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Upstart Columbia Univ. 1981

S C O T T B U R T O N  
J O H N R O M I N E

This interview was conducted on March 11, 1981.

JR: Where did you grow up?

SB: I spent my childhood in Alabama and my adolescence in Washington, D.C.

JR: What toys first interested you as a child?

SB: A tiny table and chair which were, in fact, not mine but only loaned to me, and in some way all my furniture is some attempt to repossess — to possess — those pieces; that little green table and chair.

JR: Because you were anxious about them being taken away from you?

SB: I must have been, because they were my favorite objects, and they were never really mine.

JR: So you went to high school in D.C.?

SB: Yeah.

JR: And were you thinking about art much at the time?

SB: Yes. To quote myself I was a teenage Tenth Streeter. I discovered art, or modernistic art, at a relatively early age, at fourteen or fifteen. In fact when I was fifteen I stumbled in on a class that Morris Louis was teaching and it frightened me. They were staining bedsheets.

JR: Frightening because it was so unconventional?

SB: Well, it was beyond me. I was up to Picasso, but I wasn't up to, say, Abstract Expressionism, much less beyond that. It was too scary so I didn't take his class.

JR: After high school you went to Columbia College.

SB: Yes. In Washington I was very lucky to discover a wonderful man, Leon Berkowitz, whom I studied painting with, and he sent me to study in the summers with Hans Hoffman in Provincetown. But then I decided not to go to art school but to go to college. I'm very glad I made that decision, even though it was based on the desire to become a writer. I spent almost ten years of my life in that detour. The writing and the study of literature ultimately led me back to the practice of art. At Columbia I studied English and Literature; I haven't painted since I went to college.

JR: How did you feel about Hans Hoffman, or about his teaching technique?

SB: Well, I'm ambivalent because he was very interesting but it was the opposite of what I am like, what I know myself to be like today. Perhaps a wrongly introjected idea of his about what painting must be is one of the reasons that I gave up painting.

JR: Was that the extent of your fine arts training?

SB: Yes. The study of drawing and painting is the extent of my fine arts training.

JR: What were your favorite courses at Columbia?

SB: Steven Marcus in Romantic and Victorian Literature and Robert Brustein and Eric Bentley in Modern Drama and Lionel Trilling in Modern Literature. They were all fabulous. And Professor Howard Davis is great. I had the required Art Humanities with him and he spent the entire

semester on the Greeks, and I learned so much.

JR: Were you making art at this time?

SB: No. I didn't make art for almost ten years.

JR: When did you realize that what you wanted to do was make art?

SB: Well, I first realized it when I was very young, at about fourteen, but then I turned to writing, and writing led me to art reviews, and that led me right back to the practice of art. I discovered at the time I was writing reviews and starting to make art that if you're useful the way a reviewer is useful, people promote that in you much more than if you're producing your own art, so rather than develop my criticism I had to abandon it entirely. Recently I went back to it in writing a piece on Rietveld, whose work is major and important and he's as good as Brancusi and Matisse and Picasso and Tatlin and Duchamp.

JR: Your work seems to be concerned with a breakdown of tradition, of hierarchy between fine and decorative arts.

SB: Yes, sure.

JR: What do you consider to be your major artistic influences? Could you label artists?

SB: Conceptually, Tatlin. Visually, Brancusi. I can't get Brancusi out of my mind. I love him so much. One ambition of mine is to go to Rumania.

JR: The "Endless Column."

SB: Yes, but also the "Table of Silence and the Twelve Stools." Morally, I would say my greatest influence has been Andy Warhol. I think he's the most important living artist. His meaning is liberation in every way: sexual, artistic, and social. His meaning is mobility and daring and transgression and democracy and even Christianity in that the lowest shall be the highest. He's very profound. There's a displaced democracy in my work, displaced meaning dealing with objects rather than with people. Warhol is so directly moral because his work is about people. Now I'm sounding like a Trilling student. Lionel Trilling was very important to me. At the time he was very unfashionable with all the hip people, the Beatniks and also with the New York School of Frank O'Hara and Kenneth Koch. Trilling was very old-fashioned to these people, but he was very good. His emphasis on morality has stayed with me.

JR: Could you define a main objective of your recent work?

SB: Sure, the recent work is trying to be public, either out of doors in parks, or in public rooms and institutions. It deals with needs of groups of people. This is large-scale work consisting of total design for a whole room or a whole park as opposed to individual objects.

JR: How would you like your individual works to be seen in relation to furniture?

SB: It is furniture.

JR: It's utilitarian?

SB: Yes, but not only. Something that is considered as being useful rather than as an object of contemplation still is

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conceived stylistically. We can see stylistic similarities between an Eighteenth-century farmhouse and an Eighteenth-century shoe. Such similarities exist in our time also. My work is furniture, but it's also art, and finally it's got to work in relation to experience, and not just in a Duchampian category thing, in a kind of art history strategy thing. Is it art? Is it furniture? Who cares! Such a question is momentarily interesting, but finally the object has to work in a level of experience. I feel that your own self is always part of the content of an art work, but by this time to have yourself as the main content of the art work is trite; it's weak. I would like to step to one side. My work would be unmistakably Scott Burton's art, but people who wouldn't know or even care about the oeuvre of Burton could, if they had some visual sensitivity, still get some heightened sense of occasion from viewing my work.

JR: Do your preconceived ideas about a work change while the work is under construction?

SB: Yes.

JR: Do works often turn out differently than you had originally planned?

SB: Sometimes. When that happens sometimes it's a case of form versus function. A piece of mine which I had planned formally to be a table that you could use beside your chair turned out to become what is called a pedestal table, which is higher with a much smaller surface area so you could only put a vase of flowers or some little antiquity on it. The type changed because the design didn't visually go well the first way I tried it. It had to become a different shape, and therefore it became a different kind of table, so the function followed form in that case. In other cases, the form follows function. I'd like to do a chair designed not for visual reasons but for hygienic reasons; for proper posture, in which case form would totally follow function.

JR: Are your ideas for new works ever triggered by preceding works?

SB: Sure, but always in unexpected ways. The pieces now in the Whitney [Biennial], the two chairs, each cut out of a monolith, a single piece of stone, are not so much influenced by Oriental ideals as by a Western idea of rustication, as seen in architecture and then later in furniture. Once I did a table which was a bronze replica of a rustic table. The idea of bronze replicas is something which is transitional and early for me, but the preoccupation with rustication has really paid off in these rock chairs, so that the early work, which was a replica piece, is more interesting in retrospect because the embryonic interest in rustication has now flowered. There I saw replica, now I see rustication.

JR: How do your performance works relate to your furniture works? Do you see shared concerns?

SB: There are three answers. In one way no relation. In another way a very deep personal, internal relation because they're both things that an artist doesn't do. In one I impersonate a director, in the other I impersonate a designer. Impersonation isn't the term I'm looking for, but both the furniture and performance works can be seen as appropriations from other disciplines, as opposed to regular painting or regular sculpture. In a third way they can come together when I do these recent large-scale works in progress because the performances study body

language, of which territoriality is an important part, territorial spacing, personal space. It's like city planning rather than designing an individual building, like room planning, or space planning. It becomes a kind of architecture and in that way the subject of the performance pieces, which is this body language, has given me more of an understanding of proxemics for my public work.

JR: Spatial relation, then, is very important to you.

SB: Not in an individual piece, in an individual table or chair, but in a room or a large-scale piece, yes.

JR: Are your individual furniture works meant to be contemplated on their own? Is their placement of significance?

SB: No. If they are shown at a museum they stay isolated, but otherwise they should take their place in somebody's room, and they need not be isolated. They should be able to be seen next to an ordinary chair or any other piece of furniture. The individual pieces are meant to be seen not in isolation but in intimacy, peripherally.

JR: Do you consider yourself to be a romantic?

SB: I probably am but I would try to suppress that. I think it would be a harmful part of oneself to encourage at this point in history. Probably there's a tension from some suppressed Romanticism in some of my work, especially in the performance pieces. As I said the performance works study body language; they're in tableaux, and they're very slow. It's museum stuff, but I would like to study body language in, for instance, very intelligible TV documentaries, because it's the subject of body language that's so important, not just my format and style.

JR: The works shown in the Biennial, the table and especially the two chairs, seem tough and invulnerable. Was this a concern of yours in the construction of the works?

SB: No, it wasn't important. The chairs are important for me because there's an implied confusion between the in-doors and out of doors, taking the natural and making it artificial or vice versa. It has actually to do with childhood and play, of taking furniture out of doors and playing house. The table I felt had to be massive and almost ungainly. The legs are deliberately wider than the apron, which makes it bottom heavy. That's partly to get enough light bulbs in the legs, but also there was an attempt to make the table indelicate. In the table, with the pink onyx and the lights, there would be a danger of preciousness, and I wanted to make sure that it was forthright and substantial; assertive rather than frail or discreet.

JR: How do you feel about art criticism?

SB: To tell the truth it's not an important pursuit because it usually confines itself to a disguised reviewing. Reviews and journalism are another thing. I can often learn things about the life of my work outside of my own mind by journalistic reflection, but there is very little considered discourse, essay, prose in art writing that is more than disguised reviewing. Of what there is there are some very great things. Joseph Masheck's *Carpet Paradigm* is so incredible. It's been helpful to me in my own development. Some of the writings of Linda Nochlin and Robert Rosenblum are great. Those are the people who should write about contemporary art and tend not to. Linda Nochlin is brilliant on contemporary body art and persona art and that kind of stuff. Most criticism, however, is thin.

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JR: Does the fact that many critics don't produce art themselves upset you?

SB: No. Maybe the fact that they don't produce more writing on broader subjects would upset me. For example, criticism of the popular visual arts is at a very low level. Writing about comic strips, about illustration, about couture, and about industrial design and graphic design is poor. Some of these very intelligent art critics should write about some of that. That'd be interesting. In a way I'm lucky; furniture is very fresh. There's no Janson of furniture, thank God. Intellectually there's no Clement Greenberg, there's no Harold Rosenberg, it's wonderful. A Leo Steinberg would be OK. I would welcome a Leo Steinberg of furniture. There are few serious historians of furniture; there's Mario Praz and Hugh Honour, and they're both great, but they're what you'd call belletrists, I suppose. That's fine, but there's no such thing as a Meyer Schapiro of furniture. It'll take several generations of scholars before there can be, and by then everything will

be lost. So I would say criticism has been lagging intellectually over the last, say, twenty years. The split between the literary culture and the visual culture, the gap the New York School bridged, isn't bridged anymore.

JR: What artists working now do you particularly respect? Do you see any artists whose work shares concerns with yours?

SB: Of my own generation? There are several. Those who immediately come to mind are Siah Armajani, who has worked into a kind of architecture, and George Trakas, and Richard Fleischner, who have worked into a kind of landscape architecture. Those are the people I immediately am crazy about. I like very much some of the people of the so-called decoration school, the more minimal ones, the ones more concerned with the structure than with glitter. I like the work of Valerie Jaudon, of Joyce Kozloff, of Ned Smyth when their work is related to architectural ornament. I don't like the cutesiness, the glitter and dippiness of other pattern and decoration artists. I'm not interested in cutesiness in art, only cutesiness in dinner parties.

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Statements by Artists  
**SCOTT BURTON**

Born: Greensboro, Alabama. Studied with Hans Hofman, at Columbia University, at New York University.

"My chairs and tables are not just sculpture, but also real furniture for actual use. Some are ornamented, most are not. I try to relate the function of a piece (is a seating piece for talking, reading, resting, working?) to the design by calculating a utilitarian effect, not just the formal image. My new pieces are rooms, real rooms for mixed uses. New decoration is leading away from painting and sculpture ('Pattern Painting' is nothing but one more conservative attempt to hold onto painting.) New decoration — murals, furnishing (screens, wallpaper, fabric) rooms public and private, fountains and parks and playgrounds and gardens — is leading back to the real social world of multi-class culture, and thus into the history of our time."

**CYNTHIA CARLSON**

Born: Chicago, Illinois. Studied at Art Institute of Chicago and Pratt Institute. Teaches at Philadelphia College of Art.

"My work in this direction began with landscapes turning into repeated forms which gradually eliminated landscape and became the repeated forms alone. In 1974 I began working more quickly and gesturally, and the work became thicker through that process. Finally the thickness of the paint with its crusty surface became the central concern. Since 1976 I have made works only using pieces of thick paint glued directly to the wall itself as installations, titled, with tongue in cheek, 'wallpaper pieces.' I think of my work concerning itself with breakdown, or deliberate confusion, of the previously separated categories 'decoration' and 'art.'"

**BRAD DAVIS**

Studied at St. Olaf's College, Northfield, Minnesota; at University of Chicago; at Art Institute of Chicago; at University of Minnesota; at Hunter College.

"To be beautiful and ornamental and at the same moment expressive and inspirational. To be light, humorous and entertaining while remaining serious and artistically intelligent. To include a wide variety of subjects and modes of representation with a high degree of abstraction. To draw from the past and the present, to connect with the long traditions of Eastern and Western art, to blend craft and high art, yet create new expressions. In a word, decoration is freedom to me."

**MARY GRIGORIADIS**

Studied at Barnard College and Columbia University.

"I strive for an optimum of opulence and visual lushness within an ordered format of my work. The central image is an amalgam of patterns and geometric forms, into which small scale patterns have been integrated as ornamental or decorative elements. The patterning is essential since it enhances the variety of forms, color and texture and contributes to the richness of the surface."

**VALERIE JAUDON**

Born: Greenville, Mississippi. Studied at: Mississippi College for Women; at Memphis Academy of Art; at University of the Americas, Mexico City; at St. Martin's School of Art, London.

"I think of the decorative as an integral part of the artist's intention, rather than something separate and nonfunctional which is applied to art and architecture. For me, the decorative expresses an attitude, not a style or an art movement. It is an attitude which is inclusive rather than exclusive, and it does not make a distinction between 'popular' and 'high' sources or readings of art. The decorative encompasses both the emotions and the intellect and recognizes complexity, ambiguity and change. It does not offer a pure system or filter through which to organize a chaotic reality. In art, the decorative is both a reflection of and an essential part of the world around it."

**RICHARD KALINA**

Born: New York City. Studied at University of Pennsylvania.

"Paintings are all there at once. They get their power from being convergences, from being static but highly

being made, the viewer is presented with the result. Leave out the seeing and the remembering, or make those acts too literal and unimaginative, and you have a flat, boring painting. Decoration, pattern and ornament are all around us. They are hidden enough and accessible enough to make the ideal model."

**JOYCE KOZLOFF**

Studied at Carnegie Institute of Technology; at Columbia University.

"At its best, decoration is the coming together of painting, sculpture, architecture and the applied arts. Decoration humanizes our living and working spaces. It connects with ancient, worldwide traditions and crafts. It opens up the possibility for artists of varying skills to work collaboratively on public projects. Decoration abolishes hierarchical distinctions between 'high' and 'low' art. It is not elitist and does not condescend; it will expand our notions of 'the artist' and the 'art audience.'"

**ROBERT KUSHNER**

"Educated conventionally in the public schools of California, Robert Kushner's artistic development was richly encouraged by his parents' and grandparents' enthusiasm. First, he wanted to be a horticulturalist, to which end he brought 'The Rite of Spring' to show-and-tell in the second grade. His friends laughed, but Bob became an artist anyway. Other than his applauding family, young Robert was influenced by the Burpee Seed Catalogue, Paul Poiret, Matisse, Busby Berkeley and the Watts Towers. Mr. Kushner feels deeply about pattern, decoration and ornament."

**ROBIN LEHRER**

Born: North Carolina. Studied at the University of North Carolina; at Claremont College, Claremont, California; at Feminist Studio Workshop under Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago.

"Pattern is a verb. It is a way of viewing the world, a process by which to take in and make coherent the random and often chaotic information the world has to offer. It is the thread of my connections which makes the world intelligible to me. The act of connecting, of making metaphor, of 'patterning,' provides a structure through which is sieved new information which, in time, becomes part of the structure through which is sieved... et cetera. One might say that North Carolina, with its conservative milieu, provided for me the geometric pattern through which was filtered the random chaotic imagery of California."

**KIM MAC CONNEL**

Born: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Studied at University of California, San Diego.

"I use pattern. I think of decoration, of ornament. I work with pattern in making decoration. Working rhythm is an important pattern. It's a vehicle that moves all over the place. I move around a lot. I don't get bored. I don't get sullen with thought. I'm not making art. The work is physically involving. I use my feet, my hands, my eyes. It's pleasurable work. I use my head for other things."

**TONY ROBBIN**

Studied at Columbia University and at Yale University.

"For 2000 years, over half the globe, art has been pattern art. The pleasure of lyric calligraphy — whether expressed figuratively or geometrically — is intrinsic to the coincidence gained in knowing the multiple, simultaneous structure. Ornamentative seeing, knowing space, may be a specific form of consciousness, originating in a different (and especially powerful) part of the brain than we normally use in our linguistic culture."

**MIRIAM SCHAPIRO**

Born: Toronto, Canada. Studied at State University of Iowa.

"Miriam Schapiro is a painter who superimposes found, patterned fabric in tissue-thin layers on painted canvas. Sometimes she paints again on the final surface. Her sources lie in the utilitarian objects of all countries, throughout time. Her passion for needlework, quilts and clothing by anonymous American women inspires her to create works of art in their image. She travels and lectures extensively on the art of

both) which she then incorporates into her art. She calls this aspect of her art 'femmage.'"

**NED SYMTH**

Studied at Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio.

"I am drawn to decoration, not as an end, but as a means of communication. Decoration represents a move from the avant-garde towards humanism. I want to seduce, excite and move people by a mass decorative, physical, historical and archetypal image and objects. This is my Cathedral Theory: to kindle the feelings of respect and awe which people experience upon entering a Cathedral. Each of the disciplines — architecture, painting, stained glass — become a detail in the larger pattern. This pattern is recognized by all cultures and faiths."

**ROBERT ZAKANITCH**

Born: Elizabeth, New Jersey.

"My involvement with flatness, overallness, and large scale continues. Previously I had been conditioned to believe that flatness and overallness were formalist in concept and I had forgotten that they were also traditional. With the inclusion of new references, the structure and the focus of my work has changed and is no longer only about itself, remote and removed from the rest of the world. The objects I choose to use, such as flowers, cherries, radishes, et cetera, have been seen by contemporary mainstream thought as decoration, or embellishments. I am interested in them as ends in themselves. They become the major focus in my paintings. I want these 'embellishments' to create paintings of exotic, joyful expansiveness."

**BARBARA ZUCKER**

Born: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Studied at University of Michigan and at Hunter College.

"I've often drawn on non-Western sources. But my mother is also a source: as a child I'd smell her perfume in the hall. When she appeared, set for the evening, she was resplendent in gowns and jewels. Utilitarian objects intrigue me: graceful tubing ending in a bulbous light fixture, or plumbing pipes interrupted with a quirky elbow. Now this kind of art is called 'decorative.' Fine."

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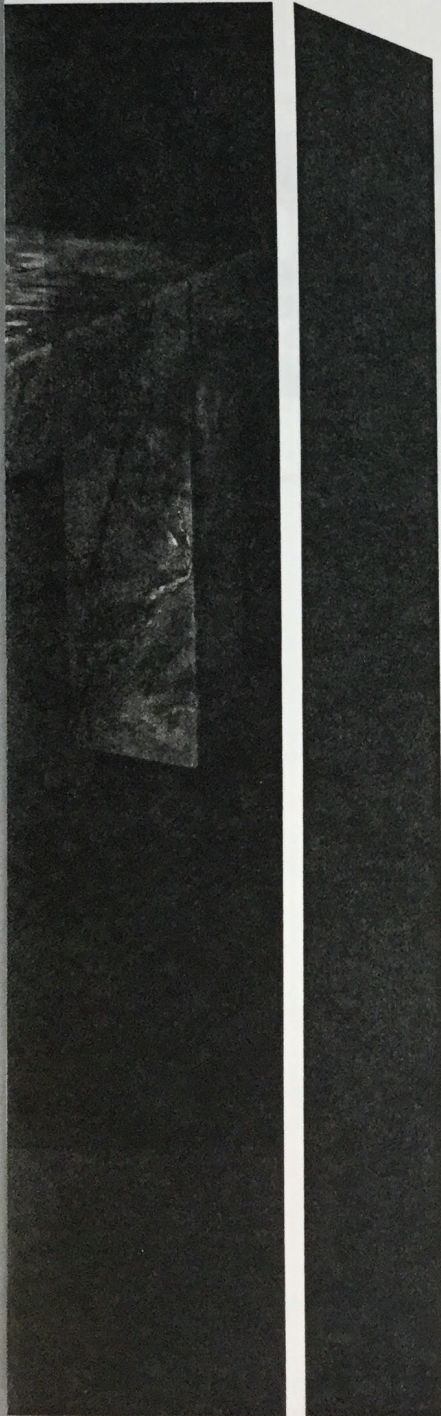
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Artists Design Furniture.  
Denise Domergue  
Abrams 1984



SB.

When I first decided to become an artist as an adolescent, I did mostly paintings and drawings, but I was equally interested in architecture and design. Now I am also fascinated by the theater and dance, and it's that range, from design to theater, that interests me as an artist.

Tableau is a form I identify with. Beginning in 1970 I did furniture installations: tableaux in forests, on stages, in galleries. I still stage performances: tableaux with real people. In 1973, however, I decided that I really wanted to design furniture instead of continuing to use found, "readymade" pieces. Also I wanted to design furniture for everyday use in the home rather than pieces removed from use in the context of tableaux or museum exhibitions. It was not an easy decision to make and was misunderstood at first. The subject matter of my work now is in the common terms of furniture and there is that implication of a broader accessibility.

For the most part furniture today is in sad shape. As an artist rather than a real designer or crafts-person, I have the freedom and the opportunity to invent a whole new style of furniture for my place and time in American history. Contemporary designs are mostly pastiches of the modernist classics, and organic crafts furniture is no more authentic or fresh, and promotes illusory, sentimental values. I want to be neither a corporate hireling nor an aging hippie. I believe that furniture should not be negative or critical or falsely complacent. I want my work to express optimistic values.

Designers of furniture need to have some common sense, whereas I rarely abandon an idea on the grounds of impracticality. I don't have to think in rational terms; I can do whatever I like. The result is that certain work finds its place only in the art world. But I feel very lucky that, at this point in history, what I love best has a new, wider significance. A friend of mine, Edit deAk, once wrote about me and ended with a paraphrase of Gertrude Stein: "Scott. Chairs. Eloquently." That is how I would like my epitaph to read.

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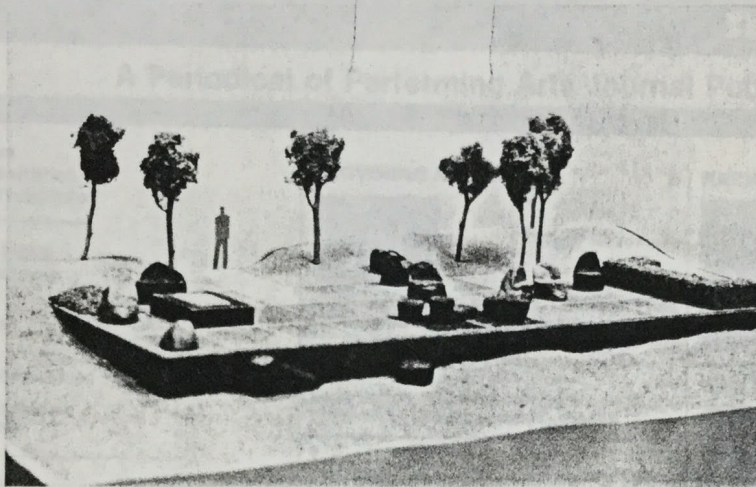
Scott Burton

PERFORMANCE

Site

The Meaning of Place in  
Art + Archit.

Des. Quest. 122 1983



leading us to a new notion of art as landscape architecture.

I'd like to mention a certain schizophrenia that I feel in myself as an artist on one hand, and a designer—though of course not an architect—on the other. An artist is very much a solitary person, whose solitude seems integral to creation. But in public art we must collaborate with all kinds of people outside the work—not only the people who pay for it, but architects and landscape architects, engineers, fabricators, and the government people who come into the process. The psychology of the artist and the psychology of the architect or the designer are very different. Public artists must learn not to be so emotionally tied to their ideas.

However, an artist need not repress himself to make public art. Love of color or shape or of an image can be expressed, and still do something more. Namely, bring a new fervor of imagination to our quite stagnant conception of public amenity.

For me and for a number of other artists, there is beginning to be a kind of resolution of the modern hostility between art and architecture in the evolving form called public art, which has to do with design of the built or landscaped environment by people trained in other forms of art—sculpture or painting.

What is public art? It is in my definition art that is not only made for a public place but also has some kind of social function. In fact, what architecture or design and public art have in common is their social function or content. Public art has descended from, but must not be confused with, large-scale outdoor sculpture, site-specific sculpture and architectural or environmental sculpture. Architectural sculpture is still sculpture. Public art is not sculpture. In it one is dealing with a total situation—a situation with a shared psychology, where there's a whole set of needs. Probably the culminating form of public art will be some kind of social planning, just as earthworks are

Model for Scott Burton's terrace for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Western Regional Center, Seattle, Washington. The regular terrace grid is a reflection of the architectural grid.

Scott Burton  
Rock Chair 1981-82  
lava stone  
32 x 36 x 40 inches  
Courtesy Max Protetch Gallery,  
New York City

Scott Burton  
Rock Chair 1980-82  
granite  
40 x 40 x 48 inches  
Collection Eileen Rosenau

Burton's granite chair is one of a number of examples in which the artist has altered the natural material only to the degree necessary for the creation of a functioning chair.

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interview

1979

# PERFORMANCE ART 2

## magazine

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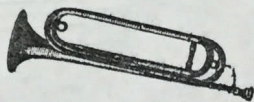
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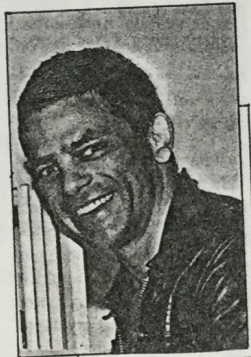
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## ACTING / NON-ACTING

Until recently, most New York performance was thoroughly anti-theatrical, for motives ranging from ideology to ignorance. But almost overnight, performance activity has shifted from confessional and formal gestures to theatrical entertainments. Such a quick and quixotic change puts some basic issues up for grabs (narrative, autobiography, materials, staging) and I asked several performer/directors to comment on one of the most significant and elusive topics — acting/non-acting.

John Howell

### SCOTT BURTON



Do you think of your "Behavior Tableaux" performances as a theatre-performance hybrid?

Ten years ago it was fantastic that, as a work of art, art could be a live event. But within a couple of years, that in itself was no longer enough. I think one began to be bored when the time element was not manipulated. Back then, it was just fascinating that an event could be plastic art, not theatre. Not to be Greenbergian ... but after a while people had to face up to the inherent nature of the medium which is keeping people's attention occupied through "X" number of minutes. So I found myself very conscious of how I would have to direct time.

## ACTING / NON-ACTING

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Does that mean you adopted a dramatic structure?

Not dramatic in my case, because it's just one thing then the next thing. I wouldn't want it to be dramatic. You know that Merce Cunningham said "Climax is for those people who like New Year's Eve."

So you think performance can be theatrical without being dramatic?

The nature of the performance medium is inherently theatrical, even if it's not the theatre of writers, directors, and designers, which is such a schizophrenic product, usually a pseudo-collaborative effort. In my earliest performances, I used myself conceptually, but when I started using other people, I became aware of being a pseudo-director of a pseudo-theatre. My early performances were very intellectual gestures . . .

I've been sort of stage-struck all my life. I was very close to going into the real theatre at one point but the people in real theatre have mediocre minds. My mother took my to the Alabama State Fair where I saw Gypsy Rose Lee, and I remember these strip tableaux as making deep impressions which have profoundly influenced my performance format.

Why did you begin to use other people in your pieces?

I think because I loved the theatre and wanted to imitate it. I wanted to deal with elements of costume, lighting and sets, as well as directing, but in a very Walter Mitty way. That's the only way you can when

you're one person. Artists' performance is an integrated form, not a schizophrenic one. One person is responsible for everything.

How does that work when you include other performers?

It was a breakthrough for me. I used the people like models. Like my furniture, the behavior tableaux are pseudo-sculpture. When I work with the models, I just touch their bodies and push them around.

**Concrete gesture and meaning are the same thing.**

Are a lot of their poses conceptualized beforehand?

I get an image in my head, then I try it on them. Then I re-arrange, alter, edit, and try to clarify. But it's not schematic. I try to make the setting and costumes look like they don't exist. I try to be on the edge. It's very carefully planned but it should look like it's just that way. The tableaux are secretly completely theatrical, but I try to make it look sort of real. The costumes, for example, are carefully edited street clothes.

Do you get images from the people you select as performers, as well as from your own image bank?

I always use tall, slender men. For one thing, their limbs carry well at the great distance that I use. That linear clarity is the main thing. Also, the uniformity of look is very

important. I try to make them look similar but not identical. Not so different that you get involved with personalities, but not so similar that they're like robots. It's not about a we're-all-machines idea.

Then what makes it performance art instead of theatre, given your terms?

I'm working on a new piece that's very involved in costume and narrative, which is as theatrical as I can get. In the behavior tableaux, the people are treated in some ways as automata which must link me with De Chirico and the whole surrealist thing about mannequins. In a way, I use performers like dolls.

What happens in a rehearsal?

The performers are very carefully rehearsed. They have counts, moves, and cues—what they call blocking in theatre. From their point of view, it's task-oriented, but from the audience point of view it's not. The audience sees an image or a representation or a re-enactment, but the performers are trained to do it as a task.

Is it difficult to keep out what you would consider extraneous material?

Very hard. They can't be too good and they can't be too awkward. If they're not really in their own bodies and stumble around, their movement is not invisible and it is distracting. If they're trained performers, especially dancers, I just have to sit on them to keep their gestures where I want them. The best performer I ever had was a musician who

same edge re: furniture

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	Burton	IV.15

was a performer, but not an actor or dancer. He had stage presence and consciousness, but it was his own, it wasn't a persona.

So you're really muffling any projections.

They can't really project except through gesture because I have so removed them. You can't tell it, but I use a whitening make-up on the eyebrows and the lips to erase the face which my 50 to 75 feet viewing distance does too. So the only projection is through supple movement.

Do you think of it as dance-related?

I'm not involved with dance. I want to stay away from that because my work would suffer greatly by comparison. I don't want my performances to be dancerly.

Do you try to teach or develop a performance attitude as to the particular tasks?

No. There's no self-expression.

Do you think the audience reads expression from their actions?

What is to the performer a task, the audience sees as a representation of an action, an avoidance or an approach in a gesture or a display.

And you don't want the performers relating to that?

What the audience sees is not a task but, ideally, my representation of an action. It's pictorial rather than literal. I want the performers to just do the specific job.

How do you feel about that quality in the current wave of entertainment performance?

The turnaround time was so short. Performance used to be lying in the gutter on 14th Street, now it's *Saturday Night Live*. The old attitude toward the audience was indifference/aggressive, and it wore itself out very quickly. So it seems natural to swing the other way. And, the examples of people like Foreman and Wilson, Yvonne Rainer and Merce Cunningham, the great theatre performance artists, had a great influence on this theatrical kind of art performance. Also, a lot of conceptual performance turned into body art and nothing is more boring. It was important when Acconci first did it, but it degenerated into what I call the I-do-this-you-do-that school.

There are some performance precedents for theatrical works, Fluxus, for example. These events were built on whimsical timing.

When I first saw Ralston Farina, I thought he was Fluxus reborn. I never saw Fluxus, but he seemed like that spirit. He was an early referent to theatre, but amateur theatre, like the kid next door who was a magician. The original performer, the primary figure for everyone from Warhol to Acconci, is Jack Smith.

How do you choose your performers, and do you project on them?

There is some self projection but I'm not really aware of it. When I changed the figure from a woman to a man, it all came out. I used

### ***I don't believe in the artist as his or her own subject matter.***

to use women before I began to work with behavior content, but there's something personal and projective about that kind of material.

There's a sub-text to what's shown?

No, concrete gesture and meaning are the same thing. I work to make sure I've gotten the essential gesture that is as clear as it can be to the audience. I don't want mystery, I want them to understand the form of gestural and spatial communication that goes on between us all the time. There's no sub-text because that's a narrative concept. In the behavior tableaux what I want people to become aware of is the emotional nature of the number of inches between them, or how a person uses an arm as a barrier to communication. I want to be didactic and explanatory but there's all kinds of other content which creeps in that I don't care to go into. I don't want to think about the psychological content.

So you try to keep yourself out of it while you're in it?

I don't believe in the artist as his or her own subject matter. First-person performance can be good but I don't think it's that great. I've done performances about the self but I consider them very minor. I'm not a personal ar-

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re: public art

tist. I don't believe in the validity of that stance.

You prefer to be objective, almost mechanical.

It's very cut and dry, almost schematic, but it's schizophrenic because I know the audience gets this other stuff from it.

Then, unlike "schizophrenic" collaborative theatre, performance art is schizophrenic solitary theatre. But, you know there's more personal content than you've let on.

I know there's a certain homosexual content which I do not put in. But somehow it comes out. The actors never do anything sexual. The audience may see something like that but it's not there.

Do you think gay or straight people look harder for that?

Straight people see it more. But I can't deal with that, so I just ignore it. A long time ago I did pieces with a homosexual content, and I'll do that again in a new piece which features a series of sexual self-presentations. But there's no overt sexual content in the behavior tableaux. Group Behavior Tableaux is about a stable peer group, then an unstable peer group, then a hierarchy with one at the top and four below, then a hierarchy with one below and four at the top. Pair Behavior was about strangerliness, acquaintanceship, intimacy, estrangement, alienation, aggression, and avoidance. Individual Behavior Tableaux is about what is called aggressive displays, threat, appeasement, and sexual

homosexual

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displays, what one would call art poses, not for plastic but behavior reasons. I don't know who gets how much of that how often, but that's the way I think about it.

### RUTH MALECZECH



Ken Wittenberg

Using only male performers who engage in sexual displays, how can you not read gay content in to it. Choice of males over

As an actress, do you perform you pretend time different from the real time of the event? And is that a useful distinction between acting and non-acting in performance?

I always call myself a performer because I think the term actor or actress implies what

you've just said. It implies the adoption of a part other than my part. But I also think that a theatrical performer is more compelled to search in areas that a performance art performer would rather avoid. That is to say, those areas which are sometimes embarrassing—psychology, emotion, feelings—and hard to deal with. It's easier to pretend that they are not material and therefore not to deal with them and make a process performance. But I don't like to define performance and performance art because I don't think

way. It depends on are willing to go to or performance. Most performers t themselves with ng, maybe because nk performance art

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performance art. It's y I'm not really a ou don't see that ow you see quite equally skilled as nd that's why it's

more interesting now because you can talk about it as a field, as an art. In a theatre of the kind I work in, what happens in performance art is very important. If you're only dealing with emotionalism and psychology, you won't make very interesting theatre. It'll

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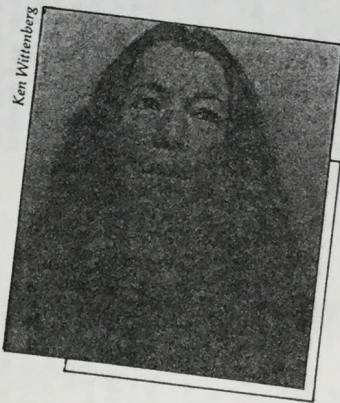
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As an actress, do you feel that when you perform you pretend to be someone else in a time different from the real time of the event? And is that a useful distinction between acting and non-acting in performance?

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you've just said. It implies the adoption of a part other than my part. But I also think that a theatrical performer is more compelled to search in areas that a performance art performer would rather avoid. That is to say, those areas which are sometimes embarrassing—psychology, emotion, feelings—and hard to deal with. It's easier to pretend that they are not material and therefore not to deal with them and make a process performance. But I don't like to define performance and performance art because I don't think there's any difference in a way. It depends on the depth to which you're willing to go to find out what's in a performance. Most performance artists content themselves with much less in-depth looking, maybe because it's not as much fun. I think performance art is more fun.

What about those once-popular performances in which heavy psychological, personal material was offered in presentations which were very naïve by theatrical standards?

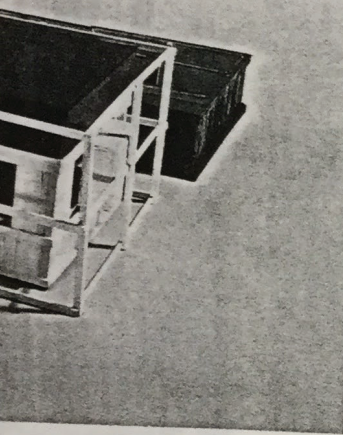
Naïveté is like a mask in performance art. It's an escape to be able to say I'm not really a performer. But it's true, you don't see that very much any more. Now you see quite skilled performance art, equally skilled as theatrical performances, and that's why it's more interesting now because you can talk about it as a field, as an art. In a theatre of the kind I work in, what happens in performance art is very important. If you're only dealing with emotionalism and psychology, you won't make very interesting theatre. It'll

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"Behavior dynamics of furniture"



say he could live there, that it's accommodating, is contradiction, given the fact that your work is not  
 plain it this way: Dewey is very important to me, he diversified and fragmented society like America, we need to bring the social, political and economic factions together. The art experience could become the catalyst. Dewey was a catalyst for that. There was a salvation there, and we came together through the structure of culture, the structure of experience. When I say it's accommodating, I mean it brings together many diversified elements of an art experience. I believe Lissitzky would have appreciated.

Scott Burton

Born in Greensboro, Alabama, 1939  
 Lives in New York City

**Education**  
 Private study, Leon Berkowitz studio, Washington, D.C., 1957-59  
 Hans Hofmann studio, Provincetown, Massachusetts, Summers 1957-59  
 Columbia University, New York, 1959-62, B.A.  
 New York University, 1962-63, M.A.

**Selected Group Exhibitions and Performances**  
 The University of Iowa Museum of Art, University of Iowa, Iowa City, *Two Evenings*, July 31 and August 5, 1970  
 Artists Space, New York, *Persona*, April 25, 1974 (performance)  
 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *1975 Biennial of Contemporary American Art*, January 20-April 9, 1975  
 The Institute for Art and Urban Resources at P. S. 1, Long Island City, New York, *Rooms, P. S. 1*, June 10-26, 1976  
 Institute for Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, *Improbable Furniture*, March 10-April 10, 1977. Traveled to La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, May 20-July 6, 1977; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, July 21-September 4, 1977  
 Rathaus, Kassel, West Germany, *Documenta 6*, June 27-30, 1977 (performance)  
 Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, *A View of a Decade*, September 10-November 10, 1977

**Selected One-Man Exhibitions and Performances**  
 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Group Behavior Tableaux*, April 18 and 19, 1972; American Theatre Lab, New York, October 27-29, 1972 (performance)  
 Artists Space, New York [two chair pieces], December 6-27, 1975  
 The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, *Pair Behavior Tableaux*, February 24-April 4, 1976 (performance). Pamphlet with text by Linda Shearer

Young Amer. Artists  
 1978 Exxon Nat'l Exh.  
 Guggenheim

SB: My work couldn't have existed in the sixties. My furniture is not Conceptual, but I see myself as an artist of the seventies in that Conceptual Art enabled me to find my own way as an artist. At that time, it freed art from having to be either painting or sculpture. I was able to start working in the late sixties through performance art, which, of course, is related to Conceptual Art. I'm also a Conceptual artist in that I don't do any of the actual constructing myself but have my pieces fabricated by someone else. But, of course, that is also a characteristic of Minimal Art. As a matter of fact, I think my tables and chairs must be indebted in some way to artists like Judd, Lewitt and Andre. I see them as artists of another generation, however, as part of a different tradition. I consider Judd's term "specific object" applies more accurately to my work than his own, which I see as sculpture. I do not consider my furniture pieces sculpture. The bronze chair (cat. no. 7) is a transitional piece because it is still half image, not totally a specific object. Insofar as it is a replica, like Johns' beer can, it's part of the past. But my tables and chairs are informed by a life-long love and experience of sculpture, even though I had always made paintings and collages and had never made three-dimensional work before I did them.

LS: What is it about furniture that appeals to you? How is your work related to real furniture?

SB: I find furniture releases something in my imagination whereas painting and sculpture do not; I can't explain it. It was in 1973 that I was first able to begin the tables series—that is, table as table, rather than table within tableau or as found object. And after that, I started doing chairs. I give life-size drawings and cardboard models to craftsmen from the interior decoration world who build real furniture. Of course, what I'm gambling on is that no one trained in design would ever come up with the kind of furniture I make. I somehow see myself as an *impersonator* of design. But the decorative and applied arts have become extremely important to me; I see the beginning of some new and significant form of decorative art—for want of a better phrase—in work that is jewelry, wall decoration, murals, clothing and furniture. Not only have the decorative arts been a major source for me, but I'm vitally involved and interested in their capacity to expand beyond the art context, in the possibility of appreciating them on a level other than fine art.

LS: What specifically are your sources?

SB: First there are autobiographical, personal sources. I have a life-long obsession with furniture; I can't really explain it, but I recognize it. My most important intellectual source and inspiration are the Russians, Tatlin, Rodchenko and Lissitzky, and what they did after the Revolution. They laid down their brushes and went out to do applied art, art for the people. Of course, those were revolutionary times and we're not in even a vaguely similar situation now. The

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Droll/Kolbert Gallery, Inc., New York [tables and chairs], November 15-December 3, 1977

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Scott Burton [Documentations of *Furniture Landscape, Furniture Pieces, Chair Drama*], *TriQuarterly* 32, Winter 1975, n. p.

Robert Pincus-Witten, "Scott Burton: Conceptual Performance as Sculpture," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 51, no. 1, September 1976, pp. 112-117; reprinted in Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism, American Art of the Decade*, New York, 1978, pp. 175-185

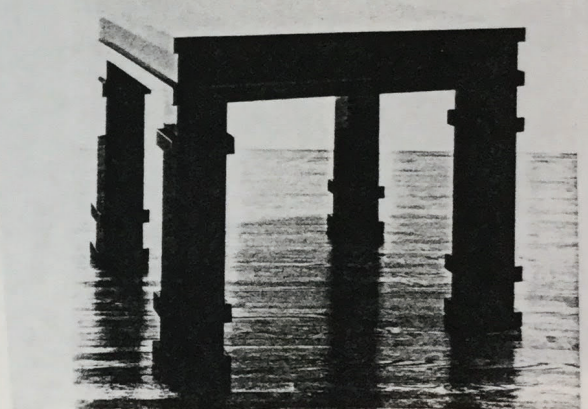
**Checklist**

- 7 *Bronze Chair*. 1975  
Bronze, 42 x 18 x 20"  
Cast no. 2/2  
Collection Donald Droll
- 8 *Untitled*. 1975-77  
Lacquered wood, 30 x 35 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 35 $\frac{3}{4}$ "  
Courtesy Droll/Kolbert Gallery
- 9 *Spattered Table*. 1977  
Painted and lacquered wood,  
18 x 35 x 17"  
Courtesy Droll/Kolbert Gallery
- †10 *Child's Table and Chair*. 1978  
Chair: lacquered wood with fabric and rubber, 27 x 12 x 12", table: lacquered wood and steel, 21 x 22 x 17"  
Brooks Jackson Gallery Iolas, New York

Bauhaus has also been important to me because there they believed that art and craft were unified.

And there have been other great confirmations for me: the quilt show at the Whitney and the Navajo rug exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in the early seventies; late Matisse decoration; Warhol's wallpaper also. And in other ways, Diane Arbus' photograph of a Levittown living room—a meditation on furniture; Philip Johnson's glass house.

LS: Since you're making objects which are recognizable and functional, part of the popular culture, I wonder if Pop Art has influenced you in any way?



8. *Untitled*. 1975-77

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SB: I suppose I couldn't have existed without Pop Art either. For example, my bronze chair is cast from the cheapest kind of fake Queen Anne-Grand Rapids mass-produced chair. So I have a definite attraction to the Pop vernacular, to ordinary, even unworthy things. But I think there is a major difference from Pop in that I don't mean my work to be ironic—there's no parody in it. The styles I use are genuinely beautiful to me. Also, Pop Art borrows its styles and I have by now gone beyond this idea of pastiche to my own style—which I actually consider "style-less."

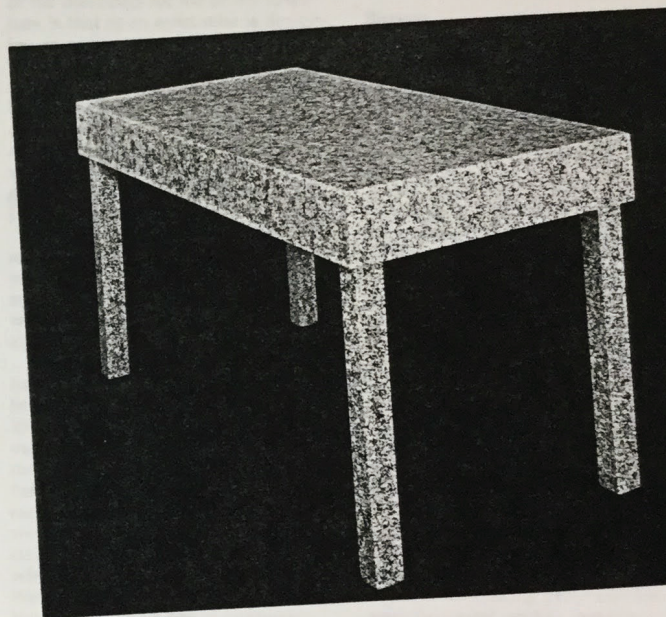
After making the individual chairs and tables, I started to design chair and table ensembles. I'm working on my first ensemble—a child's chair and table (cat. no. 10) right now. Then I want to do a suite with several chairs and a table. Eventually, I hope to do rooms and whole houses, as well as public areas, like theater lobbies or company cafeterias. I want my furniture to function within environmental ensembles.

LS: How does your furniture function in a social context?

SB: I want the furniture to be a factor in the behavioral dynamics of a social situation. For example, when two, three or four sit at the black table (cat. no. 8), they'll be quite close together. So that, although the table aims at a certain massiveness, it will force a psychological intimacy on the people who are sitting at it. So, by controlling the distance between people as they sit at my table, I am making a conscious effort to adapt what I know about behavioral dynamics to the design of my furniture.

LS: Do you expect people to react to your pieces as design or sculpture?

SB: My chairs and tables are independent, specific objects that you can walk around to look at from all sides; I want them to have presence. So, in many ways, I have a very sculptural definition of the furniture. I want the work to be forceful but not have too much tension. I designed the furniture with the intention that people like it. I attempt to arrive at some relation to human proportions in order to make it as comfortable as possible—and functional, of course. But people have said of my work—and it surprised me—that it's difficult, formidable, uninviting. And insofar as the furniture is like me, it's probably not ingratiating enough. This is a personal contradiction of artist as decorator. But, there's another important contradiction in art as decoration—a social one. There are three kinds of decoration, wealthy class, middle class and working class. Gallery clients are middle to wealthy class, but the true potential importance of a new movement of artists' decoration would be on a broader, economic scale, on a public scale.



9. Spattered Table. 1977

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SB - interview - Designing The Wexner Bldg

**Cruikshank:**  
Why don't you give us first your overall sense of the process of this collaboration?

**Burton:**  
So far, it's been great. It's not quite over yet. And it's been five years. I mean, this thing has been going on for five years.

I have especially good feelings about the I. M. Pei people: mainly Sandi Pei, and also David Martin and Tom Woo. Without the architects, I am nothing. In other words, as a designer, I am a primitive, or an amateur. So the architects not only have to specify the structure, but they have to teach me elementary things. The architects were a big element in collaborating. Their good will and their patience was terrific.

There were problems resulting from my ignorance. The other problems were problems of the state building codes. My first final proposal was rejected because of building codes. We can go into that; it's very relevant.

**Cruikshank:**  
Maybe we should get a little background first. What qualified you for the job? How did you come to Kathy's attention?

**Burton:**  
Since the early 1970s, I've been making art as furniture. My earliest works were tableaux and installations, using objets trouvés—that is to say, existing furniture. Some stage performances, some installations out in the woods, on city streets, in museums, galleries, and so forth. That evolved into my actually designing and having fabricated tables and chairs that have many qualities that real furniture does

not have, and that lack many qualities that real furniture does have. Yet they are all usable.

I make a kind of work which is, as far as I'm concerned, equally furniture and sculpture. It's not arty furniture, like Memphis-type style, which I consider "art furniture," to revive an old term. That's designer's work. One of the meanings for me of my furniture is that as an artist who is designing, in some way my work is a critique of existing ideas of sculpture. I mean, Richard Serra and Joel Shapiro both—that's fine art. Art as design can, I feel, connect with a non-art audience. I'm very anti-art in certain ways. Although, yes, I show in galleries and museums; and yes, I'm collected.

But this work of mine is not anti-art in the way that, say, Dada work is—that it's throw-away, cheaply made, and so forth. I take great pains with the proportions, the materials, and the workmanship.

I very much like to talk to architectural people, rather than art people, because you're a tougher audience. You say, "What's so special about trying to design a chair?" By the way, now there are a lot of artists who do furniture things. But I mean, in the early 1970s, when I started, there weren't so many. So I have a minor claim to fame—"oh, he's the artist who started the furniture trend." Well, that's okay, but that's not much, because this is an age of gimmicks. Somebody paints upside down; somebody paints with hay—those are basically gimmicks, to differentiate their products from all the other products. I think the state of art today is pretty sad.

I'm hesitant to say this to people who are not in the art world, however, because you don't share my assumption that the art culture is also

valuable. From outside of the visual-arts culture, there's a lot of hostility, always. People are very eager to agree with what critical things I have to say, but for all the wrong reasons.

**Cruikshank:**  
Did people buy your early work as furniture?

**Burton:**  
No, as art. It has always been shown in galleries. You've asked me how the endeavor of my individual objects broadened into what is now called "public art." My stock answer is that first I did the chair, and then I placed it.

It occurred to other people before it occurred to me that this furniture art of mine was a natural for public commissions. It would have been inevitable, though, because the earliest pieces, which are not functional, were still about places, rather than just being objects independent of place. So I would probably have come around anyway to doing functional installations or environment.

But the process was quickened when, in 1976, I and a couple of other artists were asked by the New York State Council on the Arts to submit for a competition for the design of a public space in a small city in New York. I didn't win the competition, but this changed my life; since 1976, I have been making proposals for environmental works—outdoor rooms, parks and plazas.

**Cruikshank:**  
And your thinking about public spaces evolved concurrently with, or began to merge with, your gallery and museum works?

Important - PS proposals for the furniture  
like the furniture  
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**Burton:**

I continue to do individual objects. But the broader canvas of the total space is so thrilling, and so gratifying.

There are always limitations: there's an easement here, or there's going to be a building there. The perimeters are usually set. But the satisfaction of being able to say, "The pathway should go from here to here, rather than from there to there," is *deep*. It's not only picking out the materials of the pathway, but also saying, "This is where the pathway should be." So recently I've been branching out: now, I not only do the seating elements, but I've also been doing some landscape design—although that's always in collaboration with someone who is a plant expert, which I am not.

So the work is very, very collaborative—mostly with architects, who have to tell me how these things can be built. But I've designed light standards, pathways, planting beds, fountains, and water walls—all the things that architects and especially landscape architects normally do. And it's great—it's like going from the poem to the novel. The chair is like a lyric poem—it's a short form, an ecstatic form. The novel is a long form, with many complicated analyses. Or maybe the comparison is with the short story and the novel.

Anyway, it's just great. I mean, my emotional core is always in the furniture object. I couldn't do a quote, sculpture, quote if you asked me to.

But let me go back to your question. By 1979, I had not completed any commissions. Let's just call them "commissions," instead of saying location works or environmental design. So the individual pieces, the individual tables and chairs, is probably what suggested to Kathy and her committee that they should consider me.

You asked me how the individual pieces were first distributed, or contextualized—as furniture or as art? It was always as art. However, just as public art moves you into contact with a non-art audience, I have the ambition to have some of my individual objects widely produced. I have designed a couple of pieces that could be production pieces. Not two-ton granite chairs, but lightweight steel or aluminum or wooden pieces. So far I have been rejected by manufacturers. But I'm not giving up, because I have the ambition to have my work in new places.

I think that for me, one great motivation is new audiences. I think the non-art audience is the important audience for us. The tragedy of the Richard Serra piece in New York City [*Tilted Arc*] proves that. Serra's a very, very fine sculptor, and I do not believe his piece should be torn down, because that threatens everything. However, I don't think it's a very appropriate work of art for that site, and I can understand the antagonism to it. So it's not a clear-cut black or white case, where he's right or they're right. They're both right, they're both wrong.

I think that art has to get back to a broader meaning than that available to the initiated audience. But you see, that gives some non-art people the chance to reject modern artists. People argue to me against the Serra, and I say, "Have you ever seen a Richard Serra exhibition? If you haven't, you have no right to discuss this. You don't know the guy's work; you have no right."

What I'm trying to do myself is to move beyond the category of art. I want it both ways. I'm anti-art, but that is an art position. You cannot be a regular designer and be anti-art,

because that's just philistinism. Only an artist has the right to be anti-art. (*Laughs*) So it's a position of complexities, ironies, and some apparent contradictions.

I have no doubt that my work is formally, visually, sculpturally fine. The way the MIT bench twists around, and looks like it's falling on its side, from one point of view. I mean, I find it extremely interesting as *sculpture*, but I want the work to have some meaning to people who never heard of me, and who are not necessarily museum-goers at all.

I think importance and quality have been separated in our period. I would like to do work of *importance*; I don't care about the quality. There are many good artists, but there are few important artists. Those two aspects have been separated from each other. There are an awful lot of good artists around.

**Campbell:**

Isn't that because the culture, in order to make sense out of it, has to pick almost arbitrarily a few people who are going to go into the history of culture?

**Burton:**

No, I don't think it's the culture's choice. I think it's a combination of an artist's temperament and the historical breaks. One example of a work that's good and important is Jasper Johns' flag. In my opinion, when he started doing those flags in 1955, he created the 1960s, in a certain way. He foresaw the whole issue of the deep questioning of American society just by doing that one thing. That's my favorite example. I want to get some social meaning back into art.

And I'd like to help change art into some kind of design. I think that the moral, the ethical dimension of art

is mostly gone, and only in a newly significant relationship with a non-art audience can any ethical dimension come back to art. There is something called the '80s, and there's this generation of neo-Expressionist and neo-Dada artists, but that is the most superficial kind of recycling.

I want to get to not only an ethical, but also some kind of social component, as well. There are few other such artists: Fleischner, George Trakas, Athena Tacha, Nancy Holt, Elyn Zimmerman, and especially Siah Armajani. All in very different styles, these artists are groping towards something new. I mean, we're a pre-generation in a way. It's sort of like the Post-Impressionists: you know you're only defined by being in the same place at the same time. The only thing we have in common is that the work is in public spaces, and therefore, potentially for a non-art audience.

I think that public art has to come to grips with the question of public taste. And public taste, unfortunately, usually means something like the Helmsley Palace, or some kind of Marriott motel decor, where there's a false opulence. But the fact that the artist has to deal with notions of "taste"—this has been foreign to the thinking of the artist. Mere taste is something that Mondrian didn't even *concern* himself with. Or Jackson Pollock.

MIT is a special case, because it is pretty much for a subculture. It's an intellectual subculture, and it's definitely a portion of that subculture that this building is for. I do think a great deal about my audience, which is not a traditionally avant-garde concern. Usually, one's work seems self-generated; it's for yourself and a few people who are your surrogates

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—other artists, or your friends, or a few people like Apollinaire or Harold Rosenberg.

But, to get back to MIT: I *do* think about the audience. And one of my intentions in this work was to do something that would have a certain, maybe, subconscious effect on the users of that building. There is a dialectic there, between the benches and the railings. There are two elements: one is the benches, and the other is the railings. And where the one bench has a railing, and becomes a settee, that's a kind of synthesis to me. One of the things I'm trying to do is to make the same form serve two purposes, so people will look at forms in new ways.

It's very important for you to know that my original plan was not accepted. Originally, I had one bench, and it was at the edge of the [stairwell] cutaway. The railing was 42 inches high—which is code, as you know. The railing was in four horizontal modules, and the top two modules became the back of the settee, then went around the corner and down the staircase, becoming railings again. My intention was to make one thing become another thing. That's why I considered it a dialectic, and that was the intention: to teach the students—maybe it's a little bit pedantic—that something is not necessarily one thing at all times.

But it was interpreted, in a strict interpretation of code, that the rails have to be 42 inches high from where you're *standing*. So if someone were to stand on the bench, the rail wouldn't have been 42 inches high at all. And it was unacceptable to raise the railing to 42-plus-19—which is the seat height—to make it higher at that point, because then it wouldn't have been an identical railing; it would have been a special case.

So my compromise, after a year of real disappointment over this rejection, was to move the primary bench forward, away from the edge. The railing just continued around the arc, and stayed itself. The bench came forward, and two of the rail modules became the back of the settee. I get the point across; but it is now more of a metaphor than a fact.

The way that I then tried to restore the dialectic was by adding a front bench, a backless bench. It's actually a little bit ambiguous as to type, because it could be seen as a table. It's fifteen inches high instead of nineteen, so it's a little bit like the coffee table pulled up in front of the sofa.

**Cruikshank:**

So you have element A out toward the elevators, element B back against the cutout, and elements A plus B in the middle.

**Burton:**

Exactly. That's the dialectic: A plus B equals something else. Bench plus rail equals "settee." "Settee" is what I call something that seats a number of people, but that's not a sofa, not an upholstered piece.

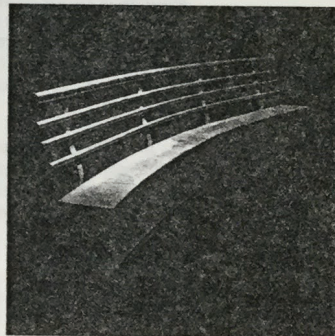
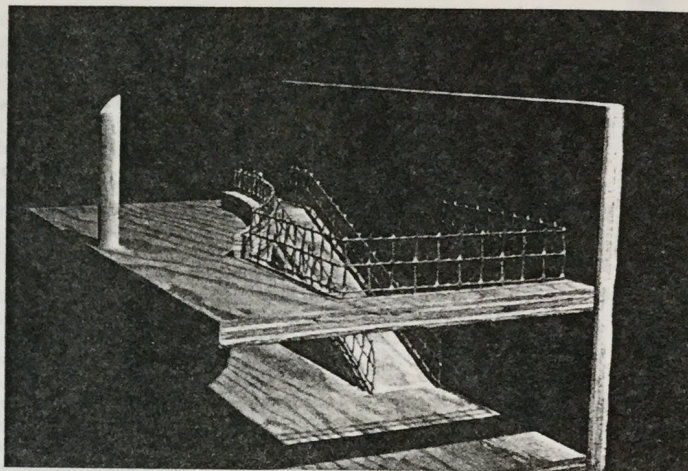
So I was able to rescue the dialectical element.

**Cruikshank:**

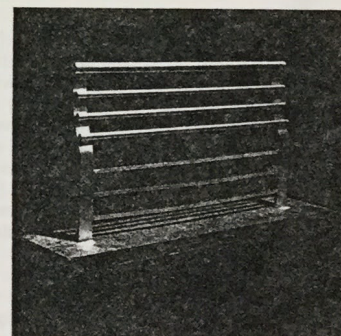
Let me follow up one thing. You mentioned that there was a certain amount of frustration in the process of coming to what you thought of as a first final proposal, then having it get impaled on a building code.

**Burton:**

And architects can laugh at me for that. You know, they *should*. I learned it the dumb way—they learned it in school.



Burton, early model of Wiesner Building atrium stairwell (top)



Burton, Wiesner Building early balustrade model (Herb Engelsberg photo)

Burton, Wiesner Building early settee model (Herb Engelsberg photo)

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**Cruikshank:**

But does that have positive implications, as well? I mean, if you *knew* the building codes, what would the consequences be? Would you be boring, more predictable?

**Burton:**

I hadn't yet internalized the censorship of the building codes. Now I have. And that problem probably would have occurred to me earlier. Now I know more about tread heights, riser heights, tread depths, ramp slope proportions.

**Campbell:**

It's kind of a side issue, but in fact, most elements in most building codes are up for negotiation. The first thing you learn as an architect is that you learn the building code, and you have to apply it. The second thing you learn is that the building code is really in the head of whoever is responsible for interpreting it. Very often, there is a lot of room for negotiation.

So after gaining the security of thinking you know everything, suddenly you are again in the anxious position of *not* knowing everything. So it is very difficult. But the railing height issue is probably the hardest of all to negotiate.

**Burton:**

I had hoped that there could be a loose interpretation, but instead, there was a strict interpretation. And my thing that I had worked for two years on—and met so often with the Peis on—was vetoed. There is so much that goes into it that is rejected.

On the other hand, for me, the slowness of process is terrific, because I think too fast—which is an undoing of mine. Because then I go along and I reconsider. I think architects are unfortunate because they have to

put something down and then stick with it, because it's been costed, and signed by contractors, and you can't change your mind in the middle. The luxury of working on a petty scale is that sometimes you can change your mind, and refine, and evolve as you go along.

For any artist or architect, the unconscious cooking, the back burner, is very, very important, of course. But maybe that's why so much architecture is mediocre: you are forced to build an early concept. I mean, if the client forces you to redesign, you redesign; that's something else. But even after you've fixed on a design, maybe after a year your unconscious mind will come up with something much better—related, but better. And you can't build it.

**Campbell:**

When did the atrium become "your" space? How was that decision made?

**Burton:**

Well, I was asked to consider the atrium as my general location. The expectation was that I would do seating. They had no idea that I would get into railings.

I had done another piece, a landscape tableau, which was not very successful, but I made a couple of wooden benches to sit in and look at it. And those benches, which were a very minor part of it, later became much more important to me. I had made backs for the two benches which were totally independent of the seat, and looked more like fences.

So benches and fences became settees. Now, those pieces were destroyed—in fact, they never were even photographed—but that opened up the whole dialectic between the

seat and the back, an idea I have gone on and on and on with in the last few years. I have to admit it: my natural form must be furniture.

So that's how I suggested that I do the rails as well.

There's another important point I want to bring out about my atrium work. For the cut-out of the floor, Pei's original design had an S-curve here [on the edge parallel to Noland's wall]. It was very, very nice as design. But my method of working on such an issue is not to think first of how it *looks*, but of where I would actually like to sit within this space. Where would I feel most comfortable, sitting?

This is not exactly a functional approach: functional simply means you can sit on it. This is a psychological, operative, point of view. It's thinking about where I would feel comfortable sitting, rather than seeing something as a tableau in front of me. My inspiration comes from imagining myself within the space, rather than being outside of it looking on.

**Cruikshank:**

Did you have in your mind a big Noland-something in that position, as a potential influence on where you would like people to alight?

**Burton:**

No. I didn't "turn my back" on the Noland, if that's what you're suggesting. It was not at all part of my consideration.

There are several aspects to what makes a place comfortable for sitting. One of them is that your back should not feel too exposed, so that you don't feel that too many people are coming up behind you. Another thing is that you like to be very near the action, not too remote from it; but on the other hand, you can't be literally right in the middle of it, because then

you'd be an obstruction. And I didn't know where, in this S-curve, people would like to sit.

But I thought that it would be nice to sit so that you could see out the main doors and out the doors to the courtyard. And of course, the elevators are right in the middle, so all of this is good for people-watching. So I thought of seating somewhere around the middle, with your back to the cut-out, because it's not as interesting to look down into.

Then I realized that an S-curve, such as Pei had proposed, has equal tension, or energy, along its entire length. So there was no place to rest on an S-curve. One point is as good as any other.

**Cruikshank:**

Like going down a slide.

**Burton:**

Yes, exactly. The energy is distributed equally. And that's the beauty of it. However, in this case, I needed some way to anchor people in the space—to create a space within the larger space. And so I proposed to them that we make a straight line [parallel to Noland's wall], and that we make an arc here [on the stairwell end].

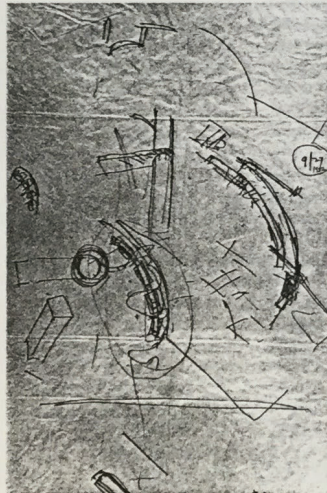
So I had asked Mr. Pei's permission to alter an element of the design, and he liked it. In fact, he apparently said later, after it was built, that that was exactly the right thing to do to that space. I'm very proud of that.

The arc, the curved form, is important. It gives a place for people. I got it so that it's related to both entrances. If you're waiting for people from here, you can sit on this end; and if you're waiting for people from there, you can sit on that end.

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I. M. Pei and Burton



Burton, Wiesner Building stairwell curve drawing, with Sandi Pei

*Equitable  
Hunster benches*

I definitely wanted something that would work with the architecture; and would be part of the architecture, rather than an independent object. The arc has two very important aspects to me. One is that it's like a pair of arms. It's a comfortable shape for people to sit within. It turns people slightly toward each other, unlike an ottoman, which turns them outward. And it's an embracing form. I liken it to a pair of arms—the father standing behind, and the little children in the father's arms. So it's psychologically a rather comforting or stabilizing form.

Another aspect of the arc that I like very much is that it reminds me of the amphitheater. There doesn't seem to be anything classical about this, but the aspect of the Hellenic amphitheater is important to me. So anyway, that helped me out of my dilemma of what to do: I decided to double the benches, to emphasize the amphitheatrical quality more, as well as to re-express the dialectic. So I was able to add the second concentric arc, and it was the idea of a fragment of an amphitheater that got me out of the dilemma, and introduced some new content and a greater usefulness.

**Cruikshank:**  
Did you talk like this to Sandi, and I. M., and work these concepts over?

**Burton:**  
Yes.

**Cruikshank:**  
So you shared all this with them?

**Burton:**  
Uh huh. And Mr. Pei was very generous with his time at the crucial moments. I saw very little of him, except at crucial times. He's a brilliant man, not just in design, but also in per-

sonal relations. I was in there really depressed over the rejection of the first plan. And he got the log-jam un-jammed. He made suggestions that I didn't take, but that were heuristic, that gave me ideas. He made me feel competent again. And it was wonderful. He has a truly sensitive perception of human situations.

**Campbell:**  
I wonder if it's partly that architects are so used to those rebuffs, and coming back from them. I think for artists—who are so used to having more control—it's much more difficult.

**Cruikshank:**  
Can you recount for me how the reiteration of this form on the second floor came about? Did you have a part in that?

**Burton:**  
That was truly collaborative. They always had the overhanging balconies, but they redesigned their contour to reflect the arc, I think. And then we worked together on the detailing of the rails, and how they fit those arcs. Which was fine with me, even though the arc would have been a more distinctive feature if those upper balconies had been a different shape. So they were "de-Burtonizing" the arc, in a way, by repeating it. It looks now like an element of the building.

**Cruikshank:**  
They were mass-producing you.

**Burton:**  
But that's fine with me.

**Campbell:**  
Did you have interactions with the other artists at all? You have at least a contextual relationship to Noland.

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**Burton:**

I had a potentially difficult relationship with the Noland. The inner rail going down the stairs is against Noland's wall. So I proposed a more minimal rail than is there now. But because of code, those planes of steel had to go down to the ground; it couldn't be open, because there's a gap of a few inches; and so on.

I thought he would kick up a fuss, which he didn't. But there is more of my work in that inner stair-rail than I think appropriate for the relation to his piece. I would have liked to have it be less, so as not to interfere as much with his wall.

**Campbell:**

But you didn't consider the conventional solution there, which is to use Lexan, or something like that?

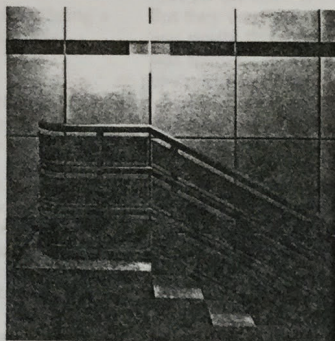
**Burton:**

I considered it, but I rejected it because that would have been a whole different element, and it would have looked worse in terms of total design, where the rails are the unified things and you look up—floor, floor, floor—and there are the rails.

The best solution would have been a modified version of my rail, with fewer of the covering panels. But we weren't allowed to do that.

**Cruikshank:**

When people discuss this issue of art and architecture, they tend to talk first about what the architect gives up. Some people are amazed, for example, that I. M. Pei would want to "give up control" over this building. Did you ever think in terms of what *you* were "giving up"? You've talked about what you gained, but what have you given up, in your normal working processes, as you participated in this project?



Burton, Wiesner Building balustrade against atrium wall, detail (Steve Rosenthal photo)

**Burton:**

What I gave up was autonomy. Not vis-a-vis the architect, but vis-a-vis the forces of society. But I don't think that's so bad. I'm infinitely inventive, as far as I'm concerned. And by now, I'm no longer so discouraged if I can't have something a certain way.

**Campbell:**

It's really inevitable.

**Burton:**

Another aspect that is very, very important is that of budgets. Budget constraints are a very important element of sited work, and one which is not important when I do my individual pieces. My dealers are willing to back me in expensive fabrication costs, and money is not the object.

And developers are a problem. Government agencies, cities, municipal agencies—they're a problem, too. But with government agencies, and cities, and municipalities as the patrons, there are *groups* of people involved. With the developer, however, it's arbitrary, and it's personal power. The power of the person who is funding it is absolute, and so I find that a potential constraint.

**Campbell:**

Autonomy is exactly what you lose, isn't it? It doesn't matter whether it's the developer's budget constraining you, or the building code, or the need to function properly in some working situation, or the architect, or the other artists, or public taste. The whole thing is really one problem, isn't it? You move out of the studio, and out of the gallery, and you're moving into constraints.

**Burton:**

But that, for me, is *deeply* stimulating. It's challenging, and I've learned to

cope better with it emotionally, and have more faith in my own inventiveness, and feel that I can deal with it. And I feel that the autonomy of the studio artist is a trivial thing by now, in our society. Who *cares* if you paint it blue instead of red?

**Campbell:**

Does this get back to your issue of the difference between being "good" and having importance—in the sense that you can be "good" in the studio, but it's harder to be "important" there?

**Burton:**

No, it's conceivable that a studio artist—a person who makes paintings, or sculptures or photographic works; works of a purely esthetic category—could be an important artist. But that work is seen only by people who go to galleries and museums, so that limits it.

When work is limited to an art audience, it can have all the moral issues in the world, but the audience is limited. And you're converting the already converted. Forms of art that are not fine art are the only ones that have a chance of being disseminated into the wider culture.

**Cruikshank:**

Could you talk a little bit in a similar way about Fleischner, with whom you share a lot of vocabulary, and—it seems to me—a lot of objectives?

**Burton:**

I doubt it very much. Fleischner is very concerned with his work as "art." I believe in him. He was a pioneer of the artist moving into landscaping-as-design—beyond earth works. He's really an original. But I think he's got a strong element of art-love.

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**Campbell:**

I think he's in transition from being a sculptor to being something else.

**Burton:**

It's a transitional generation. Some of the other artists I've mentioned really hate me, because I pooh-pooh the sacredness of art.

But someone like Siah Armajani is a great confirmation to me of my direction. You know, the art audience may like my work, but they don't understand the implications of it—that it is, indeed, to change the nature of our art.

I recognize that the artist is still not *really* a part of the culture. I realize that when I have to go before a city planning commission, or a New York City community board, or a municipal design committee, and they don't really understand what I'm trying to give them. They pick it apart. And I realize there is still some degree of alienation, which is the basis for and causes the need for the avant garde.

Ours is a transitional generation. Maybe the next one will be designers, public-space designers, plaza designers, park designers. Design: another reason why certain artists dislike me is that I use the word "design." The word "decoration" used to be such a dirty word, and then it became chic. Well, design is even more of a dirty word. Some so-called public artists proclaim, "I'm not a designer, I'm an artist." It just makes me laugh. Although I'm not a real designer, design is a content—and a value—for me.

**Cruikshank:**

Let me ask two grubby questions, having to do with geography and money. People say that you are the one who got most involved in the process. The Pei people said, "He was

here all the time. It was just great."

But they would also say, "Providence was pretty far away, and California was *really* far away." So that seems an obvious lesson.

**Burton:**

That's very, very important. Working in your own town is terrific.

**Cruikshank:**

How about money? Did you get paid well enough?

**Burton:**

In my opinion, I was overpaid for it. We were to each get \$25,000, and I was thrilled. I had only done one commission, and I got about \$800.

But then Noland wanted more, and apparently he was really adamant. So rather than pay him more and us less, they upped our figure. So I feel overpaid for it, frankly. And especially considering all these costs that are not mine, like in the architects' time. Because there were many hours of architects' time on this that didn't come out of my pocket.

**Cruikshank:**

And your project did not run up against the sorts of expense problems that Fleischner's did, for example?

**Burton:**

Well, the scope of his work is much larger, right?

**Campbell:**

And it kept growing all the time.

**Cruikshank:**

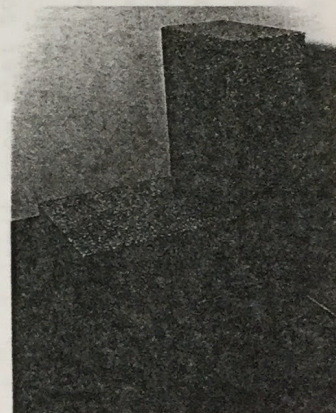
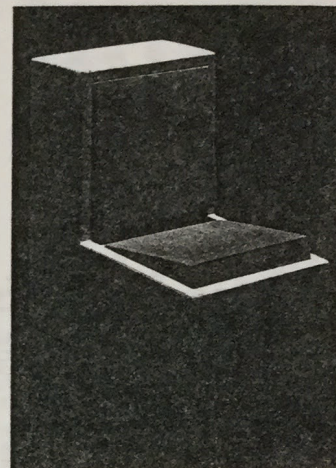
You never had to go to Wiesner, for example, and say, "Please find us another \$10,000"?

**Burton:**

Well, that has happened because of this thing downstairs in the lower lobby.

This was the second collaboration. In the lower lobby, this is what I would like to do: a pair of segments of a circle. A pair of benches. It's totally different from the upstairs part. There will be the grey Pirelli [flooring], and these polished black granite forms will sit on it. It won't jump out like Noland's red and blue squares, but it's clearly an added element, rather than an integral element. But it's very good, because the room is a square, and this is concentric. It repeats the square, but it slices things off, so the pedestrian routes are considered.

It's minimal, but it's just enough. They're wonderful shapes in themselves, just the two slices. But better, they make this space into a *room*, rather than just a hallway.



Burton, Wiesner Building, model of concrete and granite chair for lower level (Herb Engelsberg photo)

Burton, Pair of two-part granite chairs, 1984. Collection Robert Kaye (Earl Ripling photo)

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June 25, 1970 Iowa City, Iowa

*that are 'liberalist theatre'?*

with  
 It's only been/in the last year and a half that I've been involved in doing works which are in public situations. (By urban environment I mean any kind of situation involving more than one person in terms of art works. You might think well, a painting or a sculpture on display in a gallery involves ~~an urban environment~~ <sup>liberalist theatre</sup> in that sense but what interests me is the execution—that is to say, the performance—of the work in a public situation not just the after-the-fact exhibition of the work. None of them has titles. The first one I will mention to you—I can only describe them—and I'd like just then to note some of my intentions, because I think <sup>those are</sup> ~~that is~~ paramount, and some things that, some concerns that interested me while doing this. For one of the Street Works series that Marjorie and John and Hannah Weiner organized, I did, I wanted to do something invisible, I wanted to be there and not be there. I did this, and it sounds funny but it wasn't meant to be funny, by dressing as a woman. It wasn't drag, it was very ordinary. I carried a shopping bag and I tried to be as inconspicuous as possible and I think I succeeded because a lot of my friends looked at me and none of them saw me, saw me, you know. My interest was in <sup>and</sup> controlling the way you present yourself, and your clothing as a language or like a language you can not use it. I tried to say something silent, I don't know. I did another piece as a Street Works involving silence, a removal piece, my negative sound piece. What I did? sounds fancy, all I did was walk around with wax in my ears to remove the condition of sound from the environment. Now obviously this involved only myself, but I want you all to do it and if it's published, you know, the text—and the text of all of these <sup>is not</sup> constitutes directions in some way for performing them. To read them, to read these things is not to experience them. You have to do a lot of them. I don't say you have to go around in women's clothing, <sup>but</sup> I do intend ~~that~~ <sup>that</sup> the reader/ <sup>then</sup> ~~put~~ wax in his ears. That's the only way/he can experience the work as far as I'm concerned. Instructions, I think, is, literature as instructions, I guess. Anyway, I induced silence by putting wax in my ears. and walked around and it was very strange, it was, it made me feel very peculiar and, I don't know what to say about it.

I did some pieces called street theatre pieces or theatre of the street. I have some examples of them. All of them, all of them really have to be performed to be, to be fully, to be, not only to be fully experienced, to be experienced. The performer has to approximate reality as closely as possible. They have to be, the degree of credibility has to be, has to be perfect because they're just doing, they're just pretending, doing ordinary actions but just pretending to in a sense, doing them gratuitously. For example—ten examples. Standing on a corner, waiting for someone, who does not come.

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Hurrying or perhaps running to a destination. Dropping <sup>and</sup> some coins as if accidentally and then picking them up. Stumbling~~ing~~/tripping or falling and then getting up. Greeting a stranger, for example by waving or calling a name in which case this becomes a piece of, involving mistaken identity. Laughing to yourself as if at your own thoughts, but in public. Asking directions as if you're lost and then going to that place. Walking down the street, stopping, and then turning and going back home or wherever you came from as if you had forgotten something or had changed your mind in mid-course. Looking behind you several times as you walk, as if you're looking at something of interest, ~~of~~ moderate interest, not enough interest to make you turn around. And the last example- incidentally, these are only examples. Anything you do without having to do it or doing it in the ~~course~~ course of your life, just because you want to imitate ordinary life, constitutes another example, and an equally valid one of this idea, streets as theatre. Anyway, the last one is appearing to be deeply preoccupied while you're walking and not noticing anything at all around you. The duration of these pieces in some cases variable. I mean the one about picking up, you know, dropping the coins and picking them up obviously only lasts a certain time but you can wait for somebody as long as you want.

I did another piece in the streets as part of Street Works. The Architectural League of New York officially sponsored Street Works number four and for that I did a public nudity piece which you might think of as a visual removal. That is to say, I walked down the street nude. I didn't have the courage to do it on Fifth Avenue at high noon, I did it only a couple of feet <sup>late</sup> at night in an obscure neighborhood. <sup>well,</sup> I'll tell you why. <sup>because</sup> The themes of this work, as far as I'm concerned are madness and criminality, as well as the dream. I was told later that it was a classic anxiety dream. I in fact dreamed it. Walking down the street without your clothes on and everybody has theirs on and you feel totally terrified--well, I--you have reason to feel terrified, I can tell you. But I wanted not only to enact a dream, ~~which~~ which ~~I~~ I'd had, but, I don't know, I was preoccupied with, well, in the modern period, like in Dickens, the theme of ~~the~~ prisons is frequent and very haunting. And in Genet, the theme of the criminal. I think the idea, some future idea I have for art works, is that they must be illegal. This of course is illegal, <sup>II</sup> but I think ~~that~~ art can undermine, if art can help to undermine the legal system in this country, I think that would be good. The public nudity work <sup>was</sup> a companion piece to a work I did called Dream. Well, it isn't called Dream, it was having a, this dream. The Architectural League had--many of my works are initiated to fit situations, not conceived

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and then executed whenever the chance comes up, but fitted to the situa-  
tion. This, the work, Dream, well, the Architectural League had an opening  
a public art opening, not public, ~~it was~~ <sup>they were</sup> invited <sup>but</sup> it was a huge party with a  
rock and roll band and everything else and I just took a cot and put it in  
the hallway and put on pajamas and dropped some--took some pills and went to  
sleep in public. For two hours, the opening was two hours <sup>so</sup> that constituted  
the duration of the piece. I think of my works as theatre because they  
exist in time. I've done pieces for, for actual stages, which are not  
really relevant to urban environment in a way, except insofar as they <sup>was</sup> re-  
quire an audience. Anything else to say about the dream, yes, it, I said it,  
they asked me for an explanation for their press release, <sup>and</sup> I said it was a  
combination of literalism and Surrealism-literalism in that I was using my  
own actual processes instead of processes of my imagination, my biological  
metabolic processes, I really was asleep and I really was dreaming. I  
really did dream this dream too. But body art, that's a term you're going  
to be hearing a lot of next fall, interested me at the time. ~~Surrealism~~  
That's the literalism part. Surrealism is the obvious thing, using the  
unconscious as the source of creating your art work. I wanted to dream  
up a work and I dreamed a classic, you know, this anxiety dream. All, you  
know, there're fictional elements in, in all of this critical analysis,  
obviously. But not fictional in the <sup>in the</sup> sense of made up, just fictional in that  
this is like a performance for me because I'm dissociating myself from my-  
self, I'm talking in a critical way about works I've done and it's very,  
this is a schizophrenic work. I think that's all, thank you.

Street  
works

↓ art  
illegal

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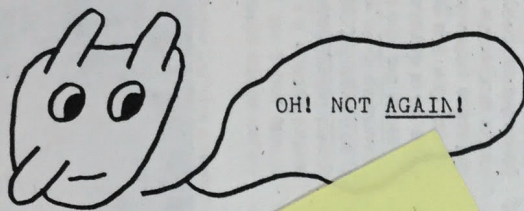
Art-Rite #6

Scene 74

WE ASKED A NUMBER OF ARTISTS TO RESPOND TO THIS:  
**MAKE A POLITICAL STATEMENT**

**RAY JOHNSON**

My "roughly the same length" political statement follows:



**JON HENDRICKS**

**JEAN**

To be a labor artist

- 1) Be available when needed.
- 2) Forget about imprinting your own stylistic esthetic onto the reality.
- 3) Deal with day-to-day realities, not fantasies.
- 4) Be able to overcome your personal hang-ups.
- 5) Deal with issues, not personalities.
- 6) Be active, not reactive.
- 7) Be able to work alone, or with others.
- 8) Be flexible.
- 9) Be able to take initiative when needed.
- 10) Not be afraid of making mistakes.
- 11) Not be afraid of being inconsistent.
- 12) Be versatile.
- 13) Be imaginative.
- 14) Get rid of preconceptions.
- 15) Constantly redefine your role as reality dictates.

**KENMARE MOTT**

[expletive deleted]  
[expletive deleted]

**SCOTT BURTON**

"Make a political statement." Or at least, a statement about politics. The art class is a conservative and stagnant class. It cannot hope to become a politically alive class in its group social behavior (viz., the May 1970 Emergency Art Government). It can only hope to become politically alive if it becomes culturally alive; this it can only do by redirecting its real energy, which lies in its works. But so far artists have not produced new styles or kinds of art that relate to more than a small part of the rest of the people or that have any vital relation to the energies — expressed or frustrated — of the whole culture. Only if we do so can we then serve the better of those people and energies. There have been a few exceptions so far: (1) Tatlin was right when he designed/invented a new stove, a set of clothing, an orniopter and a media megatower. (He also wrote, in 1932, "Work in the field of furniture and other articles of use is only just beginning: the emergence of new cultural institutions, vital in our daily lives, institutions in which the working masses are to live, think and develop their attitudes, demands from the artist not only a feeling for the superficially decorative but above all for things which fit the new existence and its dialectic." (2) Joseph Beuys is right when he says that the creativity of all men is our responsibility. (3) Robert Smithson was right when he prophetically started working on a land-reclamation project, addressing the industrial desolation that every other modern artist has found picturesque. (4) Andy Warhol is right (in another way: the semantic rather than the

pragmatic) when he makes an accessible or popular narrative film, *Frankenstein*, designed for broad audiences but keeping his subversive attitudes — Artaud speaking through the Addams Family. And a partial exception is the Women's Movement in art, which has not produced any new conceptions of art itself. (However, in what it has done to institutions and habits of taste, it is far advanced in comparison to the Gay Movement.) No other important instances from the area of "good" or "real" art occur to me. But these few could be inspiring.

**HOWARDENA PINDELL**

Censorship in the provinces. Judy Bernstein's work was removed by the director (political appointee) of the Philadelphia Civic Center from the Focus on Women Artists exhibition, because he felt that the work had erotic overtones and therefore had "no redeeming social value... besides there would be school children seeing the exhibition." The participating artists were in the meantime sent a lengthy insurance form with the brief paragraph that stated that the center had the right to withdraw work.

The Duchamp exhibition brought adulation and praise in Philadelphia for its explicit erotic content. What reaction would there have been if Duchamp had really been Rose Selavy.

**RUDY BURCKHARDT**

I still think ART is stronger than politics.

**WILLOUGHBY SHARP**

My art is personal  
This is a political statement.

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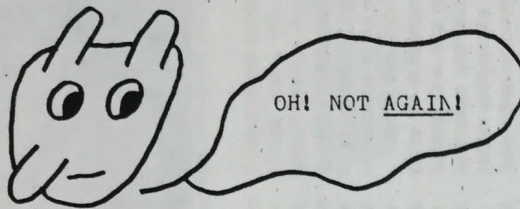
Art-note #6

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To be involved in useful labor - as a revolutionary artists - you must:

- 1) Be available when needed.
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- 15) Constantly redefine your role as reality dictates.

**KENMARE MOTT**

[expletive deleted]  
[expletive deleted]

**ADRIAN PIPER**

Power is bad for the lining of the stomach. Financial success causes overweight and heart trouble. Artworld parties are bad for the liver. Galleries cause headaches and bloodsugar attacks. Dealers cause dislocation of the jaw. Critical reviews cause digestive upsets and emphysema. Competition between fellow artists for any of the above is a known carcinogen.

**MAY STEVENS**

The Shafrazzi affair makes an irrational attempt to break the barrier between art and life. On other levels, so does the art of Andre, Andrews, Baranik, Golub, Grossman, Haacke, Kozloff, Morris, Neel, Schapiro, Sleigh, Spero and myself. There are others who understand that we are participants, whether active or passive, in the currents of corruption, sexism, racism, war and exploitation that govern our lives. I find art that shows that awareness incomparably more exciting than art which solves the problem of the picture plane alone

**SCOTT BURTON**

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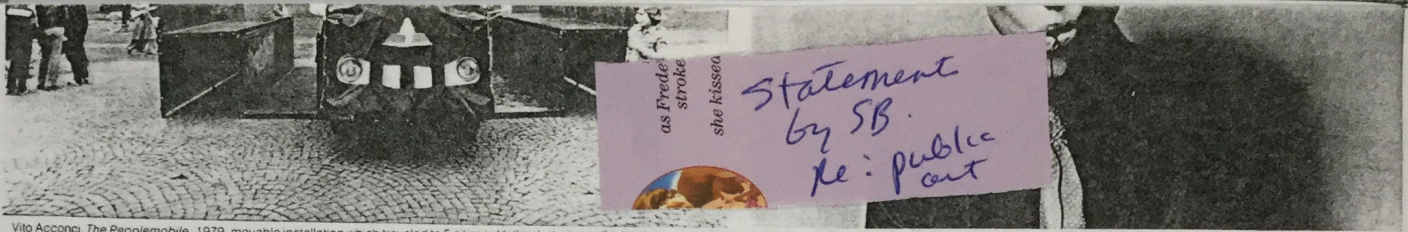
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Vito Acconci. *The Peoplemobile*. 1979. movable installation which traveled to 5 cities in Holland, staying in the town square of each city for 3 days, changing shape each day.

Laurie Anderson. *Solo with Small Speaker in Mouth*. 1979. performance.

Situation Class Notes. 4/80 Artforum

way I had never considered. He was an expert at letting the energy level in the room drop off disastrously—to the point where people suddenly become aware that they are part of a half-drunk clientele crowded in a room waiting to laugh. The walls start to close in.

I learned a lot about space from Andy. For a while I was straight woman/audience plant for him. I was an angry women's libber and my job was to heckle him until he said, "Yeah, well, I'll only respect you when you come up here and wrestle me down." Andy never just pretended to wrestle. We used to go out to Coney Island and ride the Roto-Whirl—the cylinder that plasters you against the wall, stretching mouths into grotesque smiles, and then the bottom drops out. As soon as everybody is inside, the door is locked and about three minutes pass while the cylinder is checked. It was this time frame that Andy understood. The moment the door was locked he began to look panicked. "I don't think I want to be here. I don't think this ride is safe. Let me out. Get me out of here." Suddenly the other riders' mood changed, and they began to act like hijack victims. The bottom dropped out.

I have received and continue to receive psychological and intellectual support from the art world and believe that the structure and intentions of my work are best understood by other artists. However, in the past two years I have found myself doing as many things for nonart audiences as for art audiences. I don't change the work according to the audience. As a result, it is now possible for me to think of American art as something that can enter culture in other ways, unescorted by institutional art intermediaries. Radio, T.V. and a variety of spaces—old movie houses, rock clubs, bars, V.F.Ws and amphitheatres—have become more accessible to artists who work in live situations. Using these channels makes it possible as well as necessary continually to revise my ideas about the flexibility of space—physical, electronic and psychological—and finally to learn to look at people. The art audience appears to be expanding and although

I'm not *that* enthusiastic about going uptown to Ticketron to get tickets to something I used to just be able to go around the corner (at the last minute) to see, I think it's interesting that there's so much enthusiasm. It's hard to tell who's coming to these things, but I know that *something's* different because now I receive a fair amount of letters that can only be described as fan mail. Nobody used to ask me what my favorite color is, what I like for breakfast, what I do in my spare time. Strangely, a few of the letters appear to be form letters, with multiple-choice questions.

I'm also interested in wider audiences because it takes performance art out of slightly ingrown situations (twice a year for the same three hundred people) and because it pays better to do things sponsored by Schlitz than the Museum of Modern Art. Besides, I have only one year left of declaring business failure before the I.R.S. changes my category from "profession" to "hobby!"

**Scott Burton**

The very idea of audience is reappearing. It isn't just a question of the nature of the audience—what class or caste is reflected—but of the nature of the work's relationship to audience. A new kind of relationship seems to be beginning to evolve, a deep shift beginning in our needs: toward a visual culture of design or applied art. The new descriptive phrases for this culture haven't been coined yet, but it might be called public art. Not because it is necessarily located in public places, but because its content is more than the private history of its maker. It might be called popular art, not because it is a mass art, but because it is not an unpopular art, not a "difficult" or "critical" art. Visual art is moving away from the hermetic, the hieratic, the self-directed; toward more civic, more outer-directed, less self-important relations with social history. No mere maker of visual signs can be exemplary, can propose a sufficient moral authority or model of psychic liberation in a time like ours, a time convinced that it is proceeding toward apocalypse.

Art just seems spiritually insufficient in a doomsday climate and it will probably take an increasingly relative position. It will place itself not in front of but around, behind, underneath (literally) the audience—in an operational capacity. (This doesn't mean that monumental forms will die out. On the contrary.)

I see at this time two main mutations of art. They come out of sculpture and painting but leave them behind. One is a new architecturality. I mean the landscape architecture of George Trakas and the interior architecture of Siah Armajani. These artists have advanced beyond architectonic sculpture to the category of actual buildings, for the structures of Trakas and Armajani are not to be experienced for their own sakes. Instead, they shape or enhance—they operate on—the user's experience (respectively, of the landscape itself and the social function). The audience's use of these artists' structures is their very meaning. The counterpart of this new building art is the new decorative art. Its makers have emerged from painting and will eventually renew craft; they do not use decorativeness as a theme of pictures but are rediscovering other categories of artifact—furnishings and architectural decoration. I mean the lamps of Harry Anderson; the screens, curtains and hangings of Robert Kushner, Jane Kaufman and Kim McConnell; the walls, floors and ceilings of Joyce Kozloff and Valerie Jaudon. Professional designers and craftspeople don't have the powers of invention that these and a few other artists are being given by the historical moment.

Somewhere between these two new forms I locate my own objects, my furniture. And there is an important related artist who has appeared at this time, too—Judith Shea, the clearest, most advanced artist who produces wearable objects. Her work is clothing, not costume; she is rethinking the structure of Western garments much as Steve Reich rethought the structure of our music, and in a way that only an artist, as opposed to a fashion designer, has today the cultural freedom to do (for the art world still has its uses).

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My own history in performance leads me to add the point that there is a parallel mutation toward audience-oriented work in this field. The pioneer of the emergent entertainment-performance, as opposed to the self-investigation of "conceptual performance," is Alan Suicide. From the beginning, this music-artist took performance to real stages, to clubs and cabarets, and in the process was an innovator of contemporary personal style (Punk). Related is William Weg-

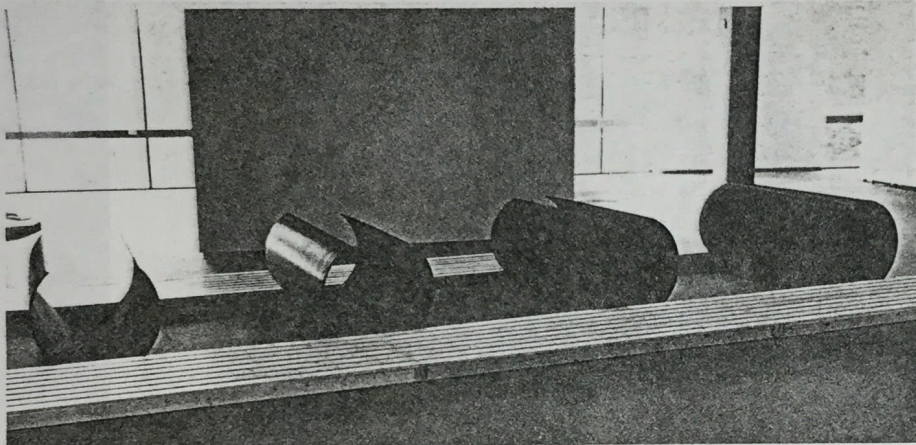
man, who introduced a classic means of audience accessibility, humor, into art, thus moving the visual culture away from video art and toward television.

All this will take several generations; it's not just a matter of new styles which can appear and disappear within a decade. There are still painters and sculptors whose talents are large enough to give their art forms some historical vitality—though there are fewer and fewer.

#### Peter Campus

I hope that artists are working away from the elite view and that "the public" is becoming more aware of contemporary art; that artists and art will serve some real function directed toward society, giving it the fruits of their struggles and searches, and society will nourish itself on these fruits and become healthier. The reality that confronts us at every turn is that "the public" looks quickly if at all at contemporary art, that too many artists are ambitious for themselves and not ambitious enough for their works. The very forms of art that were supposed to reach greater audiences have only formed their own elite groups. In video we reached the ridiculous situation of showing works in art galleries that were meant to be aired on television. We were put in that position because broadcasters refused to show anything but the most palatable work and never on a regular basis. This is understandable when you realize that you are looking at an industry that censors itself (from within) at every level.

In our manipulation of language "the avant-garde" is really also "the salon," and we can't see it because we are seated in the middle of it. The reply that artists can only be responsible for their own work, keeping it honest and pure, is defeatist and dangerous. What one must do is erode the system by affecting an uncompromising attitude in dealing with the art-world structure. This is the most difficult path possible because the results of one's labors are almost nonexistent, but then there is no other choice. If enough erosion occurs over the years there will be an eventual change in the system and artists will have a closer participation with society. To me it sounds like Eden.



Cecile Abish, *Renaissance Fix*, 1979, installation, Hudson River Museum, Yonkers.

#### Cecile Abish

*From content to discontent and vice versa*

##### *Content*

Cement floors, polished waxed floors, slate floors, carpeted floors, old wood floors, white walls, formica table tops, elevators, spotlights, telephones, are recognizable familiar artifacts, objects, things that have become a replacement for the pedestal. How do these affect the content? . . . They no longer merely represent the art context, they are an indicator of taste that validates the art.

Work is not merely exhibited. It is given space, allowed room . . . which implies a decision, and control.

Duration of the sculpture is possession of a surface.

##### *Discontent*

Does discontent compel the artist to search and explore new forms, i.e. a new content?

To what degree has the person or persons designing the exhibition space also imposed his or her ideas on all future content? Is the putting down of a carpet an economic decision or an act of sabotage?

With a slight amount of persuasion one should be able to convince anyone that their apartment or loft is essentially a mini-museum.

The artist tends to think in terms of time slots, seasons, and spatial requirements, not of impermanence. Im-

#### Richard Fleischner

It is a concern about boundaries, distances and scale, and the attitude they create, that has determined the form, content and location of my work. Because these works occur in other than traditional places they are seen by people who might not go into museums and galleries—but I think this is a by-product of the nature of the work and not a motivation for it. As such I don't feel a change in my perception of audience.

The resolution of a project depends for me on its relationship and dialogue with the elements of a particular site. I begin a project with a general concept whose final form and scale are very much determined by the specifics of the site.

#### Dan Graham

Sixties art was, in general, internationalist, idealist and utopian in outlook. In various forms, the avant-garde