, but I understand the language of images.

Cultural history (anyone's) has always been of absorbing interest to me, not as refuge from the present but as a site of fantasy and imaginative adventure. In reading or traveling, I search for clues, resonances. The past is a bizarre place (truth is stranger than sci-fi). I like to familiarize myself with the historical context of a country, a city, its architecture, a person, a work of art, a thought. I'm very curious but absorb impressions rather than information. Links are formed but are obscure by the time the data re-emerges, in image form. I have recently learnt to trust this process, and let the material bubble up, uncensored.

I have always had a certain confidence, an awareness that I have "something," a kind of space inside, that is inviolate. Even in the bleakest moments when I couldn't work, I always had this place where I was totally free. I carry it around . . . it's like a space with wings, and it's taken me a long time to know how to use it . . . though I've never doubted that I would. It is, in a sense, my essence, and is very strong. However, I was never prepared to settle for just entertaining myself. To hone this sensibility, to use it effectively, has been a long and sometimes painful process. Now that I've found my stride, I am frequently surprised by what is available, fully realised. I trained briefly as a commercial artist before abandoning it to study painting. Straight manipulation, its tricks and kicks, doesn't interest me. The language I use is complex, personal, wordless, and slow. And I want to own the painted figure, it's mine and I want it . . . it belongs to me and drives me. There is so much still to explore, from another perspective . . . that of a woman, which I happen to be. As a child I was a real tomboy, and good at art (I'd do drawings for the girls that I had crushes on at school). It never occurred to me then that when I grew up I wouldn't be valued by society . . . worth as much as a man. I read a lot of contemporary feminist theory as a student, but I decided at a certain point to move away from an analysis of the apparatus of my own oppression. It is empowering but can lead to a kind of self-censorship or self-consciousness that hampers creative expression. And doing work about why you can't, as it were, is not particularly useful . . . you're just selling yourself short.) I am extremely grateful to those women artists who prepared the ground, who as it were, is not particularly useful . . . you're just selling yourself short .

Anthony Viti

My work has always sought to explore coming to terms with being gay in a frequently hostile environment that produces feelings of isolation, psychic numbing, and other stressors. My paintings use an abstract language as a metaphor for the effect that the AIDS epidemic has on communities most severely affected. These are small elegiac paintings. Using my blood as paint I imprint my body on the surface. They are then complexly veiled with thin layers of oil paint and an image of an iron cross as a formal and symbolic element.

With these "Elegies" I seek to equate the experience of communities ravaged by AIDS with communities ravaged by war. The similarities and psychiatric manifestations are all too similar. Both are isolated communities that undergo abnormal amounts of stress related to witnessing massive amounts of loss and experiencing incessant life threat with an uncertainty about the future. All this lays the groundwork for severe emotional distress. The free-floating anxiety, emotional numbness, and hyper-vigilance can easily be diagnosed as post-traumatic stress disorder, commonly found among veterans of war.

With this equation in mind I have appropriated Marsden Hartley's iron cross, a symbol often found in his military paintings memorializing a lover who died a premature death in the First World War. This cross was given to soldiers who exhibited distinguished service. I use this as a symbol to express the intense stress that communities are experiencing due to the AIDS epidemic, and as an act of honor for my heroes, close friends and lovers who have died without recognition.

Derek Weiler

One of the lecturing artists at Hunter — I can't remember his name but his story has stayed with me — once compared his feelings in front of Rothko's paintings to the experience of witnessing a miracle-performing rabbi ("Wunder-Rabbi"). The layers of paint triggered the same anticipation of a revelation, the same expectation of something great as the silence accompanying the announcement: "The Wunder-Rabbi is going to speak!" A lot of art has this effect on me. Ryman is a little like studying Zen Buddhism — although Brice Marden is not. Donald Judd seems to have received his orders from extraterrestrial beings. There is a mystery in greatness.

Some great ideas hover over the heads of mankind. On the other hand, just the idea of greatness is often enough. It creates stars: Keanu Reeves, for example, or Macaulay Culkin. Next to the star, the product becomes secondary; it is his or her Midas touch that turns it to gold. So the star becomes this nonhuman entity; in the words of a New York Times reviewer: "Keanu Reeves is a thing of beauty."

Great ideas and great people — all slightly incomprehensible — have always filled my pantheon. They are as shiny and as heavy as gold and it is their weight that I try to alleviate. I guess I started drawing donkeys to give my ideas some lightness — like attaching a balloon to a letter. Donkeys are comedians in spite of the weight they usually carry. They are caricatures — and it took me a long time to see something positive in that term — shoulderings the weight of history and the awe I feel in facing it. They make it something I can deal with on my own level. I can also turn this mythical rectangle into something light without losing a sense of meaning. Donkeys
have been a great help to me. They make the whole process — the process of living, painting, looking at, and even buying art — one that we normal human beings are capable of handling. It’s art minus the mystery.

In the movie Grief, Kelly’s new boyfriend Bill (“NOT short for William”) meets her ex-boyfriend Bill (“short for William”). New Bill is this classically good-looking rich kid—slash—performance artist, with serious intentions and assets. Pointing to Ex-Bill’s paintings of dogs on the wall, he asks him: “So what is this thing about the dogs? Are you trying to be William Wegman?” Ex-Bill, cute and bewildered to the point of retardation, is innocent of such art-school talk: “I like dogs.”

These are the signs of the times: Unintimidating ideas and simple people win out over heavy ideology and its complicity with — once again — establishment. In this way I guess I’m part of the ease of pop culture. But I subscribe more to the “Wittgenstein—The Musical” school of thought than to Keanu Reeves playing Siddhartha.

Michael Windle

If Sex, Race, and Homophobia are the major headlines of art at the close of the 20th century then how do I, as a formal geometric abstract painter, fit in? Do my paintings encompass these issues in any way, or do they have a completely different agenda?

While a student I worried much about how I fitted into the scheme of things. I eventually decided I could only be what I was, cajoled and battered by the media behemoth, art mags included. I had to find my way forward by taking it all on board. I felt the easy scenic route would only leave me with nothing else.

My work evolved amidst signposts pointing everywhere but the direction I was heading. This for me meant cutting the chaff, not to embrace reductionism as a goal, but as pivotal to a new start. I’d be a more mature and centered artist, able to be myself, to paint what many people would see as just colored squares on a piece of canvas. And now I read in the Washington Post that sex, race, and homophobia are the three major issues of art in the 90s.

I would be disingenuous to trivialize my colored squares. I see within them the possibility of exploring the world in their own disciplined language, using clearly and simply defined devices based on rational procedures and constructive relationships. I gather confidence in making art and am finally confident to know I can only make work I am passionate about — that art is being able to find personal involvement. As experience is ever changing, however, the subject matter can often only be broached in an effective way by hinting at it obliquely with subliminal acknowledgment of the supposed big issues. Awareness of one’s environment and culture is therefore of paramount importance to inform the work, however minutely. Although advances made in the studio are often unclear and difficult I can’t believe it could be any different sitting around a log fire with no TV. The effort of daubing the perfect bison on my cave wall would still probably be dogged by time wasted hunting and gathering (this can still ruin your whole day) or appropriation by Benetton.

Karen Yasinsky

1. The experiences and politics of everyday life affect my work in sometimes great, sometimes subtle ways. Much “experience” (political/informational) is supplied by the media, which gives fuel to the formation of my idea of everyday life, including political views. In terms of local news, more crime, more violence, or news of a parade may affect my choices that day or the way I see strangers on the streets and subways. I love to watch faces in New York and the visual information received reappears in the faces I create after being mixed around with other visual thoughts I have about heads and body language and the whole psychology of what one willingly or unconsciously reveals. There is so much to be found on the streets of New York.

My work deals with invented images of women. Humor and discomfort are important components of the images. Being a woman in this city is vastly different from being a woman in Mamou, Louisiana. The experience that gave me this information oddly enough may come out as an image of food in a painting. If I see a mother smacking her child on the subway I won’t come home and put my reaction to that in a drawing. The personal experiences that I encounter physically take more time to deal with; the feeling of outrage becomes more complex. My work is personal and more internalized than overt and political. The subject matter is not directly supplied by my experience but my interest in humor and the grotesque, pleasure and pain, and the formation of identity is fed through my experiences — and memories, whose recovery and creation are influenced by who I am today.

2. I am of this culture whose primary forms of visual information are television, movies, and urban advertising. I got away from TV but all the viewing hours of my youth have been irretrievably mixed in with my visual information bank, which most likely is not kept neat and separate from other things in my brain. Incredible art can be created in film. Movies are a huge inspiration and source for me as an artist. Bad movies I can ignore and as for advertising, its goal of creating desire interests me and I use and subvert images that I find particularly absurd. I find the lowest-common-denominator practice used in TV programming, movies, and advertising depressing.

Artists can create through these forms but the less commercial works are not as widely distributed and, therefore, infrequently seen in our large country. But the gallery audience is a limited group as well. This is why so many artists are in New York — larger audiences, more opportunities. I haven’t pursued any public art projects but the idea appeals to me.
I'm very confident in my work in that I'm deeply interested in the subject matter. The images are powerful to me and I trust my judgment. That is all I can say.

I would like to know what it's like to be an animal other than a human but my work is all about being human, specifically being a woman. No, nothing competes when I'm working in my studio.

Alexander Zane

1. What intrigues me most about this question is the notion that ideas or experiences can lie beyond the realm of everyday life. Even the most profound mystical apotheosis, philosophical insight, or arcane aesthetic concept is born from, or occurs within, the parameters of everyday life. The distinction between a profound and profane world seems injurious to the creative possibilities of the visual arts. Every day I have thoughts and feelings about painting, about making a living, about my wife and child, about my past, present, and future; in the studio I can only be the creative child of these emotions, ideas, and experiences.

2. I do not understand your use of the adjective "urban" for I believe they also have billboards and signs in the suburbs and country, or are you speaking of some sociocultural characteristics that differentiate "urban" from other geographical forms of advertisement?

To answer your question; I don't care. Under the guise of being upset about the decline of Western culture, the growing illiteracy of our society, and the lack of subtlety in its expressions, I once cared. But I gave up worrying and accepted my role as an artist working in the descending gloom of an approaching Dark Age. If I can't be Leonardo marshalling the forces of an intellectual and artistic Renaissance then I will be Velázquez quietly observing the deterioration of that same Renaissance into a vain, corrupt, and insipid cultural institution. In either setting — one of hope and optimism, or one of uneasiness and cynicism — lies the possibility for great individual creative expression.

The world is changing in ways I cannot grasp. For some people it is getting better, for others it is worse. Television, movies, and "urban" advertising are the dominant forms of expression in our culture. While I enjoy some of the more thoughtful and sensitive movies and television shows — and some of the more thoughtless and insensitive ones, too — in general I am not impressed with the media's capacity to express the complex and subtle aspects of modern life. Advertisement is an insufferable byproduct of consumerism and I try to ignore it as much as possible, except when I am actually looking to buy something. Then I closely read the text in hopes of finding a bargain.

I would like to be a part of a more cultured and reflective society: a culture that discusses its problems and aspirations in a literate fashion; educates its citizens so they can fully participate in the political-economic dialogue of the community; treats its people with respect and dignity; and appreciates artists who try to give plastic expression to its dreams and failings, but as television, Hollywood films, and "urban" advertisement force me to see — that is not to be.

I cannot wish away what I perceive to be the failings of my age, for surely in some way they must be my own failings; I can only hope to affect them with the work I produce.

3. I want to rephrase this question because it seems the confidence one feels in one's work can only be measured or understood in the public actions a person takes to produce and exhibit their work. The source of my confidence — whether it be personal experiences, validation by others, a delusional overvaluation of my talents, or a healthy appreciation of my genius — is wholly subjective and of little value to others. What seems more significant and illuminating is how my feelings of confidence and self-doubt manifest themselves in my creative life and in my struggle to establish myself as an independent working artist.

To this end I can say that I have enough confidence in my work to have made the sacrifices necessary over the last fourteen years to ensure my having a studio where I can paint. At the same time, I have found it difficult — surprise, surprise — to arrange a financial arrangement whereby the sale of my work allows me to fully devote myself to my art. I have always hoped to find a sympathetic dealer or collector who understands my artistic aims and is willing to support them. Either the nature of my work or the nature of the art world has made this financial aesthetic arrangement unattainable.

But has it ever been easy for a person to get what they wanted? Have the valued things of this world ever been freely given away or are they only to be won through determination and sustained effort? For those who do not find success, is it to be blamed on ill fortune, bad timing and misunderstandings, or is failure the product of a self-destructive behavior engendered by a lack of confidence? This line of reasoning seems to support the old adage that one gets what one deserves, but there are many examples of this not being the case, where fortune, money, and connections have all conspired to propel people to positions beyond their abilities, while talent and original vision went unknown.

It has always been with reluctance that I face the challenge of showing and promoting my work. My difficulties have been a mixture of my own and others' makings. I find uncomfortable approaching people who can help me, and when I do manage to speak, I don't always express myself clearly or forcefully. I have considered this social awkwardness and professional passivity a personality flaw, a psychological failing that I must overcome if I am to be a more successful or economically viable artist. At the same time, I consider my passivity and fear a protective shell, a sanctuary within which my own unique creative forces can sustain themselves and grow. Coleridge said it better in "Pains of Sleep":
A sense o'er all my soul impart
That I am weak, yet not unblessed,
Since in me, round me, every where
Eternal Strength and Wisdom are.

(Coleridge, however, had a patron.)

Whenever I am in a position to make a favorable impression with an influential figure and I fail (i.e. speak in incoherent sentences, remain silent with a not very charming bovine expression on my face, or take the opportunity to point out, a little too enthusiastically, that person's intellectual shortcomings), I comfort myself with the idea that I didn't become an artist because I am a normal or socially well-adjusted person. But therein lies the problem; I want an income that can sustain my family and allow me to focus my energies on my work — the very same goal desired by the socially well-adjusted. I believe that it is the art itself that propels an artist's life.

The success I have had in promoting my work does seem directly related to my personal confidence in my work. Recently that confidence has manifested itself in more opportunities via exhibitions I have curated and through the invitations of others. It also has given me the courage to verbally define and defend (sometimes a little too forcefully) my vision to dealers, curators, and other artists. And on a deeper level confidence in my work allows me to feel comfortable with the dynamics of an extremely conflicted and intimidating public art world.

It remains a struggle to call people, to show them my work, to deal with rejection — or worse, disinterest — but I feel in my own way (i.e. cautiously) that I am making progress. For me confidence manifests itself as a patient persistence that keeps me focused in the studio, and hopeful as I make the rounds, taking my slides to the galleries.

4. You could say that geography is my passion. I especially like looking at topographical maps; I am constantly amazed at how the mountains, valleys, streams, and oceans fit together. I like asking people what town they presently reside in or where they were born. I ask people what towns border their towns and what defines these localities, economically, culturally, and historically. I build a web of information tying one place to another, a map where geographical features create a physical web of interlocking landscapes.
contemporary art perhaps even more naturally. What I am after is a situation in which contemporary art viewers will be able to attend to this work with the same curiosity about its ongoing development with which we regularly attend to the work of favored contemporary artists. And in order to attain that situation the work has to be shown to transcend those traditional exclusionary categories. That's why I put the show simultaneously in the Museum of American Folk Art and the New Museum of Contemporary Art. This bicolocation implies the major historic point that is being made.

DN: What would you say to the question whether, by claiming overlap between Dial and such contemporary artists as Schnabel and Kiefer, you are doing the same thing that you criticized William Rubin for when he asserted an affinity between Picasso and African artists? I'm referring, of course, to the so-called "primitivism controversy" that attended and followed the show "Primitivism in Twentieth-Century Art" at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984.

TM: There are two points for which Rubin was criticized. First, he based his claim on affinities or formal qualities alone, without consulting the contents and purposes of the non-western artists involved. He assumed that if the forms were similar the underlying contents and purposes must be too. In other words he treated esthetic form as a set of transcultural universals and he dismissed the non-Western artists' understanding of their own contents and purposes. In comparing Dial with certain contemporary white artists, on the contrary, I compare not only formal aspects but also the artists' own estimation of the contents and purposes of their work. What I say about Dial's work I have not deduced from any supposed universals but have heard from him personally.

Second, Rubin made his comparisons between members of widely separated different cultures, so once again in order to account for the similarities, he had to invoke transcultural universals of pure form. His argument was not historical but transcistorical. In comparing Dial and certain contemporary artists, on the contrary, I am comparing artists produced by the same society, at the same time, occupying the same flows of media awareness, and black history that Dial has. If you look, for example, at the work of Bessie Harvey you could argue that there are ways that it refers to African-American experience; similarly the work of Hawkins Bolden refers to the black experience in terms of general ideas such as bondage. But my impression is that Dial is unusual in the explicitness of his historical focus. The painting Graveyard Traveler-Selma Bridge, for example, is about the walk across that bridge by Martin Luther King in 1962. And there are a number of recent pictures that refer to the 1969 South Central L.A. riots.

DN: What is the single most important difference in Dial's work that makes it stand out from other non-academically trained or outsider artists?

TM: One thing that to me makes it different from the work of other so-called "self-taught" or "folk" artists is the clarity of this commitment to the idea of history that I have mentioned. Again, this work is as deeply committed to history as, say, the work of Anselm Kiefer. In fact there are a number of relationships between the work of Dial and Kiefer which are discussed in the book. Dial's work, like Kiefer's, strikes me as being intensely focused on history from the position in which he was born into it — that is, in Dial's case, from an African-American slant on history. His work not only focuses on what one traditionally calls "black history," it also has a deep commitment to making a constructively contributive to that history. When Dial talks about the tiger the word that comes up most often is "struggle." The tiger is about struggle, and struggle is about history. It's about black people struggling through the medium of history to attain dignity and autonomy in alien societies. This is an extremely Hegelian view of history — history as the struggle towards self-advancement through reversing, and subsequently annuling, the master-slave relationship.

DN: Dial is evidently an extraordinary phenomenon who, by virtue of the quality and breadth of his work, leapfrogs over traditional art categories. It was not one of your intentions however, from what I understand, in presenting Dial's work, to propose the elimination of these categories. Is this a fair statement?

TM: Yes. One thing that I'm not saying is that "contemporary" simply means "living today," and hence, that the distinction between folk art and so-called contemporary art is meaningless and should be put aside. There are artists whose works I regard as "folk art" — artists such as Mose Tolliver, the same way as Kiefer's is — meaning they arise from a keen sense of this historical moment in society. It has as much to do with the end or revision of modernism as much prominent work by famous white contemporary artists. This is enough to qualify it as "contemporary."
Howard Finster and the no-longer living Bill Traylor. And the fact that these people may be, merely in a chronological sense, contemporaries of "contemporary artists" doesn't by itself make them contemporary artists. I do agree that there are differences between contemporary art and folk art. One of them is the involvement in history that I referred to, though restricting it exclusively to art history in the narrow sense robs the idea of real meaning and treats history like a formal game.

TM: What are other qualities in Dial's art that set it off from the work of other "self-taught" artists?

DN: What's the extent of Thornton Dial's formal education? Can he write?

TM: His production has been going on for a surprisingly short amount of time hasn't it?

DN: He started painting seriously in 1987, seven years ago. Let me point out that the entire artistic career of Yves Klein covered seven years. So we have accepted in our white western art world that it is entirely possible to create a major oeuvre in the first seven years of one's productiveness. (Klein also, by the way, was "self-taught".)

DN: Let's talk about the expressionist tendencies in the work. Are the majority of the works leaning in this direction and, if not, how would you categorize them?

TM: Well, some of them are. My impression is that sometimes he starts a painting in a purely expressionistic way by intuitively making some marks. Then, as he gazes on them he begins to get an iconographic association. And then, that in turn helps to shape the next marks and then those next marks create another iconographic association and then the two aspects develop together in this type of intuitive collaboration. However, there are pictures that could not have been done this way. In *Wondering About Life: Proud Stepping in the Flowers* at the New Museum, for example, I think that Dial obviously had to have thought this piece out entirely in his head before he began. That's why I'm not convinced that all the works should be called expressionist. Some of them, I think, were thought out entirely beforehand.

DN: What are some possible explanations for the work's visual or material sophistication?

TM: I'd like to mention four factors. One is that a lot of vocabulary elements somewhat naive . . . I hate to use that word . . . let's say non-ironic approach to iconography. Now, late modernist art in general is not involved in storytelling (if we think of the New York School, for example, Pollock, Newman and so on). There are post-modernist artists whose works are involved in storytelling, for example, Nicholas Africano's *Buttered Woman Series*. The difference is, in post-modernist storytelling art there is always an ironic stance toward either the manner in which the story is told or the content of the story or both. In folk art, per se, there is often a simplistic, earnest and non-ironic storytelling. Dial does, in many of his works, tell a story, and those works have a narrative iconography which legitimately connects the work with folk art. However, right after Dial has finished a picture he'll have a very clear idea of what the narrative line is but two or three months later he may have forgotten the storyline and the details of the iconography and then he'll say the picture is just a picture.

DN: Yesterday I watched him sign someone's book. It was just like a second grader. He signed very carefully (here McElviley acts out a slow act of writing): as if he had been taught to put the dot over the i but doesn't know why. He's learned how to draw his name not write it. He grew up in an environment where you don't really need to read. Maybe you're even discouraged from it.

TM: The elements in his work that give it a folk quality is that there are storylines in his work, or at least, this is what I'm led to believe. What are your observations on this aspect of the work?

TM: Folk art, not always, but very frequently, is involved in storytelling — a
of so-called "high-art" have passed into design. For example, you see linoleum patterns that look like a Pollock or a Mondrian. So that Dial, just by looking at design elements around him, in stores or on TV, could have picked up a certain amount of that vocabulary. Secondly, there's the fact that (and this is one thing that hasn't been explored significantly enough yet) a lot of those elements of so-called "high art" vocabulary may have been present in the African-American tradition before they actually entered the white art tradition.

DN: In your book on Dial you mention Robert Rauschenberg. You bring out the question of whether he happened to have seen any black funk assemblage while growing up in Port Arthur, Texas, which could have led him into his great early works such as Monogram.

TM: Port Arthur is in the area where such things are seen. Probably he did, you know? Or to use another example: the Pollock drip-and-splatter style is something that is seen in certain areas of African-American so-called "folk art" at least as far back as the thirties — and it probably extends as far back as the 19th century. This is a style of decorating things in the southern black community — the area that W. E. B. Du Bois called "the black belt." The black belt is a world unto itself and our scholars of art and art history have hardly begun to deal with it and its relationship to white art practice. Amiri Baraka says that there are hundreds of artists in the black belt and that the white world has no idea that they are even there. And Robert Farris Thompson has convincingly traced some elements from that area of so-called "high-art" back to Africa. It's a tradition that has been existing right alongside of our tradition with certain elements of cross-fertilization that have not been art historically worked out yet because it's something we don't want to look at. We don't want to imagine that Pollock might not have been the genius that figured it all out, you know? That maybe he saw it in some black guy's work. Thirdly, and this is a point that is clearly associated with the last one, we call these artists "self-taught," but I don't think they're "self-taught" at all. They are taught; there's a tradition down there. And whenever you have a tradition you're liable to have sophistication develop.

The fourth point is that, even without invoking romantic ideas of genius, we have to admit on the most down to earth level that some people are more talented in certain areas than others. There are children who are immediately recognized as musical or math prodigies or great chess players. In every grade school class there's always someone who can draw so well the other kids can't believe it. Well, Dial's one of them.

DN: You haven't mentioned that Dial had made patio furniture for a living since his retirement, which is evidence of a talent and skill with materials and design.

TM: Absolutely. And for 30 or 35 years he worked as a steelworker at the Pullman Standard Boxcar plant — it's obvious he gained a lot of discipline there. As you say, just the sense of how you methodically and intelligently go about making something figures into this.

DN: What's the iconographic significance of the tiger in Dial's work and how do the various materials in his work tie in with this image?

TM: The tiger is associated with primal energy and beauty and the jungle. The tiger represents Africa. The tiger in his jungle is pre-colonial black African society presented as a very harmonious contained state. Then there are other works that show the tiger being taken out of the jungle. There's a painting, for example, called When the Tiger Leaves the Jungle He Gets a Monkey on His Back. The monkey refers to the problem of drug addiction in the ghettos. It also represents the white slave master, the white factory foreman, and so on, all the seemingly unnecessary and irrational white authority figures that have plagued African Americans. The tiger — I've suggested, and Dial has agreed with me — involves an expanding series of meanings. On one level it represents Dial himself — the struggle of his life. On another it represents all African-American males and their struggle for dignity and autonomy in a truly alien society. In a still larger sense it represents the whole African-American community: the Diaspora black community. Finally, it represents all humans struggling to survive, indeed all creatures struggling to survive on earth. The tiger means struggle and the struggle means history. Dial puts this together in a very coherent way.

DN: There are interconnections in Dial's work between the overall theme of struggle and the themes of labor and displacement. What are some of Dial's works that typify this approach?

TM: There's a painting called Roosevelt: A Handicapped Man Got the Cities to Move, which gives you a good idea of Dial's acute sense of history. What this painting and several other paintings focus on is the moment that Nicholas Lehmann has called "the Great Black Migration", when black people had been picking cotton in the South and then, in about 1942 I think it was, the invention of a cotton picking machine eliminated all those manual jobs. Consequently, literally millions of African-Americans migrated from the rural South to the industrial cities of the North. The point of the Roosevelt work is that Dial feels that FDR's New Deal urban policies created job opportunities that these blacks, who were migrating up from the South when the cotton-picking jobs were eliminated, were able to find. In Dial's eyes FDR created opportunities for black Americans to better their position through the struggle of history. (Ralph Bunche has argued that New Deal policies were applied with racial bias, though I don't know if he would attribute such bias to FDR himself.)

Another picture that relates to the FDR theme is a painting called Head for the Higher Paying Jobs. This commemorates the moment when African-Americans shifted their place of employment from the cotton fields to the steel factory. Dial shows the tragic dangers of the steel plant: on-the-job injuries and so on — steel plants are notorious for this. He shows these dangers as the price you've got to pay to better yourself through struggle. A theme in Dial's work which I respect enormously is his reverence for labor. As I said he worked for 35 years in the steel plant, which is a hell of a long time — it's a punishing job. He's a workaholic now. When you see him there at the house he works all the time. He's the most gentle and meek man.
but he works ferociously. And when he's not working he doesn't know what to do with himself, and you can see this in the works themselves: they're so laboriously constructed and so sturdily put together.

DN: The themes of labor, struggle, and history in Dial's work are closely interrelated as you have taken great pains to point out in your book. How do the actual materials in the work reflect his concerns?

TM: I'll give you a few examples. In the Martin Luther King picture and in the FDR picture and in a lot of other pictures the tiger is made out of carpet — used carpet. The reading is: black people have been down, stepped on, trod upon, but they will rise up again as this old bit of carpet has risen again and been transformed by Dial's struggle through art. There are other materials that Dial uses such as mop strings and pieces of broom and these things represent the menial jobs to which black people have been relegated. But at the same time these materials represent reverence for honest labor. They also have to do on another level, with the redemptionist approach to black American history that is set forth in, for example, Nathan Huggins's book *Black Odyssey* where the idea is that American society carries at its very core the wound of the guilty secret of slavery. And that African-Americans who are redeeming themselves through the struggle for dignity and autonomy will cleanse and redeem the whole society. This is also what the mop and the broom refer to: that blacks will clean society through redeeming themselves through the struggle of history.

DN: Have you made these link-ups for Dial or with Dial or has he expressed these meanings to you himself, unassisted?

TM: More than once Dial has heard me give talks about his work, and I've asked him if he agrees. And he has enthusiastically affirmed that he does. That's not surprising since a good deal of what I say I heard from him in the first place. In addition some of my remarks are based on the iconographic readings that Paul Arnett has provided, which are all based on what Dial said to him. Paul has made a practice for years of questioning Dial about each painting as it was made and writing down his explanations. Furthermore, I've talked with Dial enough about these matters to feel confident that Arnett's reportage is correct in terms of Dial's attitude.

DN: Let's confront the issue of the packaging of an illiterate black artist by a sophisticated, privileged, white milieu. You, Bill Arnett, Paul Arnett—"white boys" — who could be accused of categorizing inappropriately. I'm surely not the first to raise this sensitive issue.

TM: Of course not. There are two questions that are involved here. First of all did these white guys direct Dial's work? For example did Bill Arnett, who's Dial's major collector, at a certain point show Dial examples of, say, Julian Schnabel's work and say: build up the surfaces. My impression is: absolutely not. I've been around Dial and Bill Arnett a lot. Bill doesn't try to direct Dial's work at all. He simply receives it. Dial notices which one of his works his collector likes. And like any other artist he is apt to be influenced by that perception. So there is a certain interplay there that isn't illegitimate at all. After all, when Peggy Guggenheim liked a certain work by, say, Jackson Pollock, he was apt to be encouraged to make more in the same vein. And that doesn't seem to bother anybody.

The second question is, maybe these white guys didn't influence the work itself, but did they influence the interpretation of the work? Again, I would have to say "no." Paul has had great integrity about this and the stuff he's written down is all or almost all what Dial has said to him, with the probable addition of some inferences or deductions that Paul has put together on top of it, which I don't think is illegitimate. So: if the artist made his own work and if the meanings attributed to the work are his own — then what's being packaged? Except that we put him in our museums. And those who would say we shouldn't put his work in our museums are dangerously close to saying that black people should be kept in their place.

DN: Aren't you leaving yourself wide open to criticisms of contextualizing an oeuvre primarily for the sake of commodifying the work for a mainstream, that is, white public, thereby disregarding the intentions of the artist?

TM: Again I think there are two points — one about intentions and one about commodification. In terms of the artist's intentions, to repeat, I've consulted Dial's expressions of his intentions, which are discussed in the book, and certainly haven't disregarded them. Further, Dial doesn't feel that the context of the white art world is inappropriate for him. He has expressed great satisfaction at the idea that his work will exert its influence in the same arena in which Picasso's work operates. In terms of the commodification issue I think — again — that anyone who objects that the work of self-taught artists should not be sold for prices comparable to those of art school graduates is dangerously close to saying that such people should be kept in their place and not be allowed a chance to improve their lot in life.

DN: What was your first time experience as a curator like in working with the Museum of American Folk Art and the New Museum of Contemporary Art? Were there differences?

TM: The experiences were as different as night and day. The New Museum treated the role of guest curator as autonomous and helped me to realize the show I wanted. The Folk Museum was, to put it mildly, less professional. The in-house curator, for example, was far more obstructive than helpful. It was a bit of a nightmare . . .

DN: What do you think about the CBS 60 Minutes segment on outsider art, aired on November 21, 1993, in which Morley Safer implied that Bill Arnett was exploiting Dial?

TM: Again, I raise my eyebrows. It strikes me as possibly racist, and certainly paternalistic, to suggest that Dial needs to be protected as if he were a helpless child. He's a sixty-five-year-old man with considerable experience and sophistication. And he has the right to choose his own associates. In any case, my relationship is with the artist and his work. I have often written about artists whose dealers are rumored to engage in disreputable business practices. But as a critic that isn't my subject matter. I'm not approaching Dial as an accountant, and whether the books are straight between Dial and Arnett I couldn't possibly know. I do know that Dial is happy with Arnett's
friendship and feels he was exploited by the ruthlessly manipulative interviewing and editing of *60 Minutes* rather than by Arnett. He's free to choose his dealer after all, and it's not my place to criticize his choice, anymore than I would criticize his choice of a lawyer or a doctor. But all that is not the point, you see. The *60 Minutes* people were much too cavalier in their dismissal. Here you have a great artist, two reputable museums — the Museum of American Folk Art and the New Museum of Contemporary Art, two serious and committed writers — Amiri Baraka and me — and an established art book publisher — Abrams — who have all considered these matters carefully and decided the project was legitimate. Yet *60 Minutes* doesn't say a single word about the artwork! If Dial has in fact been exploited, then hopefully this coverage will help him to get better protection. But in the meantime let's not lose sight of the power and significance of Dial's work, which is the point.

"I DON'T TAKE VOICE MAIL"

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Before diagnosing the condition of the art object in an age of electronic technology, let me first address the question of the object of art in an age of global commodification.* I won't be the last to note that capitalism transcends the technologies through which it operates. So just as today's artworld is dominated by marketing, sales, and promotion, so the object of art in the age of electronic technology will continue to be profit; and the values most typically promoted by the artworld will continue to be governed by market, rather than aesthetic, formal, philosophical, or ethical, values.

Within the artworld, as in the corporate board rooms, the focus of discussion has been on how to exploit this new media, as if cyberspace was a new wilderness from which to carve your niche — better get on board, er, on line, first before the prime sites are staked out. For if the object of art is to sell objects, then the new electronic environment presents many problems but also many opportunities.

But art, if it could speak, might well object to these assumptions. (If art could speak we could not understand it — that's one way to put it; perhaps it's more accurate to say if art could speak it would be poetry and poetry's got nothing to sell.) Art might speak not of its object but its objects; it might testily insist that one of its roles is to resist commodification, to use its materiality to push against the total absorption of meaning into the market system, and that's why it got one of the first e-mail accounts on the net — to talk about it. But you can't sell talk, or not for much, and that can make the net a vexing place for the purveyors of art.

Today's internet — a decentralized, largely text-based, linking of individual sites or constellations of users — will be superseded by what is aptly called the information superhighway. Just as the old dirt roads and smaller rural routes were abandoned by the megatraffic on the interstates, so much of the present informal, non-capital intensive exchanges on the net will become marginal back channels in a communications system owned and controlled by Time & Space, Inc. and other giant telecommunication conglomerates, providing new and continually recirculating versions of USA Today with up-to-the minute weather and sports information, sound files offering Nirvana: The Classic Years including alternate studio versions, hypertext tours with high resolution graphics of the British Museum collection, plus hundreds of other choices, available at the click of an icon, including items never before available in any media such as *In Her Home: the Barbra Streisand Collection*; a
construct-it-yourself simulation of making a Shaker chair; and a color-it-yourself portfolio of the complete appropriations of Sherrie Levine, together with hypothetically linked case dossiers of all related legal suits. All with modest fees for each hour of viewing or receiving (the gaze finally quantified and sold) and downright bargain prices for your "own" personal copy, making available unlimited screenings (but remember, "it is a federal offence to make unauthorized copies of these copies," or, as we say in Buffalo: it's okay to copy an original but never copy a copy). Indeed, much of what is now the internet promises to become the largest shopping network on earth, and possibly in the universe (even exceeding the Mall of the Milky Way on Galactica B282); those old back roads will be the place to hang out if you are looking for something other than franchise FastImage.

One of the hallmarks of formalist art criticism as well as media theory has been an analysis of the effects of newer media on already existing media. So we talk about the effect of photography on painting, or movies on theater; or how movies provided the initial content for TV before it arrived at its own particular formats (just as the content of the net is now largely composed of formats taken from books, letters, and magazines). It is useful to remember that in the early days of TV, many observers predicted that such spectator sports as baseball would lose their stadium audiences once the games were broadcast "live." However, the opposite occurred; TV increased the interest in the live-and-in-person event. In a similar way, art on the net may actually increase interest in seeing art in nonelectronic spaces.

Formalist critics have wanted to emphasize how new technologies "free up" older media to explore their intrinsic qualities — to do what only they can do. But new media also have a corrosive effect, as forces in the older media try to shift their focus to compete for the market and the cultural capital of what they may see as their new competitors. Within the visual arts, many of the most celebrated new trends of the last decade — from simulationism to multimedia to the transformation of Artoforum — are symptoms of a fear of the specific and intractable materiality of painting and sculpture; such fear of materiality (and by extension face-to-face interaction) is far greater and longer-lasting than the much more often discussed fear of technology — a fear so often discussed the better to trivialize and repress.

What are the conditions of visual art in the net, or art in computer space? We can expect that most visual art on the net will be reproductions of previously existing work, along the line of Bill Gates's plan to display in his home rotating CD-ROM images of the masterpieces of World Art, images for which, notably, he has purchased the CD-ROM reproduction rights. The Thing, a new visual arts online service, which has been immensely useful in imagining many possible formats for art on the net, already features an innovative, in the sense of anarchistic, pricing structure — selling over its BBS (bulletin board system) a numbered and "signed" diskette of an art work. (The idea of selling a disk is itself no more objectionable than selling a book, but numbering and signing a disk is an attempt to simulate scarcity and limit in a medium in which these conditions do not apply. I wouldn't be surprised, however, if this format was included on The Thing to call attention to the issue and also to poke fun at the net's prevailing ideology of utopian democracy, a. k. a. netiquette). In any case, telecommunications systems promise to dominate the distribution of text and image in the near future at a price — though few are now willing to acknowledge it — of more controlled and more limited access (through high user fees, institutional restrictions, and technological skills barriers) and loss of privacy rights we now take for granted. But technological change — it's a mistake to call it progress — will not be reversed and artists run the risk of nostalgia if they refuse to recognize and respond, the better to resist, the communications environment that, for better or worse, they find themselves within.

I want, then, to focus not on how electronic space will actually be used, or how e-space will be exploited, but rather to think about the new media that has been created by technological developments combining computers and telecommunications, and how works of visual art can recognize and explore these new media — even if such works run the risk of being relegated to the net's backchannels, along with "new mimeo revolution" poetry magazines and psychic readings by electronic Tarot.

The most radical characteristic of the internet as a medium is its interconnectivity. At every point receivers are also transmitters. It is a medium defined by exchange rather than delivery; the medium is interactive and dialogic rather than unidirectional or monologic. At this moment, the most interesting format on the internet, apart from the basic electronic mail function, is the listserve: a series of individuals join a list — any post to the list address is immediately delivered to all list subscribers. Individuals can then post replies to the entire list or to the individual that sent the post. Lists may be open to anyone to join or may be private. The potential for discussion and collaboration is appealing — the format mixes some of the features of correspondence with a discussion group, conference call, and a panel symposium (with the crucial difference that the distinction between audience and panel is eroded). While many cyberspace utopians speak of virtual communities with much excitement, what is particularly interesting about the interconnectivity of computer space is its difference from other types of group formation; for what we are constructing in these spaces might better be called virtual unconmunities.

The artworld remains a difficult place for community or group formations because the gallery system recognizes value primarily in terms of individual achievement. In contrast to poetry publishing and criticism, in which poets play a substantial and perhaps determining role, individual visual artists are largely restricted to (or restrict themselves to) the role of producers of potentially saleable objects. Competition among artists is more common that broad-based alliance, with the occasional exception of loyalty to a small circle of friends. At the national level, there are local communities of artists in every region. Various movements and schools — aesthetic or political or both — can
also be understood as art communities. Most recently, the connections of artists within ethnic, gender, or racial groups have been seen in terms of community. But despite these sites of community among visual artists, sustained interaction, dialogue, and collaboration remain rare; indeed, these activities are not generally recognized as values. The internet provides an extraordinary space for interaction and exchange among artists living in different places and, perhaps more significantly, encourages collaboration between visual artists, writers, and computer engineers. In a way remarkably anticipated by the mail art movements of the seventies and eighties, the net suggests the possibility of art works created for their exchange rather than market value—works that may be altered, augmented, or otherwise transformed as they pass from one screen to another. — What I am envisioning here is not art from another medium imported into the net but rather art that takes the unique constraints and potentials of the net as its medium.

To begin to delineate this and related computer and telecommunications media, let's start with the "small" screen. We might begin to speak of the screen arts to suggest the intersection of video, TV, and computer art that share the same physical support or monitor. More and more computers are now equipped with video quality monitors and the screen arts—in this broad sense—will be transmitted via modem, cable, and wireless systems as well as plugged in through cassette, CD-ROM, disk, and cartridge.

I distinguish among interactive, interconnected, and presentational screen media:

- **Interactive computer screen art utilizes the processing system of the computer and includes significant viewer participation via keyboard, mouse, or joy stick. While video games are the most elaborate visual realization of this medium, works of computer art can be created that are not game-oriented but that use many of the features developed in video games. Still another format for interactivity is often discussed under the general heading of hypertext. Hypertext involves the lateral movement and linking of a potentially infinite series of data pools. It allows for nonlinear explorations of a range of data bases; that is, unlike presentational modes, in hypertext there is no established forward path through the data. For example, Jerome McGann and colleagues are at work on an edition of the complete works of Dante Rossetti that will include multiple discrepant versions of his published poems along with manuscript versions of these poems, together with his related paintings as well as source material for the paintings and the poems. All of this information will be linked so that one can move through the data in many directions. Claims of many enthusiastic hypertextualists notwithstanding, many of the most radical features of hypertext are technologies made available by the invention of alphabetic writing and greatly facilitated by the development of printing and bookmaking. Such formats as page and line numbering, indexes, tables of contents, concordances, and cross-referencing for encyclopedias and card catalogs, are, in effect, hypertextual. Much of the innovative poetry of the past 100 years relies on the concept of hypertextuality as a counter to the predominance of linear reading and writing methods. While hypertext may seem like a particular innovation of computer processing, since data on a computer does not have to be accessed sequentially (which is to say it is "randomly" accessible), it becomes a compensatory access tool partly because you can't flip through a data base the way you can flip through pages or index cards. (I'm thinking, for example, of Robert Grenier's great poem, *Sentences*, which is printed on 500 index cards in a Chinese foldup box.)

Finally—my third category—interconnectivity utilizes the network capability of linked systems such as the internet and formats such as listserves, bulletin boards, newsgroups, and group-participation MUDs (multi-user domains) and MOOs and other "real-time" multi-user formats. Interconnectivity allows for works of collaboration, linking, as well as the possibility of simultaneous-event or immediate-response structures. Interconnectivity turns the screen into a small stage and in this way combines features of theater with writing and graphic art.

The most static of the three modes I have just defined is the presentation mode. Presentational screen media will merge with what is now available via broadcast TV, video cassettes, or video disk and CD. But certain computer features will provide novel methods for searching or scanning material, for example, enabling one to find one particular item or graphic or song or word amidst a large data base. Yet because computer screens are often smaller than TV screens, a class of interactive and presentational screen art can take advantage of the more intimate single-viewer conditions now associated with books and drawings. New technologies for viewing texts may well supplant print as the dominant medium for writing and graphics. Books, I should add, will not be replaced—and certainly will not become superfluous—any more than printing replaced handwriting or made it superfluous; these are different media, and texts or graphics disseminated through them will have different qualities. Nonetheless, it is useful to consider graphic and verbal works created specifically for the intimate presentational or interactive space of the small screen that use features specific to the CPU environment, including scrolling, lateral movements, dissolves, the physical properties of the different screen types (lcd, gas plasma, active matrix color)—an extension into the CPU environ-
ment of the sort of work associated with Nam June Paik's exploration of the video environment.

The status of computer-generated films may help to test my typology. Anything that can be viewed on a small screen monitor can also, and with increasing resolution, be projected on a movie screen. Nonetheless, it is still possible to distinguish, as distinct support media, the small backlit screen of the TV and computer monitor and the large projection-system screen of film. Moreover, the scale, conditions of viewing, and typifying formats make video, film, and TV three different media, just as animation, photography, and computer graphics may be said to be distinct media within film. (Hybridization and cross-viewing remain an active and welcome possibility.) Computer-generated graphics, then, may be classified as presentation computer art modeled on small screens for big screen projection.

Note, also, that I have not included in my sketch nonscreen art that uses computers for their operation (for example, robotic installations and environments) — a category that is likely to far surpass the screen arts in the course of time.

But I don't want to talk about computers but objects, objects obduring in the face of automation: I picture here a sculpture from Petah Coyne's April, 1994 show at the Jack Shainman Gallery, which featured candelabra-like works, hung from the ceiling, and dripping with layers of white wax. For it has never been the object of art to capture the thing itself, but rather the conditions of thingness: its thickness, its intractability, its untranslatability or unreproducability, its linguistic or semiotic density, opacity, particularity and peculiarity, its complexity.

For this reason, I was delighted to see a show of new sculpture at Exit Art, also in April, that seemed to respond to my increasing desire for sculpture and painting thick with its material obsessiveness, work whose response to the cyberworld is not to hop on board for the ride or play the angles between parasite and symbiosis — but to insist ever more on the intractability of its own "radical faith," to cite the title of this work by Karen Dolmanish, consisting of a floor display of obsessively arranged piles of broken things — nails and glass and metal.

Object: to call into question, to disagree, to wonder at, to puzzle over, to stare at . . . Object: something made inanimate, lifeless, a thing debased or devalued . . . Whatever darker Freudian dreams of objects and their relations I may have had while writing this essay, nothing could come close to Byron Clerc's witty sculpture, Big Stick, in which he has compressed and laminated 20 volumes of the complete works of the father of psychoanalysis into one beautifully crafted Vienna Slugger, evoking both the uncanny and the sublime — finally, an American Freud. Here is the return of the book with a vengeance, proof positive that books are not the same as texts. Go try doing that to a batch of floppy disks or CD-ROMs.

In Jess's 1991 paste-up Dyslecostasy, we get some glimpse of what hyper-text might one day be able to achieve. Collaged from thousands of tiny scraps collected over many years, Jess creates an environment of multiple levels and dizzyingly shifting contexts; and yet in this world made of tiny particulars, it is their relation and mutual inhabitation that overwhelms and confirms.

I long for the handmade, the direct application of materials on an uneven, rough, textured surface. I feel ever more the need for the embedded and encrusted images and glossings and tones and contours of forgotten and misplaced lore, as in Susan Bee's painting Masked Ball.

I want to contrast the solitary conditions of viewing a work on a computer screen, my posture fixed, my eyes 10 inches from the image, with the physicality of looking at a painting or sculpture in a large room, moving around it, checking it out from multiple views, taking in its tactile surface, its engagement with my thoughts.

In the face of cyber space, where will we find ourselves: not who we are but who we will be, our virtual reality.

*Originally presented (with slides) at a symposium, sponsored by the Parsons School of Design and organized by Lenore Malen, on "The Art Object in the Age of Electronic Technology", at the New School in New York, on April 16, 1994.
THE FUTURE OF WRITING
JOHANNA DRUCKER

My remarks are focused on writing — the visual, material form of language.* My working questions are quite simple: How much of the information which is contained in the visual, material features of written documents can NOT be duplicated, recorded, stored, produced, or reproduced in an electronic environment? And what are the implications for the cultural functions which writing performs — recordkeeping, legal jurisdiction, archiving and documentation of history, authentication of or fetishization of individual identity — as a result of transformations of its material form in electronic media?

To answer these questions I want to separate what I call the “not yet” aspects from the “conceptual premises” evoked by them. “Not yet” aspects are those which are simply the result of technical limitations, easily answered by the “oh you know they will invent a machine that can do that” response. Almost all of these aspects of the shortcomings or limitations of electronic media have to do with the capacity to increase the simulacral qualities of either the display mode of information stored electronically or the final output, but do not investigate the conceptual premises which are more fundamental to the problem. These, briefly, I suggest are that:

1) There is no necessary relation between input and output in electronic media. Information stored electronically is by its very nature — that is, as a set of stored pulses whose identity is a set of quantitative relations — FUN- GIBLE. It is capable of mutation, transformation, and rearrangement without, again, any necessary permanent record of those changes.
2) It is in the many implications of this fungible character that the issues of writing’s transformation as a material and social practice reside.

How is this different from traditional writing? There is a necessary and direct relation between production and output— the making of the mark is the making of a document, it necessarily has material form. Material is not just part of the information of the document — but of its history. You can scan it in from the original and you stretch and shrink these marks — and so forth — to transform them visually. And a record of these changes, an electronic palimpsest, can be made in electronic form, but is NOT a necessary feature of production. In material production, that record is always made. And that record is charged with information: such as a sandstone Sphinx from 1700 BC inscribed with one of the earliest alphabets or an illuminated letter from a medieval manuscript showing a man climbing up a majuscule letter “I,” an image of struggle towards betterment, with vivid red ground and bright gold, blue, and flesh tones. Part of the “information” in material form is derived from a document’s vulnerability. Because of its capacity to register change, the material document participates in the production of history through recording those changes, alterations, erasures, in its physical form.

Obviously, the material aspects of production are history themselves — the site, situation, conditions of a document’s production, as well as storage, change of ownership, disputed authenticity, etc. are all features which play a part in its cultural function. The historical role the document plays is not merely a matter of the content of the document, but also of embeddedness in physical matter. For instance, an image of layers of graffiti scratched on chalk marked into stone.

There is another kind of information carried in the material of writing — the trace of presence. The mark is a sign of witnessing, of a moment of actual physical, bodily relation to a document. It is the sign of a body’s having been “there”— the affirmative reply to the question “Is this your mark?” including within it — was this You who made this sign, was present, and left a trace. In the electronic world of the Net — the “there” is diffuse, geographically non-specific, the being present is a matter of a moment in input, somewhere, not necessarily as a presence in relation to the document itself. The trace is readily, easily, displaced into another situation and ceases to serve as an authentic mark of presence. To address the legal, security-related aspects of this is to enter into the endless debates on “codes” and “encoding” procedures which attempt an immaterial solution. These issues are illustrated in samples of typewriting compared in books on forgery.

In its role as authenticator of identity, handwriting in particular (but typewriting and printing as well) has been subject to all kinds of processes — at first in relation to its apparent, visual form — through elaborate contrasts at the most minute levels of the mark, the paper, the fibers, ink and so forth. There are special microscopes from the late 19th century — designed for work in detecting forgeries — which have unique lighting and mirrors to illuminate paper samples. But, interestingly, ultimately it was the invisible but still material features of writing which came to be seen as authenticating— since the duplication of visual forms was so easy, devices for assessing the somatic pulse, the muscular pattern of writing’s production, were designed in order to test a document’s authenticity. This, again, is a material feature of the work which bears no relation to the visual aspects of writing’s existence as an electronic form. If we consider the modes of input for writing into the electronic medium they move from simple keystroke to more complex (in informational terms) forms such as the writing on a wacom tablet (pressure sensitive electronic drawing pad) or use of scanning equipment — each of which apprehends and stores different aspects of writing. The features of bodily pressure and muscular pattern could be apprehended and stored as well — but again, they need not be necessarily — and it is this distinction which, again, so clearly demarcates the material from the electronic realms. For example a page from a book on handwriting analysis containing a list of readings of the lower case letter “t” — almost all representative of negative character traits.

*iversary.
The activity of personality fetishization which has been part of the history of writing — whether in the treasuring of autographic materials, the love-letter placed close to the heart, and other such sentimental gestures — or in the scrutiny of the written marks of one's own hand to discern and affirm all those quirks of character which we term "personality" — all of these things, may, very readily, be duplicated electronically. For 99 bucks you can have your handwriting linked to your keyboard as a font so that the same degree of illegibility can be obtained from your otherwise well-behaved keyboard and printer as was the case in the old days of pad and pencil.

In an advertisement for Crane's fine stationery from the Sunday Times magazine, a handwritten note is displayed on a masculine executive desk — the note carrying personal regards from one exec to another for hospitality shown on a recent business trip. The personal note will soon be as much of a "sim" as anything else with the textures of handmade paper or linen weave letter stock replicated right on the sheet along with your writing. See samples of autographs from a book on forgery. The power of simulation will increase — mainly relying on visual imitation of material features and forms — so that the replication of documents will bear more and more of their original, material features into their electronic form — BUT the fungibility factor — the fact that there is no necessary relation between input and output, that writing becomes INFORMATION without a material restraint during its period of storage in the electronic environment, means that all the aspects of the document's function which are linked to materiality risk being lost, mutated, transformed, disregarded in the output.

Does this matter? I think, without being nostalgic, that what it does is to effect certain very real transformations on the function of documents in relation to the cultural practices of history, identity, legitimation, to the very notion of presence as witness, of material as record. In the world where one will hold in one's hand the virtual autograph of a simulacral reconstruction of a long-dead celebrity — what, in fact, will one be holding onto? Maybe just the same illusions as before. And maybe not.

"This paper was delivered with slides as part of the conference "The Art Object in the Age of Electronic Technology" sponsored by the School of Visual Arts, NYC, on April 16, 1994.

BOOK REVIEW

Conceptual Art: An American Perspective
by Robert C. Morgan

In the last few years conceptual art is again the focus of theoretical and practical investigations. There has been much discussion about the historization of conceptual art of the late 60s and early 70s, postconceptualism of the 70s, and the nooconceptualism of the 80s and early 90s. Discussions of conceptual art point to the field of relations between artistic and non-artistic models such as philosophy, ideology, and cultural studies. The relation of conceptual art to modernist culture is now being examined and the role of conceptual art in the genesis of postmodernism is recognized.

Definitions of conceptual art differ according to the cultural concept in which they are generated. American conceptual art doesn't have the same characteristics as English, French, German, Czech, Polish, former Yugoslav, Italian, or Russian conceptual art. The differences in definitions and realizations of conceptual art are functions of the knowledge of the nature of modernism and conditions of its transformation into postmodernism within specific cultures and ideological systems of the late 60s and 70s. In that sense American conceptual art is determined by subversion of market fetishization of the art object and its modernist visual autonomy. In contrast, English conceptual art emerged as a criticism of modernist pedagogical discourses in art schools, and German conceptual art as an attempt to realize a "transcendental" and behavioral self-understanding of the nature of art and society. American conceptual art is not homogeneous because there are three "strategic" types: dematerialization of the art object, theoretical investigations of language and concepts of art, and also the ironic collage-montage deconstructions of dominant images of high modernist culture and mass media. One finds in conceptual art linguistic, semiotic, and phenomenological solutions that make possible the entering of "art production" into the "artificial world of new media of technology and culture." One also finds critical and analytical methods by which it is possible to undertake the criticism of postmodernist fundamentalism and transcendentalism of the 90s which is based on the return to the irrational and on the restoration of speculative theological thinking on art.

Historian and theoretician of art, Robert C. Morgan developed from the beginning of the 70s a critical historical analysis of conceptual art and its evolutions. In his book Commentaries on the New Media Arts: Fluxus & Conceptual
Art, Artists’ Books, Correspondence Art, Audio & Video Art (1992) and in a series of short essays and statements Morgan exposed aspects of the broader historical artistic context in which conceptual art emerged and acted. In After the Deluge: Essays on Art in the Nineties (1993) he gave an analysis of postmodernist tendencies pointing also to the evolution from conceptual art to neoconceptualism (the art of media consumption). In his newest book Conceptual Art: An American Perspective Morgan gives synthetic, interpretive, and historical insight into conceptual art and its transformations.

Morgan’s methodology of investigation is based on: a historical specification of models and examples of conceptual art; a pointing to the phenomenological, linguistic, and cultural differences among characteristic strategies of conceptual artists; and an application of Husserlian phenomenological methods in analyzing the status of artwork. These investigations correspond to the discussions of the nature and history of conceptual art undertaken within the last few years by theoreticians and art historians such as Charles Harrison, Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Claude Gintz, Gabriele Guercio, Anne Borrim, Juan Vé. Aliaga, and José Miguel G. Cortes.

The opening chapter of this book points to the prehistory of conceptual art and its roots: (1) in Duchamp’s readymades; (2) in American neodadaism of the 50s and early 60s that extends from John Cage’s experiments with chance operations to Allan Kaprow’s Happenings; (3) in various tendencies of the 50s and early 60s where the “closed art work” is abandoned in the name of behavioral work or working with ideas (Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, Walter de Maria, Henry Flynt, Carolee Schneemann); (4) in the reductivist and tautological art of Ad Reinhardt; and (5) in the installations and specific objects of minimal art and earthworks. Morgan analyzes modernist experiments that destroyed the integral, synthetic, and autonomous space of painting and sculpture in high Greenbergian modernism. He shows how the phenomenon of the visual artwork is cast doubt upon and transformed into language.

The basic model of conceptual art is the document which is a mediator between the artwork and viewer and between the artist’s mental state and the viewer’s mental state. Documents enable the artist to stop being a direct producer of the object and to start working with language, mental states, and intentions. Morgan builds analogies between the reduction of the visual in conceptual art and Husserl’s phenomenological reduction of consciousness. As Morgan puts it: “According to Husserl, the epoch was a way of ‘bracketting’ one’s knowledge of a particular object or event, imaginary or otherwise, in order to come to terms with the object of cognition.” Accordingly, works of conceptual art mediated by documents are not literal “things” anymore, but become data and information which point to the knowledge about the object of art, not to the “thing” as an object of art. Morgan emphasizes that within conceptual art there is a shift from the “art work” as document about objects and processes in the world” to the “art work as document that mediates and represents artist’s ideas.” In order to understand the work of a conceptual artist the viewer must reconstruct the artist’s acts, intentions, and ideas by the available documentation. Morgan observes that early works of conceptual art produce a paradox: they are established as a criticism of Greenbergian aesthetic visual formalism, yet, though they reject visual aesthetic formalism, they enter into another kind of formalism — linguistic formalism. Morgan’s examples are works of Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Lawrence Weiner, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, and Daniel Buren. Morgan also discusses the status and role of photography in conceptual art. He examines conceptual photographic works of Huebler, LeWitt, Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, Ed Ruscha, Jan Dibbets, Ian Wilson, Victor Burgin, Ian and Ingrid Baxter, John Baldessari, and William Wegman.

Morgan then goes on to analyze conceptual performance. Conceptual performance is realized on several levels: (1) in body art by actions in which the artist uses his or her own body as an element of formal tautological and semiotic operations, for example, in Dennis Oppenheim’s actions; (2) in works with language which are presented in written or spoken form, for example, in Robert Barry’s installations or in Ian Wilson’s spoken actions; (3) in work with language when written or spoken ideas cause the action of an audience, for example, Lawrence Weiner or Victor Burgin’s texts make the viewer transform linguistic images into mental representations; and (4) in performance when written or spoken text is an element of the event, such as when Yvonne Rainer projects texts on screen causing language to interrupt the intervals of the dance.

Consciousness of social processes is a problem in conceptual art. According to Joseph Kosuth conceptual art is “the art of the Vietnam war era and that was the time of civil rights demonstrations, student rebellion, wakening of ecological consciousness, and of exploding feminism.” Conceptual art as a social and political phenomenon came into being in the initial moment of media explosion, intellectual, and social change. Conceptual artists developed theoretical analyses of the art system and the mechanism of power in culture. Characteristic for that period were the analytical Marxist works of the New York group that was part of Art & Language — Victor Burgin’s semiotic investigations, Guerrilla Art Action Group’s pararevolutionary work, Hans Haacke’s detective investigation of anomalies of the art system, and so on. For Morgan, conceptual art as critical theory and praxis failed because it was obvious that the system of art and culture was resistant to artists’ rhetorical provocations. In the middle of the 70s, conceptual art was absorbed into the academic mainstream.

In his concluding chapter Morgan discusses the status of conceptual art and its relation to modernism and postmodernism. Conceptual art is compared with preceding movements of neodadaism and Fluxus, and with the following ones — postconceptual and neoconceptual art. Postconceptual art designates the work of artists who during the 70s worked within language, the analysis of media, and the ideological investigation of nature of art and culture relying on the results of pioneers of conceptual art. Neoconceptual art or “Commodity Conceptualism,” as Morgan ironically calls it, designates the work of postmodern artists who in the 80s investigated,
mythologized, and fetishized popular culture and the mass market system. Neoconceptualism is the art of ecstatic consumption of goods, values, and information. Neoconceptualism is also an illustration of post-structuralist theory (from Lyotard and Baudrillard to Virilio). Besides dominant processes in the history of conceptual art, Morgan notices individual non-fitting conceptual strategies. Pointing to atypical artists, Morgan discusses Fluxus artist Henry Flynt who introduced the term “concept art,” as well as Yoko Ono's Fluxus works, Roman Opalka's structural investigations, John Baldessari’s narrative photographic studies, and Peter Downshour’s textual installations. This book also includes Morgan’s interviews with Hans Haacke, Lawrence Weiner, and Allan Kaprow.

— Misko Suvakovic
Translated from the Serbo-Croatian by Dubravka Djuric

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KATHE BURKHART lives and works in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Her Liz Taylor Series has been widely shown, and was included in the 1993 Aperto of the Venice Biennale. Her writing has been published in Red Tape, East Village Eye, Flashart and Promotional Copy. She's read at the Public Theatre, Nuyorican Poet's Cafe, and the Fowler Museum of Amsterdam. A theatrical adaptation of her writing, Jail of Gender, ran in Chicago at Transient Theater.

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GREGORY MONTRUEIL lives and works in NYC. His work takes the form of a series of small abstract ink drawings. Doing one per day they become a visual diary, and prepare the way for the oil paintings. He is involved with El Sol Brillante Community Garden on Twelfth Street between Avenue A and B in Manhattan.

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PORTIA MUNSON divides her time between the Catskills and the Bowery. She works in painting, (pink) assemblage and photography, and is represented by Yoshi Gallery, NYC. Last March, while on a fellowship at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, MA, she gave birth to a son, Zür.

KATHRYN MYERS was born in Chicago, educated at St. Xavier College and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, lives in Williamsburg, and has a studio in Tribeca. She has been working with narrative figurative imagery since 1987, and has been teaching full-time at the University of Connecticut in Storrs since 1984.

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HUGH STEERS is an artist living and working in NYC. His next show will be at Richard Anderson Fine Arts in November, 1994.

LAURA STEIN is an artist living in New York. Her work will be in "Last Paradise — Patterns of Behavior and Practices in the Art of the Nineties," at Kunstraum Wein, Austria, fall 1994.

MISKO SUVAKOVIC is a Belgrade philosopher and conceptual artist and is one of Yugoslavia's leading theorists of postmodernism.

DANNY TISDALE is a visual artist from Compton, living in Harlem. After finishing the performance/installation "The Last of the African Americans," he will run for office.

NICOLA TYSON is an artist/painter who grew up and studied in London, England. Four years ago she moved to New York, where she lives and works. After organizing shows at Trial Balloon project space for two years, she is now concentrating entirely on her own work.

ANTHONY VITI is a painter living and working in Brooklyn. He works as an HIV pre­ and post-test counselor for active injection drug users.

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MICHAEL WINDLE is a Scottish artist who has lived in London for the last seven years. To finance his painting he works part-time for a public arts company and is helping produce a large ceramic mural for Trafalgar Square in central London.

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