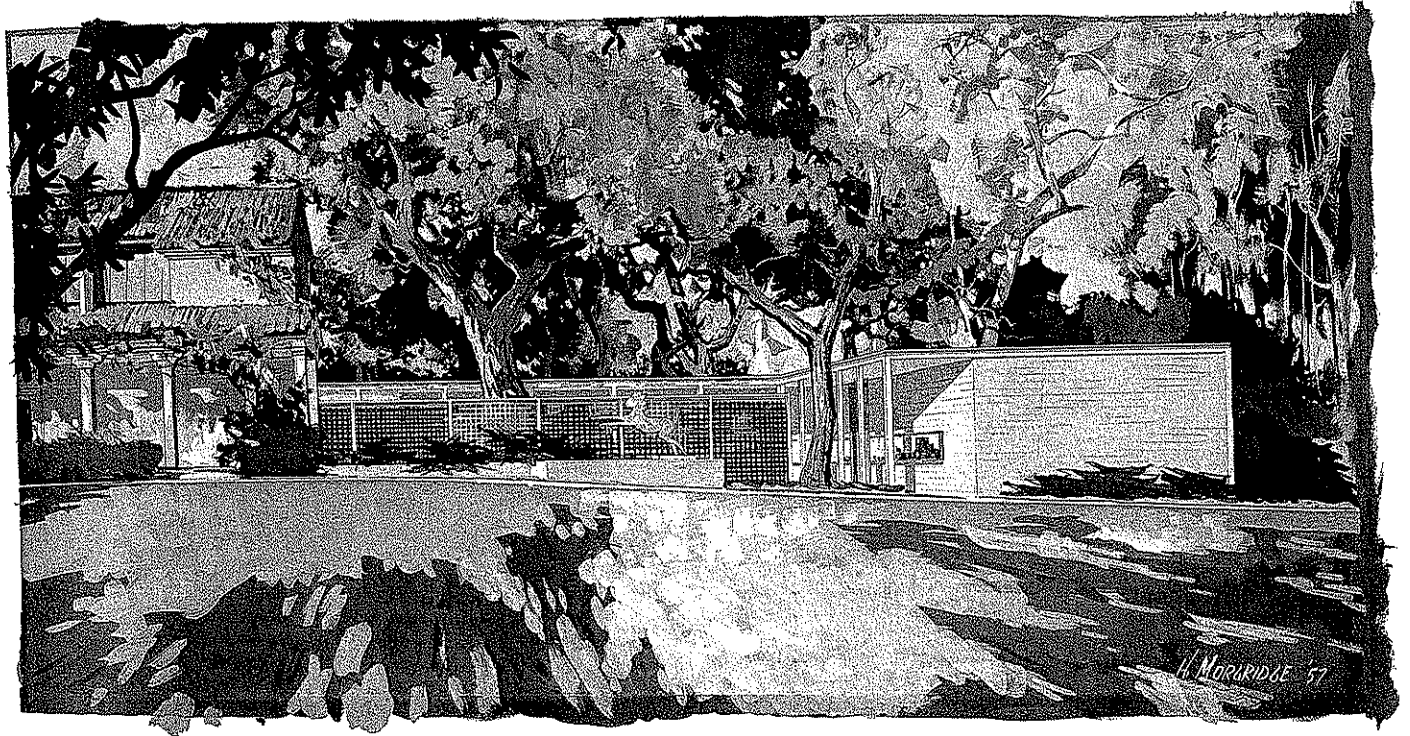


IT HAPPENED AT **POMONA**

ART AT THE EDGE OF LOS ANGELES 1969-1973



DISAPPEARING ACT: Art In and Out of Pomona
Thomas Crow



IT IS A CREDIBLE PROPOSITION to assert that the art being made and shown at the Pomona College Museum of Art between 1969 and 1973 was as salient to art history as any being made and shown anywhere else in the world at that time. Then a quiet, socially conservative college, surrounded by sister institutions of similar description in a tranquil, distant suburb of Los Angeles—one still semi-rural in its environs of mountains and lemon groves—the Pomona campus attracted some of the most distinctive artists working anywhere in the world. It also gave them, for that brief historical moment, an exceptionally sympathetic platform and showcase that succeeded in inflecting the terms of serious art making across a vastly wider terrain.

John Baldessari, the Conceptualist mentor of a generation from his teaching post at California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), recalls, "In my VW bus, I would take students out to see Helene Winer's shows at Pomona College....She would show work no one else was interested in. For every one of her shows, I would load up students and take them out to Claremont."¹ Matt Mullican, then among the magic circle of Baldessari's CalArts students, likewise remembers both the need to keep up with the Pomona scene and the effort it took to get there: "We went out to Claremont a bunch of times; it was a long trip. I had an old BMW, which was breaking down all of the time, ...so I would drive out there with Jim [Welling]."²

Names like Mullican and Welling most readily call to mind the so-called Pictures Generation, which formed as a loose cohort of young artists in New York at the end of the 1970s. And Winer was there with them, first at the nonprofit Artists Space and then as partner in Metro Pictures Gallery. She has rightly been celebrated for recognizing and sponsoring other major names associated with that moment—Cindy Sherman, Louise Lawler, Robert Longo, and Sherrie Levine, among others. But her earlier moment as director of the Pomona College Museum of Art from 1970 to 1972 brought into focus a body of art just as significant but less amenable to labeling or theoretical categorization.

While some of the names attached to this earlier California moment have become retrospectively renowned, their reputations have grown detached from the Claremont-centered network of students, teachers, and curators that shaped their initial careers. While Pomona's museum served as its principal venue, that constellation extended from the

college's own faculty and students to counterparts elsewhere in the associated Claremont Colleges: ceramicists at Scripps College were key to wrapping art in an aura of counter-cultural glamour, while the master's-degree students, who worked under the rubric of the Claremont Graduate School, brought their more seasoned ambitions to the teaching studios, along with a set of connections to other institutions in the region. It was the force of this convergence—in process well in advance of Winer's decisive arrival on the scene—to which Baldessari and Welling pay tribute. In those years, the CalArts post-studio program was not yet the professional juggernaut that it would shortly become; at this juncture, the program of exhibitions and performances staged at Pomona gave its principals—faculty and students alike—a picture of where they themselves wanted to go. How and why it occurred in this ostensibly improbable location entails the telling of story yet to enter the common history of art in our time.

PERHAPS THE BEST PLACE TO BEGIN would be to ask what planted the seed and to look literally into the earth or, more precisely, in the clay for an answer. When Rebecca McGrew recently asked James Turrell whether he had artistic ambitions when he entered Pomona as a freshman in 1961, he answered succinctly: "I wanted to work with clay....There was really this clay thing going on, and that had a lot to do with Claremont."³

A particularly rich vein of art history in Southern California lies behind that remark, one that links the incubation of the first recognizable Los Angeles avant-garde to the artistic possibilities that drew Turrell as a young applicant to Pomona. At its core was the figure of Peter Voulkos, who arrived in 1954 at the Otis Art Institute in central Los Angeles as head of its new graduate program in ceramics. He was fresh from a summer teaching at Black Mountain College in the company of John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Robert Rauschenberg, and his pedagogical ideas continued the famously experimental ethos of that institution. He imposed no schedule as such, no lectures, no critiques, no grades. In his words, "We'd all go to class, then the first thing we'd do is go off to see whatever there was to see in galleries, drinking coffee, and talking. We'd look at a new building going up or a show at a museum. Then we'd talk some more. Then we'd go to work. My purpose was for the students to become aware not only of everything around them but of themselves, to find themselves, to get to the point where they felt

1. John Baldessari, quoted in Richard Hertz, ed., *Jack Goldstein and the CalArts Mafia* (Ojai, Calif.: Minneola Press, 2003), 62. Hertz's savvy compilation of oral histories has been indispensable to the present study.

2. *Ibid.*, 157.

3. James Turrell, interview with Rebecca McGrew in this volume.

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Every individual body in the studio thereby took on a heightened salience, most of all Voulkos's. To maneuver hundred-pound masses of clay into shape on the wheel, Voulkos would throw his whole body into the task; indeed he transformed the process of forming the clay into performances for his students and entourage, wearing flamenco boots, telling jokes, and moving with musical and theatrical flourishes.⁵ Clay may have been the beginning and end of the process, but between raw material and fired finished product lay the elaboration of a different, round-the-clock way of life: throwing sessions fueled by caffeine and nicotine until dawn, accompanied by a charismatic model of the artistic vocation centered on the body and every ephemeral action of the creator.

Voulkos's improvisatory approach to manipulating clay both on and off the wheel has been linked to Zen notions of No-Mind; his abstract painterly decoration and the unprecedentedly large scale on which he worked have been likened to Abstract Expressionist painting. But his most significant impact on the emerging Los Angeles ethos lay in the way he personally worked and taught. His manner of teaching formed a salient core of Southern California artists, among them Billy Al Bengston, Ken Price, and John Mason. His very first student at the start of the 1954

academic year was Paul Soldner, who marveled at the atmosphere and camaraderie of the Otis pot shop (as the ceramics studio was called): "People began dropping in. They did not enroll. They just worked. It was dynamic. It never happened like that before."⁶

Fresh from that heady experience, Soldner was hired as the ceramics teacher at Scripps College immediately after receiving his Otis MFA in 1956. And not long afterwards, his satellite studio came to stand in the place of his teacher's. The Otis ceramics experiment came abruptly to an end in 1958 when Voulkos was asked to resign his position; the stated reason was "ideological differences with the administration," and he soon decamped for Berkeley.⁷ Bengston and Price migrated west to the coastal strip between Venice and Malibu, with Bengston applying Voulkos's epoxy pigments to metal supports and Price using delicate clay vessels as props for luminous glazes. Both thus found themselves drawn into the orbit of the other Venice artists crafting highly finished, artificial surfaces. But the two artists who stayed closest to a gestural and organic approach to the ceramic medium, Soldner and Mason, found a new base in Claremont.

At Scripps, Soldner was evolving his own version of an improvisatory, way-of-life approach to ceramics in adapting Japanese *raku* techniques to an American sensibility. He set out to ground his practice in the local landscape and in the manual skills he imparted

4. Quoted in Rose Slivka, "The Artist and His Work: Risk and Revelation," in Slivka and Karen Tsujimoto, eds., *The Art of Peter Voulkos* (Oakland: Oakland Museum of Art, 1995), 40. See also Andrew Perchuk, *From Otis to Ferus: Robert Irwin, Ed Ruscha, and Peter Voulkos in Los Angeles, 1954-1975* (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, forthcoming).

5. See Perchuk, *Otis to Ferus*; and Slivka, "The Artist and His Work," 57-62.

6. Quoted in Slivka, "The Artist and His Work," 40.

7. Slivka and Tsujimoto, 163.



to students through building kilns and wheels, mixing glazes, making quick aesthetic decisions and courting accidents, occasionally catastrophic ones, in the firing and sudden cooling of the vessels. The college had been seriously teaching ceramics since the 1930s, but Soldner's infusion made that medium a sign and vehicle for the most up-to-date artistic sensibilities in the Los Angeles basin. His older students colonized the Midway Inn on Foothill Boulevard, a rough-hewn tavern built out of native boulders, to give Claremont its own artists' bar.

That incipient formation of a scene—a self-reinforcing sense of artistic community—echoed the process taking place in West Hollywood around the newly founded Ferus Gallery, which was the undertaking of a young Walter Hopps with artist-provocateur Ed Kienholz. Before his appointment at Pomona in 1961, Mason played a significant part in defining the Ferus scene and sensibility. Hopps had solicited both Soldner and Mason for a 1957 exhibition, though their durable ceramic pieces found themselves relegated to an outdoor alleyway. Mason received a more ambitious solo showing at the relocated Ferus in 1959. That exhibition included the massive, multipart relief *Blue Wall* (1959), a consummate challenge to the hegemony of paint in terms of both scale and embodied energy. *Blue Wall* remained on the patio wall at Ferus for some two years afterward, as a swaggering emblem of the gallery's unruly spirit. When Hopps moved to the Pasadena Art Museum as curator in 1960, he devoted one of his first exhibitions to Mason's work; the installation juxtaposed *Blue Wall* with a forest of precariously towering, vertical sculptures. (Mason and Voulkos had shared a walk-in kiln seven feet in height.)⁸

Mason's move east to teach at Pomona perhaps was made easier by his having kept a certain distance from the Venice-based core of Ferus artists. Mason worked close to downtown Los Angeles and steered clear of their freewheeling, extracurricular activities. He thus brought with him the aura of Ferus glamour, but projected at the same time a quieter authority more suitable to a placid collegiate setting. In keeping with the previous trajectory of his work, Mason kept pushing the limits of clay in terms of both its potential grandeur and structural complexity, while Turrell arrived at Pomona as a student simultaneously with Mason's appointment. More mature and worldly than his typical classmate, he had just returned from serving as a pilot in Southeast Asia (duty performed as a Quaker conscientious objector to the military

draft). His tour entailed flying Buddhist monks out of Tibet in the wake of the Chinese invasion. Not the easiest student to impress, Turrell credits Mason with a strong power of example: "[In the] way he conducted himself...you really got a feeling of what it was to be an artist."⁹

IT IS DOUBTFUL, however, that the resonance of art making in Claremont would have projected itself very far had it been circumscribed by work in ceramics. In the eyes of established critical opinion, the medium itself would always be a problem. Rosalind Krauss, one of the most influential critics of the era, would later pronounce Mason's clay work ultimately wanting on account of the material alone: "Ceramics retains too much of the landscape (in its material) and too much of the architectonic (in its usage) for 'sculpture' to find it acceptable."¹⁰ For the art that was beginning to gather around Claremont, however, it proved to be exactly those axes of unmediated nature (from the physiology of the living human body to the surrounding semi-desert landscape) and of enclosing architecture (from the simplest shelter to monumental alteration of the terrain) that provided the defining coordinates of an alternative aesthetic.

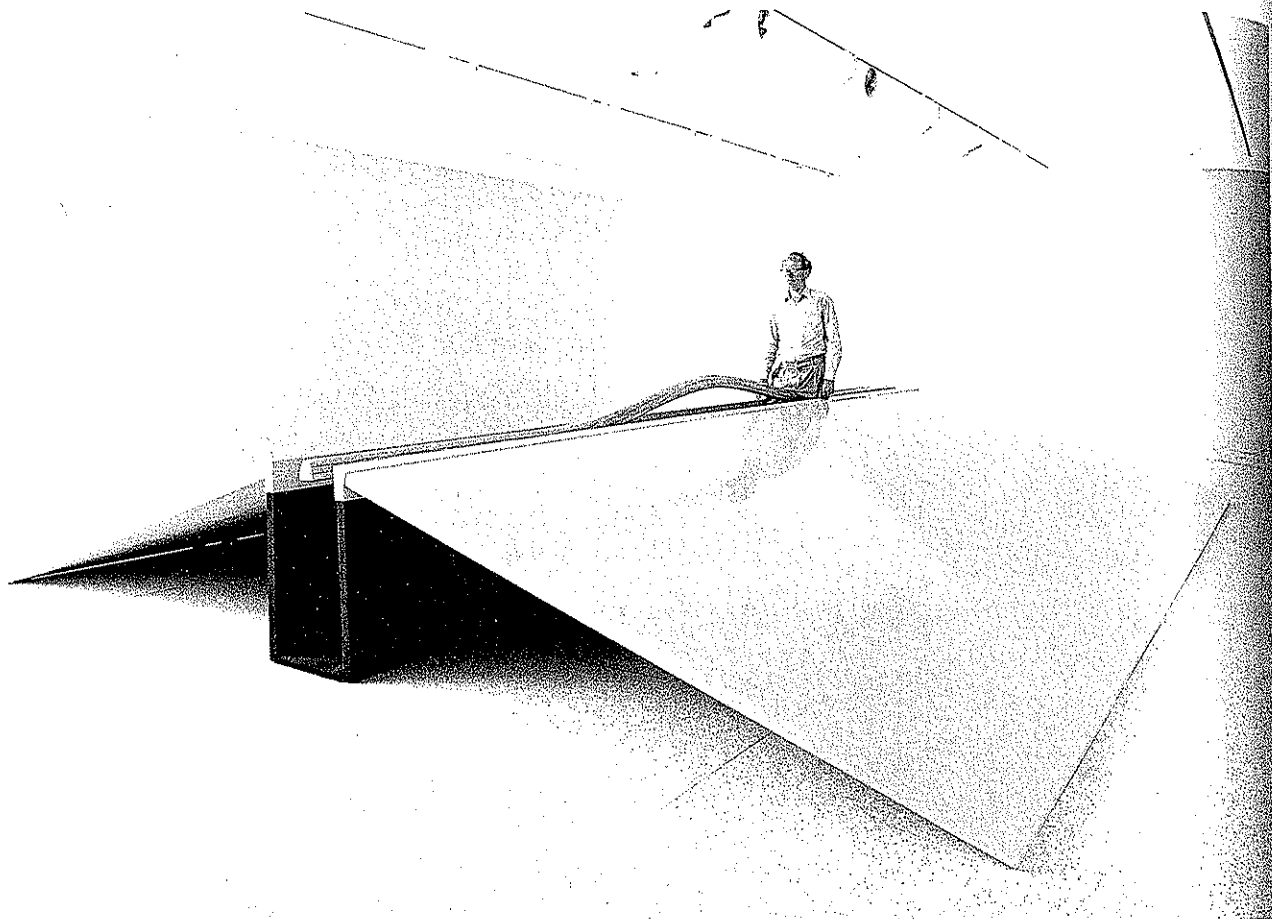
None of these themes will come as a revelation to anyone even cursorily acquainted with the most influential art of the past forty years or so. But in the mid-1960s, they were incipient at best, if not still invisible. The ceramics orbit had incubated the terms of an emerging aesthetic; what was next required was a translation of the same basic nature-architecture coordinates into another medium. Enter Mowry Baden, appointed to the Pomona faculty in the fall of 1968, whose work and teaching practice enabled the bodily and architectural implications of the Claremont artistic ethos to emerge explicitly out of their former matrix in clay.

Known to the administration as a Pomona alumnus, he had been asked to step in and steady the art department after the sudden departure of its chair. Under other circumstances, it is doubtful that the kind of art he was making would have secured him the job. A visitor to the Pomona College Museum of Art in the first weeks of Baden's new chairmanship, encountering a recent sculpture titled *Augur* (1967), might at first have been reminded of a roughly stacked, Voulkos-style ceramic tower. But Baden had engineered the shape of *Augur* by carving into a block of polyurethane foam from the inside, blindly feeling his way as he entered its volume. "I didn't know what

8. Information concerning Mason's dealings with Hopps, the Ferus Gallery, and the 1960 Pasadena exhibition can be found in Kristine McKenna, ed., *The Ferus Gallery: A Place to Begin* (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2009), 70–71, 163, 187, 210–11.

9. Turrell interview with McGrew.

10. Rosalind Krauss, *John Mason: Installations from the Hudson River Series* (Yonkers, N.Y.: The Hudson River Museum, 1978), 12–13.



it would look like," he told a student reporter, "and I didn't much care. I was more interested in the experience of generating my own physical space."¹¹ From the resulting cavity, he cast *Augur* in a light, fiberglass-resin composite as its negative remainder.

The logical corollary of the heightened visibility of the artist in the throes of creation is the concealment of the artist in the throes of creation. Baden's procedure removed vision from its position of sensory mastery; and it rendered the formal outcome of the exercise a secondary and somewhat pathetic residue of the main event, that is, the act of blind tunneling itself. As he told critic Jack Burnham, "Boring my way through...urethane foam may not have been the most reflective way to confront my body, but it certainly removed all the usual stand-off-and-look-at-it attitudes, which to me are irrelevant."¹²

His next step was to bring the body out of hiding, but reduce even further the salience of contemplative vision. The cleanly fabricated pieces of apparatus that

Baden made in a period of intense activity coinciding with his move to Pomona—*Phantom Limb* (1967), *I Walk the Line* (with its deft Johnny Cash allusion, 1967), and *Stop Gap* (1968)—enlisted the bodies of the artist or gallery visitors only to put them through paces that rendered any external witnessing more or less nugatory. The pieces only communicate by the pressures they place on the sensitive parts of the body that come into contact with their surfaces. Sculpture is possibly the wrong word for tunnels or elevated bars that resemble some species of eccentric playground equipment: the space they define lies in the physiological responses of anyone who submits to their built-in regimen.

But there were two quite distinct aspects to this transformation of viewer into living art object. As Baden made plain, the dimensions of each piece were configured to the measurements of his own body: "I am the laboratory," as he put it, "and, by extension, the art."¹³ So anyone else traversing the pieces became forcibly aware of the greater or lesser resistance that

11. May Beth Jackson, "PC Profs Display Their Own Things," *Claremont Collegian* (October 9, 1968).

4. Baden states further, "The qualities that we generally associate with sculpture are a priapic aspect and impenetrability. It may be that we don't have to make sculpture anymore and only to give a set of direct and precise instructions for action."

12. Mowry Baden, quoted in Jack Burnham, "On Being Sculpture," *Artforum* (1968): 44.

13. *Ibid.*, 45.



right word) plunged into the narrow passage between the frames, changing air pressure induced by the body's own movement caused the suspended plastic sheets to close around it, thereby shutting out the view both ahead and behind.¹⁴ From the outside, the concealed bodies inside the structure appeared like elongated peas in an undulating pod. (Racing from one end to the other quickly became a favorite pastime for kids from the adjacent Claremont barrio.)

The scale and symmetry of the piece might conceivably be traced to Burden's earlier vocational aspirations toward architecture. (Baden's arrival in his junior year helped make art practice the more intriguing alternative.) Consequently, in place of architectural school, Burden moved on to the MFA program at the University of California's new campus at Irvine, the Orange County site of which lay on a direct commuters' route from the Pomona valley. By pursuing this path, Burden was retracing the one that Turrell had taken four years before—though the latter had lasted only one year at Irvine before leaving to set up his first studio in the Ocean Park neighborhood of Santa Monica. Then, just as Burden was departing for Irvine, Turrell would return to the Pomona campus as an instructor.

Over the intervening years, Turrell had achieved both precocious recognition and a precipitate forfeiture of influential patronage. At Irvine, his curiosity and strong intellectual formation (mathematics and psychology in his undergraduate years) led to a close relationship with John Coplans, who both taught art history there and held a curator's position at the Pasadena Art Museum. Under Walter Hopps's charismatic sway, the Pasadena Art Museum had emerged as without rival in its receptivity to advanced art, famously giving Marcel Duchamp his first museum retrospective, while extending a museum imprimatur to young artists such as Roy Lichtenstein and Frank Stella. In 1967, only two years after Turrell's Pomona graduation, Coplans organized a Pasadena show of the first light pieces: luminous rectangles that appeared to hang in space independently of the physical corners onto which they were projected. The simultaneously coherent and uncanny character of those pieces, seen in such a prestigious venue, engendered strong expressions of interest from major galleries in both Los Angeles and New York. Turrell largely spurned such entreaties in order to pursue a new series of non-portable (and non-saleable) works based on the controlled release of ambient light into his bare, darkened studio—titled the

by implication imposes the shape of the absent creator on his or her awareness. The presence of the artist could thus be made more forcibly evident to the senses when missing from the scene than if he were acting out some routine before the comparatively jaded sense of vision alone.

ONE BASIC PERMUTATION from Baden's example would have been somehow to combine the exposure of the participating body with the concealment of *Augur*. In the spring of 1969, Chris Burden could be said to have accomplished something like this with a senior project constructed on an athletic practice field east of a rustic part of the Pomona campus called the Wash. Suspending black plastic sheets from two parallel metal frames two hundred feet in length and eleven feet high, he created what might have seemed like an enlarged, open-air equivalent to one of Bruce Nauman's stud-and-plywood corridors. The animated effect of Burden's piece, however, diverged significantly from the experience induced by Nauman's rigid enclosures. Once a visitor (viewer does not seem the

14. For the artist's description of this effect, see Robert Horvitz, "Chris Burden," *Artforum* (May 1976): 28.

Mendota Stoppages after the previous identity of his studio building as the Mendota Hotel.

By the summer of 1969, Turrell found himself without any of the promised exposure in New York (and reportedly owing the Pace Gallery \$13,500 in the bargain).¹⁵ But downtown Manhattan art entrepreneur Willoughby Sharp, a key underground opinion maker, wrote that, "Turrell's refusal to show after invitations from Nick Wilder and Leo Castelli, and vague reports of works with natural light constructed in the walls of his studio have made him a heroic figure for a younger generation of Los Angeles artists."¹⁶ For an artist whose very medium was visual response, it was his invisibility in the normal venues of art, a controlled vanishing, that made for this heroic reputation—part and parcel of which was having spent time behind bars for allegedly encouraging draft resistance while counseling young conscientious objectors in 1966.¹⁷ But on the Pomona campus, his commanding physical presence—a long-limbed Western figure with cowboy boots and thick nimbus of dark hair, anti-war martyr, and ace pilot who had once landed and taken off on the college's central quadrangle—was fully and visibly in evidence.

IF TURRELL HAD BECOME his own embodied ideal of the artist, much as he had regarded Mason in his own student days, he differed from his predecessor in lacking evident work or workplace in Claremont to accompany the persona. All of that lay for him fifty miles away on the other side of the Los Angeles basin. But new Pomona gallery director Hal Glicksman's exhibition program during the 1969–70 season supplied the Claremont audience with a vivid sampling of work by artists whose approach was cognate to Turrell's. Glicksman had been working as a preparator under Hopps at Pasadena; Baden recalls hiring him on the recommendation of painter colleague Guy Williams, who had worked with Glicksman there. Having acquired his curatorial acumen while working in this capacity had instilled in Glicksman a heightened awareness of the gallery as a physical apparatus. At a time when the idea of site-specific sculpture was still in its infancy, he set out commissioning sympathetic artists to take over the entire gallery in a series of comprehensive installations.

In March 1970, he staged what was perhaps the most uncompromising of these endeavors to the design of Michael Asher, then an unheralded young Los Angeles artist with few realized works to his name.

Asher's plan was to create a parasitic interior architecture that would nest inside and conceal the two offset rectangles that constituted the whole of the exhibition and office space. He drew the shape of the new space as two opposed right triangles meeting to form an hourglass shape, the narrow throat of which lay within the old opening between the two galleries. The low-ceilinged, pristinely white interior—hammered together and finished largely by Glicksman and Baden themselves—was illuminated only by the light that entered from the outside during the day or by a dim artificial substitute in the entryway at night. The main entrance doors of the museum were removed so as to permit round-the-clock access to the space.

As the fame of the piece has grown with Asher's subsequent reputation, it has come to be aligned—on account of its masking the normal display, security, and administrative functions of a gallery—with a critique of art institutions.¹⁸ But such issues were minor preoccupations among the first (and only) actual witnesses to the installation's effects. Baden speaks of a "whiteout" visual overload and of the startlingly amplified sound of the trains passing a few blocks to the south.¹⁹ Virtually all of Baden's recollections liken the piece, not to any inanimate construction or sociological experiment, but to parts of the human body. He calls the opening passage "a permanently open esophagus." The wide interior variation in light intensity approximated the widening and narrowing of a pupil; its acoustic effects made the space function like a superhuman ear canal. Baden describes Asher bringing a device into the space that released a coherent ball of smoke, the movements of which enabled him to track the currents of air moving through an interior, functioning now as a kind of lung: "The gob of smoke took off, went down the wall where we were standing at chest height, turned the corner, went along the opposite wall ahead of us and into the first room, went around two walls there and then went out the door. And then Michael said, 'It's working.'"²⁰

The magnified physiological analogies engendered by the piece had as their objective correlative the actual and necessary presence of real bodies inside it. A gallery is a container for art; any body inside the container takes on the volume of sculpture much as Baden had earlier imagined his devices subjecting their users to re-description as art. The figurative and literal descriptions of the piece thus nested one within the other. There was no possible way to experience the piece, still less to "see" it, without

15. See Craig Adcock, *James Turrell: The Art of Light and Space* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 87, 237.

16. Willoughby Sharp, "New Directions in Southern California Sculpture," *Arts* (Summer 1970): 37.

17. See David Pagel, "Turn on the Light," *Los Angeles Times* (October 21, 2007).

18. For the author's own discussion along these lines, see Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 136–41.

19. Mowry Baden, interview with Rebecca McGrew in this volume.

20. See *ibid.*; also Barbara Munger, "Michael Asher: An Environmental Project," *Studio International* (October 1970): 162.

simultaneously being one of its components—the spectator was not just in it, but of it, overtaken by an art condition without temporal boundaries.

In one sense, Asher, Baden, and Glicksman could be seen to have taken the typically opaque container of Minimalism and simply turned it inside out. But that achievement carried with it a more far-reaching challenge to dominant aesthetic assumptions than they themselves may have realized in that moment. The only significant contemporaneous comment on the Asher piece came in fact from one of the prime inventors of the Minimalist container, New York artist Robert Morris, writing in *Artforum*—which is to say, in the leading American journal of the period.²¹ Two photographs and a plan of the Pomona installation appear prominently on the opening page of Morris's essay, which begins with a premise sympathetic to Asher's ambitions: "It seems a truism at this point," Morris asserts, "that the static, portable, indoor art object can do no more than carry a decorative load that becomes increasingly uninteresting."²² But the remainder of the essay contains no explicit reference to Asher or any other actual artist. Instead Morris contrived an entirely invented account of visits to two sites in California, where he discovers immersive structures designed to isolate and manipulate the senses. Each of their creators entices Morris's fictional narrator into enclosed spaces where he is subjected, in one case, to high-energy radio frequencies and, in the other, to an array of noxious gases, administered by a scarred, monocle-wearing "artist" fond of Auschwitz comparisons. While Morris concedes the exhaustion of the New York scene in which he was formed ("next season's polished metal boxes, stretched tie dyes and elegantly applied liquitex references to Art Deco"), a decisive alternative emerging from the West Coast fills him with ambivalence and anxiety. He applauds, on the one hand, the "suppression of an objective source of stimuli that can be located externally and separately from oneself" and a consequently "new plane of experience...qualitatively different from the possible responses to external objects..."²³ At the same time, he cannot concede this achievement without suppressing the actual work in question in favor of Gothic grotesqueries out of a Roger Corman B-movie.

THE IMPLICIT THREAT that Morris perceived in Asher's large but reticent sculpture lay in its negative implications for the traditional mastery enjoyed by both the form-giving artist and the self-possessed spectator. Simultaneously resident in Claremont was

the artist who, perhaps more than any other, made this emerging vulnerability the dominant theme of his career. Since 1965, the Dutch expatriate Bas Jan Ader had maintained a relatively unobtrusive presence in the community, living quietly in a 1920s shingled bungalow just southeast of the Pomona campus. A disaffected and semi-successful student in his native Netherlands, he had emigrated to the United States on a yacht helmed by a film-studio artist who had once worked for MGM (after a mishap-filled voyage that ended with the U.S. Coast Guard towing their disabled vessel into San Diego bay).²⁴ Settling in at the Otis Art Institute, he had completed his undergraduate degree and married the dean's daughter and fellow student, Mary Sue Andersen. When his wife began teaching art in San Bernardino, the couple settled in Claremont, and Ader began working toward a Master of Fine Arts at the Claremont Graduate School. His degree show in 1967 consisted of large paintings and reliefs in a Pop mode, some with eye-catchingly iridescent surfaces, which he arranged as an interconnected installation. In a foretaste of the work to come, however, the photomontage illustrating the poster for his degree show depicts him sitting precariously in a chair resting on the crest of his bungalow's roofline. He leans back against a painted cartoon sky, nonchalantly smoking a cigar.

In the course of the Claremont degree program, Ader had found a close friend and ally in fellow student William Leavitt. After graduation, Leavitt drew their shared attention back towards downtown Los Angeles when he took a day job in the dean's office of the venerable Chouinard Art Institute. A neighbor to Otis, Chouinard possessed considerable residual cachet, a stature comparable to the newly minted prestige of the Irvine program. Mason had been enrolled there during his formative days in the neighboring Voulkos studio; Ed Ruscha and Joe Goode followed around 1960. The latter two had been featured—alongside Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol—in Walter Hopps's groundbreaking 1962 exhibition at the Pasadena Art Museum, "The New Painting of Common Objects." Their exposure in what stands in hindsight as the first Pop exhibition, enhanced by the support of the Ferus Gallery, lent significant 1960s glamour to the school from which they had emerged. But that very cool factor had also engendered considerable dissension within the student body by the time Leavitt went to work there.

What might be called the dominant student faction at Chouinard consisted of male artists—among them

21. Robert Morris, "The Art of Existence, Three Extra-Visual Artists: Works in Progress," *Artforum* (January 1971): 28–33. Morris's article alludes as well to Turrell, Bruce Nauman, and Larry Bell, but discusses no actual work by any of them. Morris's elaborately indirect commentary also includes a rural Ohio character who disdains the name "artist" and is said to have built an archaizing facsimile of a burial mound with a narrow passage to an interior chamber. At the equinox, the rising sun projects a hovering luminous rectangle against the rear wall (its maker, notes the narrator, was unaware of James Turrell). The first of the Californians, located in San Diego, operates inside a large hourglass-shaped chamber that amplifies ambient radio-frequency transmissions capable of exciting human neurons and inducing palpable and generally unpleasant effects outside the normal range of sight, hearing, and touch. (He is described as admiring Asher's work but finds it "too estheticized.") In Sacramento, Morris's narrator encounters an artist left largely blind and facially disfigured by earlier experiments with acid, who subsequently builds a labyrinth of gas chambers that work both on the smell and color vision of any visitors he can induce to enter them. Head shaven and sporting a monocle, this character is fond of analogies to Buchenwald and Auschwitz. Undeterred, the intrepid narrator plunges in and finds all of his senses and general equilibrium unpleasantly disturbed in "an exhausting afternoon."

22. *Ibid.*, 28.

23. *Ibid.*, 33.

24. "STORM-BEATEN KETCH TOWED TO SAN DIEGO," *Los Angeles Times* (January 6, 1963).

Charles Arnoldi and the brothers Guy and Laddie Dill—set on a suave, formally accomplished manner in both art and style of life. For their models of success, they looked to the Ferus Gallery artists of Venice Beach and to visiting stars from New York, such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, who regularly visited the Gemini G.E.L. print studio. The view of dissenters is aptly summed up by then-undergraduate Jack Goldstein: "People in their group... wanted to be important artists. They became more like decorators, but that was not their intention. They were striving to be famous artists."²⁵ Hirokazu Kosaka, Goldstein's closest friend at Chouinard, puts the matter more starkly: "There were painterly beauty artists and there were the Post-Studio Conceptual artists. The two sides didn't cross over.... It was like Vietnam—there were the long hairs and the short hairs. It was a cultural and social dynamic that we may never see again."²⁶

As with the forced break-up of the Otis ceramics circle a decade before, turmoil and disintegration within a central Los Angeles institution propelled its innovative elements outward to the receptive boundary location of Claremont. This was a dynamic into which Leavitt and Ader eagerly inserted themselves. Using scrounged materials, they started up a parodic art journal they dubbed *Landslide*, in its title an uncanny anticipation of the art sheet *Avalanche* that Willoughby Sharp and Liza Béar were shortly to launch in downtown New York. In its pages, they were no kinder to the posing worker-artists of Minimalism than Goldstein and Kosaka were to the "beauty" boys. To that end, they invented a California artist called John Grover, "mustachioed carpenter-turned-sculptor" complete with portrait pose decked out in *Easy Rider*-style fringed suede, love beads, shoulder-length hair, and shades. "I knew Bob Morris, Don Judd, Sol LeWitt pretty well," the fatuous Grover is made to say, "But I never gave much thought to their influences.... I was always struck by the beauty of the mass-produced home and the myriad structures possible with very simple materials. It goes to the core of our culture. This system of putting things together serially."²⁷

John Grover represented an end of the line for the model of art as way of life in the incipiently counter-cultural mode that had taken root in Los Angeles during the late 1950s. In the intervening years, the artist's body more rigorously conceived as perceiving mechanism or mechanical volume had taken over. The overriding question then became: How does one

articulate the human body in its indivisibility, when production of meaning in any field depends upon systematic internal differences? Already suggested in Baden's *Augur* and Burden's outdoor senior project was concealing or removing the body from view as the equal and opposite requirement to putting it on display or subjecting it to some stipulated regimen. The body taken as a whole carries only rudimentary signifying possibilities unless it can also be cancelled or negated.

In Ader's studio installation of 1969, *Please Don't Leave Me*, the spot-lit words scrawled on the wall in crude capitals gave voice to the absent artist subject protesting his abandonment from vision. The staged photograph *All My Clothes*, of the following year, laid out the social signifiers of the artist's self across the roof of his increasingly iconic Claremont bungalow, the container that presumably shielded him from sight. A certain intimation of remains and dismemberment also attends the piece, though it comes couched in a kind of slapstick reminiscent of Buster Keaton's silent-movie stunts. Both peril and comedy converge in the filmed performance *Fall 1, Los Angeles* of 1970, where he descends from the chair on the peak of the roof—the spot where he had perched for his MFA poster—to disappear from view into the overgrown shrubbery beneath the porch.

As famous as these works have since become, they were barely visible to anyone outside Ader's intimate circle during the years in which they were made. Kosaka described the neglect that all of them felt keenly at that moment: "Art in L.A. was about making objects that were beautiful and that you put on the wall. Decoration. All of a sudden there was space, a small space, for a different kind of work that dealt with more important issues. There were a small number of people doing this new kind of work: Bas Jan Ader, John Baldessari, Chris Burden. Jack Goldstein, Bill Leavitt, Bruce Nauman, Al Ruppertsberg, Wolfgang Stoerchle, Bill Wegman.... There were maybe a dozen people, you could count them on your fingers, and we were outcasts, complete outcasts...separated from the Venice artists...not known by anyone."²⁸

They were not known by anyone, that is, until Winer arrived as Pomona gallery director in 1970, after which this roster, including Kosaka himself, became the ready-made core of her exhibition program. Unlike the appointments of Baden and Glicksman (who resigned in 1970 to accompany Hopps when he

25. Jack Goldstein, quoted in Hertz, 20.

26. Hirokazu Kosaka, quoted in Hertz, 34–35.

27. See *Landslide IV* (1969).

28. Kosaka, quoted in Hertz, 34.

was appointed director of the Corcoran Gallery in Washington) no previous Pomona associations preceded her. Though a University of Southern California graduate, Winer's key formation as a young curator had taken place while working at the Whitechapel Gallery in London—a city that had arguably surpassed New York in the later 1960s as a place to encounter and learn about advanced international art. Under Robert Townsend and Charles Harrison, *Studio International* had outdistanced *Artforum* as a vehicle for both information and ideas. In 1969, Harrison had been instrumental in adapting Harald Szeemann's watershed exhibition "When Attitudes Become Form: Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information" for its London iteration. "When Attitudes Become Form" was perhaps the most thoroughgoing summation to date of art's possibilities as the primacy of the "beauty" object disintegrated. But her return to Los Angeles presented her with a palette of curatorial possibilities, courtesy of Kosaka's outcasts, just as advanced as any she had left behind in London.

ONE COULD SAY that the group remained outcast in a more literal sense, that is, cast out from a deteriorating core to a new and far more receptive location on the geographical periphery of the metropolis. By this date, the old Chouinard had effectively disappeared, absorbed into the new, multidisciplinary CalArts, which was destined for its own remote, exurban site in the new town of Valencia—a location as far from the center of Los Angeles as Claremont, but without the latter's developed roots as an art community. The unreflective culture of the old Chouinard was to undergo a profound change as the CalArts ethos came together, from a defiantly pragmatic attitude verging on anti-intellectualism towards, as Goldstein put it, "a whole new attitude about what art could be, not expression but investigation." But he also observed, "When I was there in the early 1970s we didn't know what it would become."²⁹ In those intervening years, the intellectually sympathetic environment of Claremont offered perhaps the only venue where art making could engage formal learning without apology. Ader's preoccupation in these years with Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* exasperated some acquaintances; Turrell's scientific and mathematical training, carried more lightly, undergirded all of his investigations of light and space. Baden thought simultaneously like a physiologist, psychologist, and engineer. And a new standard for such endeavors had been set in the spring of 1971 by Chris Burden's *Five Day Locker Piece*, a Pomona piece by proxy performed

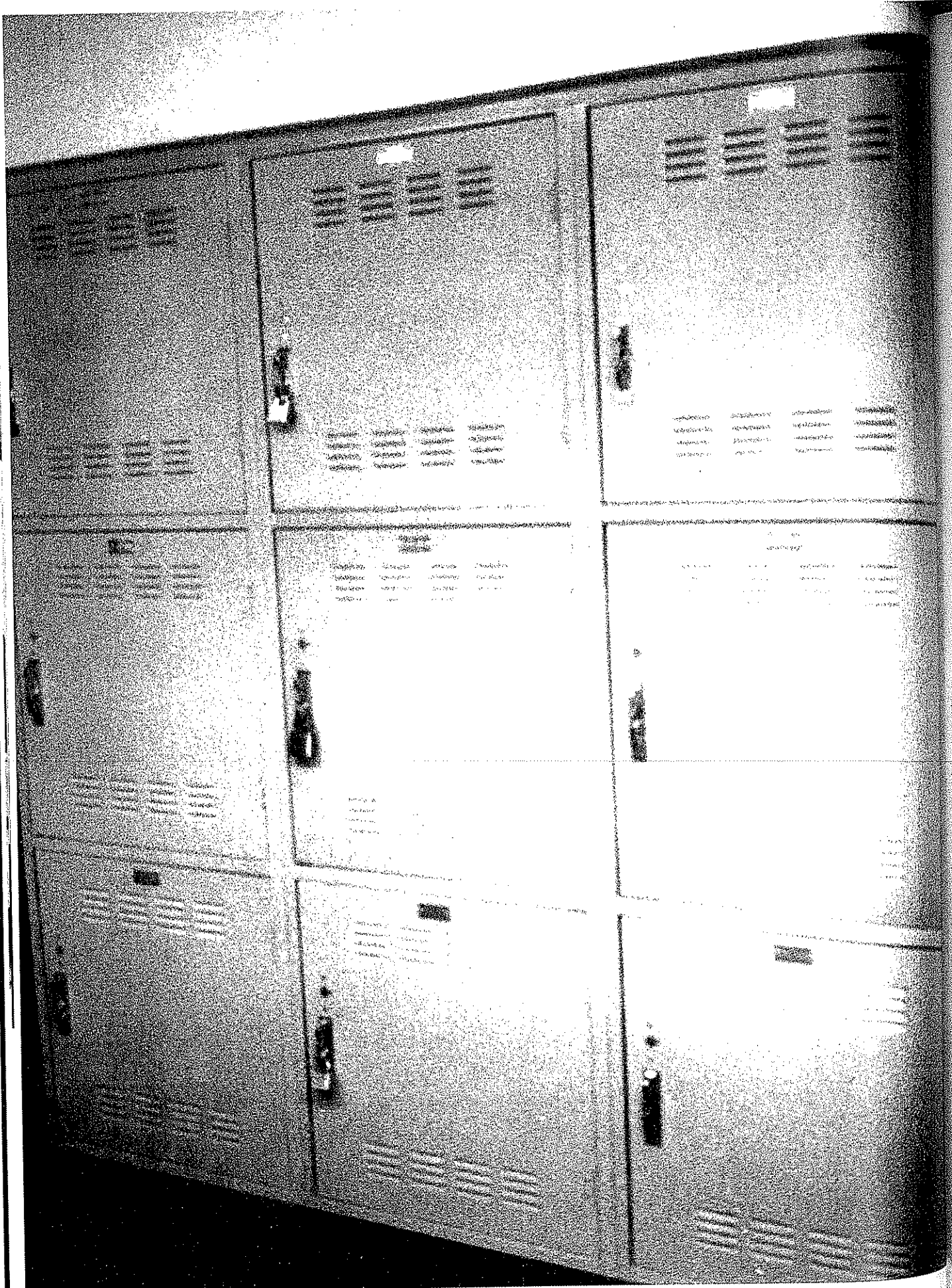
as his MFA exhibition at Irvine. Taking Baden's investigation of bodily parameters to a place that was persuasively his own, Burden's self-imposed ordeal of confinement in a standard-issue student's locker diverted standard avant-garde devices of the ready-made and Minimalist container into the most thoroughgoing concealment of the artist to date, acted out, what was more, over that unbroken, round-the-clock continuity of time that Asher's installation had made manifest the year before.

Though Burden can be said to have remained within a physical-mechanical set of operations, an unintended excess of meaning arose among the parade of visitors drawn to the bank of lockers during the days of his occupancy. Some strove to make themselves recognized, frequently through self-revealing confession, by the invisible but reciprocally vocal presence on the other side of the metal barrier.³⁰ The kinds of performances associated with Los Angeles—Burden's and Ader's in particular—can readily attract imputations of narcissism and self-aggrandizement; yet that tendency is always tempered by the implications of loss and melancholy, which necessarily shadow these complementary actions of self-erasure. Burden discovered these as they were reflected back to him from the supplicating visitors to his locker; Ader, literary-minded European that he was, found more representational means to figure that light and dark chiaroscuro of the self. Over the two years preceding his exhibition at Pomona in January 1972, he had been honing, alongside the falling scenarios, a filmed performance called *I'm Too Sad to Tell You*, which featured his sobbing face in theatrical close-up. As he had staged his falling episodes as a kind of Keatonesque comedy, the haunting of the performance artist by his negated double here takes on the aspect of exaggerated, silent-movie melodrama. Seen in public for the first time in that exhibition, that installation has been probed by many for psychological clues leading as far forward as his 1975 death in a risky, solo sailing voyage across the Atlantic—despite the traps of sentimentality and incorrigible conjecture that lie along this path of interpretation. In a terse statement solicited by *Avalanche* early in 1971, he batted away the charismatic reading that his works might attract: "I do not make body sculpture, body art, or body works. When I fell off the roof of my house, or into a canal, it was because gravity made itself master over me. When I cried it was because of extreme grief."³¹ Following his lead, the firmer path lies with the demonstrable, that is, the observable interplay between the artist's presence and withdrawal,

29. Goldstein, quoted in Hertz, 3, 55.

30. See artist's statement in Horvitz, "Chris Burden," 27.

31. See "Rumbles," *Avalanche* (Winter 1971): 2.



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between self-possession and loss of control, a dynamic broadly shared among his network of Claremont-oriented peers.

Baldessari, more senior (he was then forty) but still years away from his current renown, joined his younger colleagues and students in mounting a Pomona show that linked themes of absence reckoned in ephemeral traces with the erasure of the work of art as surrogate or stand-in for its maker. As he has described his negotiations with Winer: "At the time I was into police photography and when she came to the door I gave her a bowl, which she grabbed. I dusted it for prints and said, here, show this, which she did. I had burned all my paintings and had the ashes. I gave them to her and said, 'Scatter them in the corner; after the first person walks in, rope off the area.'"³²

That negation of self carried, it must be recognized, dire real-world connotations in this period for Baldessari's pupils at CalArts and for the decidedly male coterie that dominated the Pomona exhibition program. As early as 1967, Ader began to be pressured by American immigration authorities to apply for United States citizenship, which would have made him eligible for the military draft.³³ For a generation of young men under threat of being involuntarily enlisted in a futile war that few if any of them endorsed, infusing the work of art with themes of the artist's hidden, fugitive, or even entombed condition carried inescapable implications of genuine legal jeopardy and physical peril.

A remarkable series of performances that Winer organized in March 1972 included a contribution by Kosaka that drove these dark implications to the fore. Lying on the floor of the Pomona gallery, he encased himself in an electric blanket turned up high, over the top of which was shoveled a thick covering of earth, such that the shape of his body and his individual features were lost to view. The performance consisted of his enduring the weight and oven-like heat for its duration, while a subdued audience hung back against the walls of the space uncertain as to whether humanitarian intervention was required. But even here, a certain comic leavening remained latent in the work, the intimation of a stunt designed to induce a theatrical *frisson* of alarm in the guiled spectator. Such was the stock in trade of the historical escape artist Harry Houdini, the specialist in live burial, around whom Chouinardian Allen Ruppersberg built his Pomona exhibition. The show opened with an appropriate flourish on Halloween

night in 1972, the forty-sixth anniversary of the magician's death. Among the conjuring paraphernalia on display was a recently minted piece Ruppersberg called *Missing*, consisting of overdue notices for five books by or about Houdini checked out from the Los Angeles Public Library. The artist's responsibility for the fugitive status of the books was left to the viewer to infer.

Also mounted at Pomona was Ruppersberg's consummate comedy on the theme of the elusive artist, *Where's Al?* (also from 1972): 160 casual instamatic photographs of a beachside reunion among friends interspersed with bits of laconically pitch-perfect dialogue typed on 110 index cards like these:

he: Why didn't Al come?
he: Too busy maybe. He's been working a lot.
he: Yeah, could be.
he: Was Al coming by himself?
she: Usually does.
he: Somebody ought to check.

Needless to say, Al is never spotted.

Winer observed that the physical matter of the entire exhibition was so slight that he could carry it anywhere in a small brief case.³⁴ *Where's Al?* traveled that same year to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, which had lately emerged as a nodal point in the international dissemination of advanced art, marking an accelerated, centrifugal momentum within this circle of artists—one that Claremont could not have contained for long. Indeed that event helped inaugurate the longstanding historical pattern whereby Los Angeles artists frequently leapfrog the East Coast of the United States to achieve their first wider recognition in Europe. When Ader staged what would be his final artistic gesture in 1975, he was among other things mapping that link. Having installed the first iteration of *In Search of the Miraculous* at the Claire Copley Gallery in Los Angeles, its projected culmination was to have taken place, had his voyage succeeded, at the Art & Project Gallery in Amsterdam, "possibly to continue," he noted.³⁵ That same leading-edge space, with its attendant journal, had welcomed Leavitt and Ruppersberg as well, placing them among a constellation of luminaries that was bound to obscure their earlier Pomona moment. Winer's precipitate departure in 1972 (in administrative retribution over Stoerchle's publicly urinating in the course of a performance) closed that experimental episode altogether.

32. Baldessari, quoted in Hertz, 62. The official title of the piece is *Cremation Project* (1970), which he also manifested in public with a paid, notarized notice of his action in the newspaper (July 27, 1970).

33. See Paul Andriess, *Bas Jan Ader* (Amsterdam: Openbaar Kunstbezit, 1988), 87.

34. See Christophe Cherix, *In & Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960-1970* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 118-19.

35. Hand-written note, Bas Jan Ader Archives.

Closer to home, CalArts began to find its independent center of gravity, as its first student cohort continued in Valencia the lines of endeavor initially launched in Claremont. Perhaps the most extreme manifestation of the artist's self-erasure occurred in 1972, at the MFA graduation performance by Jack Goldstein on the CalArts campus. For his Pomona outing, Goldstein had shown—in a distant dialogue with Richard Serra, he admits—sculptures composed of stacked sheets of unsecured wood.³⁶ Finding no affirmation from Baldessari for this direction, he concluded his formal art training by subjecting himself, over an entire night on a hill above Interstate 5 in Valencia, to perhaps the most perilous act of Houdini-like self-immolation to date. Baldessari offers this recollection: "The work of Jack's that sticks in my mind is when he buried himself underground and got his air from plastic tubes; it was one of the most risky pieces I have ever seen. It took place at CalArts and Wolfgang Stoerchle was there; it was in the evening. The sun was setting, and Jack had a stethoscope, which measured his heartbeat from about twenty feet away. It was connected to where he was buried and where he was symbolically dead. What a terror being buried like that must have induced. Jack said that he was trying to give up something organic to make a symbolic statement."³⁷

itself around the production of portable objects that quoted and reframed found imagery. But faint signals can lead the searching astronomer to consequential fields of force. In this case, an attractor was centered in the village of Claremont around 1970 around which works of varying historical renown—from Ader's and Burden's at the more visible end of the spectrum to Baden's, Kosaka's, and Goldstein's at the other (with Asher's and Ruppertsberg's somewhere in between)—grasped a truth imperfectly recognized in other times and places, that is, the artist's body and persona can credibly occupy the work only under the sign of their vanishing.

Well might it have stuck in the mind of a mentor. And well might he have discerned a symbolic intent whereby the presence and absence of the artist finds itself reduced to the simplest on-off binary, converting, in Goldstein's words, "subjectivity to anonymous objective impulse."³⁸ By Goldstein's estimation that performance helped launch his mature trajectory as an artist: "I tried to disappear by hiring actors and by hiring others to manufacture my paintings. The movies and performances became symbolic of my disappearances, just as in my final show at CalArts I was buried. All anyone saw was the blinking light, which was symbolic of my heartbeat."³⁹

That nearly forgotten blinking light can be likened as well to the faint signal from a pulsar in deep space, a figure for the temporal distance and near-invisibility of the Pomona moment with which this exploit so plainly resonated. Goldstein's early CalArts performances, though a break-through in the artist's self-knowledge, have likewise receded in retrospective consciousness, overshadowed by the films and then the paintings that made his name in New York by the end of the decade. As these were annexed to the notion of a Pictures Generation, so too the fame of CalArts established

36. Goldstein, quoted in Hertz, 25–26, 55.

37. Baldessari, quoted in Hertz, 65.

38. Goldstein, quoted in Yves Aupetitallot and Lionel Bovier, *Jack Goldstein* (Grenoble, France: Le Magasin, Centre National de l'Art Contemporain, 2002), 154; see also Goldstein's remark in an interview with Philip Pocock, *Journal of Contemporary Art* (Spring 1988), 37 (reprinted in Aupetitallot and Bovier, *Goldstein*, 105): "The beacon flicked on and off to my heartbeat and consequently lit up the side of this hill to my pulsation. My physicality as a body or whatever was not to be seen. Now this pulsating beacon indicates its own presence since it is displaced from its source of origin or location. This beacon of light follows after the thing that it represents and consequently we have something called representation. I became this origin without any existence. That one performance defines and exemplifies my body of work up until today." My thanks to Rebecca Lowery for her help with this material.

39. *Ibid.*, 93.

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REBECCA MCGREW Let's begin with a discussion about your background and how you came to Pomona College. You were previously at Whitechapel Gallery in London; what brought you back to Los Angeles?

HÉLENE WINER I was away from Los Angeles for about three years. Most of that time I was in London working at the Whitechapel Gallery as assistant director. I started at Pomona a few months after returning to Los Angeles in the fall of 1970. I grew up in Los Angeles, in Westchester, and I studied art history at USC. After college, I landed what for me was a prize job at the L.A. (Los Angeles) County Museum of Art (LACMA). Jim Elliott, chief curator, and curator of modern art, hired me as part-time assistant. I think I told him that I would do anything, even empty ashtrays, if he would just hire me. I vaguely intended to do graduate work at the UCLA, but quickly dropped that idea.

RM What did you do at LACMA?

HW I was an all-purpose, curatorial/exhibition assistant until I was assigned to American Art. For the prints and drawings department, I catalogued prints and assisted on Pablo Picasso's eighty-fifth birthday print survey for which I drove around Beverly Hills with a Polaroid camera documenting prints in collectors' homes. I helped in the decorative arts/costume department, sometimes getting my photo taken in period costumes. In the American art department, I worked on a watercolors show. I organized a very small show of the Ash Can school from the collection, and produced a brochure. I worked with the preparators installing exhibitions, which I loved doing, and did odd jobs like making wall labels.

I quickly gravitated to contemporary art, as I became acquainted with artists and curators. Through them I discovered the galleries that were active in Los Angeles at that time, like Dwan Gallery, which had shows of Minimalists such as Carl Andre and Sol LeWitt, and Irving Blum Gallery, where the Pop artists and Ferus artists showed. I remember seeing Warhol's Mylar pillows [*Silver Clouds*, 1966] at Irving Blum. The most prominent new artists showed at either Irving Blum or Nick Wilder. This immersion into an art-based community that I knew little about made an enormous impression on me. The idea of a community of artists such as those I had studied about in Paris or New York existing in Los Angeles never occurred to me.

At twenty-three, of course, I naturally became acquainted with all of the younger, and all male, artists. I got to know Ed Ruscha because he designed catalogues for LACMA and designed for *Artforum*. I was there when Ruscha unveiled his *Los Angeles County Museum on Fire* [1965-68, now owned by the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C.] on the museum patio. I posed for his famous "Ed Ruscha Says Goodbye to College Joys," his January 1967 *Artforum* ad/marriage announcement. I was bartender for Jim Elliott's parties for friends, like Robert Rauschenberg and Claes Oldenburg, at his apartment above the merry-go-round on the Santa Monica Pier. These are some of my most vivid memories of that time, along with buying my first artwork—two paintings by Richard Pettibone for \$15 at his annual studio sale.

RM Why did you leave Los Angeles and move to London?

HW My job at the museum was tremendously valuable, but it was also a very loosely defined, entry-level job. So when friends of mine went to Croatia (then Yugoslavia) to shoot a film, I joined them with no real purpose but to spend some time in Europe. It was certainly not a career move. After visiting Croatia, Greece, and Italy, and spending several months in Paris, I moved to London. Bryan Robertson, who had just retired as director of Whitechapel, told me of the assistant director job there. It was very fortunate timing, and I stayed for two years. It was the peak of Conceptual art activity for both American and European artists, with London as a hub. My introduction to that work, and the often intense, serious talk around it, was in stunning contrast to the mute, wry stance adopted by the artists I had known in Los Angeles. But I left London, primarily because I was unable to adapt to the dark and damp weather, or survive on the impossibly low pay.

RM Tell me about what the Los Angeles art world was like in 1970, when you came back and started working at Pomona College.

HW Los Angeles had changed dramatically during the few years I was away. When I left, it was the late sixties, and the Finish Fetish artists were prominent in L.A. The counterpoint group was the "assemblage" or Topanga artists. I respected both groups of artists and admired what they did.

Los Angeles in the 1960s was still fairly isolated and had developed a kind of parallel universe where the main artists had careers that were serious and active locally, and included shows in New York and Europe. But I cannot think of one artist who was fully embraced outside of Los Angeles. I believe this problem for L.A. artists really did not change substantially until the 1980s.

When I returned in 1970, Chouinard, where I took painting classes as a teenager, was closed, the Finish Fetish artists were now firmly established, CalArts had opened, and UC Irvine had an ambitious art program.

RM Was your position at Pomona College similar to Hal Glicksman's before you?

HW I was hired as gallery director and assistant professor. Other than some secretarial and very part-time student help, the gallery had no staff. Director then meant curator, registrar, PR, transport, preparator, etc.

RM What courses in art history did you teach?

HW I taught "Art Since 1945," and a contemporary art seminar. I recently found a stack of file cards that I used for one of the classes, with a list I had compiled of major modern artists, organized chronologically by birth date. So many of the figures who were the foundation of Modern art were, remarkably, still alive in 1970. What is astounding to me is that the era from 1970 until the present—forty years—is the same amount of time as the period from 1930 to 1970. When my time at Pomona is viewed today, it may seem as distant as the Depression, prohibition, and the WPA were to me.

It seemed incredible when I was at LACMA that Picasso was going to visit Los Angeles for his print show; that I visited Igor Stravinsky at his house; that I met Man Ray when he was a house guest at a Los Angeles collector's home. With the students, I used the idea of artist interactions to contemporize and humanize the art history. In the seminar, I assigned the students to interview an artist. One of my students interviewed Bruce Nauman. This was one of Nauman's first interviews, and it was referenced in his first museum exhibition at the Whitney Museum and LACMA.

Montgomery Center Director Appointed

CLAREMONT—Miss Helene John Sloan and "Art and Community."
Winer, former assistant director of Whitechapel Art Gallery in London, has been named director of Montgomery Art Center and assistant professor of art at Pomona College.

A native of Los Angeles and a graduate of USC, Miss Winer served as curatorial aid for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art for three years.

As assistant director for the Whitechapel Art Gallery, she was responsible for the organization of contemporary exhibi-



"Montgomery Center Director Appointed," undated newspaper clipping

RM I'm interested in hearing you speak about your exhibitions at Pomona. You were quoted once as describing the artists that you worked with at Pomona College as "defining a new direction in Conceptualism." What did you mean by that?

HW I wouldn't describe the artists I showed in that way now, but this was when Conceptual art was narrowly defined by a core group of artists, including Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Sol LeWitt, and Lawrence Weiner. Their work was language-based and not focused on producing objects of any permanence or visual interest. The Los Angeles artists whose work I became interested in were doing work that was both closely allied to but made striking departures from this Conceptualist orthodoxy. The new work that I found utilized imagery, humor, cultural references, and wide-ranging content in varied mediums, including painting and drawing. I made a fairly deliberate effort to locate artists whose sympathies were Conceptual but who were bringing in something new. It was the first time that I looked for artists whose work I did not know, who did not have reputations that preceded them, artists at the beginning of their careers.

RM How did you go about finding newer artists?

HW I began to visit studios and seek out group shows of newer art. Jack Goldstein was one of the first artists whose work I saw in a group show in an exhibition titled "Temple Street Artists," at the Long Beach Museum of Art. The work was very minimal and made of paper; it was not yet the work he would later become known for. It was through Jack that I met Bill Leavitt, and through Bill, I met Bas Jan Ader, and so on. Quite soon I began to identify other artists whom I had an interest in, like Bill Wegman, Al Ruppersberg, Wolfgang Stoerchle, Chris Burden, and the artists around them.

Postcard with Bill Leavitt,
Jack Goldstein, and Gary Krueger



RM Did these artists identify loosely as a group, or recognize each other as being part of something new?

HW Not at all. Chris Burden was living and working near Irvine, where he went to graduate school, and I don't think he knew the others. The same applies to Bill Wegman, who came to Los Angeles for a teaching position at Cal State Long Beach. When I met him, he was living fairly isolated in San Pedro.

RM Do you remember what was in Wegman's show, in January 1971?

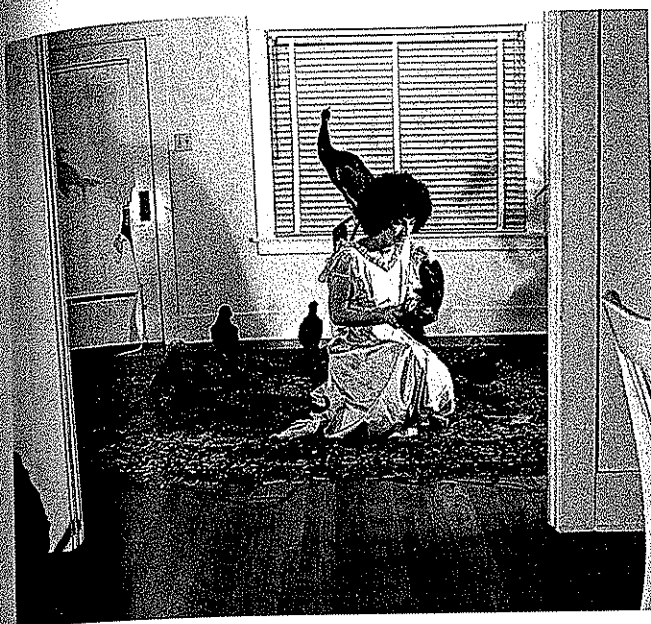
HW Yes, very distinctly. I thought then, and still do, that the work in that show was remarkable. The small gallery room held his black and white photographs. Several of his earliest videos played on a reel-to-reel tape deck borrowed from Pomona's audiovisual department. The tapes were brief, absurd, comical compositions using sight gags or perceptual tricks and art-related puns. They were really brilliant, very independent of the videos that others were doing at that time. Tragically, one was erased by accident when someone came and took the equipment with the tape still in it. Even though he had no other copy of the tape, Bill was not as upset

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RM Jack Goldstein's exhibition ran concurrently with Wegman's show.

HW Yes, the Goldstein and Wegman shows were simultaneous, though there were separate announcements and small catalogues. I am not sure why I chose to do this, since only one of the two gallery rooms was a good exhibition space.

RM Interestingly, like Wegman's erased videos, the sculptures Goldstein exhibited at Pomona don't exist anymore. Do you know what happened to the sculptures?

HW The materials for the sculpture, the wood blocks, were retained for a time, but I think it was a space issue that determined their preservation. The individual works consisted of blocks of wood stacked to a precarious height, with black or white cards inserted in the corners between the blocks. I thought of these as ironic gestures reflecting the oppositional stability of the forms and rendering the precarious and potentially dangerous stacks with the physically purposeless cards somewhat comic. The pieces often tumbled over during the colder nights and had to be restacked in the morning. The work Jack became known for is quite different, but certain qualities were evident in this early work, such as their performative quality, their temporary nature, and the ominous precariousness that was also in the early films and performances. But primarily, it was the aspect of a proposition that first drew me to the work.

I recently read a quote in an article by Howard Singerman, where he quoted Richard Hertz's book *Jack Goldstein and the CalArts Mafia*. Apparently, when Jack showed slides of his sculpture to John Baldessari's class, Jack noticed that John was unimpressed. Jack said that if John was that uninterested in the work, it must be really bad. So Jack never made sculpture again. I believe Jack was referring to work like what he showed at Pomona.

RM Let me jump ahead to 1972, and ask about the performance series you organized with Chris Burden, Wolfgang Stoerchle, and Hirokazu Kosaka. Did a theme tie them together?

HW No theme, just that they were young artists doing performance, which was not so prevalent then.

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RM I have heard from some attendees that Chris Burden's *Match Piece* not only entailed throwing lit match "rockets" at a nude woman (his then-wife), but also that it felt like an endurance event, that the intention was to bore the audience so much that they would just leave and the performance would end when the gallery was empty. Is that what happened?

HW It was somewhat of an endurance event because of the repetitive nature of the activity and the perversity of waiting ghoulishly, for a long time, to see if one of the lighted matches would ever hit or burn the woman. Chris had wanted a student to volunteer, but no one did, and he recruited his unhappy wife, who really did not want to do it. There was something disturbing about the situation, where the audience had to sit and witness this malicious and juvenile act.

RM Did he tell you what he was going to do in advance? He had just done *TV Hijack* (1972) a few months earlier. Were you worried at all about what he might do at Pomona?

HW No. It never crossed my mind to be concerned about what he might do. Chris just said he had an idea, and would show up and do it. I was so interested in his work, and this aspect of fear and danger, that I didn't view it as a concern.

RM Do you remember if there was any fallout from this performance because of the nudity or the implied violence, especially in light of one of the other performances—by Wolfgang Stoerchle, the prior week—which caused quite a stir?

HW I don't believe so, although I seem to have been fairly oblivious to institutional concerns. I didn't consider that the college would be concerned about what I did, *their interest seemed so low*. I was never called upon to explain, defend, or accept any criticism. During my interview for the job, I think I made it clear that I wanted to show things that weren't otherwise being shown. I didn't see any reason to show art that was already being seen in museums, or to take traveling shows, or to do anything but originate contemporary exhibitions by fairly young artists. I thought that would be most valuable to the students and the college environment, and of course, to the artists themselves.

RM Stoerchle's performance became notorious. Apparently, he incorporated a number of different elements that he used in other performances, and then urinated on a carpet in the gallery. What do you remember of this night?

HW I really only remember him doing a kind of movement around the room, with his movements directed by the controlled stopping and starting of his urinating. It seemed like the piece was designed as a kind of formal dance. There is a good description in the review by Paul McMahon in the school newspaper, and in the *Los Angeles Times* review. (See pages 229–30) Before the performance, Wolf explained to me that it was very difficult for a man to start and stop urinating; it required great control. I thought it was so funny that he assumed this fact outweighed or had greater bearing than the reality of a naked man urinating in public.

RM The performance series immediately followed the exhibition by Bas Jan Ader, William Leavitt, and Ger van Elk in January and February 1972. Can you talk a little about how that exhibition came about?

HW Bas Jan and Ger were sharing a studio in Pomona and they suggested I come over. They more or less proposed the three-person show with Bill Leavitt. I agreed because they really wanted to do this show, but I would have preferred at that time to do bigger shows by Bill and Bas Jan. I didn't really know Ger's work.

RM It's strange that Ader was underappreciated for so long, but is now incredibly popular among younger artists. What do you think makes his work so relevant to artists today?

HW I think he is being romanticized, partly because of his disappearance at sea, but also because his small body of work wasn't well known. His early work was very beautifully conceived and has a special kind of emotional impact. His work was both philosophical and slapstick, with an elegant formalism and pathos. The later work was more romantic and operatic.

RM Can you talk a little more about Bill Leavitt's work? You showed his *California Patio* (1972). What did that piece capture that made it so significant at the time?

HW Possibly it was the isolated clarity of this iconic California image, done so lovingly, celebrating its role in people's lives and others' minds. The text that accompanied it sets the tone. I would say this work, which Bill created for the Pomona show, is one of the most successful of his theatrical, tableau-like stage sets. The theatrical fragments have the content of recognition and meaning, without irony, without critical position.

RM After this exhibition, in April and May 1972, the next show you organized was "Los Angeles Painters of the Nineteen Twenties," which you co-curated with Nancy Moure, who was working at LACMA.

HW Yes. These artists were of interest to me in part because standard Southern California landscapes were almost unknown at that time. Also, most of the painters worked at Disney or other Hollywood studios painting backdrops, like the big skies for Westerns, as the announcement of the exhibition shows. This cultural aspect, which is peculiar to Los Angeles, was a resource and reference for many artists then, and for generations of artists since.

RM The Allen Ruppersberg exhibition, which opened on October 31, 1972, came shortly after.

HW Al Ruppersberg was, for me, the ultimate Los Angeles artist. He was one of the few artists who was already well known at the time of his Pomona show. He had done his famous *Al's Café* (1969), which happened before I got back to Los Angeles, and he had just done *Al's Grand Hotel* (1971). His use of the city for his work, and his ability to move around, without a standard studio, was unusual. His show included many extraordinary works. The show opened on Halloween, which is the date of Houdini's death. Many of the works in the show dealt with sleight of hand or visual trickery.



Allen Ruppersberg, Jack Goldstein,
and Wolfgang Stoerchle at LAX for flight
to New York, 1971



RM Ruppertsberg was part of this new direction that you saw emerging in Los Angeles art. Would you say that many of the artists that you showed at Pomona fit into this program?

HW That was true of the younger artists, but certainly not for the more established artists, such as Joe Goode, John McCracken, or Ed Moses.

RM Do you remember what was in the John McCracken exhibition in February and March 1971? The archives only have a press release and one photograph.

HW He showed three new wall sculptures that were a departure from the leaning planks. I recently found an article I wrote for *Studio International* in 1971, wherein I described the type of work shown at Pomona. I said, "McCracken has lately moved away from this surface perfection in some of his sculpture, which is occasionally wall hanging. These pieces are constructed of wood beams painted directly with hard, resilient marine paint."

RM What was the environment like at Pomona College when you were working there?

HW I was the only woman on the Pomona faculty. Stanley Crouch taught writing at Pomona then, and he was likely the only black faculty member. At my first faculty meeting, two women who were part-time faculty, seated at the ends of a long table with a silver tea service, poured tea. It was so archaic and comical. The president later asked me if I would pour at the next faculty tea, and I said, "absolutely not." Some in the art department were unhappy that I had done that, considering the art department's shaky position. I asked the studio faculty if one of them would do it in my place. Mowry Baden, who was an extraordinary person, volunteered. When the faculty arrived, Mowry was there at one end of the table, in overalls, and was setting up a very male system of pouring tea into cups lined up on the table, as opposed to picking up a cup and saucer in one hand and pouring with the other. In hindsight, my walking papers were probably drawn up by this act. I was later warned that President Alexander was very angry about this. Somehow, either in a note or in person, I explained about the inappropriateness of having women faculty perform this sort of "women's work." Later, as a mutual peace offering, Jim Turrell and I did it together. He got all dressed up in a top hat and tails, and I wore a long skirt of some sort.

Curiously, no women were included in the shows I did at Pomona, nor was I aware of their absence, though I was certainly aware of feminist issues. I did not see myself as contributing to the problem, and I did not see that my position gave me an opportunity to contribute to a change. It did not occur to me, or to many others, until later to make specific corrective efforts in order to address the problem.

RM In addition to a new feminist consciousness slowly coming to campus, do you remember other social and political situations? For example, I know there were Vietnam War protests and sit-ins on the campuses. What was your perception of that?

HW My impression was that Pomona was surprisingly straight and preppy, given the radical and activist climate elsewhere. Among artists there is a kind of automatic assumption of liberal politics, indifference to certain conventions, and some degree of oddness. I was surprised at how conservative the students were in their dress and demeanor. They conducted themselves, at least in my courses, in a strangely well-programmed way that I couldn't relate to. I did not live in Claremont, so it's entirely possible that I missed whatever was really going on. I do remember I had a part-time gallery assistant who was very attractive, preppy, and nice. He was engaged to be married, and an excellent student, but he almost never showed up. It turned out that he was a very troubled druggie.

It was just a very strange time. I remember that when I first came people were somehow suspicious of me. In fact, during my interviews for the job, someone asked me if I was involved in radical politics. That, I imagine, was due to my appearance and age. In London, my hair, which was an Afro, was just fashion, as opposed to a Black Power statement. When I started at Pomona, in October of 1970, Angela Davis was a high-profile fugitive thought to be in California. I was stopped a few times by the police, who were on the lookout.

RM In Claremont?

HW Yes, after getting off the freeway, twice that I remember.

RM Your leaving Pomona College was a very complicated situation, and I've heard so many versions of the end of your tenure. Given how important your curatorial vision was historically, it's really amazing that the college essentially fired you, or asked you to resign.

HW Thank you. I did feel at the time that I was providing a worthwhile program for the students and others, as well as something of value to the artists and larger art community. The only open disagreement I can remember having with anyone was concerning the gallery budget. I had a very small budget, and the expenditures were well accounted for, but there was a disagreement about whether the department chairman or I controlled this budget. I printed small catalogues for some of the shows, which I felt were important for the understanding of such new issues in art, and they were very much appreciated by the artists. The Ruppertsberg catalogue was the trigger for the resigning/firing events.



RM This was the fall semester of 1972, during the Ruppertsberg exhibition. Lewis Baltz, Michael Brewster, David Gray, James Turrell, and Guy Williams all resigned or were terminated on or near June 30, 1973, at the end of that academic year. So, basically, the whole studio department quit after you left.

HW The studio faculty were very good artists who took teaching seriously and together generated a lot of energy and camaraderie amongst the Pomona College and Claremont Graduate faculty and students. It was an unusually interesting and desirable atmosphere for artists and art students. I was surprised to learn of the problems that occurred after I left.

I think the college's attitude toward the art faculty was one of distress. There was the notion that the department did not enhance the standing or reputation of the college.

RM What was the actual reason for your firing? Do you think it was over the catalogues exclusively? Or do you think it also had something to do with the kinds of programs and artists you were presenting, like the controversial Stoerchle and Burden performances?

HW For the official firing, I really don't know what the reasons were. I had a contract that made it difficult for them to fire me, which was what I more or less forced them to do after a standoff over the tiny gallery budget. That, of course, wasn't the core problem. There were a number of reasons why the administration was unhappy with my performance or existence. Foremost were aspects of the program that caused the administration some discomfort, like some of the exhibitions, as well as incidents separate from the exhibition program.

I believe it was a cumulative situation, beginning with the tea pouring and including my dealings with a women's group associated with the gallery. The Rembrandt Club raised a small amount of money each year to donate to the gallery by holding an annual print sale. I had a painfully uncomfortable lunch with some members at the Cucamonga Country Club. I objected to the greeting card level of the print sale. I don't think I ever heard from or saw them again. Another occasion I remember was a lunch meeting with potential corporate donors, where someone objected to my wearing pants to the lunch.

After Ackerman threatened to stop the printing of AI's catalogue, thinking the exhibition would go one without it, I said I would resign and the exhibition would not proceed if the catalogue was not printed. After a few hours, I realized that they should have to fire me, and I withdrew my resignation, but not the threat to cancel the show. Ackerman was furious; I was fully prepared to depart, but I would not resign. I got a lawyer, Gerry Rosen, a labor lawyer, who was bucking convention by wearing head-to-toe black leather and rode a motorcycle to his meeting with Alexander. Forcing the firing and a settlement of my contract gave me some satisfaction in an otherwise really unfortunate situation.

RM After you left Pomona, you moved to New York. Did you move to New York because of the Artists Space position, or did that come later?

HW Immediately after leaving Pomona College, I wrote a column and did some reviewing for the *Los Angeles Times* and then moved to New York a year or so later. I did freelance work for the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts for a few years and, in 1975, I became director of Artists Space.

RM When you started at Artists Space, it seemed they didn't have a defined mission. How do you think your knowledge of post-Conceptual art in Los Angeles influenced your curatorial decisions?

HW The lack of identity at Artists Space had been purposeful, since it was conceived to provide some ideal of a democratic exhibition program and a site for meetings of artists' groups. In the effort to avoid curatorial prejudice, a supposedly neutral method of organizing exhibitions was devised with uninspired results. I initially found ways to do something resembling a democratic selection of shows, but soon ignored the impossible issue. As at Pomona, my biggest concern was to show the most interesting art developments, and my preferences followed the course set at Pomona. Alternative spaces were essential in those years for artists early in their careers; there were no small galleries available to them as there are now, and the established galleries were relatively few and inaccessible.

RM What led to your founding of the gallery Metro Pictures in 1980?

HW I had been at Artists Space for five years and wanted to make a change. The public funding was changing so that it would be necessary to spend time fundraising and reorganizing the Artists Space board from its advisory role to a financially supportive role.

I had never entertained the idea of starting a gallery, and in fact, I had the usual antipathy of what was perceived by outsiders as a very elite and unwelcoming environment. Janelle Reiring, who was director at Leo Castelli Gallery, and I talked about founding a not-quite-standard gallery that would operate only at night and include artists I had been associated with, but we quickly shifted to the idea of a more conventional and serious gallery. The artists' needs, and their lack of options, were the reason for opening the gallery. It is hard to imagine now, but there were virtually no galleries for new artists to show in.

RM Why the name Metro Pictures?

HW Metro Pictures was just the solution for not using our names, i.e., Janelle Reiring Helene Winer Gallery. We weren't trying to be clever or to send a particular message, but we did think it suited the work we would be showing.

MARIE B. SHURKUS My research revealed three different stories about how you first came to the States. So let's start there.

GER VAN ELK Mine is the classic story of an immigrant. My father flew back and forth between Holland and America. In the late fifties, he was living in Cheshire, Connecticut, but he was planning on moving to Los Angeles, where he was an illustrator for Hanna-Barbera cartoons. So on one of his trips back to Holland he confronted me, saying something like: "What the heck are you doing in Holland; it's such a provincial place. It's not good for you. You should be out in the world. You should come see me in Los Angeles." So I decided to go to America.

MS Was that in 1959?

GVE Yes, I immigrated to the United States, and got a job in a pastry shop with my father's friend Louie Cavalier. I earned \$90 a week punching holes in Connecticut donuts, and it was great! I learned to speak English, got to know American culture. And then, after eight or nine months, I took the train from New York to my father's place in Los Angeles.

MS Once in Los Angeles, you enrolled in Immaculate Heart College. Why there?

GVE Because I have always been difficult. [Laughs.] At that time, any self-respecting contemporary artist went to Chouinard Art Institute. But I thought, how can anyone possibly learn to make contemporary art? I found that ridiculous, plus I was intrigued by this nun place. It was unheard of to have nuns dressed in habits teaching contemporary art! I thought this is really one misunderstanding after the other, and decided that it would be more interesting for me to go see the nuns than to go to Chouinard.

MS Did you get a degree?

GVE No, before coming to America I went to art school in Amsterdam at the Kunstnijverheidsschool, which is where I became very good friends with Bas Jan Ader, though we lost touch right after school. You see, Bas traveled south, through Spain and onto Morocco, where he signed on with an English crew sailing west, across the Atlantic, through the Panama Canal, and on to San Diego. At that point I was already living on Sunset Boulevard, and one day I got a phone call; it was Bas looking for a place to stay. The sailboat had sunk, and the U.S. Marines had fished him and the crew out of the water. He had lost

everything, his passport, everything lost at sea again, or for the first time. Anyway, I convinced him to join us at this funny place with the nuns. Mary Sue, whom he later married, was also taking classes at Immaculate Heart. We ended up living together for about a year, but then it was my turn to be a sailor. It's not that I wanted to be a real sailor, but I thought I've got to go through that experience. So I signed on to an oil tanker for about nine months. When the tanker stopped in Rotterdam, I got off and spent more time making art in the Netherlands.

MS Is that when you organized the International Institute for the Re-education of Artists?

GVE I organized that group with Jan Dibbets and Reinier Lucassen in 1967. Back then international art schools were becoming a very popular phenomenon; it was like McDonald's, something that was spreading everywhere. So we thought we could make it even more ridiculous by starting an international school for the re-education of artists in Conceptualism. We advertised classes on how to become an artist, tips on how to be a successful collector, or how to run your own gallery.

MS Did anyone try to enroll?

GVE Some people took it seriously, but most knew it was a joke. A few people got really annoyed. They didn't like us making fun of people who were trying to start galleries, but we were against that kind of amateurism. I was very contrary back then.

MS What do you mean?

GVE Oh, I was constantly questioning myself and whatever was going on in the art world. For example, in the early sixties, it was forbidden to like Salvador Dalí. The general feeling was that Dalí couldn't paint! I saw that he couldn't paint in the manner that people think of as good painting. But I didn't care, because I liked his concepts. Of course, I understand the phenomena of artists making pieces about painting, like Ad Reinhardt or Robert Rauschenberg. In fact, I really appreciate their work. But I have always made work that functions as a witness to thoughts, a witness to things happening in the world and my relationship with society.

MS Does this notion of witnessing have anything to do with the projection pieces that you started making in 1969? For example, in the *Self-Portrait behind a Wooden Fence* piece, there is an actual wooden

GER VAN ELK INTERVIEWED BY MARIE B. SHURKUS

*Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, California,
October 6, 2009*

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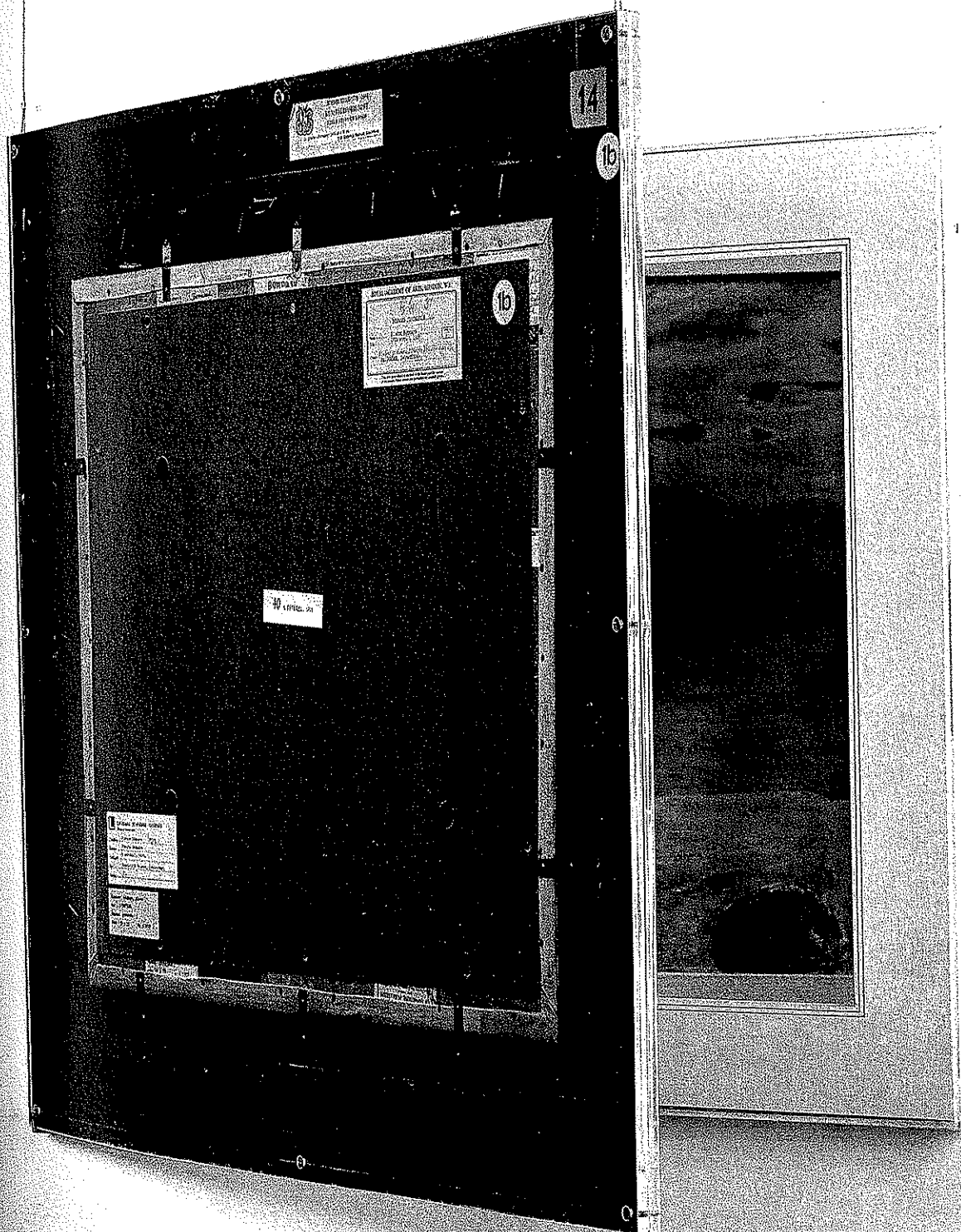
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fence hanging on the gallery wall, but you also project a film of the same fence on top of it but slightly off register. As the film unfolds, we see your head emerge slowly from behind the fence, but of course you are only behind the fence in the film, not the actual fence hanging on the gallery wall. It's hard to tell what we are really witnessing here. What were you trying to convey with this doubling of the image and the actual referent?

GVE It's about comparison, making comparisons. It's sort of like stating a proposition and saying, if this is the truth, then the other statement cannot be true. But maybe the other is the truth and the first one is not accurate. I've asked questions like that my whole life. When you look at my work, especially these early works, it always has a sort of schizophrenic element about struggling to make decisions. The projections also provide a strategy for adding information because the film pieces were always projected onto something concrete. So, if you have a film, you add something to reality: a story. You open the present up to another possibility.

MS After 1972, the film projections and the slide projections just stop. What happened?

GVE No, I started again in 2001. The newer ones are presented on flat screens. I started these because I wanted to show some of the earlier films I had made that weren't being shown because of the challenges of showing film in galleries, so I recreated them as framed video pictures in the gallery. For example, I made a film in 1971 that is called *The Flattening of the Brooke's Surface*. It features me in a little rubber boat floating on a small brook. The movement of the boat makes small waves, leaving a trace from the boat, and you see in the film I'm trying to smooth that out; I am using a trowel to smooth the surface of the water. But the theoretical idea behind it was to use the water as a sculptural material, because it's a body of material. But of course you cannot really sculpt it, it's a liquid that's moving.

MS *The Well-Shaven Cactus* piece, from 1969, was presented as both a film and in photographs. Which came first?

GVE Let me see. First, I sent the Queen of England a telegram, asking for permission to clean a square meter of the mall outside Buckingham Palace. You see, on the right side of the mall is the exhibition hall where "When Attitudes Become Form" was shown in London, after it had opened in Bern. I didn't show *The Well-Shaven Cactus* in Switzerland, but I made it for the London presentation of the show.



MS It sounds like you're suggesting that *The Well-Shaven Cactus* was inspired by *The Well Polished Floor Sculpture* (1968–69). But to return to my initial question, did you show the *Well-Shaven Cactus* as film or photographs?

GVE Neither. It was an action, a performance. Someone from the British weekly newspaper *The Observer* photographed it and pictures of the performance appeared on the front page. About a month after I saw these pictures I made the photo version of the piece as more of a remembrance, like a souvenir of the action.

MS Many of your works set up a specific dialogue with certain art historical works. In fact, one of the pieces that you showed at Pomona College in 1972 was *The Return of Pierre Bonnard* (1971).

GVE Yes, that piece is about reading art history. Bonnard made a painting of the French Riviera, a very wonderful little painting of a white sailboat moving along the rocky coast. I saw that painting in the collection of the Stedelijk Museum, but they rarely show it. So I thought since it was such a wonderful piece, I should bring it back into history and somehow initiate a discussion with it, because that's exactly what I wanted to do, to have a discussion with Pierre Bonnard. Of course, I couldn't do that, so instead I made a "mirror-image" of this

wonderful painting; I mean, literally a mirror that reflected a copy of the painting. Seen in the mirror, the boat is going in the other direction, and so is the piece. It was painted in 1917, but the mirror reverses the date, which appears on the painting after Bonnard's signature. It becomes 1971 and that's the year I made that piece!

MS One of the other pieces that you showed at Pomona was titled *The Reality of G. Morandi*, which sets up another dialogue with a past artwork.

GVE The Morandi piece is composed of a photograph of the actual painting and another photograph of what I imagined his studio to look like, beyond the frame of the painting. [Giorgio] Morandi was always setting up still lifes. Bottles and little pill boxes or things like that. And I was always curious about what was on the other side of the table that he didn't paint? So I tried to imagine it. In those paintings he always concentrated on the mystical atmosphere surrounding the objects, but I thought he must have some earthy things too, like a bowl of soup or something. So I made these fantasy photographs about what was on the other side of the table that he had left out of the painting. Amazingly enough, my friend Rudi Fuchs visited Morandi's studio in northern Italy and sent me a postcard that revealed that my fantasies weren't far off the mark!



In addition to the five towers, the exhibition also included three more sculptures, which were horizontally oriented.

Hirokazu Kosaka, conversation with the author, March 5, 2010.

Helene Winer, *Jack Goldstein* (Claremont, Calif.: Pomona College Museum of Art, 1971), n.p.

Jack Goldstein, "Aphorisms," in Jack Goldstein, John Miller, Daniel Buchholz, and Christopher Müller, *Jack Goldstein: Films, Records, Performances and Aphorisms, 1971-1984* (Köln: Daniel Buchholz Galerie, 2003), 22.

Chris Darcon, "An Interview with Jack Goldstein, 1985," in Jack Goldstein, Susanne Gaensheimer, and Klaus Gerner, *Jack Goldstein* (Frankfurt: Museum für Moderne Kunst, 2009), 167.

Kosaka.

Goldstein ended up using a few nails because the polished gallery floor was so slippery. See Laurie Anderson, "Exhibition Reviews, OK Harris Gallery," *ARTnews* 72 (January 1973): 89.

Four were reconstructed for the 2008 Jack Goldstein exhibition presented at Magasin Centre National d'Art Contemporain in Grenoble, France.

Helene Winer, conversation with the author, October 24, 2009.

Morgan Fisher, "Talking With Jack Goldstein," [1977] reprinted in *Jack Goldstein: Films, Records, Performances and Aphorisms, 1971-1984*, 26.

IN JANUARY 1971, the Pomona College Museum of Art became a very dangerous place. Entering the gallery meant sharing space with five Jack Goldstein sculptures, which were constructed of eight-by-eight-inch blocks of wood stacked approximately nine feet high.¹ The wooden blocks were freshly cut and mostly unpainted. Accordingly, the wood dried and shifted over the course of the exhibition. The effect enhanced the sculptures' instability while also animating them, as the invisible forces of heat and humidity announced their presence with audible cracks. In short, the sculptures confronted viewers with a palpable sense of danger.

Since the only armature holding these towering structures in place was gravity, the danger was neither imagined nor symbolic, but rather a potential held in suspension like the deadly weight of Richard Serra's Prop pieces, initiated only a few years earlier. More to the point, Goldstein's friend and roommate Hirokazu Kosaka recalled, the danger was real; they fell down in the studio almost every day.² During the actual exhibition, however, they only teetered. In fact, the height of the vertical sculptures was determined by the size of the components and their ability to remain upright and maintain balance; taller stacks would have required larger blocks, Pomona curator Helene Winer explained.³ Pushing toward the impossible, Goldstein's sculptures marked the edge of gravity's power over composed shapes as well as the edge between actual violence and its threat. Like a video image placed on pause Goldstein's physical objects thus contained and held both movement and danger in suspension. Indeed, as Goldstein once observed: "An explosive is beauty before its consequences."⁴

Violent imagery and other forms of implied danger and overt spectacle populate Goldstein's entire oeuvre, which encompassed sculpture, performance, film, photography, sound, painting, and prints.

Nevertheless, Goldstein repeatedly insisted that his work was never about violence. Instead, Goldstein treated danger as a material that he used to craft a sense of anticipation and thereby enhance his viewers' awareness of how representation operates. As Goldstein explained, "If there is a dangerous aspect, it's because of what happens to an image when it anticipates, and so that moment before its

fragmentation is gonna be violent, no matter what it is."⁵ Goldstein's 1972 film *Rocking Chair* specifically depicts this effect: after building a tense rhythmic rocking, the figure abruptly gets up and in one swift

movement exits the frame, leaving the deserted chair to continue rocking wildly in his wake. Where *Rocking Chair* demonstrates the fragmentation of the image, Goldstein's sculptures dramatize the moment before departure, when it appears in the violent tension of rocking or teetering, as only a threat, calling viewers to anticipate the potential consequences.

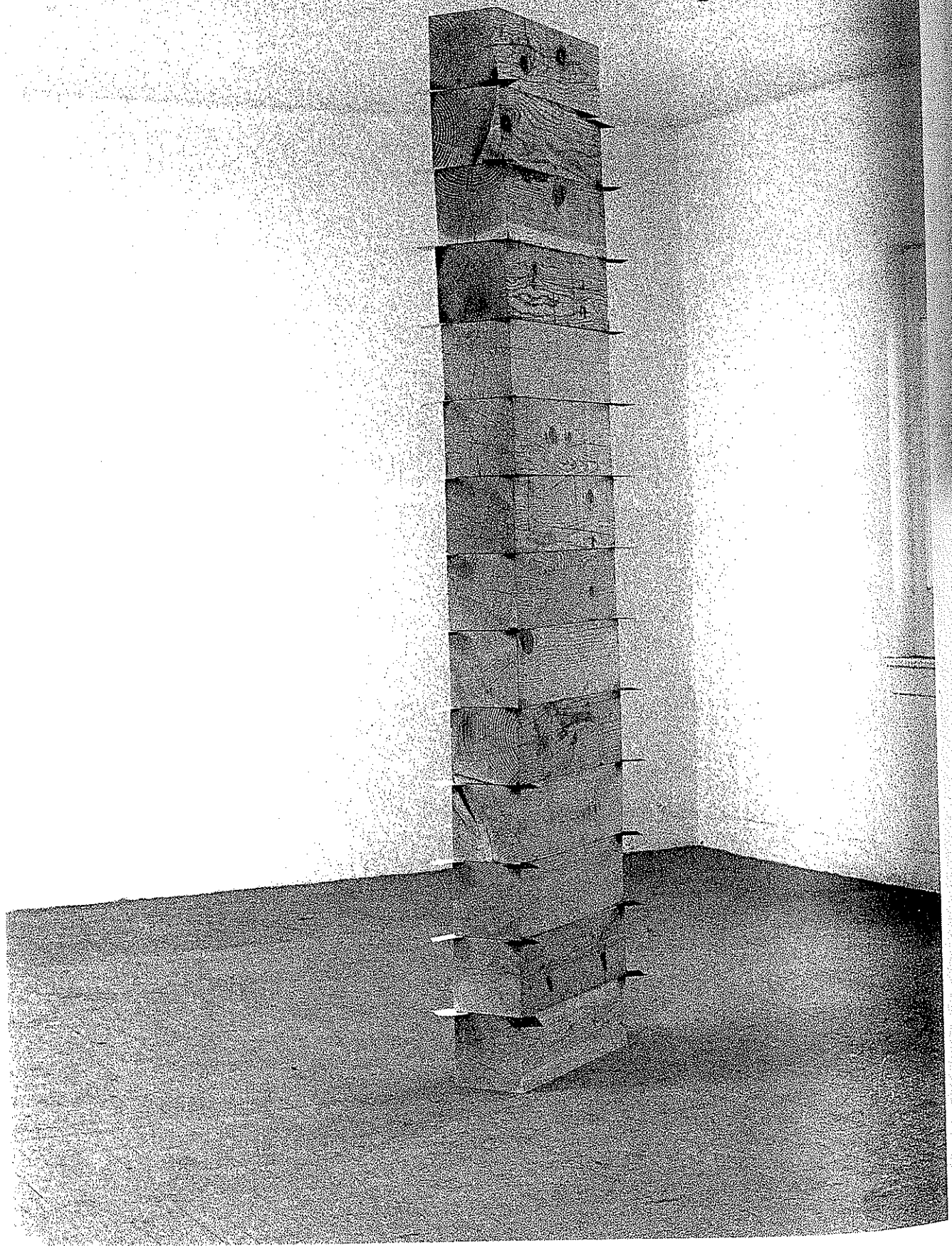
Although Serra's Prop pieces offer an insightful precedent, Goldstein's inspiration primarily came from Carl Andre's "stacks."⁶ This influence becomes especially apparent in Goldstein's next series of sculptures, exhibited at New York's OK Harris gallery in December 1972. Like those at Pomona, these sculptures relied entirely upon a balance negotiated between the material components and the ever-present force of gravity. However, the newer sculptures were composed of long, two-by-four planks that presented more complex and elegant forms. One critic even described their spiraling shapes as "miraculous"; for once again they seemed to defy gravity without the assistance of nails or other bindings.⁷ Nevertheless, one strong vibration—like a fist pounding on a table or some one jumping nearby—and these sculptures would crumble, their elegant shapes fragmenting, leaving a heap of planks scattered across the floor. In fact, Goldstein demonstrated as much in his films—*A Glass of Milk* and *Some Plates*—produced during the almost two years that elapsed between the Pomona and Harris exhibitions.

Although Goldstein's work has been the subject of numerous exhibitions and essays, little has been written about his sculptures. None of the originals exists anymore, which partially accounts for this critical reticence as well as their absence in the recent retrospective mounted at the Museum für Moderne Kunst.⁸ Moreover, after 1972, Goldstein gave up making sculpture to focus on his better-known film work, which Winer said was a direct outcome of the sculptures he exhibited at Pomona.⁹ Nevertheless, Goldstein always situated his artistic practice in terms of Minimalist sculpture. His focus, however, was not on the medium per se; rather, he latched onto Minimalism's theatricality, which appeared initially in his sculptures as a dangerous discourse with gravity, and was later developed as a more pictorial value.¹⁰

In the gallery space, Goldstein's control over the events that developed was limited; film on the other hand provided a space in which Goldstein could enact the events his sculptures only threatened. Thus,

JACK GOLDSTEIN'S SCULPTURES IMAGINE DANGER CONSEQUENCES

Marie B. Shurkus





11. Dercon.

Some Plates (1972) opens with a static camera monitoring a stack of over one hundred plates towering in what appears to be an empty room. Shot through a blue gel at a dramatic angle, the space acquires a mysterious, dreamlike quality that vaguely references horror films. Without explication a booming sound suddenly echoes from a corner outside the film-frame. A few seconds later, closer now, it booms again. This process is repeated with the stack of plates wobbling more each time and threatening collapse. As the sound advances, a shadowy figure enters the frame and is seen jumping up and down at regular intervals. With the source of the noise now revealed, fear dissipates but anticipation remains, for the task at hand has become clear. When the stack finally topples, viewers experience a discernable sense of relief. Unlike the sculptures, there is no violence or danger in viewers' experience of this film, only the theater of anticipation. In film Goldstein found a tool for extracting this theatrical quality and manipulating it as a pictorial value that images could convey directly, separated from the material constraints of his sculptures.

For Goldstein the medium of an artwork was simply a tool for constructing distance between images and viewers." In this regard, the sculptural towers exhibited at Pomona mark the beginnings of an effort to control and specifically manipulate this distance for the purposes of his more pictorial concerns. Ultimately, the Pomona sculptures were designed to confront viewers with a sense of danger and thereby engage them in a manner similar to the suspense of a theatrical drama. Like theater, Goldstein's sculptures were capable of sustaining the presence of danger over an artificially extended period of time. In other words, by suspending movement and keeping it on hold, the sculptures specifically increased the temporal, as opposed to spatial, distance between viewers and the transmission of events. The films on the other hand reversed this formula; they increased the spatial distance by occupying a separate, inaccessible space. Accordingly, the films followed the simple formula of television, which is a one-way transmission. As Brian Massumi once observed about a soccer game, "Through the TV audience the

12. Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual* (London: Duke University Press, 2002), 80.
13. David Salle specifically associated Goldstein's work with the presentational effects of television; see his "Distance Equals Control," in *Jack Goldstein: Distance Equals Control* (Buffalo: Hallwalls, 1978), 1–11. Bruce Grenville extends this discussion to technology in general; see his "The Spectacle of Technology," in Bruce Grenville, Jack Goldstein, and Fiona McLeod, *Jack Goldstein* (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1992), 6–19.
14. Kosaka.
15. Ibid.
16. Goldstein, "Performances," *Jack Goldstein: Films, Records, Performances and Aphorisms, 1971–1984*, 67.
17. Michael Brewster, email exchange with author, June 6, 2010.
18. For a discussion of how desire and dread operate throughout Goldstein's oeuvre, see Jean Fisher, "Jack Goldstein," in *Jack Goldstein: Feuer, Körper, Licht* (Erlangen, Germany: Städtische Galerie Erlangen, 1985).
19. Goldstein, "Performances."

play folds out of its own event space and into another. The televised game enters the home as a domestic player.¹² Home viewers, however, cannot affect the events broadcast through their television. Goldstein's recognition of this basic condition of media transmission was apparent as early as 1972, when he literally recreated his sculptural towers in the form of a stack of plates and enacted the drama that the gallery space had only allowed him to present as a threatening potential.¹³

Occurring one semester into his graduate studies at California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), Goldstein's first solo exhibition at Pomona College marked a significant turning point in the development of his artwork and career. In Winer, the young, new curator at Pomona College, Goldstein found an intellectual partner who would facilitate the development of his career. Together the two hosted dinners, organized exhibitions, and helped strengthen a growing sense of community among a younger group of artists who saw themselves as distinctly separate from the more established "Venice Beach" crowd.

"We were Downtown Boys," Kosaka proudly recalled.¹⁴ Friends for life, Goldstein met Kosaka at Chouinard, where they worked as janitors under the supervision of another undergrad—Al Ruppertsberg. According to Kosaka, Ruppertsberg's obsession with collecting Americana greatly inspired Goldstein's use of imagery; in fact, when Kosaka first saw Goldstein's films from the mid-seventies (*White Dove*, *Bone China*, etc.), he thought Ruppertsberg had made them.¹⁵ By all accounts, Kosaka also had a major impact on Goldstein, exposing him to ideas of duration, Japanese aesthetics, and the traditions of Noh theater. Kosaka specifically recalls explaining to Goldstein how Yves Klein's work was influenced by his study of judo, which entails throwing bodies on mats that momentarily retain visible imprints. This insight informed Goldstein's 1971 performance *A Flight of Steps*, staged on Pomona College's campus. Goldstein directed his collaborator (Kosaka) to climb the stairs and leave a footprint on each step, including one atop Goldstein's white-clad body, lying prostrate across one step. According to Goldstein, the footprint became an image that left the residue of a presence.¹⁶ However, much more than defining representation as an indexical imprint, Goldstein was investigating how images function as forces that transmit energy from one body to another.

Goldstein's understanding of the image as a transmission of energy becomes particularly evident in what was no doubt his most dangerous work, namely his untitled "burial" piece (1971), staged on the CalArts campus. For this work, Goldstein was interred in a box with a red light installed above ground that was supposed to pulsate in tandem with Goldstein's heartbeat throughout the night. In actuality, Goldstein was dug up not long after the performance started. According to Michael Brewster, who built the gadget that was supposed to convert Goldstein's heartbeat into the pulsating light, the mechanics didn't quite work. Too many other bodily sounds interfered with isolating Goldstein's heartbeat. Brewster explained, "We settled on some EKG skin sensors running through an amplifier...[but] Jack was hyper-nervous and squirmed around a lot, loosening the sensors."¹⁷ Some critics have interpreted the pulsating red light from this performance as a symbolic representation of Goldstein's life, but from a strictly mechanical perspective it was a transmission that was specifically designed to translate a beating sound into a pulsing visual image that appeared in a new context, transformed and detached from the body that had generated it.

Prior to his "burial" piece, Goldstein had created a series of nine performances that along with his films specifically developed this notion of the image as a transmission. Following in the task-based approach established by Happenings, Goldstein's performances operated within specific parameters, such as extinguishing a row of lit candles by running back and forth. In a related, more harrowing performance, *A Street at Night* (1972) Goldstein ran back and forth across a busy street at night. Dressed in a white T-shirt, his visibility was determined by the lights of passing automobiles, an effect that seemed to articulate his presence as if it were an image. As happened with the Pomona sculptures, the audience's encounter with this "image" was fraught with apprehension, a combination of desire and dread that recognized the potentially dangerous consequences of this event.¹⁸ Yet, unlike what happened with the sculptures, this "image" was not suspended on hold. "The action itself takes precedence over the body," Goldstein explained, "locating intervals or spaces within the stream of traffic through which it develops its own internal almost mechanical rhythm."¹⁹ Thus, where the sculptures relied upon a towering accumulation of components to create apprehension, the

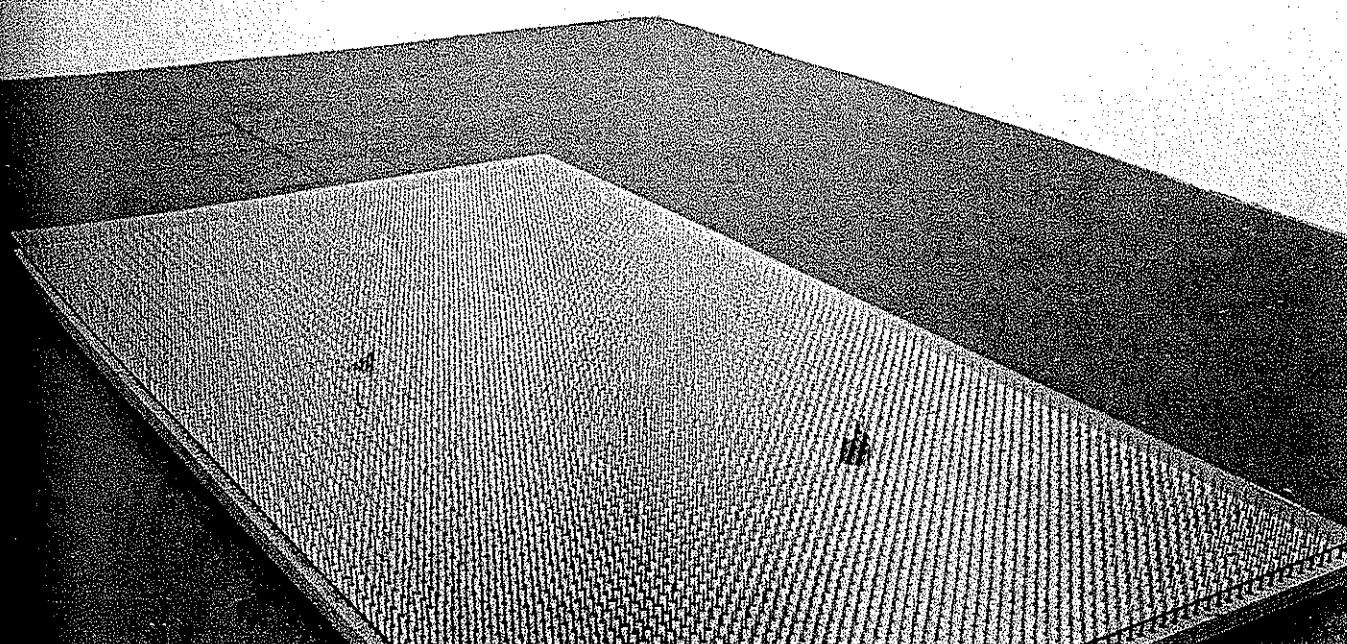
See Morgan Fisher, 28.
See Michael Newman, "Michael Newman Talks to Jack Goldstein," (1981) reprinted in Jack Goldstein, Yves Aupetitallot, and Lionel Bovier, *Jack Goldstein: 03.02-28.04.2002* (Grenoble: Magasin, Centre National d'Art Contemporain, 2002), 87.

performances engaged a temporal composition based on repetition, which conjoined apprehension with expectation (a combination that informed his later use of the film-loop format).

Central to Goldstein's use of repetitive actions is its effect on the fragmenting image, which does not disappear as much as it transforms. *A Glass of Milk* (1972) offers an early example of this insight. The opening scene depicts a full glass set atop a folding card table. A fist comes down on the corner, shattering the still silence of the image. The pounding itself is not loud but it reverberates on the soundtrack, enhancing the sense of its force. Repeated regularly, the pounding fist eventually causes the milk to splatter across the artificial wood-grain laminate of the tabletop. As Goldstein noted about his performance in traffic, the repetitive force of the pounding fist creates a temporal rhythm that enters viewers' bodies like the backbeat of a familiar tune, causing viewers to anticipate its next impact on the table. In fact, Goldstein strategically controlled the duration of his films such that when they concluded, viewers were "left with this thing in [their] head[s] afterwards."²⁰

Significantly, the milk spilt on the tabletop creates a white pattern, effectively another image that not only references abstract expressionist painting but also causes the image of the faux wood-grain to recede

and seemingly disappear into what now appears as a black background. Despite this visual effect, Goldstein was acutely aware that images are never composed of concrete materials—be it milk, wood, or paint; rather images are a form of light and energy moving through matter—the matter of wooden sculptures, ceramic plates, and even viewers' bodies.²¹ Inherent to Goldstein's work is an understanding that visual representations convey more than subject matter or signification; they also transmit energy, which like music adds temporal qualities to the other subject matter being conveyed. His sculptures provided a first glimpse of his effort to investigate how this "virtual," more theatrical register of the image operates; his films and later audio recordings develop this investigation much further.



GLENN PHILLIPS How did you first come to Los Angeles?

HIROKAZU KOSAKA I came in 1966 to go to Chouinard Art Institute. My parents insisted that I receive an American education. When I came to the United States, I brought fear; there was a language problem, a cultural difference. During the occupation in Japan in the 1940s and '50s, I met American soldiers. Seeing American soldiers with rifles coming into the house with their boots on was very scary. I came from Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan. You see thousand-year-old homes there, and merchants that go back hundreds of years.

I never knew the word "art." In Japan, it's called craftsmen or artisans. The Chinese ideogram is three symbols: ear, sound, and ladder, to support it. We have to hear it, the sound of the crafts. That's how I grew up: I thought brush-makers were artists. Paint-makers were artists. We didn't have museums. The museums were Buddhist temples, and the walls were screens that were painted five or six hundred years ago. Japanese gardeners were artists. I thought, coming to Chouinard Art Institute, that I would be learning something in that line of craftsmen. But Chouinard was very different.

GP What were the other students like?

HK The first year, I met many non-Americans: people from Mexico, people from Europe, one or two Japanese. The students were very diverse. I always thought Americans were six feet tall, blue eyes. I was surprised. It was nothing like what I imagined. Most of my teachers were draftsmen in the lineage of Rico Lebrun. The first year was figure drawing for eight hours a day. I think there were thirty students in the class. We drew with charcoal. That's all we did that first year.

GP And then you studied painting after that?

HK It was general studies: We had drawing class, painting class, sculpture class. I had an incredible handicap with language, but one of my interests was art history. Our teacher was a writer for the *Los Angeles Times*.

GP—Jules Langsner.

HK Yes. He was showing some Chinese and Japanese paintings, and one of the paintings was from my neighbor's temple. I told him this, and he was very surprised that I'd seen this painting. He

asked me to sit around on the patio, talking about these paintings. He was also very fascinated with experimental art. The name Gutai came up. And I said, Jules, I know these guys.

GP So you had known some of the Gutai artists in Japan.

HK Yes, I knew some of them as a teenager. There was a publication that came out around 1956–57, which I had. My high school teacher was very experimental, and he was showing these photographs. I had collected a lot of photographs of that period.

GP And what did you think of that work? Did you think of it as performance, or photography, or was it just another approach to art making?

HK I think when I came to Chouinard, Allan Kaprow's book on Happenings had already been printed. There were Gutai photographs in that book. That was very surprising. The word "Happening" was a kind of fashion for that period, not so much the word "performance." I don't think Gutai group called them happenings or performances. The word Gutai means concrete forms. That's what's Mr. [Jiro] Yoshihara, the leader of the group, was concentrating on. He painted circles all his life. The circle connotes Zen *ensō*, meaning empty. I think that's the word Gutai was trying to say something about, this Buddhist notion of emptiness. I don't think Allan Kaprow knew that. I talked to him a couple of times about that, and he just said, "I don't understand." But John Cage was profoundly moved by *ensō*. He did a lot of pieces about that.

I think my potential for making art was just seated in certain periods. I did well at drafting, and I did well in painting, but I think there was a limitation. The Gutai artists really influenced my work after my junior year. I started to see pictures of Joseph Beuys's work in *Art International* magazine, and I saw Conceptual art, like Douglas Huebler. I saw pictures of earth art—[Robert] Smithson, [Dennis] Oppenheim, people like that. But when it became body art—that really brought back the Gutai group. Especially [Saburo] Murakami going through paper, or [Kazuo] Shiraga in the mud, looking for his art.

At the same time, I came from a very traditional background, and there was a conflict. I think the conflict was the Vietnam War. I was seeing the Vietnam War and looking at the images of bodies, just piling up. That also went back to Rico Lebrun's drawings for Dante's *Inferno* from the early sixties.

HIROKAZU KOSAKA
INTERVIEWED BY
GLENN PHILLIPS

Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles,
California, June 2, 2010

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He was an artist in the army, and he went to death camps and drew all these incredible bodies. I also knew the photographs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But the first image that really blinded me was the Vietnamese monk who burned himself. I think it was in Saigon, and he just poured gasoline over himself and burned himself. He was so stationary. It was like meditation in a way, in this posture, and then he just collapsed. And I thought: I could do it. I wanted to do it. But...I couldn't do it.

But I wanted to do something. The word "perception" comes back. When *Avalanche* magazine came out, I think it melted into my mind a kind of a perception. *The Primacy of Perception* by [Maurice] Merleau-Ponty. That book was very popular. And [Claude] Lévi-Strauss. Jack [Goldstein] and I were hitting the bookshops constantly, trying to catch up.

GP How did you meet Jack Goldstein?

HK I met him at Chouinard, probably around 1967. We became good friends. He had a studio with Jim Morphesis, and I used to go to his space. Senior year, he moved into Ron Cooper's studio, and he asked me if I would share. It was \$100 per month for ten thousand square feet. We shared it 50/50. We thought maybe we could do some kind of a business, so we created GK Frames (G = Goldstein, K = Kosaka). It was a big fashion in that period to have a Plexiglas frame—clean and minimal—so we were doing a lot of Plexiglas.

In our studio, *Avalanche*, *Artforum*, you name it, the current issues were always on the coffee table, and we had intense conversations. Jack was just intense. It's forty years ago, but still, I live that moment. It's really sentimental, good old days.



I don't know where Jack met Helene Winer. Jack was kind of a romantic guy. One day, he said he met a very smart woman. Helene saw my work through Jack, and coming to our studio. She wanted to curate something, so she called Wolfgang Stoerchle, Chris Burden, and me, and said, "Let's do a performance every week for three weeks in March 1972." The first piece I did with an audience was for Pomona.

GP Oh, that was the first one?

HK I think it was.

GP Before we talk about that piece, maybe you should describe some of your earlier performances, ones that didn't have an audience.

HK Let's look in this book. [Opens a book of his artworks.] This piece was much earlier. I was in a forest.

GP This piece is called *Pineapple Juice*?

HK It's in 1970. I got a can of pineapple juice and poured it all over my body, and then I became an entomologist. [Laughs.] This was one of the first pieces.

The second one was this electric blanket with feathers on it. This was not so much a performance, but more an installation piece. It's almost similar to Allen Ruppersberg's work. He would install something, take photographs, and that is the piece. But why an electric blanket? Electric blankets had been really important in my life. When I came to the United States, the apartment person gave me an electric blanket, and he said, "Put this on." I didn't know what it was, but I was fascinated. We had never seen this in Japan. We had huge cotton blankets over us. I was just amazed by the electric blanket. It was so warm! I had a dream the first night, with this incredible floating sensation. Ever since then, I've had this notion of America being an electric blanket.

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GP *Condition* (1970) shows an image of your feet?

HK This is a film. The feet go up and down, as if levitating. This is a forty-five-minute piece, just levitating back and forth.

GP Wolfgang also made levitating pieces.

HK With the mirror, going back and forth. Levitation and astral projection was a fashion of the period. That word "projection" came up many times. I didn't know the word. I looked in the dictionary, what is a projection? What does that mean? "Astral projection," what is that? Then the words became familiar to me in both languages, Japanese and English.

GP What about *Music Box* (1971)? You're crouched inside a tunnel.

HK When I was fourteen, I went to Spain to learn flamenco guitar. I knew flamenco music, Persian-Indian music, Moorish music, and Japanese Gagaku, the traditional court music. So I created a kind of Silk Road music, and there was a guy who built the music boxes for me, five of them. I would go to different places to play the boxes. There was a mile-long tunnel in downtown [Los Angeles]. It was owned by the Department of Water and Power. It was gated, but I asked them if I could do something, and they said okay. There was no audience, except for the guy who opened the tunnel. I had a tripod, and I took this photograph.

GP Let's talk about your performance at Pomona. Why don't you describe the performance?

HK I went back to the electric blanket. I wanted to do a projection piece, to astral project my body. I had the electric blanket on really hot. I was under the blanket, and on top of that I had a couple hundred pounds of dirt over me. When the audience came in, they saw me lying on the floor. I was trying to project my body to someplace else. About forty minutes later, I got out of the dirt and the blanket, and I lay down in another location. An assistant, I think a student, used a big industrial sifter to sift that same dirt over my body. I laid there for another ten minutes or so. Then I got up, and I had projected myself to a different place. I had a line of my body to a different space. That was the piece. About a week later, Wolfgang called me. He said, "We've gotta talk. I want to know what you did there." It was just prior to his performance [at Pomona]. He said he saw a photograph

GP What about this piece, *Stage* (1970)? You set up all these objects on a stage, and you're manipulating them for the sound?

HK Yes. Firecrackers, an air pump, rolling marbles on the ground. This is also a walking place. People will walk different textures. When you approach a Japanese garden, the architecture will provide you with different textures for your feet or even the surroundings. It's about axial orientation. Wolfgang Stoerchle was also interested in this. I told him about textural kinds of perceptions—not just in looking, but how we approach different places. We talked for maybe three or four days about this. He was working with plaster of Paris. He would drop plaster slabs on the steps of University of California, Santa Barbara. He said he approached the steps with this same kind of premise.

of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. Someone was standing in a bank, and the atomic bomb blasted, and the shadow was there, burned onto the wall. He said it reminded him of that. I said, "Yes." He said in Germany, there was a guy who jumped from a thirty-story building onto the cement, and it just flattened him. The image of his body was still on the concrete asphalt. He said, "That was a very powerful thing that you did," sort of congratulating me. I think that conversation made me really happy.

I think Helene really gambled, in a way, to do something like that in a traditional university. I remember talking to Jack, "Is she going to get fired doing this kind of stuff?" If it were an art school like CalArts that would be okay, but Pomona? Jack and I talked about it, and he said, "Oh, I think it's okay." Chris's piece and my piece were kind of conservative, but I think Wolfgang's piece—pissing in the gallery—upset a lot of people.

GP *Five Hour Run* (1972) was another powerful work.

HK This was at a gallery called Mori's Form. This was the first opening at the gallery. My friend Kikuo Mori was the owner of the gallery, and he told me that Mr. Shimamoto Shozo from the Gutai group was coming to do a performance. He said, "I want you to do something to purify the space." So I laid down lines of string. I nailed down the lines, and I ran for five hours in the gallery. I had water, and I was running, running, running. Five hours came, and I went home. I was exhausted. Then the audience came. In fact, Jack and Helene came by. The only thing they saw was a string. "Where's the art?" The gallery director told them: "You're breathing it."

GP And that was the inaugural show at Mori's Form?

HK The next week, Shimamoto Shozo came. Many Gutai people came. We did what was probably the first Southern California exhibition of Gutai photographs. I still have them. [Pulls out photographs.] This was the exhibition.

GP When was this?

HK This was 1972. These are the original photographs. Not too many people have these photographs, even the Gutai members. Many of these are different views than what you see in books.

GP These are amazing.

HK It's shocking, that these guys were doing these things in 1956.

GP It's so early.

HK And for me it's amazing because Osaka was devastated in the war. I can't believe these guys were making art, and their wives were working. These kinds of solutions, around Gutai, it changed my entire life about how I looked at art. That's Mr. Jiro Yoshihara; he did the circle. These are pieces at the Expo in 1970, the Osaka Expo. They did a huge performance of Gutai members. Many of the photographs are black-and-white. I asked them, what color was this? It was red!!! All kinds of colors. I can't imagine. For a twenty-year old kid looking at this stuff—. I thought: I'd better not paint any more decoration art, you know? They really taught me how to see different things, not just art. Especially Mr. Murakami. In 1973, I went back to Japan, and I stayed with him. His mother and wife were still living, and they took me in as their son.

Mr. Murakami was part of a gallery in Kyoto, in an old neighborhood. "Hiro," he said, "I want you to do something." I was feeling so bad about the Vietnam War. My girlfriend left me alone, and I was feeling very bad. I said "Okay." And Kikuo Mori had moved back to Japan from Los Angeles, and he asked me to do something, too. In two weeks, I went to the space. I had white paper on the floor, and one chair. I came in and a hundred people were in the audience sitting on the floor. I took a guitar. I embedded a razor blade into my index finger, and I played almost forty-five minutes of flamenco music. I was so excited, the blood just kept pouring. The entire floor was blood. But the fiery flamenco music excited everyone, too. After that, I just walked away. I took a train to Kobe, and then from Kobe I took a ferry to Shikoku Island. I went to the temple, and the next day, two priests and myself began walking around the perimeter of the island.

The gypsies play this incredible music influenced by the Moorish and nomadic people from Punjab, India. They came all the way to Andalusia, Spain, around the fifteenth century. They brought many things. So, I was doing something like that. I was a gypsy, nomadic. I traveled for three months around the perimeter of the island, a thousand-mile walk. When I came back, there was no such thing as art any more. I became a fully ordained Buddhist priest after that. I learned something that was totally different from art; to kill the self was the idea. And I lost it; I lost the egoism of making something.

GP How did you reconcile body art and Conceptual art with your studies to become a priest?

HK It was a polar opposition for me: there's the egotism of making art and aspiring to become famous, and the opposite is non-ego. That was really a conflict at the beginning, but I pursued a form of

meditation called standing meditation, which includes Zen archery. The notion of hitting the perfect shot is the action without intervening thought. No thinking; just do it, forget it. That was very important. In my study of Buddhism, the teachers who taught me the old script, incredibly, I think they knew where I came from. Some of them asked me what I did. And they would take that piece, *Five Hour Run*, for example, and put that into an historical context, and immediately I said, "God, these guys were doing this in the fifteenth century in a rock garden, or even a circle painting." They were doing exactly what I was doing. So I was sort of awakened to a certain level of human nature. Archery had a lot to do with that. It's an instrument, a vehicle that awakened me. It's not about hitting the target, it's about letting go of your ego, of *not* hitting the target. That kind of teaching really defined what I am rather than who I was in the past tense.

At the temple, I was one of the monks who attended a huge gong outside. It weighed a couple of tons. I would hit it when it was six o'clock. And it echoes. Immediately, it is disappearing. And I thought to myself, everything is impermanent. That's what it signifies, that gong. That was my job; every day at 6 p.m. I hit that gong fifteen times to feel the impermanence of all things. I read *The Tale of Heike*, a twelfth-century novel, and the first line is about hitting the gong, and the impermanence of all things. And then, after three years in the monastery, the head priest said, "Time to get out of here." And so I left.

GP When did you come back to Los Angeles?

HK In 1977, when the headquarters of this particular denomination was looking for a minister in Los Angeles. But during that time I was also going back and forth to Boston, New York, taking classes with senior ministers. My study was in esoteric Buddhism, mandala, and Sanskrit. Finally, I ended up in the Harvard-Yenching library, and assisting the curator at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, on an exhibition of Japanese Buddhist treasures. So I lived in Boston for a while, from 1980–82. At that time, Los Angeles was already creating the Japanese American Cultural & Community Center (JACCC), where I am now artistic director. The curator there asked if I could help, so I came back and they hired me as a preparator. I liked it. It was physical and not too academic.

Then, in 1983, Julie Lazar from MOCA [The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles] asked me if I would like to do a new performance as part of the Exploration series. It was going to be in the theater at JACCC, and all these young people were part of it.

I was so out of it—performance art—but I nonchalantly said, "Okay, I'll do something." I did an archery performance, *The Contemplations on the Asymmetry of a Bow*. Chris Burden came to see the performance, and Barbara Smith, Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, those guys. That brought kind of an inertia to me. I thought I should do something more creative. So from academics, I started to do grandiose performance. Then I started to bring the Buddhist congregation into the performance. Not just performance art, but small gatherings of Buddhist music and things like that.

It intermingles, but it's independent of each other, my personal life. The monastic versus Chouinard Art Institute—it's very similar, but bi-polar oppositions. If it weren't for Chouinard Art Institute, I would never have been awakened into certain levels of Buddhist teachings.

I'm very lucky. I had great teachers to show me the path. But I think that path—I don't know if it's bad or good. To find the answer—that was never in monastic life. Once you question, you have to have an answer, and that answer affirms your ego. It's an appetite, a dessert, the idea that the answer is going to be affirmed. So, I had to let that go. I asked: What is art, who is this, who is that? That, too, I think I let it go. That was one of the teachings. It was very hard to let it go. Even today—can I let go my bow and arrow? No, I can't. [Points to the Gutai photographs.] Can I let go of all this stuff? No, I can't. But I've seen people let go and, I don't know. Jack let himself go in certain ways. I'm kind of envious. There was a period of my life when I wanted to imitate the Vietnamese monk who burned himself. How can I do that? To be so still but so angry. God, it was an incredible meditation; just an inferno, you know? I don't think I could do it.

So in the meantime, I've been doing like Bruce Nauman said, "I do my art because it kills my time." I think about my kids, I've got to get these guys in college! I'm artistic director at JACC. That is a full-time job. I own my Japanese archery club, which is very heavy. It started in 1916, and I have to keep it going. I have little jobs to do, and it's hard work. My social boundaries still linger, you know?

So I can't think about the monk who burned himself. Occasionally, I think, wow, it would be nice. But the maintenance of all this work I have to do, it keeps me busy.

MARIE B. SHURKUS Your work really seems to stand out in the context of the late sixties. Who were some of your influences?

WILLIAM LEAVITT Ed Kienholz was a really strong influence because his tableaux were narrative and narrative was something I was very sympathetic to. Also Ed Ruscha. He did a show at Ferus Gallery in 1965 that was important for me, but I haven't seen any of those paintings since. They depicted birds, pencils, and fish; and if I remember correctly, the bird was a Baltimore oriole. He used those three elements in different arrangements as figures on a black background. And these paintings were in line with my interest in the absurd. Ruscha didn't really make much of those paintings later, but they did have an influence on me in terms of their presentation of the image as icon without its usual connection to meaning.

MS A similar sensibility seems to be operating in your piece *Random Selections* from 1969.

WL Yes, I used three-by-five-inch cards that had pictorial elements on them. I think there were maybe twenty different items such as smoke, wire, photo, cage, fish, and sand. They were just banal things from the world. I shuffled the cards and dealt three, then made a little drawing of the set, and then took a photograph of the actual objects in the combinations given by the cards. I think I only made three or four different photos of the various combinations, though I used that technique later on to generate material for scripts.

MS In 1969, you also collaborated with Bas Jan Ader, right?

WL I met Bas at Claremont Graduate School in 1965, where we were both students. Later we worked together on a publication and some outdoor installation performances; one we did at Immaculate Heart College was called *A Hillside Work* (1969). It was a waterfall of highway flares, laid out with one at the top, two, three...until it spread out at the bottom of the hill. All these flares were lit sequentially from the top to the bottom, creating a sense of movement unfolding. We amplified the sound of the flares with a microphone, so that you heard the hissing of the flares as they slowly burned out and the sound faded.

MS Audio is also a significant part of the work you showed in your first solo exhibition at Eugenia Butler Gallery in 1970.

WL Yes, I installed three pieces at Eugenia Butler. *Forest Sound* was composed of seven artificial plastic trees set on a sand hillock. A yellow spotlight lit the trees from below so you could see the concrete bases of the trees. There was also a tape recorder playing a looped recording of mockingbirds, which came from a speaker in the trees. The second installation, *Garden Sound*, was a clump of plastic vegetation, a wooden box with microphone and amplifier, and a speaker buried in the plants. A pump circulated water in the box, so you heard the sound of running water coming from the plastic plants. Each piece had its own room. *Wind Sound* was in the office area of the gallery. On one wall of the room was a tape player with a looped recording of the wind going through a radio transmitter—built from a little Radio Shack kit. On the other wall was a radio that received and broadcast the sound of the wind. Actually, the wind sounded a lot like static, but you also heard a whishing sound. I was mostly interested in the absurdist idea of broadcasting the sound of wind over a radio ten feet away—a wind environment in the office. I was interested in creating something that was illusionistic in terms of mood, or story, or place, or situation.

MS That sense of creating the illusion of a mood or a place also seems to describe your approach to narrative. The last time we spoke about narrative, you mentioned an influence coming from soap operas as well as from the author Alain Robbe-Grillet.

WL The banality of soap operas fits in with my interest in suburbia. I thought the style of soap operas was marvelous in this absurd way. It wasn't that I wanted to disparage it; I just wanted to hold it there and think, What is this? I wanted to look at it not through a plot sequence, but through how it was presented. It does seem kind of opposite to what Robbe-Grillet was creating—this very reduced description of a place, a situation, pared down to a point where there was just this repetition of the language and a kind of blankness that he created, sometimes with a layer of dread underneath, but not giving you too much. He kind of left you to fill in the spaces yourself. So I was interested in how he did that. I was also interested in the philosophy of phenomenology, which asks that we look at things before judgment, and try not to assign any value to our investigations of the world, but just look at it and bracket it to see if something else will come up.

WILLIAM LEAVITT INTERVIEWED BY MARIE B. SHURKUS

William Leavitt's home, Los Angeles,
California, January 21, 2010

A Summer evening in the backyard and garden of a contemporary hillside home in Southern California. There is a swimming pool, a flagstone patio; a redwood fence, some lawn, and the usual tropical landscaping of succulents, ferns, leafy plants and flowering shrubs. The beauty of this setting is most evident at this time of day when the combination of lighted pool, soft garden lights, black sky, and the lights of surrounding houses comes into play.

On this particular evening a small cocktail party is being held on the patio adjoining the house. The guests are all close friends of the host and hostess. Their presence adds the elements of motion and sound to this scene; the men standing near the edge of the patio engaged in relaxed conversation, while the women sit in a loose circle of lawn chairs arranged on the lawn. Now the hostess comes out through the sliding glass doors on to the patio to announce that a light buffet supper is ready inside.

MS In interviews, Robbe-Grillet has talked about wanting to create a new structure for the novel that doesn't rely on plot. That seems to resonate with what you were doing. Critics have described your work as creating scenes that only suggest narrative. It's almost as if you were trying to occupy the gap between a story and its telling. Is that what you mean when you referred to some of your works as "Theater Objects"?

WL *The Silk* from 1975 was a kind of Theater Object. It was a one-act play and had actors, speech, movement, some kind of plot line. But it didn't have any of the drama or metaphor that a play would have. It went through the motions of a play, but it wasn't really theater. I thought of it as a play separated from the world of theater, outside of the world of drama, comedy and so forth, as a kind of element on its own. I thought of it as a kind of object.

MS Was it scripted?

WL Yes, scripted and directed. It wasn't random at all. As I said, I was very interested in soap operas and how uncondensed soap operas are, because soap operas take years for any plot point to really develop. They are always in a state of suspension; nothing is ever realized. In *The Silk*, I condensed it into thirty minutes and something actually changed. But the situations that were presented felt like soap opera situations.

MS So are Theater Objects a kind of performance art?

WL I don't think of it as performance art because it was imitating theater. There are other established styles of performance—cabaret, stand-up comedy—all these things that got folded into performance art in a raw form. So maybe I was doing something similar, imitating theater in a kind of raw, unpolished way. It was kind of parallel, but I wasn't interested in acting out these things myself as a performer. I was more interested in it as a distanced process or event that I could do theatrically.

MS By calling it an object, there's an implied reference to sculpture.

WL Well, I think that's interesting, because one thing I liked about live theater was that it was a kind of moving 3-D. You had these very strong sculptural elements that you could use spatially. I thought it was a kind of spatial sculpture. Some of these ideas I picked up from Bill Shepard, who taught theater at Immaculate Heart College. He had studied with Jerzy Grotowski and brought some of these techniques to Immaculate Heart's theater department. I sat in on their workshops and productions, so I was aware that there was another style of theater developing, another point of view in terms of how one could do a theater piece.

MS We kind of jumped ahead with the discussion of Theater Objects. Getting back to 1969, Ger van Elk and Al Ruppersberg were both included in the "When Attitudes Become Form" exhibition [curated by Harald Szeemann at Kunsthalle Bern].

WL Yes, for our group it was kind of a coup for Al to be in that show. Plus, the title of that show was very leading, as it validated the explorations and experiments we were engaged with here in Southern California.

MS Do you feel like there was a different flavor of Conceptual art going on in Los Angeles than in New York?

WL Oh, definitely. When you think about Ruscha's books—*Royal Road Test* (1967) or *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966)—they had a very absurd element, and they weren't concerned with academic language. I'm not sure the East Coast really was either, but what was happening out there seemed a little more minimal. It seemed like the work here brought in the real world more, what was actually going on in the city.

MS Did you consider yourself a Conceptual artist?

WL No, I didn't think that was exactly what I was doing. I read Conceptual art rather narrowly. When I consider Conceptual artists like Douglas Huebler, Lawrence Weiner, and Robert Barry, I think about how they usually used only language or photographs to create their works. I didn't feel like I was doing that. I felt that I was doing something more material, that I was using material to create a mood, or a social situation. For me, Conceptual art was really a doorway into narrative. I was interested in creating the situation that could result in a story. I wanted to lay the ground for a story, but not actually tell it.

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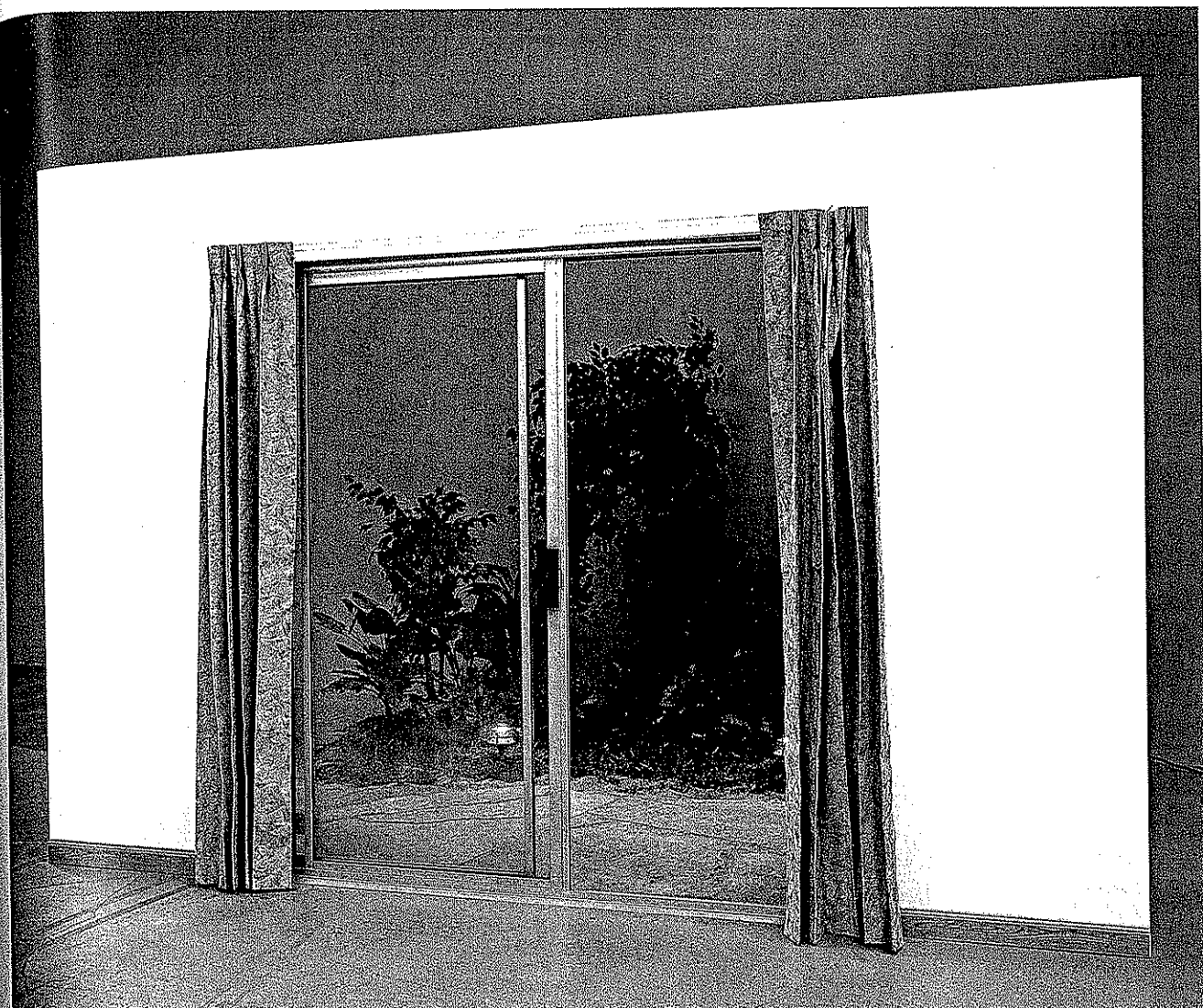
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MS In 1972, you, Bas, and Ger had your show at Pomona. You showed *California Patio* (1972), which seems to capture that sense of narrative. How did that piece come about?

WL It's interesting when one gets asked how a certain piece came about. When viewed from the present, these things almost seem to be autochthonous, like they just sprung out of the ground, fully armed, like the Titans. You don't even know where they came from. I do know that I was fascinated by suburbia. I had a catalog of swimming pools that was put out by a big swimming pool company in Los Angeles, and it had these great shots of people's backyards with their pools. I would just study it, as a kind of amateur sociologist. I was looking at all the different possibilities, and I was also interested in what was generic, or reduced. I wanted to see what I could do in terms of not being particular, maybe take from all of those backyards and present something that embodied all those middle-class patios. So I think I wanted to recreate something of that backyard suburban feeling, which was *California Patio*.

MS Helene [Winer] described your work as creating a space in the gallery that was actually quoting another space. Did you want people to look at *California Patio* and recognize it as something that was quoting suburban patios?

WL Well, I don't think I thought of it as quoting. I wanted it to have that direct reference to suburbia, but I also thought of it as an object in the gallery, that from one point of view, it could have a very illusionistic reference. If you just looked at the curtain and through the door, there would be something quite illusionistic about it. But, as a whole, it would be somewhat awkward, and you would see that the whole thing was really just this clunky wall with supports; it had a back, where it wasn't an illusion, it was just material. I liked it that you saw all the seams and the parts of it, what went into making the illusion.

MS Your approach of working from a magazine or catalogue and creating a general composite of what you saw makes me think of Cindy Sherman's work. It seems like your approach is related to what developed later in New York under the name of the Pictures Generation.

WL Yes, I think there's a correspondence—mostly with Cindy because she created her own scenes. They were called appropriated images, but they were actually pictures that she created herself in reference to the movies or some other popular media source. I didn't directly appropriate either. There was a lot made of John Baldessari and CalArts, and the whole idea that these images were lifted from existing publications. But that wasn't so important to me. Somehow I would arrive at the image, using those sources in some way, but not by copying them directly. I think too much was made of rephotographing. It's really just part of the tool kit, you know? Of course, theoretically it deals with the idea of authorship, which is interesting, but sometimes you want more from what's being rephotographed. I think John Baldessari and Cindy Sherman really supplied that; they put it into their own realm, added their personal interpretations of it, and twisted it enough so that it came alive again. They kind of recreated it.

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William Sontag '72

MARIE B. SHURKUS Your work changed significantly after you graduated from art school in 1967.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG I came out of Chouinard as a painter with a minor interest in sculpture. But once you come out of school, you have to start over again—or at least in those days you did. I had some savings bonds that my dad had put away for me, and so I had a year or so where I could just paint and get started. Somewhere in that period, I went to see Frank Stella's show at the Pasadena Art Museum. Looking at his Protractor series, I realized that he really knew what he was doing, and I didn't. So that's when I decided, I have to find my own language, my own voice. And that's when I really started over.

MS Is that when you started working on the aquarium pieces?

AR The aquariums that you bought then were almost minimalist objects, like a Larry Bell box. (See page 74) They had chrome sides, and tops with little lights in them. They were like 3-D canvases and a ready-made all at once. So they fit formally very well into my transition toward making more sculptural work. But what went inside the chrome aquariums became a much more personal kind of beginning. The whole idea of what an artwork could be was up for grabs, and that became my question, actually not just my question, but the question for my whole generation.

MS Your work *Al's Café* from 1969 really took that question and ran with it.

AR Well, it began with the aquariums. You can look at the café as just a giant aquarium. And *Al's Grand Hotel* (1971) is an extension of the café. The café is an extension of all the pieces that preceded it, beginning with the aquariums.

MS They seem like tableaux, three-dimensional images that people entered.

AR Well, what precede it are tableaux. And those indeed are images. When I made the three books—*23 Pieces*, *24 Pieces*, and *25 Pieces* (1968, 1970, and 1971)—those are about images, but they're also tableaux.

MS How did you decide what places to include in *23 Pieces*, for example?

AR I spent a lot of time driving all over Los Angeles, and California in general. Being from the Midwest, this was a great place to explore. Jack Goldstein and I would drive around town, look at things, and say: "That looks like a Robert Morris, or that looks like this other sculpture or earthwork."

MS Were you specifically looking for tableaux? I ask because a lot of the scenes have a dramatic emptiness to them, as if something is about to happen.

AR Well, I was looking for essences, kind of the essence of indescribable atmospheres, or whatever you want to call it. So, it's not only in the photographs, but it's in the aquariums. It's trying to capture something outside of art objects.

MS In 1970, you published *24 Pieces*, which focused more on empty hotel rooms, but you would alter them slightly. For example, in one of them, there's a picture taken off the wall.

AR There's a trace of something taking place, but it's only to indicate to the viewer that you can find traces like that anywhere. Anybody who walks into one of those places can find something like that.

MS In addition to location, there's often a clue that suggests a narrative that's left incomplete.

AR Yes, that really comes later, but it begins in those pieces.

MS Ed Ruscha also made books about locations.

AR Certainly, but almost everybody was making books at that time, because it was a way to make something that was not a museum piece or a gallery object. What I liked is that you could make something that could be distributed in a completely different way, and yet it was still art.

MS "The Location Piece" was your first solo exhibition, at the Eugenia Butler Gallery in 1969. When people arrived at the gallery—

AR They didn't encounter an empty gallery. That wasn't the point. There were a couple of minor pieces lying around, but the point was that they had to travel again. To go to see the real work—the show, really—they had to drive up La Cienega and come over to Sunset and Gardner, where I had rented offices much like this. Inside one office was the show.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG INTERVIEWED BY MARIE B. SHURKUS

Allen Ruppersberg's studio, El Segundo,
California, February 16, 2010

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she: I don't know. Nobody's up yet.



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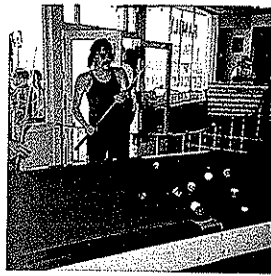
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he: Holed up in his room probably.
she: I suppose.



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he: Except Al.
she: Yeah, where is he?
he: I don't know. He said he would call.
she: You never heard from him?
he: Nope.



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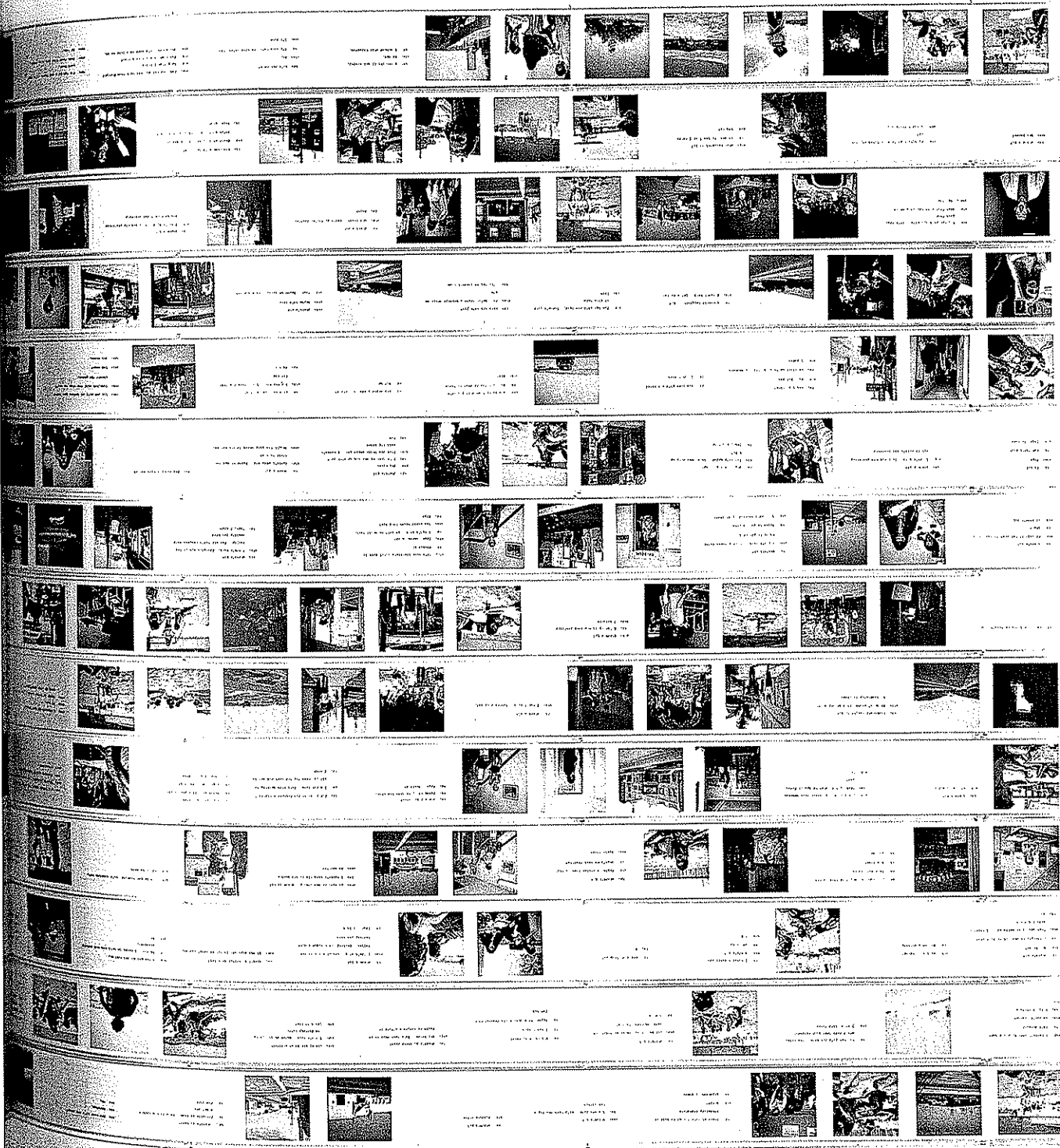
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she: Was Al in town when you left?
he: No. I think he went to Texas.
she: Yeah.

he: Has anybody seen Al lately?
he: Not me.



which was a room environment that you walked into. It was like walking into one of the aquariums, only it was real life, at its real scale, and it was located in a place where you would not expect to find such a thing.

MS Some critics suggested that the location—an old office rather than a gallery or artist's studio—created a relationship with detective novels and film noir. Helene Winner even once compared you to Los Angeles's fictional Detective Philip Marlowe.

AR I was very much influenced by Raymond Chandler and all of that stuff. People still say the same thing when they come to my current studio—it looks like an old detective office. And it is. It's from 1928, and all the details are still here. I like this kind of atmosphere. When I came out to Los Angeles in 1962, that sensibility was still around, in the post-war environment of the early sixties. I loved living in Hollywood. Part of it was the romance of old Hollywood; it was the time when Hollywood was being reinvented. I remember the curfew riots on the Sunset Strip; I was a participant in all of that, so that became part of my influences, too.

MS In 1969, when you opened *Al's Café*, were you afraid that people wouldn't get it?

AR Well, I was almost sure they wouldn't get it. And they didn't at first. I remember the opening night: everybody was looking around, wondering: What do we do? What is this? Everybody had to go through their initiation period, when they first came in, but word spread and people began to know what was happening. But the most significant reactions came from outside the art world. The LAPD [Los Angeles Police Department] infiltrated it with undercover cops. They saw people out on the streets, and you know, we were all hippies back then. They thought it was a drug ring or something. So they sent in undercover cops to try and mix in, but of course you could spot them instantly. That was the precursor to shutting it down. Because they found out what was going on in there—although they never really knew what was going on. The only thing that they knew was that I was selling beer without a license. So that's what shut it down.



MS Did you see *Al's Café* as having a relationship with Allan Kaprow's Happenings?

AR Absolutely. Happenings, combines, surrealism, dada, hippie culture, civil rights culture, drug culture, rock 'n' roll music, art, history—it was all mixed up at that time, which was a good thing. It's part of Southern California art history. Out here you have the history of George Herms, Wallace Berman, Ed Kienholz, and many others of all stripes. Assemblage seems in general very much an indigenous Los Angeles form. That's how it resonated for me.

MS Two years later you opened *Al's Grand Hotel*, which took the café one step further.

AR Well, it was just a bigger experience in many ways. It was located in a part of Los Angeles where there were lots of motels at the time, so it fit in to its surroundings more than the café. But, you know, when you ask somebody to spend the night somewhere, that's very different from inviting them for a cup of coffee. So, it's different at that level of experience.

MS The catalogue for *Al's Grand Hotel* is a kind of brochure.

AR It's a brochure because I thought I could sell some of the stuff and make some money, but I didn't. A lot was tossed out; but there are some objects that still exist, like the neon sign. Some of the objects got bought; they're out there, somewhere.

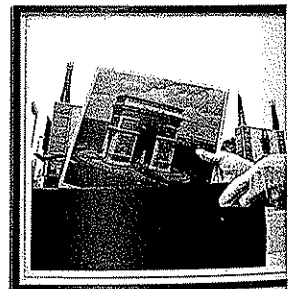
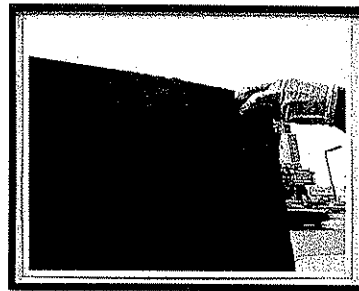
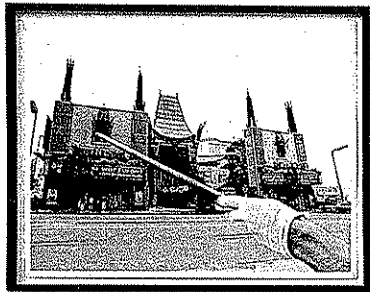
MS One of the things that comes through with café, as well as the hotel, is a focus on economic exchange as a kind of discourse.

AR Yes, I'm offering something as an artwork costs the same as its equivalent in the real world: an art object with a high price tag. It's the same with the books later on. The books were produced in order to sell something at a normal price and put them in a normal environment, like a bookstore.

MS Getting back to 1969, you were in the "October Month" exhibit that Seth Siegelaub organized; you were also in the "When Attitudes Become Form" exhibition [curated by Harald Szeemann], which must have been a big deal for you, being only 25 at the time.

AR Well, it didn't have the historical significance it does now. I mean, everybody certainly recognizes that it was an important show, but its importance also grew. If you look at the "When Attitudes Become Form" catalogue, it's a big tent. There are a lot of people in there underneath the same umbrella; a few years later would never be under the same umbrella. It was a very brief moment in time.

MS Let's talk about your exhibition at Pomona. It opened on Halloween in 1972. Several pieces had reference to magic; how did you get interested



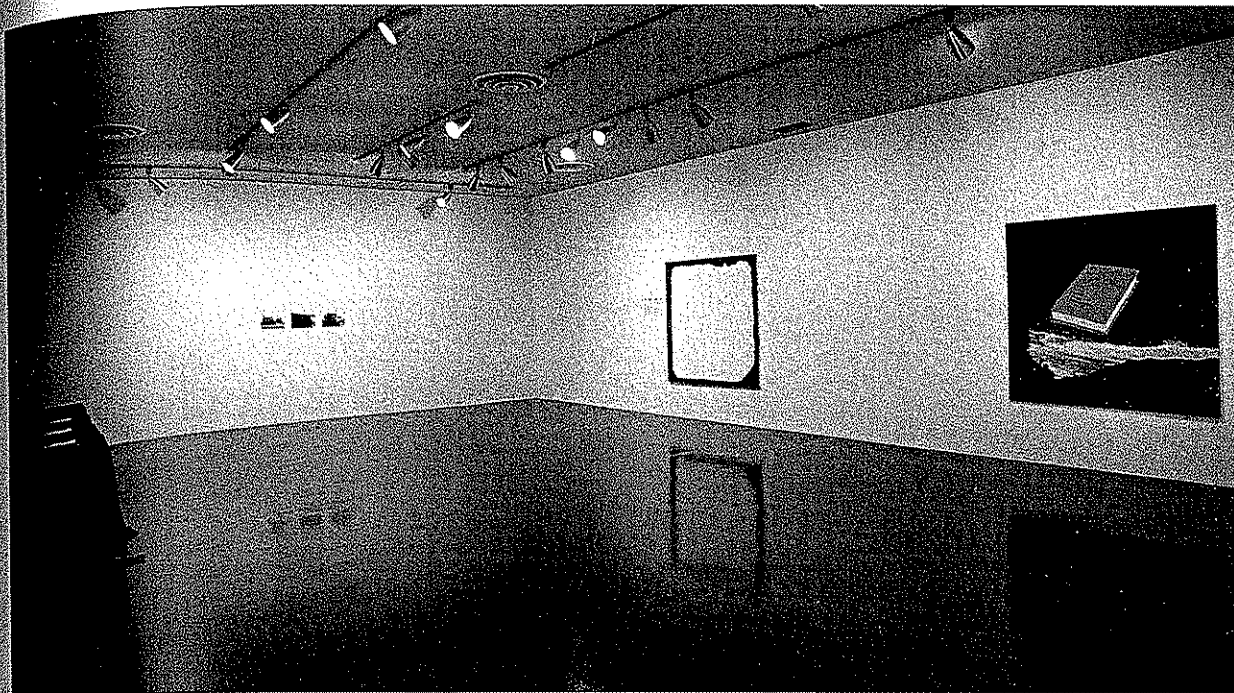
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AR I don't know. I first got interested in Harry Houdini as a person, as a performer, and as an artist. That led to an interest in magic, and then to friendships with other people who were interested in that. So it was a subject for a while, yes.

MS This is evident in your work *The Disappearing Chinese Theatre* (1972), where Grauman's Chinese Theatre disappears and then seems to reappear as a picture of the Paris Arc de Triomphe.

AR It's a fake magic trick. I mean, it's a magic trick where you see the wires. [The work] *100 MPH* (1972), also shown at Pomona, uses special effects, tabletop photography and that kind of stuff.

MS So, representation as magic. One of your most famous works, *Where's AI?* (1972), was also featured. Did you make that for the Pomona exhibition?

AR No, it was made for the occasion of my friend Terry Allen's tenth wedding anniversary. Terry and his wife, Jo Harvey, decided that Pismo Beach would be a great place for everybody to come and

hang out for the weekend. It was cheap, and we took over the hotel. It was like an extension of *AI's Grand Hotel*. I installed the work with pushpins at Pomona, so all of the cards with text and the images could be constantly rearranged. There was no set way to look at it, and it was never meant to be put up the same way twice.

MS Did that happen?

AR No, people are afraid to touch things, but the idea was that's what could happen to it. Of course, it doesn't get touched any more.

MS Another piece in the show was a return to painting called *Greetings from California* (1971).

AR Oh, that painting was there too! I forgot. I knew the book *Greetings from LA* was there because I made it just around the time of the show. Well, the painting was made the same year, but earlier. I remember having the book come out. It's connected to the Hollywood novel, a genre unto itself, so it's my kind of concrete version of living in Los Angeles.