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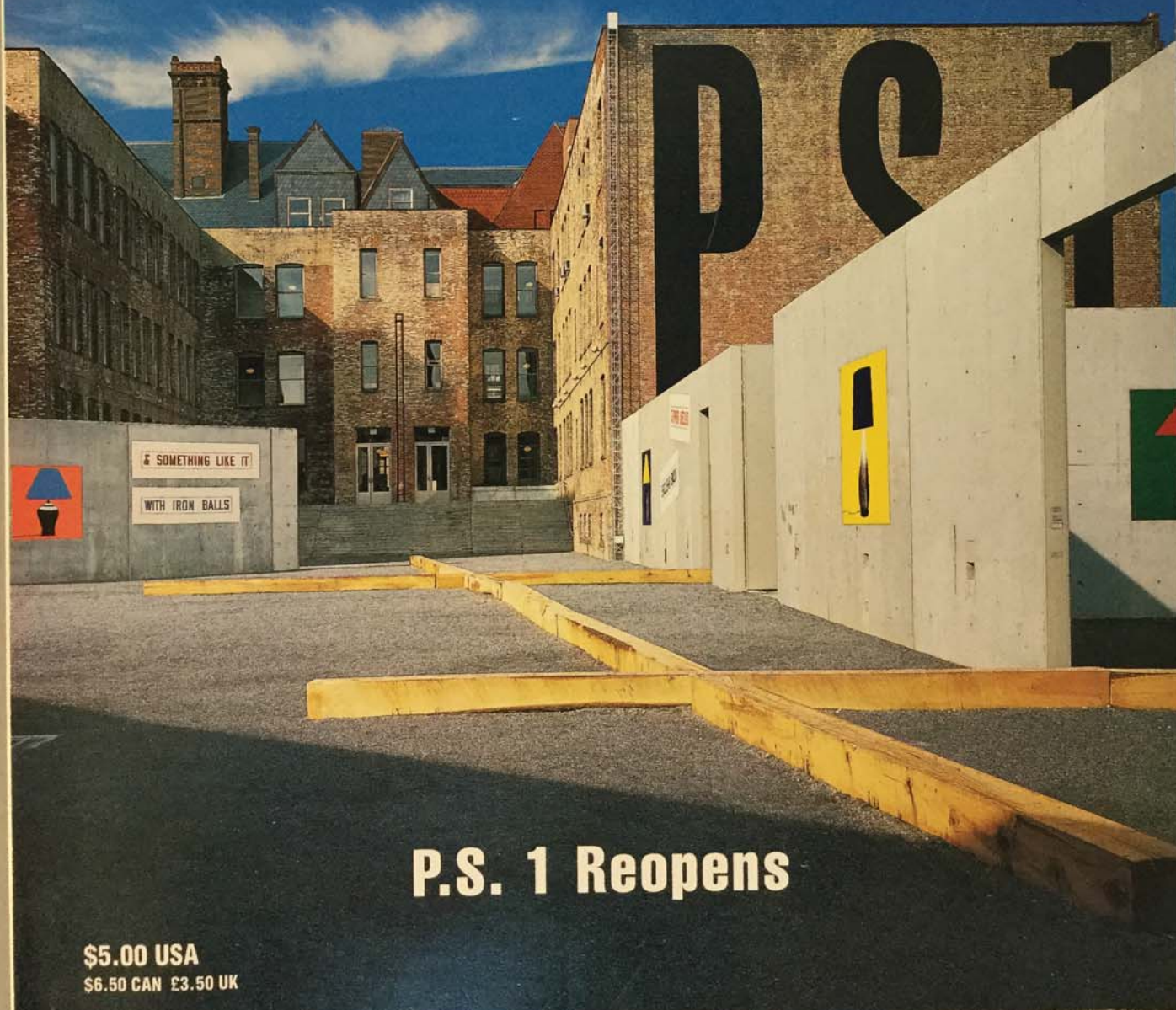
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# Art in America

JANUARY 1998





## January 1998

After three years of renovation, a greatly expanded P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center reopens in Long Island City.

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Cover: Main entrance and sculpture court leading to P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, newly renovated by Frederick Fisher. Visible are wood sculpture by Richard Nonas, wall paintings by John Baldessari, wall texts by Lawrence Weiner, steel-and-quartz sculpture by Marina Abramovic, vertical corner sculpture by Dennis Oppenheim; P.S. 1 logo by Lucy Sisman. Photo © Michael Moran, courtesy P.S. 1. See article beginning on page 56.

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# The Return of the Red-Brick Alternative

*Its three-year renovation completed, P.S. 1, the giant contemporary art center in Long Island City, has reopened with greatly expanded and refurbished galleries. Currently on view in and around this former elementary school are eight separate exhibitions and over 50 installations and artist projects.*

BY ELEANOR HEARTNEY

The weather on Oct. 26, the date of P.S. 1's long-awaited reopening, wasn't very promising. Drizzling rain that turned heavier at times stymied plans for an open-air concert in the newly graveled courtyard, forcing musicians John Cale, Elliott Sharp and D.J. Lo-ki to retreat to the teeming indoor reception area. But the rain didn't keep hordes of art lovers from pouring in from the subway and expressway. For most of the afternoon, a bottleneck persisted at the new walled entryway that now separates the familiar three-story red-brick school building from the surrounding Long Island City neighborhood.

Conservative estimates put the crowd that Sunday at 10,000. The caterers reported that there were at least 3,000 people on each of the three floors at any one time. The roof, which had also been annexed for exhibition space, had to be closed off for fear of collapse. Visitors, ranging from the cognoscenti to the merely curious, shuffled shoulder to shoulder around mobbed drink tables, up the narrow staircases and into cubicles and mazelike corridors filled with newly minted art. It was a triumphant confirmation of director Alanna Heiss's belief that her freshly renovated contemporary art center could pull in an audience to rival its formidable competitors across the East River.

P.S. 1's exultant return is all the more remarkable considering its apparent decline in the years just prior to the institution's closing for much-needed renovations in 1994. In part, the problem was physical—in the mid-'90s, visitors to the drafty former elementary school were confronted with roped-off stairwells, crumbling walls and sagging ceilings rather uncertainly propped up with I-beams. As conditions worsened, more and more of the building was placed off limits. But



View of the buildings and courtyard newly renovated by Frederick Fisher, showing a Richard Nonas wood sculpture on the ground at center, with wall texts by Lawrence Weiner and paintings by John Baldessari, all works 1997.

beyond the structural decline was a larger philosophical problem. During its heyday from the late '70s to the mid '80s, P.S. 1 gained the affection of New York art aficionados by offering, as critic Nancy Foote put it, "The Apotheosis of the Crummy Space." The place was delightfully funky, cheerfully unorganized and remarkably open to the off-beat, the underappreciated and the just barely emerging. But by the early '90s, art and commerce had formed an uneasy alliance. Museums were going global and many upscaling alternative spaces found themselves competing for artists with savvy commercial galleries. In this environment, P.S. 1's let's-all-roll-up-our-sleeves-and-make-an-art-center mentality seemed seriously out of step with the zeitgeist.

But zeitgeists change. Having shed various earlier appellations—The Institute for Art and Urban Resources, The Institute for Contemporary Art, P.S. 1 Museum—the newly rechristened P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center makes its return in a much more sympathetic art environment. Revulsion

against the boutique invasion in SoHo has spurred an exodus to the still chicly unchic spaces of Chelsea on Manhattan's far west side. Despite periodic announcements by art arbiters that installation, performance and site-specific art are passé, these anti-commercial forms of artistic expression continue to gather strength. And while the art stars of the '80s, some of them slinking back to art-making after inauspicious Hollywood directorial debuts, have diminished in stature, the seminal figures of the '70s are enjoying renewed attention.

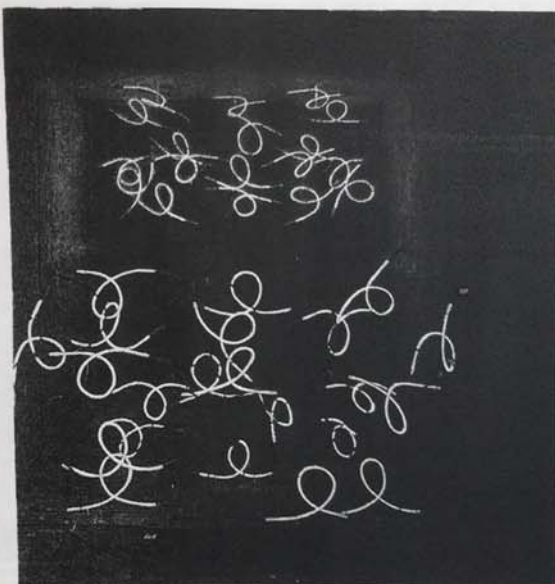
Thus, it seems fair to read the tremendous turnout for the reopening ceremonies both as a sign of nostalgia for the kinder, gentler '70s and as a vote for a less commercially focused art world. However, the reopening makes it clear that P.S. 1 has not emerged from the convulsions of the '80s unchanged. In a recent conversation, Heiss noted that during the "money episode" of the 1980s, P.S. 1 did not share in the general largesse and hence was well equipped to weather the subsequent art-market crash. But with a staff enlarged to 10 or 11 (the exact figure seems in doubt), 40 percent more exhibition space, and a commitment to remain open year-round, she admits that the institution she heads "will need much more money."

In this respect, P.S. 1 shares the dilemma faced by other contemporary art spaces: how to balance necessary growth against the risk that expansion will dull the cutting edge by holding an organization hostage to fund-raising. Any number of factors have fueled an expansionary trend among museums and alternative spaces, including the global scope of contemporary art and the belief that since "money follows money" a bigger institution has a better chance of attracting funding than a smaller



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Keith Sonnier's *Tunnel of Tears*, 1997, neon and argon tubes; installed in a skylit air shaft near the building's entrance. Photo Steven Tucker.



Close-up of Pipilotti Rist's installation *Selbstlos im Labyrinth*, 1994, a video monitor visible through wooden floorboards near the main entrance.

## Work in Progress

During the two months leading up to P.S. 1's re-opening, I made frequent visits to Long Island City to follow the progress of the installation. Here are some impressions I gathered from watching several of the more elaborate works take shape.

Because of prior commitments, Paris-based Chinese artist Chen Zhen is one of the first to complete his installation. Titled *Prayer Wheel*, it is surrounded by a crushed-paper temple which suggests nothing so much as a giant igloo. The

one does. The issue Heiss now seems to face is whether P.S. 1 can compete for needed funding while retaining the anti-institutional aura for which it is famous.

The architectural renovation provides a visual metaphor for the slightly schizophrenic nature of P.S. 1's new identity. The most dramatic change is the complete reversal of the building's orientation, and the creation of a walled courtyard which leads to the new entryway. The old entrance was an inconspicuous door on what has become the back of the building—the flank that faces Manhattan. Now visitors pass through a grand labyrinth of high concrete walls which mask out the surrounding neighborhood.

These lead into a vast open space which serves as a sculpture garden. Viewed from the courtyard, the rectangular masses of the building have the monumental and subtly diminishing quality of something out of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. This effect is accentuated in the opening show by Marina Abramovic's attenuated 35-foot-high chair, which towers over visitors approaching the main entrance.

Once inside the building and past the imposing new reception area, however, returning visitors will find that enough remains of the peeling paint, red-brick walls and eccentric spaces to conjure memories of the comfortably jury-rigged old P.S. 1. Los Angeles-based architect Frederick Fisher, who masterminded the renovation, notes that he went to great pains to retain the picturesque charm of the turn-of-the-century Romanesque Revival school building. (Among Fisher's previous projects are the Bergamot Station Arts Complex in Santa Monica and L.A. Louver

Gallery in Venice, Calif.) In fact, a large part of the \$8.5-million renovation budget went for such items as replacing rotting beams, plugging leaks and updating antiquated heating and electrical systems. A state-of-the-art elevator was also installed. The remaining money has gone for refurbishing existing galleries and opening up more exhibition space, which has been increased from 84,000 to 125,000 square feet (20,000 of which is outdoors, in the courtyard). Exhibition space of one sort or another now comprises 85 percent of the building and its environs, a proportion Fisher claims is double that available in other museums.

Practical considerations dictated many decisions. Cubicles reserved for the International Studio Program have been consolidated into the south wing of the U-shaped building, so that participants can have 24-hour access. (This also has the effect of clearly separating the studios from the main exhibition areas—avoiding the old confusion between exhibitions and open studios, but also making them less accessible to casual visitors.) Thanks to a floor which could not be saved, the chimney flue adjacent to the reception desk has become a handsome two-story gallery. The second floor in the north wing is now an elegant, naturally illuminated sculpture gallery. Several areas which had been closed for safety reasons were reopened, the most dramatic of these being the bell tower on the northwest corner of the building.

For fans of the old P.S. 1, the only real disappointment is the renovation of the third-floor auditorium space. This was formerly the most majestic space in the building—I remember with special fondness the installation of Magdalena

Chen Zhen's *Prayer Wheel* (Money Makes the Mare Go), 1997, metal, paper, Chinese abacuses, calculators, sound system, cash register, mixed mediums; sited in the building's basement.



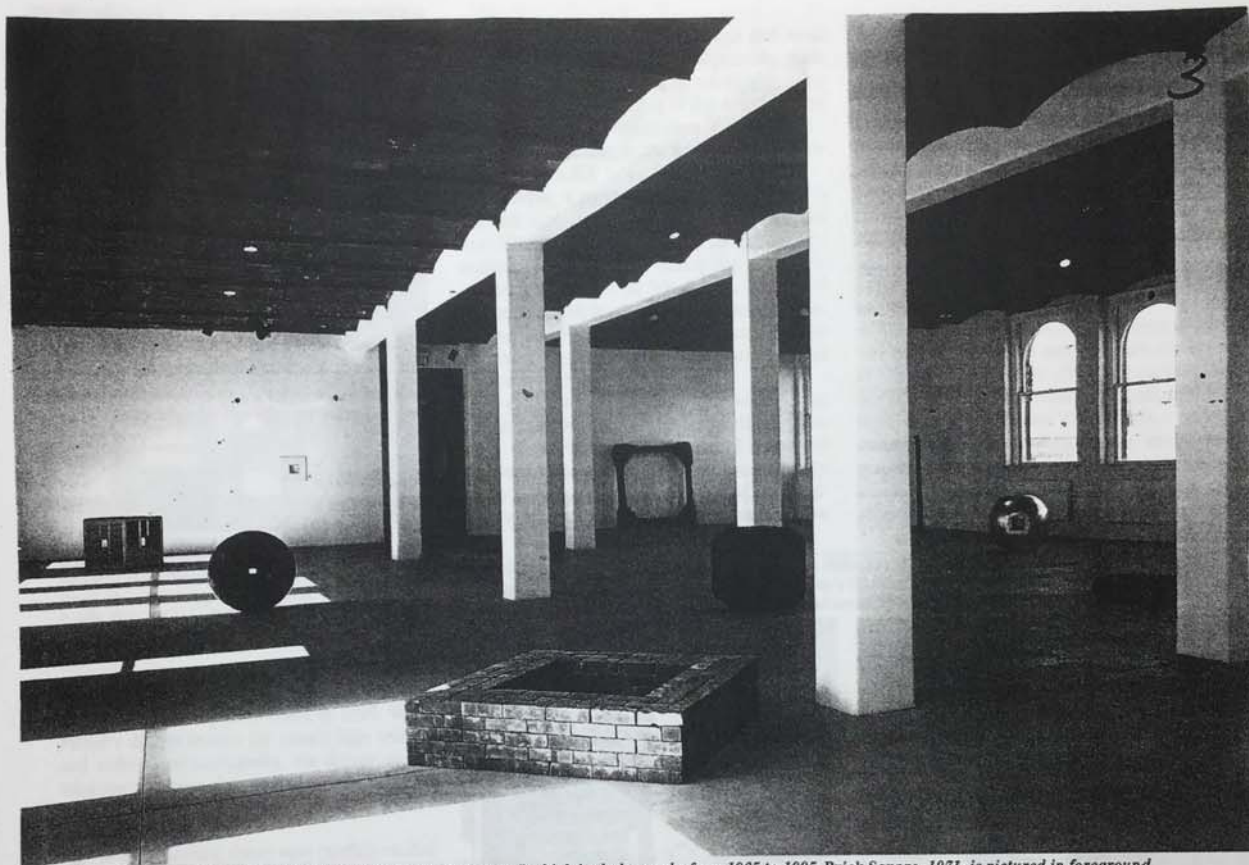
exterior is eerily lit by a pair of upturned garbage cans covered with red light bulbs. Inside, the temple's smooth, translucent walls enclose a giant upright cylindrical form sheathed in all manner of calculating devices—Chinese abacuses, mechanical adding machines, small electronic calculators. Large spokes protrude horizontally from the cylinder, allowing visitors to rotate it. When they do, the quiet inside the "igloo" is shattered by the loud ring and slam of a cash register.

The artist explains to me that his intention is

to meld symbols of commerce and meditation in order to make a metaphor for the way that economic development has become China's new religion. Traditional objects of ritual—the Tibetan prayer wheel, the red lanterns, the Buddhist temple—are here constructed out of everyday materials in order to pull them into the con-



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View of the second-floor exhibition "Jackie Winsor: Sculpture," which includes works from 1965 to 1995. Brick Square, 1971, is pictured in foreground.

## Jackie Winsor: Sculpture

Some 30 years in the career of noted Post-Minimalist Jackie Winsor are covered by the works placed throughout P.S. 1's spacious new second-floor sculpture gallery. Winsor's early work was engaged in softening the impersonal geometric forms of Minimalist sculpture, in particular the cube, by turning to materials that were often organic in nature and rife with associations. This exhibition reminds us that, along with her signature adaptations of the cube, Winsor also has a provocative way of injecting mystery, paradox and organic inflections into spheres, circles, cylinders and rectangular slabs.

While the installation of the show is deliberately achronological, the attentive viewer will be able to discern the changes in Winsor's approach over the years. The earlier works have a rough, unpolished quality, as in a 1967 piece in which a length of thick rope is coiled around a concealed steel rod. The sculpture, suitably titled *Rope Trick*, stands just over 6 feet high and is tilted at a slightly tipsy angle. A similar roughness is evident in *Wall Fence Piece* (1970), a rectangular stretch of frayed and splintered slats of wood leaning against the wall.

The mid-1970s found Winsor constructing large, cleanly made and carefully perforated cubes, the subject of which may be the irreconcilability of inside and outside. The exterior surface of the cubical *Wire Piece* from 1978 consists of layers of wire mesh clamped in place by a redwood frame. Since the layering renders the normally

airy wire mesh nearly solid, the only way one can see the inaccessible hollow interior is through the small square perforations cut into the center of each face of the cube.

In the 1980s, Winsor's structures took a more elegant turn. A 1985 mirrored cube with a painted wood frame establishes a complex play of solid and void. The mirrored exterior reflects the sculpture's surroundings, while small openings into the hollow interior appear as blackish-purple squares floating mysteriously on the dematerialized surface. Also on view from this period are two 32-inch-high cement sculptures. *Gold Piece* (1987), a cube with rounded corners, is cloaked in gold leaf. Square apertures in each side offer glimpses of an interior coated with powdered blue pigment. The other cement work is a spherical form, also with square apertures, which sports a slick blue surface reminiscent of a bowling ball.

In recent years, Winsor has moved from floor to wall. At P.S. 1, her '90s work is represented by black or white plaster squares that are partially inset into the wall. Overlaid with meticulous penciled grids, each plaster square contains a squared-off recess which extends several inches into the wall. These painting-sculpture hybrids, in which the flat design of the grid is punctuated by literal depth, are intriguing elaborations of Winsor's longstanding interest in spatial paradox. Winsor's work has become more pristine over time, but she remains true to her initial desire to undermine geometry's fictitious promise of clarity.

-E.H.



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View of the museum's new café/bookstore with suspended slide viewers containing images of works by over 100 artists; from the two-part group show "Heaven—Private View and Heaven—Public View." The café's furniture is designed by Dakota Jackson with ottomans by Tobias Rehberger.

Abakanowicz sculptures there in 1993. While Fisher's design retains the room's high ceilings and arched rear passageway, the elegant arched windows have been closed off to provide more wall space.

The eight opening shows were carefully crafted to cover the bases of the late-'90s art scene. The entirety of the south wing's first floor is given over to the films, costumes, photographs, posters and drawings of the late filmmaker Jack Smith in an exhibition curated by Edward Leffingwell, J. Hoberman and Larry Rinder. Smith, who died in relative obscurity in 1989, is here given his due as a forerunner of the current obsession with gender-bending, thriftshop glamour and blatant theatricality [see sidebar, p. 61].

John Coplans's exhibition, installed in the ex-auditorium, offers an astringent contrast to

Smith's celebration of artifice. Large and small black-and-white photographic self-portraits made between 1984 and 1996 give us relentlessly unromanticized representations of the artist's naked body. This exhibition would seem to signal P.S. 1's ongoing commitment to the work of older artists [see sidebar, p. 65].

Meanwhile, a second-floor exhibition devoted to the work of sculptor Jackie Winsor seems designed to reinforce one of the primary themes of this reopening extravaganza, namely the continuity between the '70s and the '90s. P.S. 1's selection of Winsor's Post-Minimalist sculptures demonstrates that her work is completely in synch with a younger generation's explorations of organic stand-ins for the human body [see sidebar, p. 59].

An exhibition of distorted self-portraits by photographer Martin von Haselberg further emphasizes the current artistic trend of corporeal self-examination. And an exhibition of sculptures by Lynne Yamamoto inspired by the life of her grandmother, an immigrant laundress who traveled from

Japan to Hawaii as a mail-order bride in 1914, points to the prevalence of identity-based work and a growing Asian presence in contemporary art. The work employs photographs and evocative objects (starch-stiffened shirt sleeves, synthetic hair passed through a clothes wringer, tiny nails labeled with the names of domestic activities) to conjure a sense of Yamamoto's grandmother's difficult life. In a nod to the vogue for community outreach (and to P.S. 1's past), this exhibition was curated by four high-school students, who also contributed two works of their own and designed a Web site dealing with Yamamoto's work.

The group shows highlight other areas of current concern. Media and technology are the focus of "Heaven," a two-part exhibition curated by Joshua Decker and Jean-Michel Ribes. While the section titled "Public View" offers a rather unimpressive assembly of slide, video and photographic works, the other half, "Private View," was a lot more fun. Located in the new café, it presents slides by over 100 artists. The slides are housed in

Left, Mike Bidlo's *The Fountainhead: Tribute to R. Mutt, 1917, 1997*, photo-offset on newsprint; installed in the second-floor bathroom. Right, Clegg & Guttmann's *Washing Hands: Here and in the Manhattan Criminal Court Building, 1997*, laminated Cibachrome print and ceramic sink; installed in the third-floor bathroom.



## Work in Progress . . .

temporary world. The clash of cultures is humorous and thought-provoking, a clear illustration of what Chen refers to as "the eternal misunderstanding between East and West."

Yet, I reflect, perhaps the misunderstanding is not so total as some Western admirers of Asia like to maintain. The Chinese, after all, have long been recognized for their business acumen. Catching my thought, Chen notes with a twinkle, "Do you realize that Marina Abramovic's chair is located in the courtyard directly above us? She is expressing pure spiri-

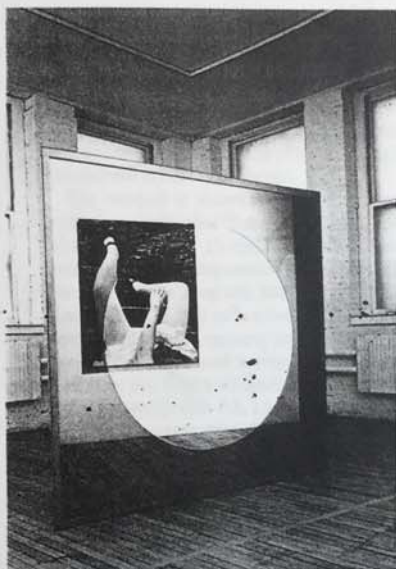
tuity. Here in the basement we have spirituality in its capitalist version."

I meet Sylvie Blocher early on in my treks to Queens. A French video artist, she is concerned that she may not be able to realize her project. She explains that her *modus operandi* is to pose disturbing or provocative questions during videotaped interviews with individuals who are often selected for arbitrary connections they have with one another. Out of hours of tape, she may preserve only a few telling minutes, where subjects let their masks slip and reveal secret thoughts or vulnerabilities.

For P.S. 1, Blocher has decided to explore the American obsession with sports. She wants to ask members of an American sports team questions about art and beauty. Unfortunately, she was not prepared for the protective cocoon that surrounds athletes in the U.S. Having sent formal letters and inquiries to various teams prior to her departure from France, she has just discovered that these have been completely ignored. In response to her persistent phone calls, she has rather miraculously received a nibble of interest from the manager of the Buffalo Bills football team, but has been informed that time is too short as they are currently in training.



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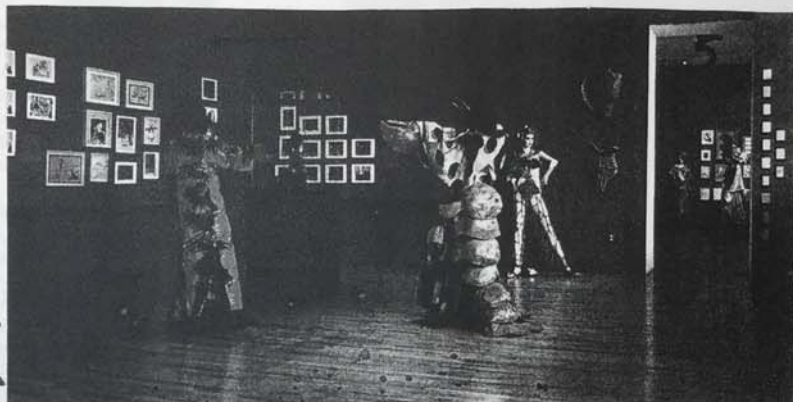
Dan Graham's two-way mirror piece *Triangle With Circular Inserts, Variation D, 1997*, reflecting Anna Gaskell's 1996 Untitled 3 C-print which hangs on opposite wall, on the first floor.

small slide viewers (one slide per viewer) which dangles tantalizingly in groups above each table. The individual images become visible only when one grabs a slide viewer and depresses its light button, making for a highly personalized art experience.

"Vertical Painting Show," curated by Heiss, pulls off a rather remarkable feat. It sets an intentionally eclectic group of contemporary painters loose on the peeling walls of two stairwells, each running the full height of the building, in the north wing. Turning painting into a form of site-specific installation, this exhibition allows P.S. 1 to affirm the current importance of painting without conceding its status as a precious object. The flanking walls of each landing present "canvases" to two artists, allowing for some interesting juxtapositions. For instance, Mary Heilmann's cool blue minimal mural sets off a wall oozing with green landscapelike blobs by Madeleine Hatz. Alexis Rockman's realistic image of a rat peer-

When I see her several weeks later, she is still struggling to break through the iron public-relations curtain. "I'm learning a lot about American culture and its divisions," she says with a touch of resignation. Among the things she has learned is that being an artist holds no special privileges in the United States. She has been called naive, told "you are no Andy Warhol." One publicist has admitted the real reason for the resistance: "What you are doing is quite dangerous—you are interfering with their images, and their images are one of their most valuable assets."

At the press opening, she tells me she



Installation view of the ground-floor "Jack Smith: Flaming Creature" retrospective, showing two "lobster costumes" from 1975 in foreground; a costume for the character Clamato, Crab Ogress of Mu, from Smith's 1969 production *Brasseries of Atlantis* in background at right; and the artist's framed "slide movies" on the walls.

## Jack Smith: Flaming Creature

This unusual, sprawling exhibition is bursting with glittering costumes, elaborate photographic tableaux, films of performances, movie clips, black-and-white film stills, letters, diaristic comments scrawled on filing cards, underground magazines, artists' books and rehearsal scripts. Some viewers may be reminded of the work of a range of contemporary artists, including Matthew Barney, Cindy Sherman, Nan Goldin, Sean Landers and Hunter Reynolds, but in fact all these objects and documents pertain to the late filmmaker, performance artist and photographer Jack Smith.

Smith burst onto the New York scene in 1964 with a low-budget, orgiastic film called *Flaming Creatures*, which was promptly confiscated by the police for obscenity and praised by Susan Sontag as "a triumphant example of an aesthetic vision of the world." Smith subsequently careened from project to project, exploring a bewildering variety of media until his death from AIDS in 1989. Curator Edward Leffingwell has chosen to suggest this protean creativity with an exhibition organized around the principle of controlled chaos.

There are galleries featuring exotic and tawdry costumes from Smith's productions, while others present a barrage of drawings, collages and press clippings. Several walls of the exhibition are devoted to black-and-white photographs which attest to Smith's never-realized ambition to become a fashion photographer. One gallery is lined with enlargements of contact sheets of otherwise lost color photographs. These images swarm with elaborately costumed figures and ornate props which Smith used to re-create scenes drawn from history, legend and his own lush imagination. Vitrines overflow with memorabilia. There is even a re-creation of Smith's Lower East Side apartment, a haremlike space hung with patterned fabric and clothing. Clips from Smith's movies and films of his performances run on strategically placed video monitors. Throughout the show, speakers pipe in Smith's murmuring voice.

The figure who emerges from this collage of material is fragmented and elusive. The quintessential starving artist, Smith was given to witty tirades against the distorted values of the capitalist system and the perfidy of his lapsed supporters. Such attacks alternated with dreams of escape into an imaginary world of eroticized beauty. Hoping to emulate Josef von Sternberg, Smith presaged Warhol by surrounding himself with a circle of drugged-out, cross-dressing "superstars," as he once termed his outrageous actors and models. Although he died in relative obscurity, Smith is increasingly seen as the precursor of many aspects of contemporary art, from theatricality and gender-bending to the use of film as an art medium. This exhibition eloquently confirms his unexpected prescience.

—E.H.



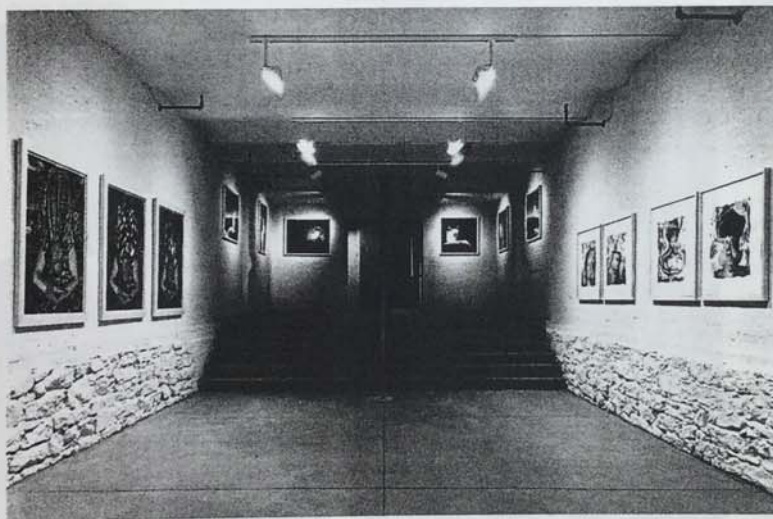
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ing out from a trompe-l'oeil hole in the wall is across from Judith Hudson's wildly undulating stripes. An eccentric composition of gesture and image by Fabian Marcaccio is countered by a very austere abstract study by Tobi Kahn. Carl Ostendorf covered his wall with colorful Pop-inspired rectangles and question marks. Directly opposite, Rebecca Quaytman contributed a severely conceptual mural which consists of a black-and-white photograph of the stairwell in which it is placed.

The banquet of shows is rounded out by the rather laconically titled "Some Young New Yorkers," which confirms P.S. 1's continuing commitment to emerging artists. It was curated by Heiss and Klaus Biesenbach, who along with Michael Tarantino and Kazuo Kobata served as members of the curatorial team for the entire opening program. (Although none of them are based in New York, Biesenbach, Tarantino and Kobata will have an on-going curatorial relationship with P.S. 1.) Despite the general title, the four young artists featured here all display architectural inclinations. Sarah Sze broke into the



Rachel Whiteread: Table and Chair (Green), 1994, rubber, polystyrene; installed on the third floor.



Installation view of Martin von Haselberg's series of altered photographic self-portraits from 1997; in the basement.

wall and constructed an intriguing miniature world which spills back out onto the gallery floor. Clara Williams erected a full-scale cockeyed front porch ca. 1940 against the gallery wall. Jason Rosenberg presents a series of small, architecturally inspired geometric collages. Seth Kelly assembled several impossible architectural models based on landmarks of the International Style. Their works are accompanied, at the far end of the gallery, by a large-scale, recent Rauschenberg print, suggesting perhaps that some New Yorkers remain forever young.

While the opening exhibitions offer a wide-ranging curatorial statement of purpose, the soul of the new P.S. 1 seems most evident in the special projects and site-specific installations scattered throughout the building. Many are located in out-of-the-way, hard-to-reach recesses in the roof, attic and basement, prompting more than one visitor to speculate about liability issues posed by exposed pipes and electrical wires, perilous ladders and unlit corridors.

Presiding over the installations is the ghost of a 1976 exhibition titled "Rooms" from P.S. 1's maiden

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has been forced to postpone her athlete project. However, she is optimistic that she will be able to interview the Buffalo Bills in the near future and has a commitment from P.S. 1 to show the video when it is completed.

Meanwhile, she will show a work she completed in Honolulu last year in which she asked volunteers intimate questions about sex. We sit in her comfortable womblike room on a carpet of fabric scraps and watch the video. Subjects look straight at the camera and make unsettling confessions—a young woman, asked what

she would change about herself, goes into a startlingly graphic description of her dense body hair. A young man, asked to describe the clitoris, begins confidently with a science-class description and then abruptly falters, confessing sheepishly, "Well, I don't have one."

Blocher notes a cultural difference: French subjects, faced with a video camera, will stand stiffly but answer the question, while Americans are totally at ease around the camera, but freeze when questioned about sex.

In one of my tours through the building, I come upon Matt Mullican and his assistants survey-

ing the old boiler room where he will sink a set of metal grates into the dirt floor. The patterns on the grates will evoke an aspect of the complex metaphysical system Mullican has been elaborating for many years via drawings, banners, sculptures and electronic media. Heiss has confided to me that she wants Mullican to go maximal with this space—to include drawings and other works along with the sunken grates. Mullican is obviously thinking the other way. He will play his simple forms off the sculptural presence of the massive old boiler.

In excavating the dirt floor, he has unearthed a set of curving drain pipes. Struck by their



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year. The original "Rooms" featured works by an impressive roster of 80 Post-Minimal artists. They created a series of more or less subtle interventions in the barely renovated school building which Heiss had leased from the city for \$1,000 a year. For the reopening, she reinstalled and reexposed a sampling of these original projects. Richard Artschwager's spherical glass ceiling lamps emblazoned in red with the word "Exit" were reinstalled along one corridor. Artschwager also contributed a series of enigmatic lozenge shapes, stenciled throughout the building like coded symbols. Lucio Pozzi re-created a work in which paint swatches were affixed along the old school hallways to match some of the building's institutional paint colors. A dramatic pyramidal room off the bell tower was reopened to reveal a long-hidden and remarkably

Hironori Murai's  
Japan Noise Grand Prix  
"USO," 1997, electric fans,  
plastic raincoats, timer,  
speaker, mixed mediums.



metaphorical and physical similarity to his own graphic symbols, he wants to make them the conceptual center of the piece. "The pipes will be the capital, the rest will be suburbs," he remarks.

The problem is that exposing the drain pipes may create a liability issue for P.S. 1 since visitors could trip over them and injure themselves. One solution is to cover the pipes with a grate, although this too could present dangers—someone's shoe heel could catch in the grate openings. The other idea is to surround the excavated pipes with a low wall. Unfortunately, both solutions undermine the radical simplicity of the whole installation.

restrained Richard Serra consisting of an I-beam nestled into a slot on the floor. A ladder behind a steam pipe in the bell tower led the stout-of-heart up to Bruce Nauman's understated contribution—several slabs of wood propped on stones and pieces of ceramic pipe, positioned on the topmost section of the roof. Throughout the building, Muntadas set up slide projectors to show the images of the original school interior, which he had first projected in 1976. Alan Saret's contribution, a hole which the artist had dug out of the wall at the far end of a corridor and whose art status had lately been overlooked, was suitably relabeled.

Other "Rooms" alumni were invited to create new work. Among those who took up the challenge were Lawrence Weiner and John Baldessari, who produced nicely complementary text (Weiner) and

One of 10 works by Lucio Pozzi from "Ten Color Combinations Revisited," 1976/87, all acrylic on plywood, various dimensions. This is one of several works re-created by artists from P.S. 1's 1976 inaugural show, "Rooms."



I run into Mullican again at the press opening. He is carrying a small metal gate designed to fit over the drain pipe opening. However, he plans to use it only if insurance necessitates. For now, the hole will remain open, allowing it to play off the sunken grates surrounding it. "I went through all these permutations and finally came full circle back to my original idea," he says with satisfaction.

One constant during my trips to P.S. 1 is the presence of Sarah Sze, who is included in the "Some Young New Yorkers" exhibition. Sze has carved out two openings in the walls and



Marina Abramovic's Double Edge, 1995, wood, stainless-steel knives, heating elements; installed below a first-floor balcony.

image (Baldessari) works which were interspersed outside along the courtyard's inner wall. On the ground nearby, Richard Nonas positioned a group of rough-hewn wood beams to form a double-barred cross leading to the entry stairs.

The "Rooms" esthetic of using subtle alteration to draw the eye to previously unnoticed aspects of the existing environment carries through to some of the new P.S. 1 installations. Of works with a more discreet presence, two of the most successful are by Ann Hamilton and Pipilotti Rist. Hamilton's weeping wall located near the entrance secretes pinhole droplets of water which gather in pools on the floor and have to be mopped up each evening. Nearby, Rist sank a tiny video monitor into a knothole in the wooden floor. It shows a miniature woman imploring indifferent passersby to pull her out of her subterranean prison. Another below-floor-level work

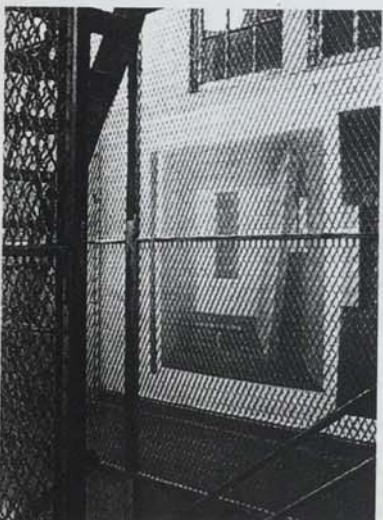
filled them with intricate miniature environments, elements of which spill out onto the floor. The wall openings are on two floors (second and third), which serves Sze's intention to suggest that the entire building is pulsing with hidden organic life. Her materials are utilitarian. A garden hose connects the wall space to an aquarium in which fragments of photographs can be seen floating. An electric fan ripples delicate little paper constructions, while desk lamps double as grow lights, illuminating small plants which sprout in a dustpan. Chewing gum wrappers, candy dots and light-bulb cartons form an oddly



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An untitled 1997 work by Madeleine Hatz installed in one of the building's stairwells, oil on joint compound, painted plaster reliefs; included in the "Vertical Painting" show.



Rebecca Quaytman's silkscreen *Two Places in One, Here and My Studio*, 1997, installed in one of the building's stairwells; included in the "Vertical Painting" show.

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appealing landscape in the wall. Sze tells me that she wants her miniature installation "to look like something someone would create if they were locked for a long time alone in a bathroom."

The first time I make my way to Nari Ward's installation in the attic, the artist is jubilant. Just that morning he has discovered a stash of old school records tossed behind the wall decades ago. These will become important materials for his installation, which is titled, with apologies to

is Matt Mullican's installation in an inactive boiler room in the basement. By embedding several specially designed steel grates in the room's earthen floor, Mullican subtly hints at aspects of the elaborate metaphysical system on which his oeuvre is based. Nearby, Robert Ryman contributed two small paintings. Placed beyond the boiler room and beneath the sidewalk in a dungeon-like alcove, they quietly sparkle with light from an aperture above.

Other works, however, partake of the monumental scale and heightened theatricality that characterize so much contemporary art. The contrast between these pieces and the more modest "Rooms" installations suggests that one big difference between the '70s and '90s may be a greatly increased audience expectation. It is hard to imagine today's contemporary-art public being completely satisfied by an exhibition devoted to holes in the wall and tiny stenciled lozenges.

Several of the new installations successfully combine theatrical presentation and emotional engagement. One of these is an initially deceptive toolshed which Ilya Kabakov constructed in one of the open-air enclosures formed by the courtyard wall. Tucked off to one side, the structure is easily mistaken for a shed used by those working on the P.S. 1 renovations. Only by pushing open its rough door and venturing through the darkness, past scattered ladders and piles of lumber, does the intrepid viewer reach the shed's illuminated center, where Kabakov constructed a miniature city. This Lilliputian—and distinctly Russian-looking—city is magically presided over by an airborne angel.

Dennis Oppenheim's contribution also appears utilitarian at first glance. It consists of a skeletal aluminum armature stretching from courtyard to roof along an outside corner of the building. It is actually a miniature elevator shaft whose *Falling Room* rises slowly to the roof and drops back to the ground with alarming speed.

In a rooftop loggia which had once housed the school's bell, Julian Schnabel installed several large metal

sculptures, one of which is hung in place of the missing bell. On the loggia's peeling ceiling, he placed an ornately framed painting of an angel in priest's garb, playing off the ecclesiastical associations of the bell tower.

In the attic, Nari Ward wove a dense web out of twisted garbage bags filled with building debris, which the viewer has to navigate to reach a restful open space in the center. Robert Wogan created a narrow, twisting labyrinth which shrinks to a cramped passage about 2½ feet high before opening into an expansive cathedral-like space. In the basement, Chen Zhen's giant prayer wheel celebrates the sound of money when laboriously rotated by visitors. Patrick Killoran erected a combination guillotine/pirate's plank in one of the administrative offices. It invites visitors to lie on a sliding platform which propels them half way out the window and over the street three stories below.

The reopening installations serve as a reminder of how closely P.S. 1's identity is tied to the nature of the building that houses it. Other not-for-profit spaces may change location with little or no detrimental effect, but for P.S. 1, the

Nari Ward's installation *How to maintain and preserve the virgin fertility of our souls*, 1997, twisted garbage bags filled with building debris, mixed mediums; in the attic.

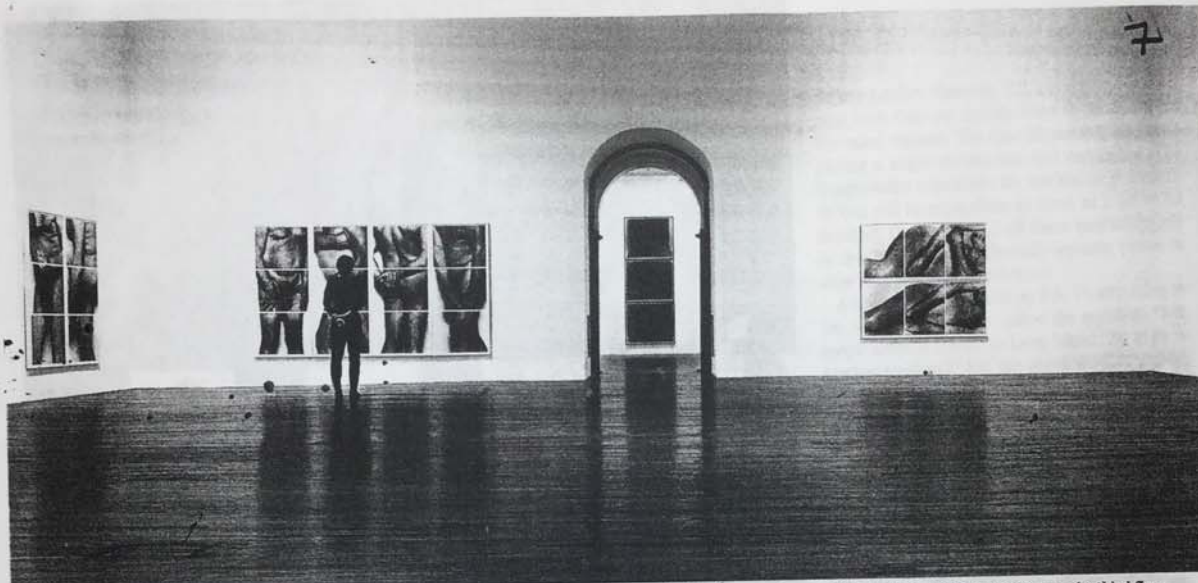


The next time I come through, the vast peaked room has been invaded by a dense web of twisted garbage bags filled with Ward's discovered treasures. One must step through, around or under the looping plastic tendrils to reach a relatively open area in the center of the room. This, Ward informs me, is the "meditation area." It is dominated by a refrigerator he found in the basement and has chosen to sus-

George Washington Carver, *How to maintain and preserve the virgin fertility of our souls*. Ward's plan has been to build a dense labyrinth out of discarded building materials, abandoned bottles, obsolete equipment and appliances from P.S. 1 and its environs. This new find allows him to tie his installation even more intimately to the building's pre-art history. He will wrap the penmanship flash cards and religious instruction excuse forms in black plastic garbage bags, or hang them at eye level from wires. "These are real echoes of the past," he says excitedly.



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Installation view of "John Coplans: A Self-Portrait," showing recent multi-paneled photographs from an ongoing series; in a double-height gallery on the third floor.

## John Coplans: A Self-Portrait

**A**lthough its subject is the naked human body, the work of John Coplans can hardly be thought of as nude photography in any conventional sense. First of all, the fact that he serves as his own model gives the work a particular edge. Secondly, his images are almost anti-nudes, presenting the absolute contrary of the idealized forms, whether female or male, of Western tradition. Coplans's large-scale, meticulously printed black-and-white photographs linger over every imperfection of the artist's hairy, sagging, aged body, zeroing in on matted body hair, ripples of fat and hills and valleys of untanned flesh.

Like Cindy Sherman and Yasumasa Morimura, two other contemporary photographer self-portraitists, Coplans takes pains to conceal his identity in his images, but not, as they do, through elaborate disguises. Instead, Coplans crops his head and face out of the picture. This simple device frees him to use his body not as an index of identity but as sheer raw material that can suggest a variety of animate and inanimate objects. At times, the close examination of rolling flesh mimics the gentle folds of landscape. In some photographs, his belly and nipples become a cosmic animal face. By drawing in his head and arms and raising his clenched fists above his shoulders, Coplans can transform the massive rectangular expanse of his back into something like a primitive pot with small knobbed handles.

Frequently Coplans uses scale to defamiliarize body parts. At 5 feet high, an image of his feet begins to look more like a section of tree trunk than a pair of human appendages. He also crops images in inventive ways, in some cases making it nearly impossible to work out just which part of the body is being revealed. He often divides a single image over two or three separately framed panels.

Among the most striking images here are works from his "Frieze" series of 1994. Each work in the series comprises two to four large views of Coplans's body from the upper chest to the knees. Collectively and individually, the images possess the tension and rhythms of classical reliefs. One thinks of the succession of largely headless figures in the Parthenon frieze who twist their torsos, clasp their heels or tense their knees as they prepare to mount horses. Coplans accentuates the coiled energy of his pose by compressing it within the boundaries of the photograph.

In bringing together a generous selection of Coplans's 1984-96 work, the P.S.1 show underlines the artist's ability to elicit apparently endless series of permutations out of his bulky naked form. Over and over, Coplans demonstrates that the body beautiful is no match for the expressive possibilities of the body blemished.

—E.H.

pend from the ceiling. Incense smoke pours from the appliance to enhance the meditative aura. "I want to transform everyday experience by using everyday things," Ward says, matter-of-factly. However, he has noted with disapproval how quickly I have been able to find a route through the looping bags. "I'm going to change that right now," he says.

Less than a week before the opening I make another pilgrimage upstairs. "I thought I was done, but I just discovered a whole new cache today," Ward announces. This haul includes cursive writing practice cards, collages by students and more excuse forms. He will build a

vitrine to hold them under the refrigerator, which is now also covered with his finds. He tells me how, when a community group came through the building recently, one of the visitors recognized the names on several of the excuse forms dated 1945.

Each trip to Ward's installation is followed by a visit to the other installation going up in the attic, by Robert Wogan. This is Wogan's first crack at a mainstream art space, and he plans to make the most of it. His previous work has largely taken place in abandoned buildings and inaccessible sites. As in those installations,

he hopes here to create a psychologically charged space which will unsettle the viewer's perceptions.

Currently, his site is the open attic, filled to the eaves with various bits of wood and discarded metal cafeteria equipment. Working with his technical collaborator, Craig Baumhofer, he plans to wall off the chaotic debris and build a narrow tunnel which will lead, after various twists and turns, into a large open space. The pyramidal walls of the room will be painted seamless white. Once visitors reach the open space, a steeply inclined, carpeted ramp will lead to the peaked



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Installation view of Julian Schnabel's "Ogni Angelo e Spaventoso," which includes Marie, a hanging bronze bell from 1983, a ceiling painting, Father Pete Jacobs, from 1997, and a bronze-and-ceramic-tiled table with four wooden benches from 1997; installed on the roof in the former school's bell tower.

rambling red-brick school building is a vital player in all programming decisions. Its eccentric spaces make unusual things possible, and the art it has most cherished plays off its distinctive architecture. The only other art space in New York that can make the same claim is its sister space, the Clocktower.

This may explain the widespread sense of relief expressed by longtime fans when they realized how much of the building's original ambience had been maintained in the renovation. However, less visible aspects of P.S. 1's operation will no doubt be very different. With the renovation out of the way, difficult questions about funding and pro-

gramming cannot be avoided. The \$8.5-million renovation was paid for by New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, which owns the building. The DCA will also provide a third of the projected \$1.5-million annual operating costs, but the agency will not be contributing to programming expenses. Heiss is optimistic but vague about future sources of support, as the institution looks to board members, private donors, corporations, foundations and members for funding. Currently, P.S. 1 is in the second year of an \$134,000 NEA Endowment Challenge Grant.

Heiss is confident that the expansion will attract

serious funders. However, P.S. 1 is not alone among New York City art institutions in its quest for increased support. The New Museum is also completing a major renovation and expansion. The Guggenheim continues its worldwide outreach. MOMA will be expanding as soon as it picks an architect. One wonders if all these institutions will be able to carve out sufficiently separate niches to allow for a beneficial coexistence.

A typically bitchy article on P.S. 1's reopening in the *New York Observer* asked the question: "Will people take the E train to Long Island City to go to another museum?" For the short term, of course, the answer is yes. Art lovers will come for splashy openings as they will go to openings in Bilbao, or Münster, or Kassel. But, more importantly, will they keep coming, especially if Heiss downplays the event-driven nature of programming in favor of projects that do not all open on the same day? Heiss insists that one of the big differences between the old and new P.S. 1 is that the focus is now much more on audience. Hence the increased emphasis on education and the new amenities such as the café and bookstore. But in this brave new era in which box office spells survival for cultural institutions, it remains to be seen whether the avant-garde can pull in the Spielberg crowd. [As this issue goes to press, P.S. 1 reports that post-opening-day attendance has been strong, averaging 500-700 on weekdays, 1,000 on weekends.]

Against this background, one finds it hard not to look for symbolic meaning in the text Scottish artist Douglas Gordon painted on a wall at the courtyard entrance. In large blue letters, Gordon's contribution reads: "It's only just begun." For the new P.S. 1, this is both a promise and a prayer. □

The opening program at P.S. 1 includes the following exhibitions, all of which opened to the public Oct. 29, 1997: "Jack Smith: Flaming Creature" [to Mar. 1], "John Coplans: A Self-Portrait" [to Mar. 29], "Jackie Winsor: Sculpture" [to Mar. 1], "Lynne Yamamoto: Selected Work" [to Mar. 1], "Martin von Haselberg: New Works" [to Feb. 1], "Heaven: Public View, Private View" [to Feb. 1], "Vertical Painting Show" [to June 28], "Some Young New Yorkers" [to Mar. 1], "Installations and Projects" [through spring].

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ceiling where Wogan plans to install a video, which will provide the only light in the room.

The steep ramp is intentionally designed to make it difficult for visitors to ascend to the top. "Confronted with the obstacle, probably just a small percentage will take up the challenge," Wogan says. He demonstrates what is in store for these select few by bounding up the ramp to the video monitor and then racing back down. The descent looks even more challenging than the climb up since the pull of gravity draws one rapidly and inexorably

earthward. As Wogan describes his project, metaphors tumble out: "I'm looking for a fun-house effect. . . . I was thinking about how mountains are created with plate shifts, and how they make you want to go to the top. . . . I'm going for the feeling of euphoria you get when you almost crash your car." In the end, he sums up his ambition thus: "What I want to do is take your ocular sense away and leave you to your other physical senses."

As the deadline looms, Wogan's ambitious environment slowly takes shape. Not until the day of the opening is the background clutter completely sealed off. I experience the desired

claustrophobia as the dark tunnel narrows to a height of about 2½ feet before opening into the dimly lit room. Mobs of people have joined me in braving the tunnel and we stand watching the video, an apparently endless loop showing interconnected corridors in an institutional building. This may be Wogan's way of telling us that it's the voyage (through the tunnel, up the ramp) and not the destination that counts. In some ways, I reflect, this is an apt metaphor for P.S. 1 itself, an institution that has always seemed to value the process of art-making over the finished work, an institution that is itself a vast, constantly changing work-in-progress. —E.H.



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