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Installation view of the exhibition Projects: Vernon Fisher. January 20, 1990 through march 6, 1990. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
Photograph courtesy, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

(Southwall)

Keller 10980



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Installation view of the exhibition Projects: Vernon Fisher. January 20, 1990 through March 6, 1990. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
Photograph courtesy, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
(Eastwall)

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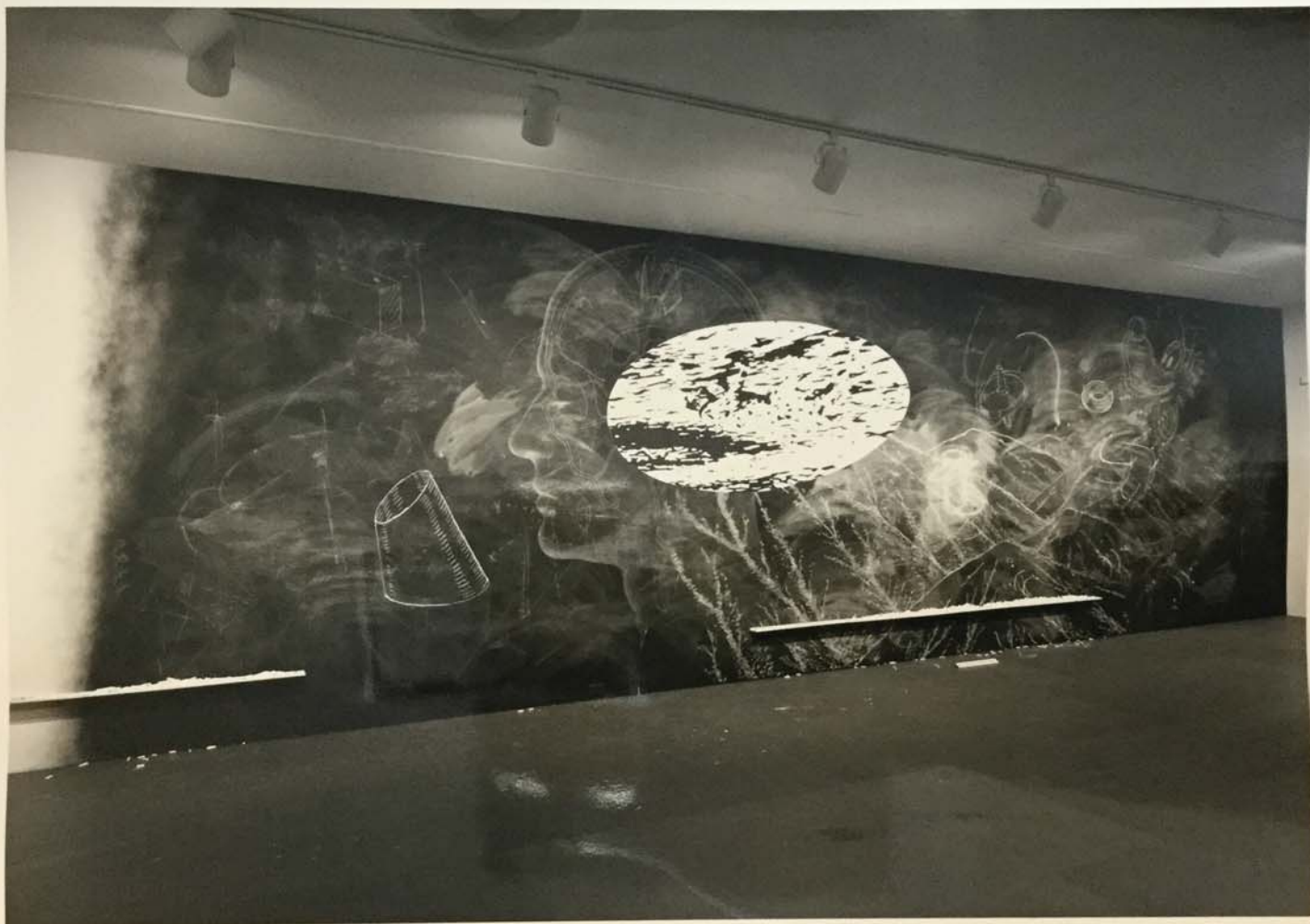
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THE VILLAGE VOICE  
20 February 1990

file

# Art That Barks, Art That Bites

AR

VERNON FISHER  
11 West 53rd Street

Monrovia Kelley 10981 3/7

To \_\_\_\_\_  
Date Monday Time 1:50 A.M. ☐  
P.M. ☐

## WHILE YOU WERE OUT

M. Miranda  
of Mcc Lintoc  
Phone 414-444-6364  
Area Code 414 Number 444 Extension 6364  
- 10 60 5th Ave

TELEPHONED	PLEASE CALL
CALLED TO SEE YOU	WILL CALL AGAIN
WANTS TO SEE YOU	URGENT
RETURNED YOUR CALL	

Message 996 3292

Re: Vernon  
Fisher ext.

my wed. - Any photos - can it  
call w/  
checklist info Operator he picked  
up Tuesday

161P  
NJOS

includes survivor's inst. +  
metronome

from the floor while I was there and began to improvise on one of the black-boardlike walls. By the time the guard—who was staring absently into space—noticed, an awkward diagram had been added to the installation. As he tried to erase the offending addition with a handkerchief, the guard made a contribution of his own to the work: a chalky smear.



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THE VILLAGE VOICE  
20 February 1990

file

# Art That Barks, Art That Bites

BY KIM LEVIN

**ART**

**VERNON FISHER.** *The Museum of Modern Art*  
11 West 53rd Street, through March 6.

All art is participatory, requiring a viewer's mind or eye. But some art demands more. A number of current installations raise questions about what the terms of this eternal unspoken contract between viewer and art really are, here and now. And whose terms are they, anyway? "Participatory" art is drawing out the subtle tension between ethics and aesthetics, privacy and process, information and manipulation, exploring new regions of social awareness—or lack of it.

Narrative artist Vernon Fisher's cosmic blackboard installation in the MOMA Projects room flirts with viewer creativity, inviting participation and then thwarting it. The beautifully scribbled diagrams and erasures that Fisher has made on the blackened walls create a galactic-schoolroom effect. Long chalk trays on these simulated slateboard surfaces overflow; the floor is littered with pieces of chalk. Among the doodles, notations, and drawings of optical equipment is a Disneyish dog (Pluto?) smirking from within a connect-the-dots Milky Way, and an anamorphic dalmatian that reveals itself by way of a mirror and lens. The text is a fantasy about a frantic mutt and a Pavlovian experiment gone haywire. A metronome ticks.

Little wonder that a middle-aged man in suit and tie picked up a piece of chalk from the floor while I was there and began to improvise on one of the blackboardlike walls. By the time the guard—who was staring absently into space—noticed, an awkward diagram had been added to the installation. As he tried to erase the offending addition with a handkerchief, the guard made a contribution of his own to the work: a chalky smear.

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March 26, 1990

TO: Richard Oldenburg  
Sue Dorn  
James Gara  
Sara de Leon  
Magdalena Dabrowski

PROJECTS: Vernon Fisher Preview  
Friday, January 19, 1990  
6:30 - 8:30 p.m.  
Garden Hall, PROJECTS Gallery  
Attendance: 122  
Guarantee: 150

FROM: Joan Howard *JH*  
Andrea Rizzo

Charge Number: 8078

Project Orders: Security #26285		
Operations #26286		
Security Guards 24 hours	459.60	
" Supervisors 4 hours	<u>83.08</u>	\$ 542.68
Climate Control/Lighting		70.00
Staff Overtime	35.08	
" Hostesses	92.88	
" Temporary help	<u>105.00</u>	232.96
Miscellaneous: Plastic glasses		49.50
Invitations:		
Design	45.00	
Offset/Paper	189.00	
Postage	<u>175.00</u>	409.00
Wine		63.27
Catering: daka		473.50
Includes: ice and set-ups		
help		
equipment		
TOTAL EXPENSE:		\$ 1,840.91



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FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM  
5 February 1990

# ART

## Fisher's work reaches out and touches

By JANET TYSON  
FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

**A**RLINGTON — Vernon Fisher's art has a way of plopping stones into the pond of your brain, creating eddies that continue even after you've left it and returned to the rest of the world.

Now, as it happens, there's a lot of eddying going on.

Fisher has an installation at the Museum of Modern Art, New York City, and one at the University of Texas at Arlington.

And the local presentation of his traveling retrospective — organized by the La Jolla (Calif.) Museum of Contemporary Art — opens at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth on Feb. 11.

Between the latter two exhibitions, viewers in the Fort Worth vicinity will have their best chance ever to get to know Fisher's work, which ironically — but in the art world it always seems to be so — is better known elsewhere than in his hometown.

As noted above, Fisher's wryly poetic work always has been remarkably engaging and resonant. It becomes a flexible cluster of reference points for decoding other aspects of life.

But his most recent work — which resembles old-fashioned blackboards covered with dusty, ghostly chalklike scrawls and added-on things like chalk trays, photographic screen prints and painted images — reaches out and involves viewers even more.

Almost, it could be said, to a somewhat

problematic degree.

For example, in New York, Fisher has a room in which the four walls have that blackboard look.

Titled *Movements Among the Dead*, the installation revolves, among other things, around the way animals — including people — are conditioned to expect things to be a certain way because they associate those things with certain signs and stimuli.

But more and more, what we perceive and are led to anticipate, isn't what really is happening.

Anyway, handmade chalk trays, mounted near the bottoms of the walls, are so loaded with chalk Fisher has let it spill onto the floor. There is a surveyor's compass on a tripod in the middle of the room that's about the first thing people approach upon entering.

Looking through it, you can see a screened image on the end wall. But the compass brings the image of a white explorer in a canoe into such focus that it entirely disintegrates.

There also is a parabolic mirror, mounted to one of those crisscrossing extenders, coming out from that end wall. It reflects another distorted visual element on the adjacent wall. That element is an ellipse containing an upside-down, abstracted, Dalmatian dog. Close by, on that same wall, is a dot-to-dot drawing of Pluto-the-dog, with some of the dots left unconnected.

Apart from that incomplete image, various aspects of the "chalk" drawings and notes on each wall have a look of being constantly drawn, erased and redrawn.

The whole work seems to be in a state of flux. And there are more than a few things for viewers to interact with and contribute to via processes of perception. So much so, that New Yorkers started picking up the chalk and adding their own little doodles to the installation.

Now, Fisher's work is meant to blur distinctions between art and everything else, which may or may not mean blurring other distinctions, as well.

For example: Where does what the artist does stop, and at what point does the viewer come in as part of the art process?

Is it up to the artist to provide stimuli, ranging from ambiguous to perfectly

### Vernon Fisher: An Installation

Through March 16: The University of Texas at Arlington Center for Research in Contemporary Art, Fine Arts Building, 600 S. Cooper St.  
Information: 273-3110

Also on view, through Feb. 16: *The New Narratology — Examining the Narrative in Image-Text Art*, curated by Maria Porges and featuring works by Jack Balas, Nayland Blake, Mark Alice Durant, James Morris and Margaret Crane/Jon Winet.  
Hours: 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday-Thursday; 6-8 p.m., Wednesday; 11 a.m.-2 p.m., Friday  
Admission: Free

clear, that lead viewers to certain conclusions or expectations?

How much flexibility is built into that stimulus/response?

Ironically, the stimulus of Fisher's art seems to have led some viewers to anticipate that they could take part of processes they weren't supposed to be part of.

The extent to which they followed the initial cluster of thoughts isn't known. Maybe they contributed some very pertinent observations to Fisher's assertions.

But that wasn't Fisher's intent. So did their doodling reveal some sort of fallacy about his art? Or did it work into his basic premise of stymied expectations?

Without answering those questions one way or the other, MoMA has printed little messages on the floor that say, in essence, please do not touch the chalk.



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FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

Page 2

## Vernon Fisher Installation in MoMA

Which is what was done right off the bat at UTA, where Fisher has a three-wall installation at the Center for Research in Contemporary Art.

This installation, so blessedly close to home, was touted as a studio installation for the MoMA work.

But it really is a completely new constellation of images, with several likely overlaps in ideas.

In question is the evolution of a picture of comedian Bud Abbot being scared half-to-death by a skeleton. Abbot is standing, gaping out at us, while a bony hand clutches at his throat.

The paintings and drawings (and trays of chalk) are on three walls.

From wall to wall, and within the images on each, there is a sort of thigh-bone-connected-to-the-hip-bone progression that, we come to realize, is a rather fragile construct.

As ever, Fisher seems to be asking us why we see things the way we do, why we believe certain things that we see.

Stop and ask questions, he seems to say. And don't stop asking questions.

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ANTIQUES & THE ARTS WEEKLY  
2 February 1990

## Vernon Fisher Installation in MoMA Projects Series

NEW YORK CITY — The Museum of Modern Art continues its ongoing Projects series with an installation by Fort Worth artist Vernon Fisher. Organized by Magdalena Dabrowski, associate curator in the Department of Drawings, "Projects: Vernon Fisher" is a site-specific installation that combines painting, wall drawing, three-dimensional objects, and original narrative. Titled "Movements Among the Dead," the installation remains on view through March 6.

Word and image and the exploration of complex and unexpected connections between the two have been the

essence of Fisher's multimedia installations for over a decade. By juxtaposing text with image, the artist arranges a balance between two distinct forms of cognition — reading and seeing.

Ms Dabrowski observes in the exhibition brochure, "The pictures never directly illustrate the words, but act as a visual metaphor ... aiding the viewer in decoding both language and image, and often crossing the borderlines between fact and fiction, reality and illusion."

For the installation, Fisher has transformed the gallery walls to look like blackboards — a consistent element in his recent work. Three of these slate-like walls are drawn with white paintstick. On one, chalk trays are filled to overflowing, some spilling to the floor. Half-erased images, drawn from the artist's personal iconography, provide a backdrop for the text. By erasing the images and preserving the residual markings, Fisher teases the viewer's notions of memory.

In "Movements Among the Dead," Fisher focuses on nostalgia and contemplates human responses to death, alienation, and longing. The theme is introduced by the artist's text on the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov and his famous experiments on the conditioned reflex. While recounting Pavlov's training a hungry dog to salivate at the sound of a bell, Fisher alters the outcome so that Pavlov is forced to confront the dog's increasingly destructive behavior. Similarly, the viewer is provoked to face his or her own unexpected responses to the work and, in those responses, to find a personal interpretation.

Vernon Fisher was born in 1943 in Fort Worth, Texas, where he resides. He currently teaches at the University of North Texas in Denton. Fisher received his BA degree at Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene, Texas, in 1967, and his MFA degree from the University of Illinois in 1969.

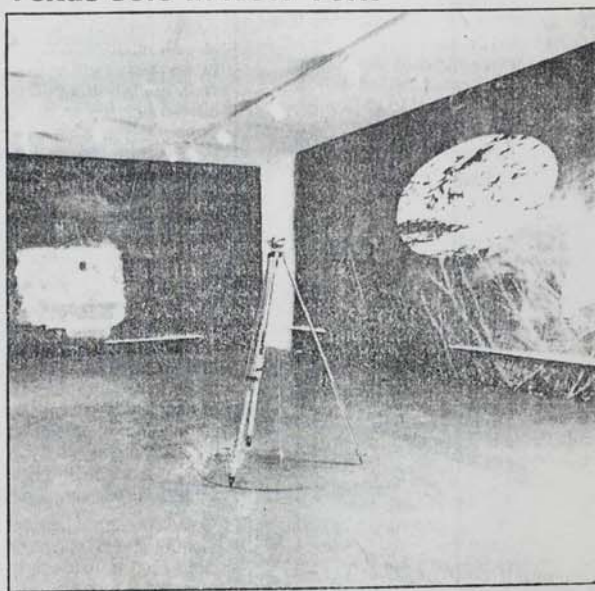
He is a recipient of several fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and a grant from the Awards in the Visual Arts, also funded in part by NEA. The artist has participated in numerous group and one-person exhibitions. A retrospective of his work was recently organized by La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art and travels to the Houston Contemporary Art Museum, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, and the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.



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THE HOUSTON POST  
6 February 1990

### Texas solo in New York



Ken Collins/Special to The Post

Vernon Fisher's paintings on the walls of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City constitute the first solo show at that venerable museum of an artist living and working in Texas. Fisher, who was born in Fort Worth, where he lives, is an internationally-known artist. His installation is part of the museum's "PROJECTS" series introducing new artists to the MOMA's public. The show will be on view at the museum, 11 West 53rd Street, through March 6.



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**The Museum of Modern Art**

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019

Nº **8256**

INFORMATION  
COPY

I have authorized release

Date(s) 3/8/90

to FINE ARTS EXPRESS,

on March 14-16, 1990, of the material itemized below:

Museum number	Artist or maker	Description
1	crate, containing installation materials for PROJECTS: VERNON FISHER, measuring 20 x 82 x 24"	

1 wrapped work of art, 57 x 94 x 7"

Collect ☐ from:

Deliver ☐ to:

Holdings ☐ by: FINE ARTS EXPRESS

Remarks: Materials being returned to artist, VERNON FISHER,  
after dispersal

The Department of DRAWINGS is hereby notified.  
If the material is not collected within the date(s) shown, this release will be voided  
and the department informed at once.

March 9, 1990

(date signed)

Registrar /E. Ricciardi III

kgg file

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S: VERNON FISHER

n dispersal of

Purpose DISPERSAL - PROJECTS: VERNON FISHER

Signature Aileen Chuk

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FROM THE REGISTRAR

Date(s) 3/9/90

Expect ☐ from:

on (date):  
at (time):

Collect ☐ from:

on (date):  
at (time):

Deliver ☐ to:

on (date):  
at (time):

Expect ☐ from:

on (date):  
at (time):

Collect ☐ from:

on (date):  
at (time):

Deliver ☐ to:

on (date):  
at (time):

Release ☒ to: FINE ARTS EXPRESS

on (date): March 15, 1990  
at (time): ?

The following objects: (artist, medium, size)

1 crate, containing installation materials for PROJECTS: VERNON FISHER  
measuring, 20 x 82 x 24"

1 wrapped work of art, measuring 87 x 94 x 7"

Works being returned to artist, MR. VERNON FISHER, upon dispersal of  
exhibition.

Pass is attached.

cc: Magdalena Dabrowski ✓  
Rgg File

Purpose DISPERSAL - PROJECTS: VERNON FISHER

Signature Aileen Chuk

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The Museum of Modern Art  
New York  
January 19–March 6, 1990

projects: vernon fisher



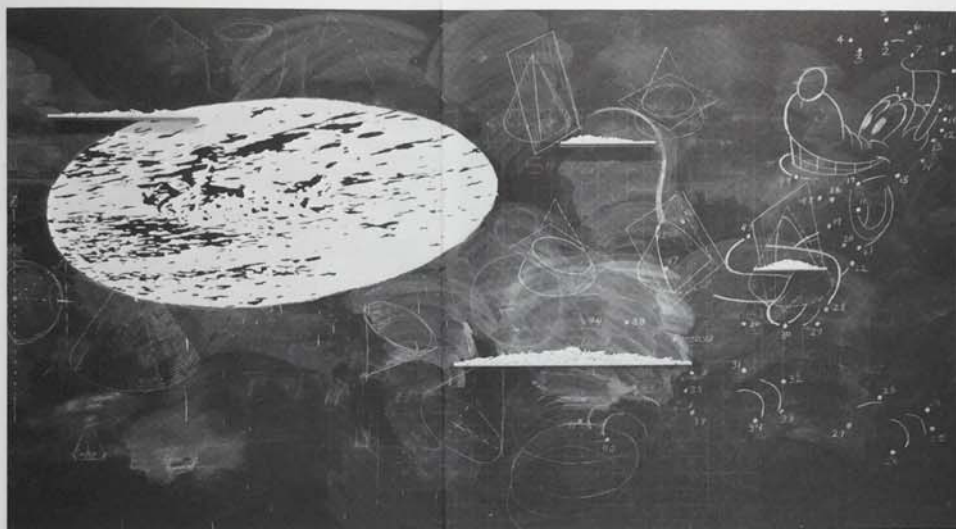
Detail from the installation *Movements Among the Dead*, south wall. 1990. Paintstick and acrylic on black latex, with chalk and chalk trays. Surveyor's level in foreground. Courtesy the artist and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York. Photo: Julie Bozzi



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**vernon fisher**  
***movements among the dead***

Word and image, and the exploration of complex and unexpected connections between the two, are the essence of Vernon Fisher's work. For over a decade, he has created site-specific installations that combine painting, wall drawing, three-dimensional objects, and narrative texts he writes himself. His fictional narratives, complemented by painted or drawn and sometimes erased images, question and subvert conventional meanings. By playing the text off against the images, Fisher strives to achieve a



Detail from the installation *Movements Among the Dead*, south wall, 1990. Paintstick and acrylic on black latex, with chalk and chalk trays. Courtesy the artist and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York. Photo: Julie Bozzi

balance between two distinct forms of cognition, reading and seeing. The pictures never directly illustrate the words, but act as a visual metaphor and introduce imagery that provokes a multitude of disparate associations, aiding the viewer in decoding both language and image, and often crossing the borderlines between fact and fiction, reality and illusion.

This investigation of language in art reflects the influences of the late fifties work of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, the concerns of Pop artists James Rosenquist and Andy Warhol, and the early sixties work of the Conceptual artists. It should also be seen in the context of the work of such California artists as Ed Ruscha and John Baldessari.

Fisher's installations reveal his interest in nature, culture, language, and the unconscious, as well as his fascination with the human relationship to nature, human emotional states, and the notions of the sublime, nostalgia, and memory. He believes that these have been contaminated and trivialized by a materialistic, insensitive world with dictated attitudes and responses to daily life and experience. Thus, his aim is to detoxify and restore their meaning by creating new contexts for them through words and images in unorthodox pairings or juxtapositions.

In his installation for The Museum of Modern Art, titled *Movements Among the Dead*, Fisher focuses on nostalgia and contemplates human responses to sorrow, death, alienation, longing for the unattainable, and, finally, conditioned but uncontrollable destruction and self-destruction.

The central conceit of the installation is divulged on one wall, in Fisher's written narrative on the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936) and his experiments culminating in his famous discovery of conditioned reflex. Fisher's text contains part fact and part fiction. While recounting Pavlov's training a hungry dog to salivate at the sound of a bell previously associated with food, the artist comments on the significance of conditioning to the reflexes of the nervous system. Indirectly, he remarks on the relationship between humankind and nature. The description of the dog's increasingly destructive behavior discloses the vagaries of the artist's imagination. Pavlov presses himself against a wall in fear, forced to confront an unexpected reaction induced by his own experiments on the animal. Similarly, Fisher asks the viewer to face his or her own unexpected responses while viewing his work.

The installation is composed of four parts, reflecting the architecture of the gallery. Fisher has transformed the four gallery walls to look like blackboards—a consistent support element in his recent work. Blurring the lines between reality and illusion, the artist has drawn on three of the walls with white paintstick to imitate actual slate boards covered with drawings in real, white chalk. On one wall, chalk trays are filled to overflowing, and chalk spills to the floor.

This same, long wall is dominated by a white ellipse with an upside-down abstraction of a dalmation. The dalmation was projected at such an angle that it is elongated, and now, painted in, is indecipherable until the viewer looks through the surveyor's level. Positioned in the middle of the room and pointed at the dog's reflection in a parabolic mirror on another wall, the level reconstructs the image for the viewer, turning the oval into a circle and returning the dalmation to its natural form. This process of decoding the image is analogous to the one that takes place in the viewer's imagination while reading the text on Pavlov. Language and image function as two indispensable and yet interchangeable agents to push the narrative forward, beyond the written text and pictures that appear on the walls.

Featured on the adjacent wall, with the parabolic mirror attached to the top center of it, is a silkscreened image of explorers—a symbol for humans in an alienating environment, and a metaphor for the artist's, the viewer's, and Pavlov's search for clues to hidden, as yet undiscovered, meanings.



Detail from the installation *Movements Among the Dead*, east wall, 1990. Silkscreen on black latex. 48 x 66" (120 x 169 cm). Courtesy the artist and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York. Photo: Julie Bozzi



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The remaining, freestanding wall is positioned in such a way that natural light enters the dark space at one end of the room. A "doorway," about seven feet square, is blocked by a heavy, false-slate blackboard that looks as if the upper left-hand corner were broken off, allowing a view of the installation from the walkway outside the gallery and permitting an additional stream of light to enter the room.

Half-erased images on the blackboard walls, drawn from the artist's personal, iconographic vocabulary, provide a broad, evocative, visual backdrop for the text. Cones intersected by planes to form ovals; diagrams and renderings of brains; and schematic mountains intersected by cones, together create a visual and psychic landscape. By erasing the images and preserving the residual markings, Fisher teases the viewer's notions of memory and offers visual stimuli, encouraging participation in and a rapport with different components of the installation. The disjunction of images, the meanings of which remain in constant flux, allows the viewer to select those that correspond to his or her own emotions and perceptions. Through the interplay of word and image, the artist motivates the viewer to respond to his work and, by extension, his or her environment, intellectually, emotionally, and physically and, in those responses, to find a personal interpretation.

Magdalena Dabrowski  
Associate Curator  
Department of Drawings



*Works 88: Parallel Lines.* 1988. One of eight. Paintstick, acrylic, and latex on wall. Installation at Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Courtesy Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. Photo: Lee Stalsworth

Designed to present recent work by contemporary artists, the new **projects** series has been based on the Museum's original **projects** exhibitions, which were held from 1971 to 1982. The artists presented are chosen by the members of all the Museum's curatorial departments in a process involving an active dialogue and close critical scrutiny of new developments in the visual arts. The **projects** series is made possible by a generous grant from the Lannan Foundation.

Support for this brochure has been provided by The Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art.

## biography

Born Fort Worth, Texas, 1943  
Resides in Fort Worth

## education

University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana.  
MFA, 1969  
Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene,  
Texas. BA, 1967

## selected individual exhibitions

Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York.  
*Niagara: Welcome to US\** (installation)

La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art.  
(traveling exhibition)\*

Dallas Museum of Art.  
*Lost for Words\** (installation)

Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York.  
*Building Our House*

Lannan Museum, Lake Worth, Florida.  
*Perdido en el Mar\** (installation)

Asher-Faure Gallery, Los Angeles.  
*The Knight's Move* (installation)

Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston

Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

Madison Art Center, Inc., Madison, Wisconsin.  
*Bridge* (installation)

## selected group exhibitions

Los Angeles County Museum of Art.  
*Awards in the Visual Arts 7\**  
(traveling exhibition)

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,  
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.  
*Works 88\** (installation)

The Menil Collection, Houston. *Texas Art\**

Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.  
*Comic Iconoclasm\** (traveling exhibition)

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.  
*Past/Imperfect: Eric Fischl, Vernon Fisher,  
Laurie Simmons\** (traveling exhibition)

The Art Institute of Chicago.  
*Seventy-Fifth American Exhibition\**

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.  
*The Texas Landscape, 1900-1986*

Centro Cultural Arts Contemporaneo,  
Mexico City. *Memento Mori*

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,  
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.  
*Content: A Contemporary Focus, 1974-1984*

The Corcoran Gallery of Art,  
Washington, D.C.  
*Second Western States Exhibition—The  
38th Corcoran Biennial Exhibition of  
American Painting* (traveling exhibition)

\* A publication accompanied the exhibition.

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The Museum of Modern Art  
New York  
January 19-March 6, 1990

projects: vernon fisher



Detail from the installation *Movements Among the Dead*, south wall. 1990. Paintstick and acrylic on black latex, with chalk and chalk trays. Surveyor's level in foreground. Courtesy the artist and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York. Photo: Julie Bozzi

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WALL (D)  
detail





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WALL (D)  
detail



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explorer  
silk screen    ↑    wall (c)  
MIRROR TO BE ADDED



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wall (D)  
detail





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WALL (D)  
detail  
with surveyor's level

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WALL (B)  
insert





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WALL (B) INSERT AS  
seen from walkway ↑



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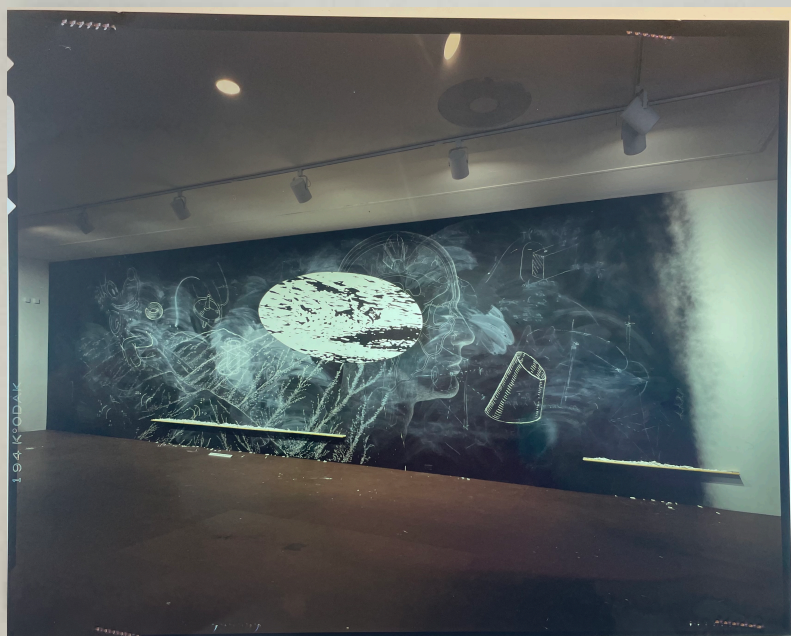
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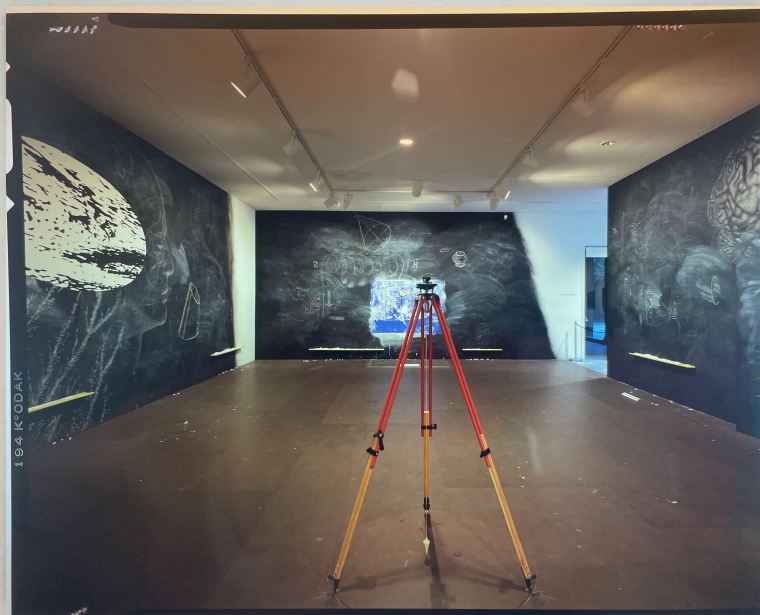
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**projects**

The Museum of Modern Art  
11 West 53 Street  
New York, New York 10019



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The Museum of Modern Art  
invites you to attend  
a reception and preview  
of the exhibition

## projects: vernon fisher

Friday  
January 19, 1990  
6:30–8:30 p.m.  
11 West 53 Street  
New York

The **projects** series is made  
possible by a generous grant  
from the Lannan Foundation.

This card admits two.

20

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VERNON FISHER  
1109 N. MAIN  
FT. WORTH, TX 76106

Dear Jerry-

Here are the plans for the wall. If you have any questions give me a call. Here also is a list of stuff that I would like you to provide:

- 1) slide projector
- 2) a table to put stuff on so we don't have to work off the floor
- 3) a rolling cart for projector - we can add sculpture pedestals to it to adjust the height
- 4) a bundle of cotton rags
- 5) two large buckets for water
- 6) air compressor with tank plus air hose
- 7) spray gun for spraying the black wall paint (Ben Moore Black Regal)
- 8) electric drill
- 9) 1" drywall screws
- 10) ladders, a rolling ladder would be ideal
- 11) extension cords
- 12) black plastic sheeting to block out light when we project
- 13) level

I'm sure that I've probably forgotten something, but this is, at least, most of it.

I'll be in the museum the middle of the afternoon of the 10th and we can go from there.

Yours,

Vernon



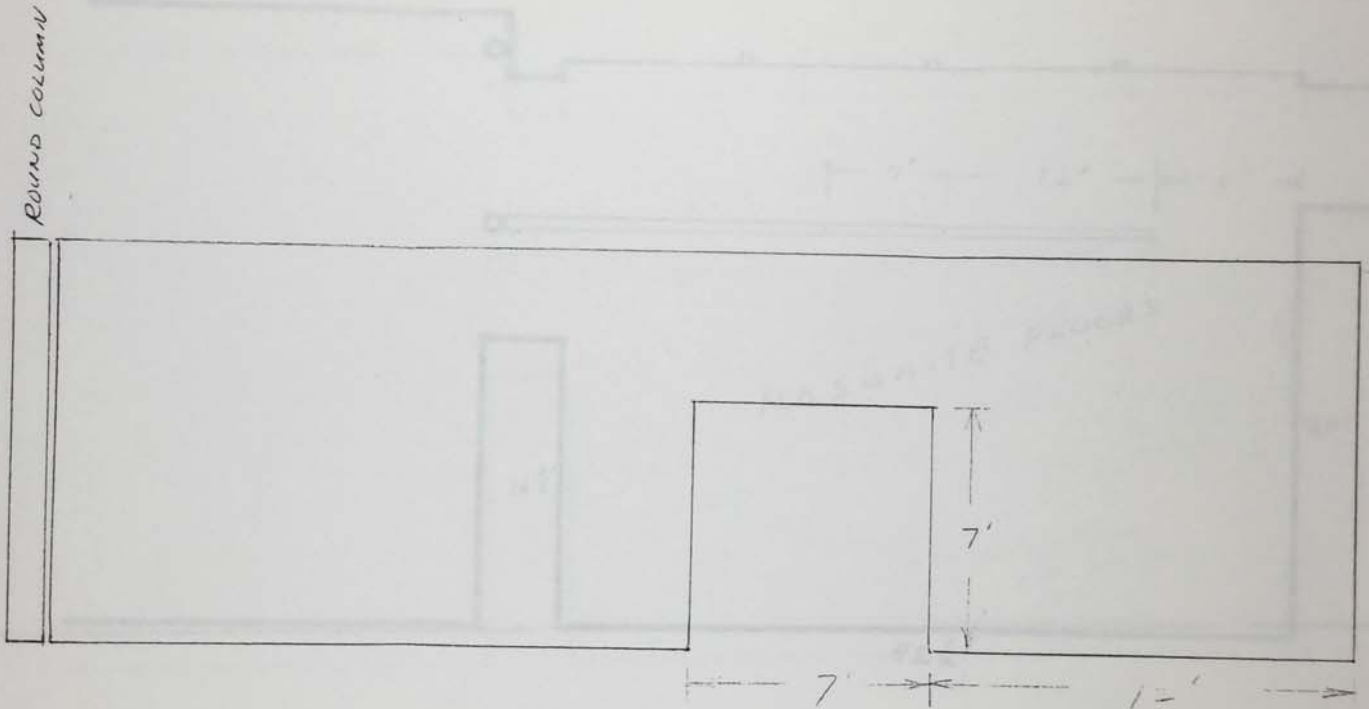
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Movements Among the Dead: photo captions

VERNON FISHER  
1109 N. MAIN  
FT. WORTH, TX 76106

$\frac{1}{4}$ " scale

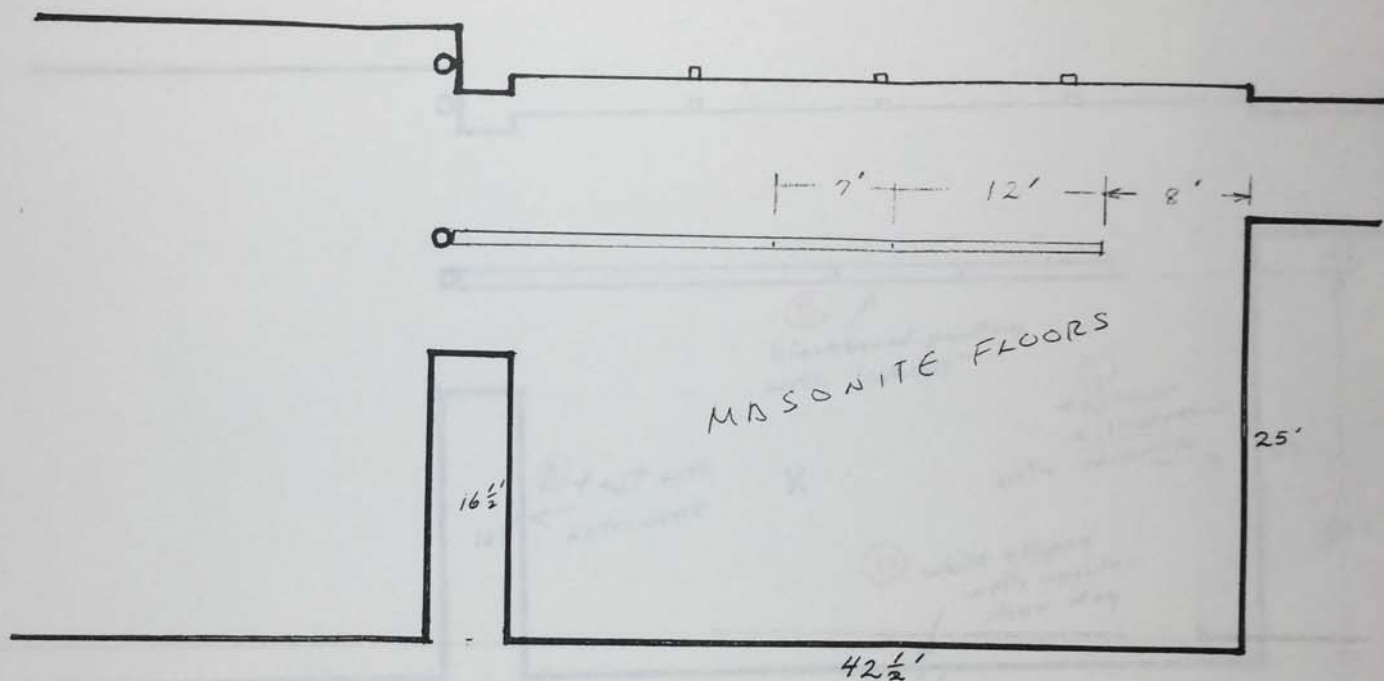


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VERNON FISHER  
1109 N. MAIN  
FT. WORTH, TX 76106

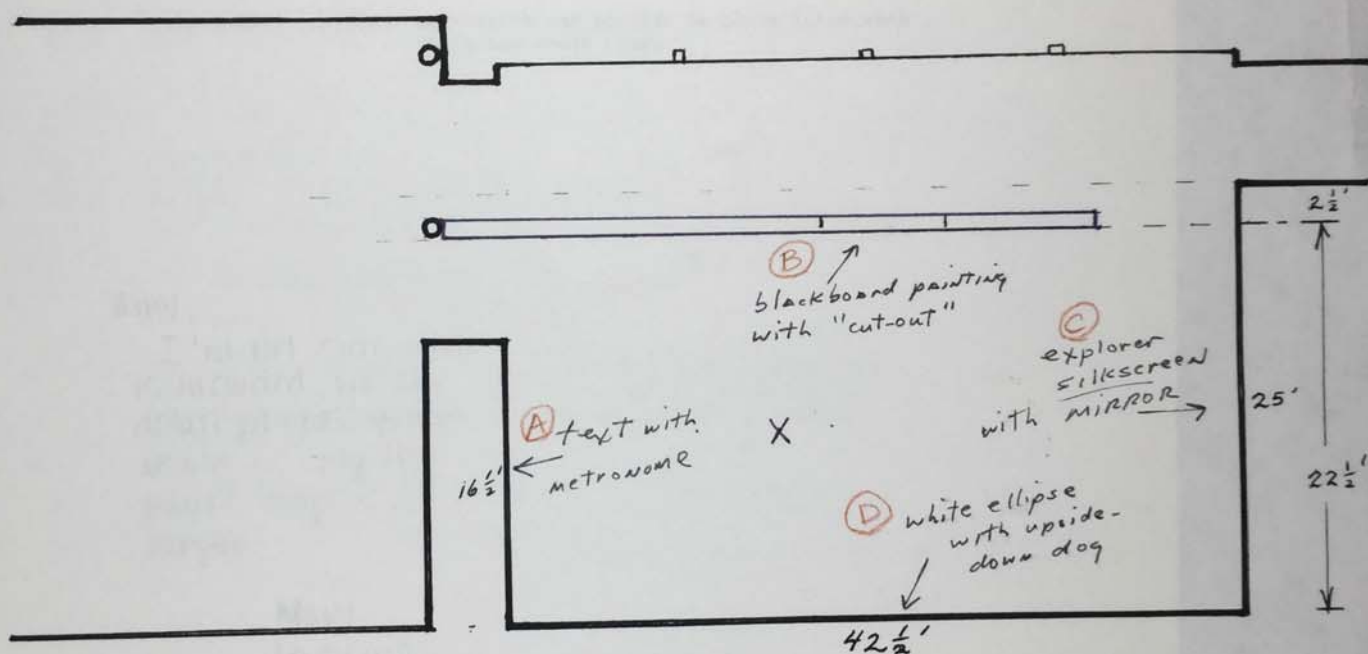
$\frac{1}{8}$  scale





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Movements Among the Dead: photo captions

South wall (detail): paintstick and acrylic on black latex  
with chalk and chalk trays

Explorers. East wall: silkscreen

South Wall (detail): paintstick and acrylic on black latex with  
chalk and chalk trays

Amy,

I'm not sure what  
is included in the  
detail photos you've  
using -- only the  
white ellipse is  
acrylic.

Many  
Drawings



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## The Museum of Modern Art

December 12, 1989

Office of the Registrar  
212-708-9634

Ms. Nancy Russell  
Fine Arts Express  
35-00 47th Avenue  
Long Island City, NY 11101

Re: PROJECTS: Vernon Fisher

Dear Nancy:

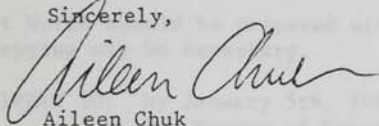
Further to our telephone conversation today, Vernon Fisher will be prepared for FAE to pickup up the materials for the above exhibition on December 28-29th for delivery to New York by January 5th.

I am enclosing purchase order 27379 to cover the charges.

Call me if you have any questions.

Thanks and regards.

Sincerely,



Aileen Chuk

Encl.

PROJECTS: Vernon Fisher  
cc: M. Dabrowski  
Exhibitions  
Reg File

cc: Mr. Vernon Fisher

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TRANSPORTATION ORDER

**The Museum of Modern Art**

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019

P.O.# 27379

~~XXXXXX~~  
~~XXXXXX~~

Date December 12, 1989

Mail invoice in duplicate bearing order number to the treasurer's office.

To Fine Arts Express, Attn: Nancy Russell

Address 35-00 47th Avenue

Long Island City, NY 11101

List below names and addresses for collection and delivery together with dates and time if specified: And list works to be collected or delivered at each location.

Do not type  
in this space

For charges related to the wrapping, pickup and delivery of the following:

FROM: December 28-29, 1989  
Mr. Vernon Fisher  
1109 No. Main  
Fort Worth, Texas 76106

1 crate - 6½' x 2' x 1½'  
1 blackboard - 7' x 8' x 6" Tel: 817-782-0504 (Home)  
2 boxes chalk - c. 8 x 11 x 15" each 817-625-6931 (Studio)

FAE-Fort Worth should be prepared with bubblewrap and cardboard as some wrapping may be necessary.

FOR DELIVERY TO: by January 5th, 1990  
The Museum of Modern Art  
20 West 54th Street  
New York, NY 10019  
Attn: Aileen Chuk, Registrar, tel: 212-708-9637

Estimate: Transport \$750.00  
Packing 100.00  
TOTAL 850.00

Purpose ASSEMBLY - PROJECTS: Vernon Fisher

Ordered by E. Ricciardelli/akc



The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
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projects: houston conwill

It is much to be la-  
ment that no per-  
son has taken notice of  
[the Constitution's] to-  
tal silence upon the  
subject of...an office  
for promoting and  
preserving perpetu-  
peace in our country.  
*Benjamin Banneker*  
(1793) Nobody eber  
helped me into car-  
riages, or ober mud  
puddles, or gibs me  
any best place! And  
a'n't I a woman?  
*Sojourner Truth* (1851)  
If there is no struggle  
there is no progress.  
Those who profess to  
favor freedom and yet  
deprecate agitation  
are men who want  
crops without plowing  
up the ground...Power  
concedes nothing  
without a demand.  
*Frederick Douglass*  
(1857) It is much to

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### houston conwill the cakewalk humanifesto a cultural liberation

Houston Conwill's work is complex and challenging. It is dense with references, combining anthropological and theological sources with influences from African-American literature and music, and modern and contemporary art. It embodies a mix of cultural forces that is at the core of American history and life. In *The Cakewalk Humanifesto*, the artist charts a pilgrimage that is both political and spiritual and, at the same time, explores the very nature of acculturation.

This installation takes its name from a dance that became a national craze in the 1890s. The cakewalk was probably originally performed by slaves for slave owners in the antebellum South; tradition has it that the

best dancers received a cake as a prize. The slaveholders seldom realized that the dance parodied what the slaves saw as the affected manners of the white upper class. Black-face minstrel shows featured the cakewalk in the 1870s and black entertainers often included it in their acts as well. In the 1890s, vaudeville teams so popularized the cakewalk that towns and cities throughout the country had cakewalk contests. The dance was also done by the wealthy and fashionable, a fact noted in the society pages of the daily press; there was even a report that William Vanderbilt had done the cakewalk at a ball. The dance that originated as a parody of white culture by black slaves was eventually taken up by the very members of white society the dance first satirized.

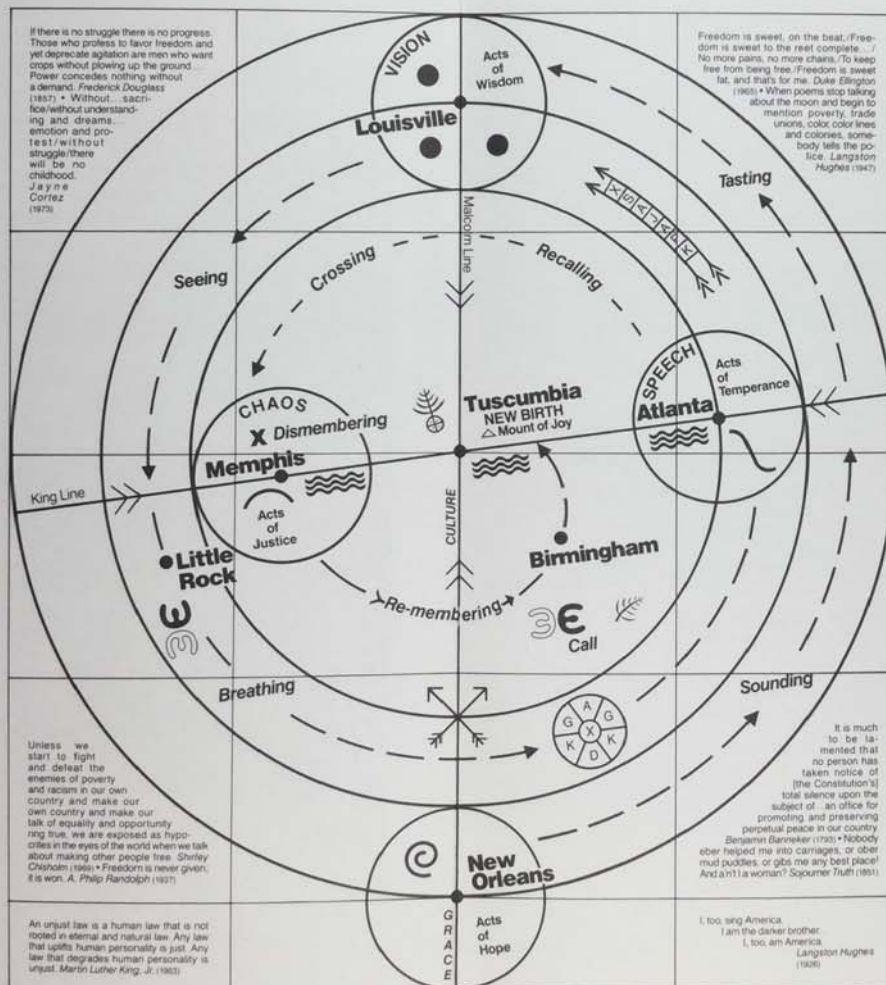
Clearly, irony plays a part in *The Cakewalk Humanifesto*. However, as in all of his art, Conwill engages in social critique, but then moves beyond irony and alienation toward something approaching resolution. The metaphors of the dance and dancer, essential to the installation, are traditionally optimistic and lyrical. Dancers, evoking a sense of vitality, are found in art from prehistoric rock engravings and Etruscan wall paintings to works by modern European artists like Henri Matisse. Conwill believes that the concept of dance informs and shapes much African sculpture as well, intensifying a sense of aliveness that is characteristic of different African cultures. Similarly, *The Cakewalk Humanifesto* reflects the spirit and vitality of African-American life. It is a "re-choreographing" of history that traces the struggle for social and political change, at the same time seeking to perpetuate black culture. It is, in effect, a "dance" of remembrance.

This installation is dominated by a window that is eight feet wide and over eight feet tall. Etched into the glass is a circular dance floor overlaid with a diagrammatic drawing of the southern United States. Conwill melds the cakewalk with a pilgrimage (which becomes a dance) through four cities of great importance to African-American history—New Orleans, Atlanta, Louisville, and Memphis. These locations are transformed into centers of hope, temperance, wisdom, and justice, respectively. On the window, Conwill has drawn the "Malcolm Line" and the "King Line" (named for Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr.), which connect these cities vertically and horizontally, crossing at Tuscomb, Alabama, the culmination of the dance-journey. Tuscomb is the birthplace of Helen Keller, whom the artist sees as a modern symbol of communication. The name given by the Chickasaw and Choctaw tribes of Native Americans to a village once located where Tuscomb now stands is "Oka Kapassa," meaning "cold water." Therefore, water—in many religions a symbol of purification—is, literally, at the center of *The Cakewalk Humanifesto*.

The window's quartered circle, a symbol for a crossroads (the intersection of paths) derives from what art historian Robert Farris Thompson terms a "Kongo cosmogram."\* The traditional Kongo civilization encompassed modern Bas-Zaire, along with some neighboring territories. For the Kongo people, in addition to signifying a crossroads, the ideogram's horizontal line divided the living from the kingdom of the dead. According to Thompson, the crossroads has been a powerful symbol in African-American folklore as well, and many folk healers were familiar with the image of the quartered circle.

*The Cakewalk Humanifesto* was also inspired, in part, by the relationship between Chartres Cathedral's rose window and the tile maze on its floor. The

Diagram of the window from *The Cakewalk Humanifesto*, 1989. Courtesy the artist





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maze was designed to be walked as a symbolic pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and can be seen as representative of the struggle on earth, while the rose window symbolizes heavenly perfection. Correspondingly, the window in Conwill's installation occupies a perceptual, ethereal domain, while on the floor, golden discs that mirror the movements indicated by arrows on the window make the dance floor accessible, part of the human sphere.

Conwill's concerns are temporal as well as spiritual. The presence of a long, narrow, glass table within *The Cakewalk Humanifesto* suggests that the installation is a habitable space and implies communal social and religious practices. On the table are glass bowls containing earth from New Orleans, Atlanta, Memphis, and Louisville, and water from Tuscumbia, Alabama. Also resting on the table is a text entitled *Libations* by Conwill's sister, Estella Marie Conwill Majozo. It contains letters to Conwill written from the five sites mapped on the window. Majozo has turned Conwill's dance into her own pilgrimage and has recorded her voyage, impressionistically focusing on the contributions of eight famous black women: Phyllis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells, Mary McLeod Bethune, Bessie Smith, Josephine Baker, and Zora Neale Hurston. Volunteers will read aloud from the book, starting at the beginning and continuing sequentially, for as many days as are required, until the end. They will then begin the text again. This performance element reinforces the importance of the social role that *The Cakewalk Humanifesto* is intended to play. The participants are male and female, of varying ages, and are not professionally trained: Conwill's message is addressed not to a select group of cognoscenti, but to the entire community.

For some, however, Conwill's work may be difficult to approach, as it demands that viewers enter another's personal, multilayered cosmology. As such, it is part of a modernist tradition that can be traced to the complex, hermetic systems created and elaborated by Marcel Duchamp. In addition, Conwill's art, with its concentration on generative ideas, incorporation of mythology and anthropology, and integration of word and image, has been influenced by Conceptual artists like Robert Smithson. Arguably, it is less connected to much current mainstream art. Conwill does not appropriate the forms of past masters or of commercial art; he makes few references to mass culture, and employs none of the blunt simplification that characterizes a good deal of recent work. Although he toys with the irony associated with much postmodern theory, ultimately he rejects it as a central concern. For Conwill, *The Cakewalk Humanifesto* is an act of faith.

Lynn Zelevansky  
Curatorial Assistant  
Department of Painting and Sculpture

\*Thompson, Robert Farris, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983), pp. 108-131.

This exhibition is supported by a generous grant from an anonymous donor.

Designed to present recent work by contemporary artists, the new **projects** series has been based on the Museum's original **projects** exhibitions, which were held from 1971 to 1982. The artists presented are chosen by the members of all the Museum's curatorial departments in a process involving an active dialogue and close critical scrutiny of new developments in the visual arts. The **projects** series is made possible by a grant from the Lannan Foundation.

#### biography

Born Louisville, Kentucky, 1947  
Resides in New York City

#### education

University of Southern California,  
Los Angeles. MFA, 1976

Howard University, Washington, D.C.  
BFA, 1973

#### selected individual exhibitions

1989

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture  
Garden, Washington, D.C.  
*Houston Conwill: Works\**

The High Museum of Art, Atlanta  
(traveling exhibition)  
*Art at the Edge: Houston Conwill\**

1986

The Alternative Museum, New York  
*The Passion of St. Matthew: Paintings and Sculpture\**

1983

Just Above Midtown/Downtown,  
New York  
*Cakewalk\**

1982

P.S. 1, Long Island City, New York  
*Seven Storey Mountain*

#### selected group exhibitions

1989

Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York  
*Traditions and Transformation:  
Contemporary Afro-American Sculpture*

1988

Artpark, Lewiston, New York  
*Stations\**

Cleveland State University Art Gallery,  
Cleveland, Ohio  
*Acts of Faith: Politics and the Spirit\**

1987

Socrates Sculpture Park, Long Island City,  
New York  
*Artists Choose Artists*

Philbrook Art Center, Tulsa, Oklahoma  
*The Eloquent Object\** (traveling exhibition)

1986

Centro Wilfredo Lam, Havana, Cuba  
*Por Encima del Bloqueo\**

1985

School of Fine Arts, American Academy  
in Rome, Italy  
*Annual Exhibition\**

1984

The Center Gallery of Bucknell University,  
Lewisburg, Pennsylvania  
*Since the Harlem Renaissance: 50 Years of  
Afro-American Art\** (traveling exhibition)

1982

The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York  
*Ritual and Myth: A Survey of African  
American Art\**

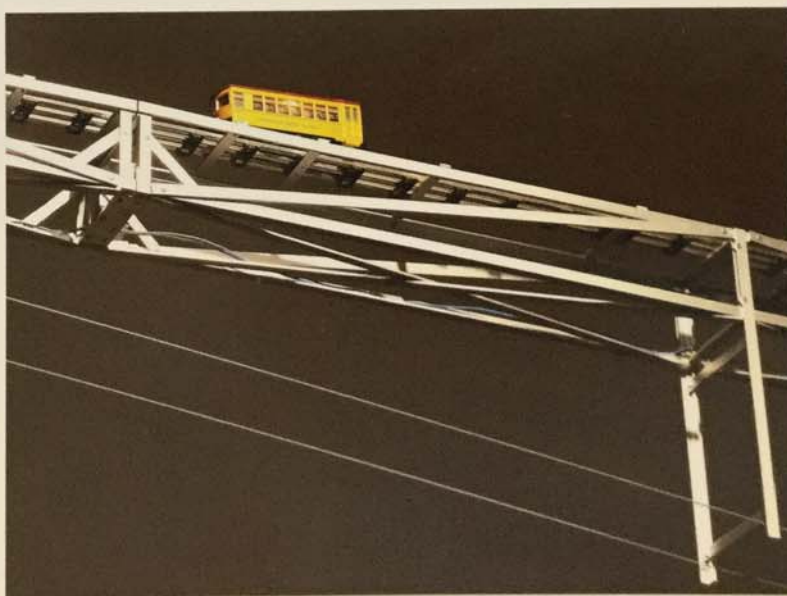
\*A publication accompanied the exhibition.

It is much to be lamented that no person has taken notice of [the Constitution's] total silence upon the subject of...an office for promoting and preserving perpetual peace in our country. Benjamin Banneker (1793) Nobody ever helped me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gibs me any best place! And a'n't I a woman? Sojourner Truth (1851) If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground...Power concedes nothing without a demand. Frederick Douglass (1857) It is much to

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VERNON FISHER NIAGARA: WELCOME TO US



ALBRIGHT-KNOX ART GALLERY BUFFALO, NEW YORK JULY 8 - AUGUST 27, 1989



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## NIAGARA: WELCOME TO US

Vernon Fisher enthusiastically accepted the invitation to consider the varied architectural spaces of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery and the environs of Western New York as inspiration for a new installation. In the blistering heat of the summer of 1988, the artist visited the Gallery, toured the city of Buffalo and engaged in the ritual pilgrimage to the natural wonder of Niagara Falls during the height of the tourist season. *Niagara: Welcome to US* evolved over the year that has passed since that visit.

Fisher frequently has selected the more unusual areas within buildings for his installations, rising to the challenge posed by each site's unique spaces. His choice, then, to use one of the traditional galleries in the original neo-classical building of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery was unexpected — even by Fisher himself. Unlike the white-walled exhibition spaces of contemporary galleries where Fisher more often works, the older spaces in this museum have sixteen-foot high ceilings, fabric-covered walls and architectural details of marble. The sense of the aging city that the artist had toured seems to culminate in this space and the dramatic and grand proportions of the room significantly affect the final appearance of the installation.

Although impressed by the cataract of Niagara, Fisher's subject in *Niagara: Welcome to US* is not so much





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## TO US

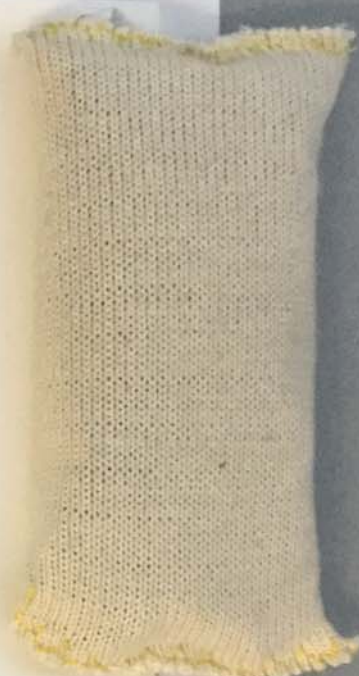
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a recent contribution to the tradition of depicting this sublime American image, but rather the visual acknowledgement of the myriad meanings and feelings evoked by such a spectacle. The natural wonder and its many levels of attraction lend themselves to the artist's continuing exploration of daily life while at the same time acknowledging its inevitable absence, death.

With a minimal number of elements in a simple, formal room, Fisher has created an ominous piece that recognizes human frailty while maintaining a sense of humor. The arrangement of the installation is physically comparable to Niagara Falls, where its two bordering countries — Canada and the United States — are connected by a bridge that spans the gorge. In *Niagara: Welcome to US*, two blackboard paintings, each approximately 11½ x 15' and covered with images both vivid and vague, are hung on opposite walls of the gallery. Connecting them is an elaborately engineered bridge, which extends from the top center of each painting, with its trestles directed toward the floor. Spanning nearly thirty feet, the bridge's entire length is covered by an antique toy railroad track, upon which rides a miniature trolley car. Traversing this distance with seemingly great difficulty, the car emits an enormous noise as it journeys on endless, repeated crossings of the subdued cavernous room.

Upon entering the installation, viewers find Fisher's



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keen sense of scale and its masterful manipulation immediately evident. The paintings are indeed monumental within or without the context of the Gallery for which they have been conceived. Yet, the placement of a pathetic little trolley car crossing a bridge that is — by design — delicate and precarious emphasizes the scale of each element. It is through this use of extremes in the installation that the artist conveys diverse and opposing levels of attraction while alluding to the frail human condition. The abrupt change in scale between the car, bridge and paintings suggests the contrast of the individual viewer in relation to Niagara Falls; there is a point at which the visitor, immersed in the sight and thunderous sound of water from four of the five Great Lakes pouring over the brink, realizes not only the immensity of the surrounding spectacle, but also the ease which one can become a part of it. It is this recognition that contributes to the perilous nature of the site. The potential use and abuse of the Falls is obvious and has been historically documented: the falling water is a primary source of electrical energy. On a more human scale, the wonder has attracted those who are willing to sacrifice life in order to achieve immortality, as well as those who desire simply to sacrifice life.

Some of these conflicting associations are suggested in the images rendered across the two blackboard paintings.





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## TO US

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US is not so much



A consistent support in Fisher's recent work — the black slate boards — with what appear to be chalk drawings in varying states of completion, encourage the reading more of the unfinished state of a work-in-progress than a formally composed painting. It is, perhaps, analogous to a tabula rasa, and has become a means for Fisher to refer to things remembered as well as forgotten in our daily existence. In this work, the appearance of things erased is especially evident; imagery that has been "rubbed out" seems especially appropriate for *Niagara*, whose namesake's flowing water continually washes away everything in its path. Evidence of the Falls' load is only occasionally left behind and sometimes not apparent for months, as in the case of skeletal remains found long after a body's fall. Images such as that of a waterfall, found in both paintings, and a series of concentric circles, alluding to the whirlpool below the Falls, are direct references to the sight. Other images that comprise the artist's personal iconography have culminated in these paintings: spiral objects serve the artist's recognition that the tumultuous, fluid water ironically appears as a static, regulated pattern — a frequency wave — when viewed over a period of time. The rib cage, a container of life by design, calls up the essence of the idea of survival. More ambiguous is the staircase, which suggests to the artist the gradual descent of water — especially at the American Fall — from the brink over boulders to its final destination, the river. Hovering around the images on both boards are equations that are based on the formula used to determine the potential energy of water falling from a stationary point.

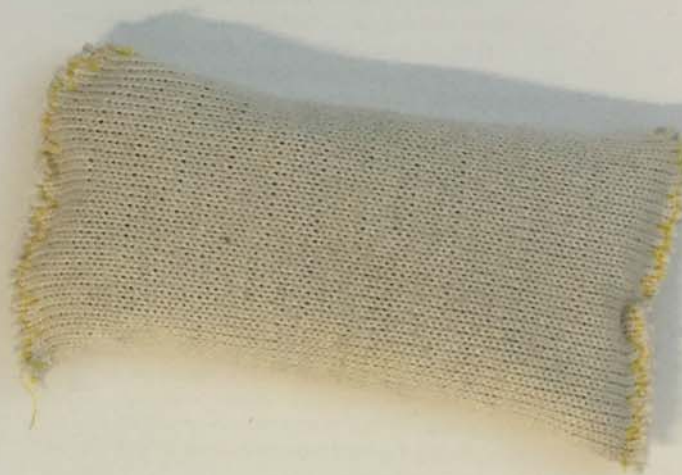
The disjunctive relationship among the elements that comprise this installation is carried to great effect throughout the composition of the blackboard paintings. For example, next to the image of a waterfall is the monochromatic painting of a hand pouring a viscous substance from a beaker; as the images approach a similar size, the appearance suggests the unnatural magnitude of the scale of the hand. As in other works, Fisher's placement of images without apparent logic encourages the viewer to determine a narrative or understanding based on the composition and personal experiences. Just as Fisher was attracted to the subject of Niagara Falls as a vehicle for existent interests and the ability to further his formal concerns, so a similar relationship develops between the viewer and particular elements found within the installation.

*Niagara: Welcome to US* is powerful and ominous, but perhaps the most memorable element to even the casual viewer will be the puny, noisy trolley car that struggles overhead. Its very appearance suggests Fisher's understanding of and compassion for our vulnerability — with an appropriate dose of silliness.

Cheryl Brutvan  
Curator

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Editor: Mary Cochrane  
Designer: Eberle Sciandra  
Photos by Biff Henrich, Buffalo

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ISBN 0-914782-74-6

This special installation was created by the artist on the occasion of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery's presentation of *Vernon Fisher*, organized by the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, California, and on view at the Gallery July 8 - August 27, 1989. The installation and this publication were made possible, in part, with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts.

750 copies of this brochure were typeset in Futura by Thorner-Sidney Press, Inc., Buffalo, and printed by Manhardt-Alexander, Inc., Amherst, New York.



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C O N C E N T R A T I O N S ▶

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## Vernon Fisher *Lost For Words*

January 23-April 17, 1988



### ELF

Across the upper peninsula of Michigan from Iron Mountain to St. Martin Bay spirals an underground antenna a thousand miles long. This antenna, because of its tremendous length, generates radio signals of extremely low-frequency (ELF). These signals migrate through the earth's crust and can be detected by submarines running at operating depth - enabling the Navy to communicate with its Trident submarines without their having to risk detection by surfacing. For this reason alone, the Navy considers ELF essential to its nuclear strategy.

The system, unfortunately, is not without drawbacks. The low-frequency waves which enable the signals to penetrate the tent, an acrobat pirouettes across the high wire. There is a skittering of feet like a puppet on a string. Above the stricken crowd the suddenly empty wire quivers in a slow, inaudible frequency. earth convey information at a very slow rate and it can take days to transmit a simple message. Even more problematical is the quality of the signal itself which is "exceptionally subtle", to use the Navy's term. The signal is described as a very faint and protracted pulsation that except to a highly skilled specialist is virtually indistinguishable from surrounding ocean chatter caused by moving fish, thermal pockets, even movements within the vessel itself. The instruments necessary to detect ELF signals are so sensitive, in fact, that on more than one occasion radio operators have delivered to the decoding center the mistakenly logged records of their own heartbeats.



Dallas Museum of Art

This series is supported  
by a grant from  
The Dallas Morning News.

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"Art seeks out the edges of things, of understanding; therefore its favourite modes are irony, negation, deadpan, the pretence of ignorance or innocence. It prefers the unfinished: the syntactically unstable; the semantically malformed. It produces and savours discrepancy in what it shows and how it shows it, since the highest wisdom is knowing that things and pictures do not add up."

T.J. Clark

*The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, 1984

In describing the advanced art of the nineteenth century art historian T.J. Clark aptly sets up a dialogue concerning the nature of the avant-garde, its purpose and context. These ideas, too, can be appropriately used to describe Vernon Fisher's art for he establishes a kind of wobbly dialectic challenging one's perceptions and chastening one's notions about the relative nature of the world. The meaning of Fisher's art is a result of an intricate visual strategy whereby the combination of seemingly unrelated images elicits multiple associations that reverberate on aesthetic, social, political and art historical levels. His art has a unique rigor and authenticity which places it among the most highly regarded of his generation.

For more than a decade Fisher has created multi-media painted wall constructions involving fictional narrative texts, images and objects depicting personal incident, allegory and memory. Moreover, his art also employs ideas embodying scientific investigation, mystery, social convention and the wry humor of life. Within the context Fisher creates, he plays havoc with images and language and their relationship to each other on a purely aesthetic and conceptual basis. And finally, Fisher's art implies that under intense scrutiny all linguistic and visual communication breaks down; any system examined too closely loses its traditional meaning and instead takes on an absurd quality. Walking a tightrope between reality and fiction, the illogical and the rational, the sublime and the mundane the artist accentuates and subverts the power of words and images and in turn one's perception of them.

Since 1978, Fisher's site-specific installations have been an important focus of his work. The neutral white walls Fisher works with promote the varieties of meaning and act as a dimensionless stage and atmospheric field.



Dallas Museum of Art  
Installation view (detail)



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Yet within each situation a unique overlay of architecture exists always creating a new context for the work. In this physical setting Fisher incorporates real time, space and memory into his already multi-layered concepts.

For the Dallas Museum the artist has created his most ambitious site-specific installation to date, combining traditional painting on canvas, three-dimensional sculpture, text and painting directly on the wall (12 elements all inclusive) over an architectural span of almost 200 feet. Fisher has choreographed the space to make the viewer aware of the processional nature of this architectural area, yet at the same time he subverts it — forcing the viewer to weave among text and image — a kind of balancing act that continually insists upon active audience participation.

Beginning at the north end of the Museum Concourse one is introduced to the installation *Lost For Words* by words themselves, a text entitled ELF, written by the artist. As with all of Fisher's fictional pieces it sets a tone, both through its narrative content and structural ambiguity. His language is melodramatic yet droll describing radio signals of extremely low frequency (ELF). This imaginary system is so sensitive and rigorous that ultimately its meaning is both altered and confused. Thus Fisher begins his installation with an investigation and comment on the significance of artificial systems within the modern world. The text itself incorporates a good amount of illogic because an actual narrative interruption occurs within the story, a phrase is inserted without any immediate external reference. Just as Fisher's images often incorporate a kind of visual interruption within their field so too does his text. Again, the work emphasizes the breakdown of communication under circumstances beyond rational control or understanding. Fisher describes this literary and visual concept as analogous to radio or TV static. Simultaneously the piece is about deciphering and destroying codes. From this point on in the physical space Fisher coaxes the viewer back and forth presenting a variety of images all painted directly on the wall. He offers one a kinesthetic experience where both physical and mental perspective are regularly shifting.

As the viewer continues to meander he encounters a pair of surveyors whose actual site line pushes both the eye and body forward in space. And hovering upon this line is a figure just losing his balance, walking the string like a tightrope. Again this juxtaposition of images focuses on humanity's inability to establish a permanent or singular reality. Continuing approximately one-half way along this lengthy corridor one happens upon a signature image for the artist, a large faux blackboard, in this installation shaped like two globes, with a striking painted image at their convergence. The blackboard idea is perfectly suited to Fisher's concept since it has a particular physical presence and also serves as a symbol for intellectual investigation, memory, reverie, discovery and experimentation. By placing a seemingly unrelated image of a woman being tested for lateral visual perception squarely in the area where his two global worlds collide, Fisher subverts and interrupts the blackboard logic. Perception is the issue here, how different vantage points both physically and psychologically alter one's view of the world.

Concluding one's experience with this piece the viewer discovers a variety of images, from a 3-D comic frame to a dot-to-dot Disney Pluto, images of quasi-scientific investigation, and finally ending with a large acrylic on canvas painting of the Bikini Island nuclear bomb test. Although the image has an awesome, frightful quality it is distanced from the viewer, made to resemble a tattered disintegrating photograph. Here again Fisher employs the idea of interruption or static by placing an octopus image from a miniature golf course within the midst of this Bikini field. All seems conceptually askew but both bomb and octopus share a similar bulbous, sensuous form and both images are simultaneously strongly horrifying and banal.

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"Bikini," acrylic on canvas, 11'6" x 18'6"

Fisher's Dallas installation begins with a text and ends with a painting, thus combining intellect and allusion into a complexly layered work. Questioning the notion of order, Fisher's art insists upon a number of different experiences — visual, tactile, intellectual, emotional and physical. Thus his strategy is truly the opposite of twentieth century precepts of a streamlined, controlled objective order. It moves from the cosmic to the mundane, the past to the present, from echoes of Duchamp to Magrittean surrealism and Jasper Johns' pop. Fisher has said, "There are really two stories in my paintings," and indeed there may be more.

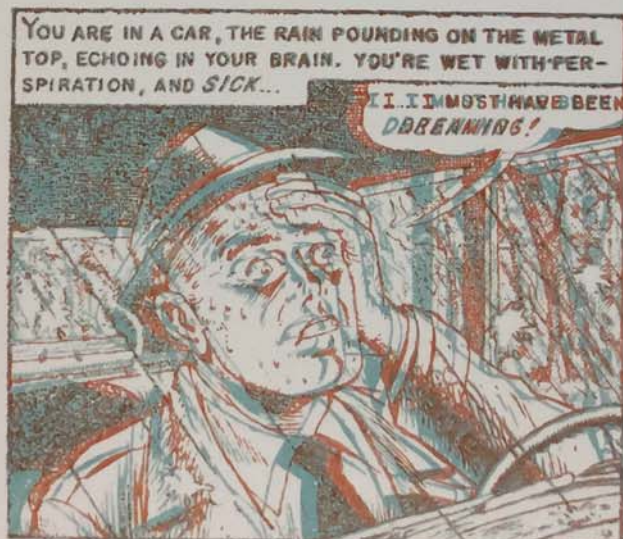
Sue Graze  
Curator of Contemporary Art

"Worlds Collide," paintstick, acrylic, latex on wall, 12' x 22'3"





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"3-D Man," acrylic on wall, 5'3" x 6'3"

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**OBJECTS ON THE EDGE: Contemporary Still Life**

January 5 - 31, 1989

**Objects On The Edge: Contemporary Still Life** opens at Rosa Esman Gallery on January 5. Curated by Pamela Freund, Director of Rosa Esman Gallery, the exhibition was organized in response to an undercurrent of still life, portrait and landscape imagery that is often seen in artists' studios, but is not reflected in the marketplace. The exhibition focuses on the personification of objects, some of which are painted directly from the set-up, others imagined or transformed.

Some artists, such as Nancy Grimes, work with a vanitas, iconographic composition in which each object in the original set-up is imbued with personal meaning. Other painters, such as Robert Valdes, Michael Shanoski and Thomas Woodruff create not so still compositions within surreal floating backgrounds. Bruce Kurland paints decaying fruits and vegetables which make reference to the vulnerability of objects over time, while sculptor Jim Makins reverses the process of painting from a traditional set-up, by first sketching vessel-like shapes, then creating them in clay and finally arranging them in Morandi-like compositions.

Artists included in the exhibition:

Elisa Amoroso	James Rosen
Nancy Grimes	Joseph Santore
Royce Howe	Michael Shanoski
Bruce Kurland	Joshua Simons
Kevin Larmon	Mary Jo Vath
James Makins	Robert Valdes
Joseph Maresca	Thomas Woodruff
Andrew Nash	Brenda Zlamany

A panel discussion moderated by writer and artist Nancy Grimes will be held at Rosa Esman Gallery on January 19, from 7-9pm. the discussion titled, Subject Into Object: Rethinking Still Life, includes panelists: William Bailey, Suzaan Boettger, Norman Bryson, Amy Cheng and Pamela Freund.

Hours: Tues-Sat, 10am - 6pm  
Reception: January 5, 6 - 8pm  
Contact: Sarah Conduit