

Ree Morton

RETROSPECTIVE 1971-1977

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curated by Allan Schwartzman and Kathleen Thomas

THE NEW MUSEUM

Ree Morton

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Preface

Since The New Museum was founded in order to present the work of lesser-known living artists, this exhibition is a marked deviation from our stated policy. This exception to the rule is, for us, an important one; that Ree Morton's tragic death, in the spring of 1977, cut short an important and influential career does not change the fact that her work has added immeasurably to the esthetic heritage of our generation.

Although Ree Morton is no longer with us, ideas and energies found in the extraordinary body of work she left behind are a living, vital force, continuing to make a real difference to all who come in contact with them. This exhibition provides an opportunity for the public to see for the first time the full range of Morton's visual investigation, and to share, through the writings of those who knew and loved her, a sense of the artist herself.

My thanks to all who have helped to make the exhibition possible: Allan Schwartzman and Kathleen Thomas, who organized the show and wrote the accompanying catalog essay, completed the intricate jigsaw puzzle of events, ideas, places, and pieces that constitute Morton's life and work; they, with Cheryl Cipriani, provide us with an overview of her work which is both personal and historical; my gratitude also to the many talented interns and volunteers at The New Museum who have worked together devotedly and enthusiastically on all aspects of the exhibition.

It is thanks to the generosity of The National Endowment for the Arts, the Jerome Foundation, and the New York State Council on the Arts that this exhibition is possible. It is also due to the assistance of the many people—family, friends, business associates, artists and writers—who cared deeply about Ree Morton and her work that her vision will remain with us in years to come.

Marcia Tucker
Director

The attempt to substantiate Ree Morton's vision through this exhibition and accompanying catalog could only have been achieved through the full cooperation of the staff, volunteers, advisors, and the many friends of the artist.

We are grateful to the following people for their assistance: Tim Yohn, for his insightful manuscript editing; Joan Greenfield, for designing and producing the catalog; Marcia Tucker, Director, for her continuing support and invaluable assistance; Alexandra Halkin, intern, who meticulously researched and compiled the chronology, biography, and bibliography; Emory Craig and John Jacobs for the difficult reconstructions of parts of several works in the exhibition; Barbara Zucker for fabricating a missing elastic component; Anne Duberek for research assistance; the many other volunteers—especially interns Evelyn Strauss and Anne Makepeace—for their unselfish enthusiasm and assistance with routine but important tasks; and the many galleries and institutions who supplied invaluable information and documentation.

We would also like to thank Donald Droll, Frank Kolbert, Barry Rosen, Colin Thompson, and Ryl Norquist (formerly) of the Droll/Kolbert Gallery, New York, New York, for their generous personal and professional cooperation.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the following: Linda Morton, the artist's eldest daughter, who assisted throughout the planning of the exhibition and whose courage, warmth, and enthusiasm were an inspiration to all; Cynthia Carlson, Morton's close friend, who advised and enlightened us on many important aspects of the artist's life and work; to family, other artists, friends, students and colleagues—especially JoAnne Akalaitis, Arlene Slavin, Marcia Tucker, Jeff Way and others too numerous to mention—who have shared with us, through interviews and/or writing, the particular ways in which they knew Morton and her art.

Above all, we are aware of our deep indebtedness to Ree Morton, herself, whose exuberant vitality, both in her life and her work made the challenge and organization of this exhibition at once an exciting and gratifying experience.

Allan Schwartzman
Kathleen Thomas

Acknowledgments

Though she made art for barely ten years, Ree Morton has left us with a substantial body of work spanning broad and diverse means of expression. Her career was cut short by an automobile accident which claimed her life in Chicago in April 1977 at the age of forty. The work of an eclectic artist, irreverent of categorical imperatives, her sculpture is pictorial, her painting sculptural; her installations are contained, yet open-ended; her dramas suggested, rather than acted out. Her extremely personal explorations and inquiries extend to a wide spectrum of universal human ideas and concerns. The visual references, metaphors, narratives, and emblems which comprise the nexus of her work echo a world ordered, yet unexplainable. Each of her works encompasses a tremendous range of ideas delineated, but not defined, for it was the myriad possibilities, and occurrences of life—present and past—and life's complexity, diversity, and contradiction that interested her. With a computer-like ability to consume and synthesize concepts and visual means, Morton, like Marcel Duchamp, whom she quoted in her notes, made "visual and verbal puns that argue with the idea of a fixed reality. All the work proposes indeterminacy in one form or another."

Organizing this exhibition and catalog has been a complex endeavor. The objects and renderings of Morton's concentration are inconsistent and certainly untraditional: starting with logs, branches, blocks, and planks, dotted paths and outlines, moving on to painted bows, roses, banners, flags, wallpaper, and finally painted images. Many of Morton's important works (especially those of the early 1970s) were situational, depending on specific spaces; of these only installation photographs remain. Even when independent of unique architectural settings, all of Morton's works are interwoven with particular situations and the relationship between elements in a given context are reflective of attitudes unique to the moment they were made. The absence of these original contexts became most apparent upon opening the storage bins that contained the fruits of Morton's labor. The complex procedure of sorting and consolidating these pieces into their original wholes was compounded by the philosophies and processes that dictated their conception and execution. Uninterested in accumulation and unwilling in her early years to allow separate elements to exist independently as art objects, Morton often reused components, constantly altering and reexamining ideas and interactions. Many of the essential recurring elements of 1971—uniquely formed logs and tree stumps, for example—no longer exist, and therefore the works that included them cannot be reconstructed. Certain large-scale installations exist only in part, and we have tried to rebuild those parts that rely on standardized materials. Exact dating is often impossible because of huge gaps in Morton's documentation.

Morton kept extensive journals of sketches, notes, ideas, and quotes (minus, in most cases, the source) which struck her as relevant or inspirational. Her constantly referring back to earlier notations, evidenced by marginal notes and underlining, added later, shows that assimilation of such information had a profound effect on her art. These passages have been quoted extensively throughout this essay, often without credit (when unspecified by Morton), in order to portray Morton and her work as fully as possible. The sources are extremely varied: philosophic writings by Gaston Bachelard, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Christian Norberg-Schulz, Jean Piaget, Martin Heidegger, among others; books on such diverse subjects as heraldry, garden plants and weeds, and Celtic history; and favorite texts, notably Rousell's *Impressions of Africa* and Louis Sullivan's *A System of Architectural Ornament*. As in her work, these sources, or fragments of them, are constantly resurfacing, reaffirming and expanding past concerns and, at the same time,

Ree Morton

A CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Data in these notebooks— accumulated over the years on hit or miss basis—using principles of selection mysterious to me which, furthermore, changed from year to year, and which I could not recover if I wanted to.

sources questionable at best

My excuse for brazenly dipping into this preempted domain is that I have a special interest, one that does not recognize a difference in value between a good novel and a bad one, a comic strip or an opera. All are equally useful in explicating the character . . . of experienced activity.

Notebook, 1976*

School became a congregating place for young artists.

there were no other options at this time.

How to spend that time in a meaningful way without imposing the restraints of the institution.

Try not to think of institutions as static objects, with services which must be involved with change in the same way that life involves change. Either you serve that change and go with it, or you get stuck and go the other way—

An institution is a function.

Way of ordering.

It's about how you bridge that gap between artists and art schools.

for me:

I couldn't have become an artist without going to school—coming from a middle class home, living a middle class life, I had no access to information about artists, except as myth.

School was a way of checking out higher up reality.

Art definitely cannot be taught.

Artists need communication with each other.

I LIKE:

*Byzantine mosaics
Moslem mosaics
Kachina Dolls
Roman villa murals
Aegean art
Sumerian idols
Good liars
Sculptors—real
Printed circuits
Ingres*

I HATE:

*Symbolism
Abstract Expressionism
Surrealism
Greek Hellenistic sculpture
Liars
Painters—phony
Paintings—rectangle
Color relationships
Elegance
Good taste*

Notebook, 1968

SPACE

3-D space = something which actually exists in a straightforward, unambiguous way. Real 3-D objects, inhabiting actual 3-D everyday space. We can walk around them and pick them up. They may not look like objects which are familiar to us, but fundamentally they lead the same kind of spatial existence as natural objects and ordinary artifacts. Although their solid form and spatial design may make demands on our powers of perception, we may nevertheless perceive them in essentially the same way as we perceive the 3-D properties of the ordinary furniture of the world.

Class notes, no date

*all bracketed information added by authors.

Notebook, 1975

suggesting new ones.

Born Helen Marie Reilly, August 3, 1936, Ree Morton was the second of five children. She grew up in Ossining, New York, where her father was a doctor, her mother a nurse. Although she studied nursing at Skidmore College from 1953 to 1956, she never entered the field, having married Ted Morton, a naval officer, before completing her undergraduate studies. Her first daughter, Linda, was born in 1957, followed by Sally in 1961, and a son, Scott in 1962. Moving around the country every few years and with her husband leaving on cruises on a regular basis for six to nine months at a time, Ree found her children to be the nucleus of her activities and devotion. The impetus to study art did not come until 1960, when she and her family were living in Florida. She happened to hear, while ironing one day, a radio commercial for free drawing classes at the Jacksonville Museum. Though prior to that the thought of making art had never occurred to her, her interest and commitment grew rapidly from that day.

Shortly after moving to East Greenwich, Rhode Island in 1966, she began work on a BFA at the Rhode Island School of Design. There she met Robert Rohn, a sculptor, and Marcia Tucker, then an art historian, both instructors who were to become her life-long friends and whose ideas provided a strong stimulus to her thinking. According to Tucker, whose class was the first art history course Morton ever took, Morton had found the Navy life stultifying, and was eager to absorb as much new information as possible.

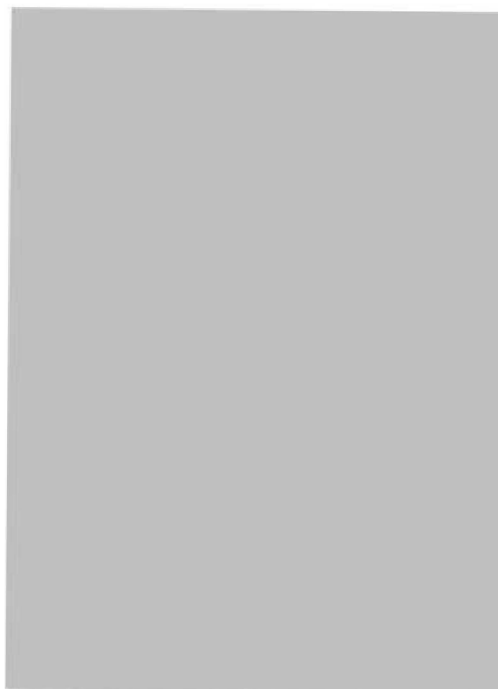
From the time of her earliest documented paintings in 1967, Morton tended to ignore traditional means of expression. Her 1967–1968 investigations are characterized by medium-size, two-color, geometrically shaped canvases in hard-edge pinks, greens, purples, and browns reminiscent of Frank Stella's contemporaneous works. In 1968, Morton acknowledged the source of her paintings, as well as marked their completion, and hinted at a future direction, with a manuscript drawing entitled "Silly Stellas"—basic Stella protractions for configurations rendered volumetrically, as if they were sculptural floor pieces. A journal entry reads

Paintings are too flat. A painting is an object—OK—yet after that, what? It should give pleasure and pain. Paint is just another material . . . Reality is never real—only seen from a point of view head on.²

At this time Morton was introduced to avant-garde theater through the writings of Jerzy Grotowski and the works of Richard Schechner. From this point on, Morton's primary concern became space—"real, imaginary, illusionary"—which she defined as "air plus object."³ She wanted something active, which people could associate with, something to engage others and to gauge yourself by, something to touch and to be touched. According to Tucker, many of the works made in Rhode Island

were paintings and sculptures at the same time and everyone was urging her to choose between the two. We talked a lot about . . . ideas I had at that time of deliberately moving in the direction that did not seem to be right—making the works as bad as you could so they would come out the other end.⁴

Morton was thinking about Marshall McLuhan's assertion, as noted in her journals at this time, that "Three-dimensional, tactile objects are real. We can associate with things we can touch and handle out of the range of the visual bombardment of painting."⁵ The journals of 1968 are domi-

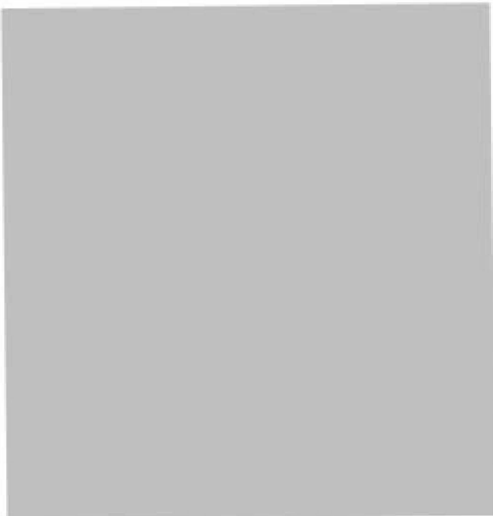


Shaped Painting, 1969–1970
Mixed Media
Dimensions unknown
Whereabouts unknown

nated by drawings of simple fabricated, modular, presumably wooden structures, most of which consist of a unit mounted on a wall and correspond to complementary open “negative” spaces in a unit resting on the floor. Her obsession with “grounding” forms reveals an interest in weight, gravity, structure, and a recurrent verticality, as well as an anthropomorphic relationship to a person, as if the object could not exist without personal dialogue or correspondence. Other drawings illustrate “things that come from the ground,” such as trees, flowers, pipes, telephone poles, and rocks, or things on floors, such as beds and chairs. She even drew a simply structured humanoid, three-headed shower nozzle, with two “legs” sprouting from a floor base.⁷

Morton’s Rhode Island years seemed to be a time of “reexamining her life.”⁸ Her passionate commitment to art blossomed as her marriage fizzled. During the summer of 1968, after receiving her BFA, she and her husband separated: he went on a naval cruise at the same time that she moved to Philadelphia with her children, where she entered the Tyler School of Art graduate program in fine arts.

While the children were her first priority, Morton nonetheless became entrenched in school and studio work. She “was working literally behind the washer/dryer in the basement of this suburban house in Philadelphia,”⁹ racing through a broad range of sculptural styles and forms, her pace reflective of the programmed life of a mother and naval officer’s wife: foam rubber and wire wall objects (reminiscent of Eva Hesse’s tensile pieces); wire sling-shape wall gestures; propped rectangular objects of weather stripping; process-oriented screen pieces, through which concrete was poured; wall works constructed of industrial screens; floor installations of modular glass bricks, fiberglass insulation, and resin; cages of plastic sheeting and flocking; can-



Untitled, September 1970
Fiberglass, glass bricks, insulation, and resin
Approximately 18" x 11" x 84"
Whereabouts unknown



vases with counted, regularized "time marks" of 24 hours, 12 hours, etc.; and dense masking tape installations spanning opposite walls of a room. Despite the specificity of media, she used many industrial materials because "she had no money" and they were "cheap and available."¹⁰ During these graduate school years, Morton demonstrated her facility with diverse materials, methods and ideas and initiated the combination of structural works dependent on specific architectural settings (such as corners) that occupied the remainder of her artistic output. Notes accompanying a series of crosshatch drawings, (similar to, but predating Jasper Johns' familiar configurations) detail some of her interests in drawing, but can be equally related to all of her work

Roughly, three ideas interest me almost equally—
Structure, geometric shapes, modular repetitions, grids; *Light*, which can glow, be reflected, be absorbed; and *Surface*, which in the case of drawings means integrating the quality of the paper with the marks made on it. The crosshatching is a device which allows these considerations to operate together—would isolate it on the page. The crosshatching is also used for its modular quality—no one line has any greater value than another, there are no "beautiful" or expressive lines."

During her years at Tyler, Morton "explored the paintings and the sculptures separately to see if she had to make a choice and then finally she put them both together," when she ultimately insisted that "I'm just going to do what I want to do."¹² Tucker feels that

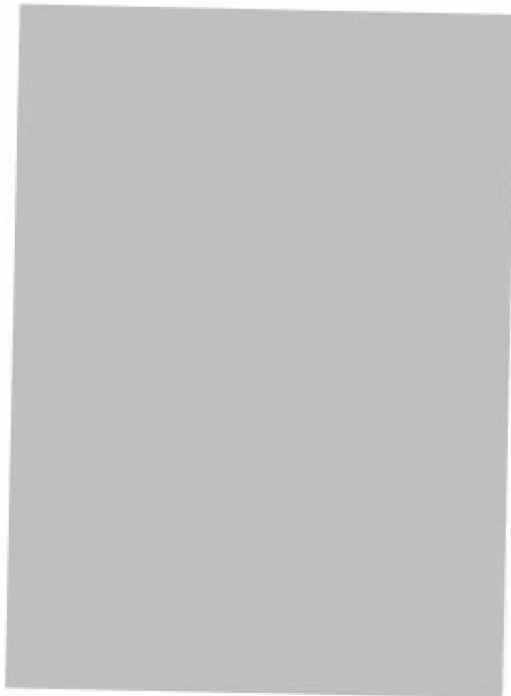
When she started to make this break she moved away from formal concerns... I think



she realized she was neither a painter nor a sculptor, therefore, the *forms* of painting and sculpture weren't of interest to her. At that point she started getting into this really arcane relationship to her work: more mystery, more romance, more eccentricity. By working very quickly she absorbed every idea she could about painting and sculpture *per se*. I think from that point on she went outside those areas for her inspiration.¹³

Breaking with these more formalistic concerns, Morton experimented in 1970 with a series of works consisting of clip-on flood lights, simple wooden supports, and (at times) glass bricks, which, metaphorically, "shed new light" on conventional thinking by making novel playthings of "serious" issues. The *2nd Light Piece* was composed of a rectangular reinforced masonite sheet vertically propped on a rectangular wooden frame base which rolled on casters. A light clamped onto one of the diagonal supports shines on the back of the masonite, thus questioning the complex roles, orientations, and definitions of sculpture and painting. The sculpture is substantial, but not massive; it partially encloses a space, without creating a volume. Its open structure identifies edges, or the boundaries defined by the wooden slats, suggesting, without actually making, a

The 2nd Light Piece, 1970
Casters, clip-on light, masonite, and wood
Approximately 48" x 48" x 60"
Whereabouts unknown

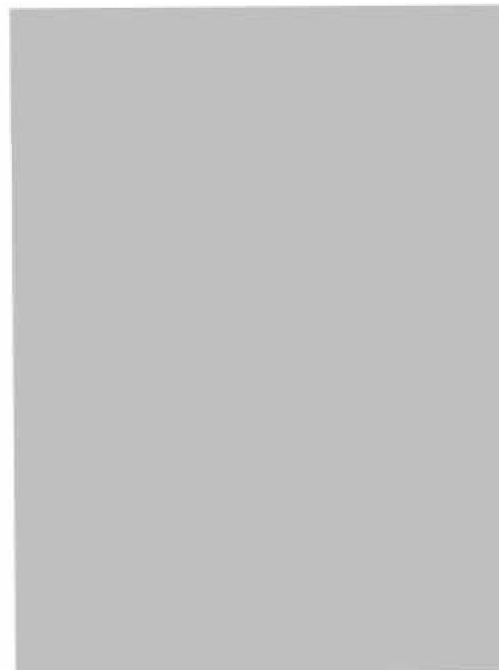


framework. In a tongue-in-cheek pun on the presentation of Old Master paintings, with overhead light fixtures to illuminate them, the *2nd Light Piece* features its own light source, basking in the total absurdity she created by juxtaposing functional and nonfunctional elements, as the bare bulb casts a harsh light on a blank backdrop. In activating the wall by moving a section of it forward, or in emphasizing the structural support of a painting (both images to which the piece alludes), Morton examines serious, viable issues by means of a satiric visual pun. This literal and metaphoric attempt to "lighten" sculptural form and painting support focuses on the elusiveness of the object, as the whole unit rests on small wheels, and thus has no unique orientation. This simple autonomous unit, like a stage prop, is ready to go anywhere, with its own means of transport and illumination.

Also at this time, Morton dissected concepts of sculptural form by combining thin wooden slats in simple structures, many of them modular, which hung low to the ground but do not rest solely on it, examining the nature of uniform distribution, simple planar enclosure, and the juxtaposition of gravity-revealing weight principles and propped or supported juts.

Shortly after the completion of her MFA at Tyler, Morton assumed a teaching position at the Philadelphia College of Art. Since most of her time was spent either at school teaching or at home with her children, studio time was severely limited. She had even less time for an outside social life. Cynthia Carlson, a painter living in New York who also taught at PCA, stayed in Morton's home during her teaching days in Philadelphia. They soon became close friends (a relationship which flourished in following years), and spent long hours talking about their own and other people's work. Morton and Carlson also had close ties at this time with sculptors Rafael Ferrer and Italo Scanga, whose classes Morton had taken at Tyler.

In early 1971 Morton turned to the use of raw lumber and logs as a primary material. She executed a series of objects entitled *Wood Drawings*, which consist of short lengths of raw, aged wood of varying widths (from boards to slats) crudely joined with nails, hinges, and screws, to construct small-scale, simple structures, to which are added red, black, and green magic marker dots, lines, and grids. Although they were not exhibited until 1974 (at the Museum of Modern Art's



Untitled, 1970 (studio view of installation exhibited in the Whitney Museum Sculpture Annual, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York)

Wood slats

Dimensions unknown

Whereabouts unknown



Wood Drawings, 1971 (installation at the Museum of Modern Art Member's Penthouse, 1974)


Felt-tip pen and hardware on wood

Dimensions variable

Wood Drawing, 1970


Felt-tip pen and hardware on wood

18" x 5½" x 2"



Untitled, 1971
Screen, twigs, and wood
36" x 36" x 72"
Whereabouts unknown
Photo courtesy of Droll/Kolbert Gallery, New York,
New York

Untitled, May 1971
Branch, clay pots, and grass
Dimensions unknown
Whereabouts unknown



Members' Penthouse, where they were comfortably spaced on a wall from floor to ceiling) they originally existed as curios, strategically positioned in "unexpected places throughout her Philadelphia home,"¹⁴ like personal markers or icons.

In the same year, Morton explored various means of containing space on a larger scale. The earliest works (Winter, 1971) consist of boxes and shelves simply constructed of raw lumber, screen, and glass, often with twigs placed in and underneath. They allude to specific architectural functions, such as slanted basement doors, hanging shelf units, and a horticulturist's tilted sorting table and are either placed on the floor, on sawhorse legs, or suspended from wall juts. Although she worked on these only a few months, through them Morton established an ongoing interest in open and closed situations, naturalistic materials, functional allusions, symbol and metaphor, and a combination of structured, yet seemingly random or spontaneous arrangements.

In the middle of 1971 Morton introduced into her work the use of tree branches, twigs, and limbs in their natural state, first as forms in themselves, then, in combination with rocks in installations spanning the floor and wall in her studio, using the naturally formed lines to define and enclose space, one which the viewer could easily enter, although not always as a welcome guest. In these installations she also plotted lines, traced routes, and suggested habitats or skeletal architectural structures.

From this point until 1972, Morton embarked on a whirlwind execution of innumerable spatial installations with many of the same components reincorporated into different contexts, which often existed just long enough to be photographed and then were dismantled. At first, she worked through so many modes that organization of the information is confused at best. Experiments in combining painting and sculpture occurred during this extended search; for instance, Morton added random lyrical orange and yellow markings on the walls, often defining a flat rectangular space by connecting a twig on a floor with gestural lines on a wall. One particularly assertive, atypical piece of this period consists of a four-foot square painted canvas in front of which a



Untitled, July 1971
Dirt, paint, rocks, and trees
Dimensions unknown
Whereabouts unknown



Untitled, July 1971
Branch, paint, and rock
Dimensions unknown
Whereabouts unknown

Untitled, August 1971
Branches, dolly, paint, and rock
Dimensions unknown
Whereabouts unknown



Untitled, September 1971
Drawing on canvas and paint on branches
Approximately 66" x 66" x 20"
Collection Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin,
Ohio



Untitled, 1971

Paint on canvas, paint on carl, and trunk

Approximately 72 x 24 x 33

Reconstructed for exhibition

It [beginning a piece] usually is involved in a kind of materials thing, you can see how I collect just junk, over there. I have thing around, and then as I work, it's almost a kind of drawing process. It involves picking something up, placing it over there, looking at it, putting a third thing in, taking it out. It's a really physical manipulation of those things as lines or areas or zones or whatever they do, and then working from there. Usually the skeleton of a piece will set around for quite awhile while I work it out. They actually look, and I realize that the work looks very offhand and quick, but really it's a very slow process of getting those things to come together.

Horsfield/Blumenthal interview, 1974

latched wooden box rests on a rolling cart painted black with white dots. The canvas consists of eleven horizontal rows laid one over the other—of eighteen short vertical paint strokes, arranged in a loose grid, first a line of yellow, then overlaid with a line of orange. It appears that for each horizontal row Morton loaded up her brush and then painted an entire line without refueling, since the strokes become fainter as they move from left to right. Through this regularized gestural grid—or rhythmic counting system—Morton overlaid a larger black dotted grid, grouping the paint dabs in more coherent clusters. The line snakes in and out, accommodating the irregularity of paint placement. The whole painting is outlined with a black border containing white dots, the bottom left hand corner left open—as a kind of threshold that allows the viewer to enter or exit the work and suggests the inability to consider a painting “complete.” The character and structure of the painting imagery are fully revealed, while the sculptural table in front of it, with its latched box, seems to contain a secret, perhaps the key to the meaning of the work.

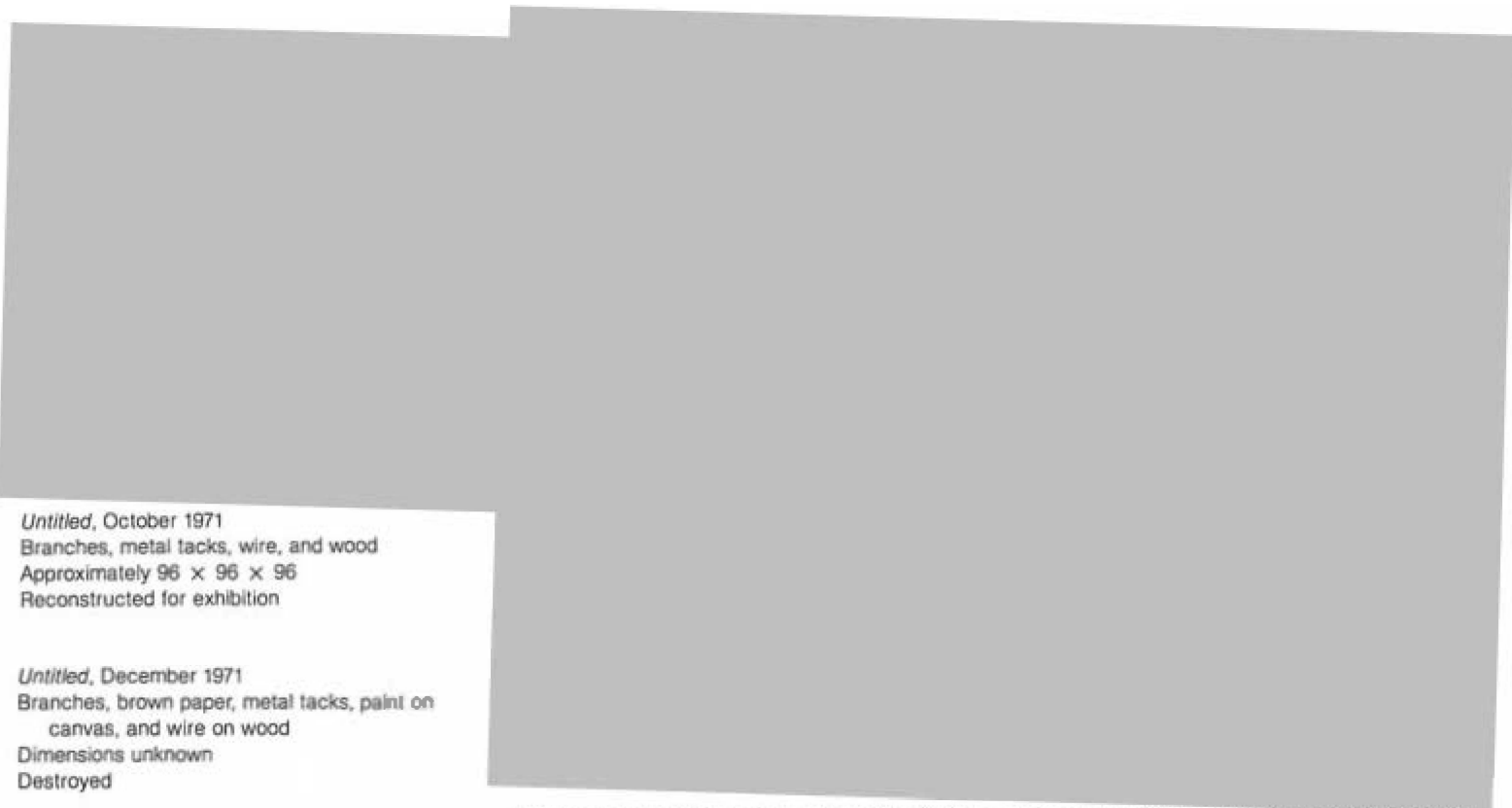
However, the more spatial, mixed-media installations occupied most of Morton’s energy at this time. In them, the arrangements of components is at times mutually responsive, at others oblique or obscured. Many of the areas suggest strong ritualistic qualities, minus specific activity. They relate strongly to the sophisticated yet primal works of tribal primitives, abstractly alluding to events totally integrated into daily existence. The objects share space concurrently for reasons totally unknown to us. Like actors in a play, they participate in an overall event, typecast in the present state we witness, only to reappear again in new situations under different sets of circumstances, with new roles and costumes.

Not only do the components exist in relation to one another, but each situation also acknowledges our presence as observers. Our mental and physical interaction allows the events to be realized, makes them live, so to speak. Rather than direct comprehension, the pieces invite personal participation, supplying the props for our own private dramas. Morton’s willful projection of non-particularized meaning insists that we give these installations whatever special significance they may hold for us. She sets up a framework for seeing, communicating, experiencing, being, and understanding *per se*: like imaginary friends, these works establish a dialectic that varies greatly with individual perspective, ultimately illuminating the relativity of meaning itself.

Although we do not know exactly why Morton chose to work with branches and sticks, these interests “were in the air at that time,”¹⁵ with the objects functioning as a universally understood language, charged with specific, albeit personal meaning. In his book *Existence, Space and Architecture* (read extensively by Morton), Christian Norberg-Schulz tells us that our orientation in the world through psychic and physical constructs “cannot be understood in terms of our *needs* alone, but only as a result of our *interaction* with an environment which we have to understand and accept.”¹⁶ In such terms, Morton’s bringing the natural environment into the studio can be seen partially as an attempt to grapple with her surroundings and with nature itself.

During the summer of 1970 or 1971, Morton spent much time observing the laying of foundations for new buildings at Tyler, taking slides of the “construction workers’ coding... lines, sticks, and triangles around trees.”¹⁷ According to Morton, it was a “language that I didn’t understand and loved to look at. Once they began digging, it was disappointing compared to the ground markings.”¹⁸

Toward the end of 1971, Morton’s installations became focused on more clearly articulated spatial contexts of geometric order, and she asserted a greater integration of various media, so



Untitled, October 1971
Branches, metal tacks, wire, and wood
Approximately 96 x 96 x 96
Reconstructed for exhibition

Untitled, December 1971
Branches, brown paper, metal tacks, paint on
canvas, and wire on wood
Dimensions unknown
Destroyed

that each component participated specifically in a carefully plotted event. Norberg-Schulz proposes a theory of space which is paralleled by Morton's personal expression (and is prominently noted in her journals) as "a dimension of human existence, rather than as a dimension of thought or perception."¹⁹ The earliest of these more clearly articulated environments (November 1971) present gridded rows, rigid, simple geometric borders: they provide general structural coherence through a simple order, reflecting an organized, methodical sensibility attempting to establish command over a new irrational, unstructured sensibility. According to Kevin Lynch, (quoted by Norberg-Schulz) our positioning in the world presupposes an

environmental image, a generalized mental picture of the exterior physical world...

This image is the product both of immediate sensation and of the memory of past experience, and it is used to interpret information and to guide action... A good environmental image gives its possessor an important sense of emotional security.²⁰

An installation executed in Morton's Philadelphia studio in November, 1971 consists of a cubic enclosure, marked by seven-foot wooden beams; (1) vertically, with one placed against the wall and resting on the floor, (2) in depth, by another beam following the same path, now extending the same boundary on the floor, and (3) horizontally, with a third beam situated at the juncture of the previous two, placed over the line where floor and wall meet, the two floor beams forming

two sides of a square. A large forked branch propped diagonally bisects the cube by touching the top of the wall beam and resting on the floor at the suggested fourth corner of the floor square. A miniature "doorway," less than two feet high, forms part of this frontal plane. Behind this threshold, in the inner "sanctuary" of the piece, short thin slices of tree branch are arranged in gridded uniformity, austere in their miniature monumentality, alluding to place markers, architectural posts, or tombstones. On the wall, centered in the seven-foot cube, rests a horizontally oriented charcoal grey canvas with a white circle grid, which is perhaps an allusion to a flattened aerial view of the tops of the floor pegs, suggesting spatial orientations not immediately perceptible. The overhanging branch, with its forked top, provides a canopy or halo for this highly personalized interior space. According to Heidegger, "spaces receive their being from places and not from 'the space,'"²¹ which perhaps gives us a clue to the extent to which Morton's work was about herself, art being the means by which she revealed inner dimensions. A short branch spanning the corner of the room, several feet from the cubic configuration, suggests a psychological space greater than the physical area encompassed. In all its spatial and geometric specificity, though Morton's manipulation of space is bathed in allusions and metaphoric associations, it relies as heavily on memory as it does on momentary expression, for, as Norberg-Schulz suggests, "the world may be organized around a set of focal points, or be broken into named regions, or be linked to remembered routes."²² Like a mother protecting her young, these early works provide locales and are womblike in their comfortable familiarity.

Other works from this late 1971—early 1972 period reincorporate similar elements in different arrangements to form pieces of similar, yet unique character. Although a few attempts were made to reconstruct these works, they never satisfied Morton, who felt, in her words

very much involved in the situation in time... the work becomes a marker for where you are and what you think. And if it's exactly where you are at that time, then it's fine... I don't know if records are important. I see a lot of the work I do as being an event... I found that a lot of the small elements in a lot of the installations I've done are what last, they become artifacts of the piece.²³

While these early installations have physical openings—symbolic doorways, unbounded edges—the completeness of the arrangements and their fantasy or private world aspects ward off physical participation. It's as if the artist has "opened" up her world to an audience, yet has offered few concrete clues as to meaning or the nature of interaction. In what appears as a symbolic act of giving, yet not quite revealing, Morton juxtaposes the active and static, ritualistic and whimsical, austere and humorous, with a childlike innocence.

With almost deadpan seriousness, Morton often violated artistic conventions. Marcia Tucker lucidly recaptured the flavor of this work as she saw it in relation to Morton at that time

There's a certain kind of perversity in deciding that sculpture could be nonsubstantive, that sculpture didn't have to deal with volume or with weight, that you could draw sculpture and you could sculpt drawing, that it could go all over the place, that its three-dimensionality was not as interesting as its four-dimensionality, that it could exist as a whole series of activities in a time and place. They're very idiosyncratic. She put things together that didn't go together.... Primitivism at that time was almost a reaction against the art world, against all that slick, fabricated work.²⁴

Untitled, December 1971
Branches, flour, paint, and wood
Dimensions unknown
Destroyed



Quotes from Existence, Space, and Architecture by Christian Norberg-Schulz

The spatial orientations of the primitive are concrete orientations which refer to objects and localities and therefore have a strong emotional color.

Action consists of the structures and processes by which human beings form meaningful intentions and more or less successfully, implement them in concrete situations.

Geometry is a human construct, rather than something found in nature.

When mathematical propositions refer to reality they are not certain; when they are certain, they do not refer to reality. Einstein.

In general, perception aims at valid assumptions about the nature of the environment, and these assumptions vary according to the situations in which we are taking part.

A more satisfactory theory of architectural space—where space is understood as a dimension of human existence, rather than as a dimension of thought or perception.

Spaces receive their being from places and not from 'the space.' Heidegger.

Man's relation to places and through places to spaces consists in dwelling.

Existential space—relatively stable system of perceptual schemata, or 'image' of the environment. A generalization abstracted from the similarities of many phenomena, existential space has 'object character.'

Piaget—the development of the concept of place and of space as a system of places is a necessary condition for finding an existential foothold.

TOPOLOGY—is based upon relations, such as proximity, separation, closure (inside-outside) and continuity.

CENTERS or places (proximity)

DIRECTIONS or paths (continuity)

AREAS or domains (enclosure)


Hodological space—space of possible movement rather than straight lines, hodological space contains 'preferred paths' which represent a compromise between several domains such as 'short distance,' 'security,' 'minimal work,' 'maximum experience,' determined in relation to the topological conditions.

Paths divide man's environment into areas.

Notebook, 1973

One humorous element—a thick two-legged branch sawed off at the torso-like point where the two joints meet—was introduced at the end of 1971, and became a major element in a number of pieces. Morton frequently used it as a means of propping heavy beams, like a whimsical transferral of human strength from maker to object, a suggestion of the tree's former organic strength.

Many of her installations are steeped in contradiction, since Morton established conventions only to negate or destroy them, denying singular focus or interpretation. In these early pieces, contradiction is most often manifest through odd-scale juxtapositions. In an untitled piece (February 1972) Morton addresses and obscures the five basic spatial/scale levels in human interaction with the environment as outlined by Norberg-Schulz in "allusory" and "amusing" ways²⁵ either through direct examination of objects, or through the suggestion and contradiction of such levels through metaphor. "The lowest level is determined by the *hand*. The sizes and shapes of articles for use are related to the functions of grasping, carrying and in general of extending the actions of the hand";²⁶ here we find Morton's inclusion of two small sticks propped against the structuring triangles, like pieces of kindling. The short paint strokes of the large paper triangles and their painted wood beam borders also express hand and wrist activity. "The next level, furniture, is determined by the size of the *body*, especially in relation to such activities as sitting, bending and lying down."²⁷ The length of the semicircular floor space in this piece is approximately six feet, enough space for a reclining person. Metaphorically, the tiny doorway at the front of the piece suggests a normal entrance of human height, while the propped tree limb alludes to a



Untitled, February 1972
Branches, felt, flour, paint on paper, tape, and
wood
Dimensions unknown
Destroyed

Untitled, March 1971
Charcoal, log segments, paint, and wood
Dimensions unknown
Destroyed

leaning figure. "The third level, the house, gets its dimensions from the more extended bodily *movements* and actions, as well as from 'territorial' demands."²⁸ The triangles suggest primitive dwellings, just as the doorway provides psychic access, yet the space — merely indicated — is barely large enough to lie down in. "The urban level (which comprises sub-levels) is mainly determined by *social interaction*,"²⁹ and we can view the triangles as a pair of figures cohabiting the same space, side-by-side, like flattened cross-sections of architectural structures. Finally, "the landscape level results from one's *interaction with the natural environment*,"³⁰ and the tree limb, which suggests all nature, is illusionistically painted from top to bottom in gradated shades from brown to sky blue, suggesting all of the world's space, from land to sky.

During the winter of 1972, Morton defined the places more clearly in terms of interior rooms,



but with the contradictions, especially of inside versus outside, and of real versus illusory, becoming more pronounced. In these works Morton dissected the logs and expanded the various limited functions of wood. Usually the walls were covered with slats, like structural studs, some real, most illusionistically painted. Log slices were often placed, like curios, on shelves: they were stacked neatly in a futile attempt to restructure the log; painted, to cosmetically cover their age rings; strewn all over the floor, like toys in a messy play room; or drawn on the wall in pencil, to suggest possible placement, to reserve a space, or to allude to "the legendary door on the wall."³¹

During the summer of 1972, Morton's children moved to Alexandria, Virginia to be with their father. Ree seized upon the opportunity to move to New York in search of the social and professional interaction life in Philadelphia lacked. Shortly after her arrival "for the selfish purpose of meeting people"³² she joined a women's consciousness raising group, which then consisted of other visual artists and a few writers. The most noticeable change the move made on her work was the incorporation into her installations of maps—two-dimensional plottings of the placement of objects within the three-dimensional installation spaces, a new diagrammed space where all objects are neutrally reduced to marks "based upon relations such as proximity, separation, succession, closure (inside-outside) and continuity."³³ As a result of this new interest in clarifying relationships, the information was more coherently structured in the three "elementary organizational schemata" of existential space which Norberg-Schulz discusses: "The establishment of

Photograph of fence and section of bridge, East River, New York, New York, taken by Ree Morton

Untitled, 1972
Mixed media
Dimensions unknown
Destroyed

centres or places (proximity), directions or paths (continuity) and areas or domains (enclosure)."³⁴

The result in Morton's work was a newly defined desire to pit one thing against another, to define installations, such as *Untitled* in terms of strategies, as in sports and games. Toward the end of 1972 the concept of "place" assumed greater existential proportions in her work. According to Norberg-Schulz

... certain centres are "externalized" as points of reference in the environment.... All the centres are "places of action": places where particular activities are carried out.... The places are goals or foci where we experience the meaningful events of our existence, but they are also points of departure from which we orient ourselves and take possession of the environment.³⁵

Untitled consisted of a small enclosed rectangular area, with a dilapidated picket-like fence, an overhanging deteriorating canopy, and, between the two, a bench on the floor. On the wall, above the bench and below the canopy, a large drawing contained a series of mapped lines: a wide,

Untitled (Germantown Piece), August 1972
Wood and pencil on paper
Dimensions unknown
Destroyed

*Realize two spaces, or more,
Rearrange this space.
Rebel against that space.
Rebirth of frames.
Rebound from weight.
Rebus flat and rounded.
Rebut from wall.
Recall the sources.
Recast nature.
Recede from vision.
Recent centerings.
Recess inaccessible.
Recharge images.
Recite other places.
Reclaim other paths.
Recollect from the past.
Reconsider sculpture.
Reconvey drawing.
Record experience.
Recreate what happened here.
Recumbent then vertical.
Recur to the left.
Redouble to the right.
Not reduced.
Re-enforce dispersion.
Re-entry into the wall, then into the room.*

Notebook, 1972

enframed processional path, leading to a circuitous labyrinth of gridded lines, with some prominent sections punctuated in heavier pencil lines. No one portion of the map was clearly the location of the sculptural piece in front of and above it. Poetic in tone, reminiscent of a ghost town with its aged, crumbling structures, the piece also looks like a waiting station of sorts. Yet the map of the larger landscape is within the place, and physical locale and conceptually larger domain obliterate the usual environmental hierarchy through the scale juxtaposition. Perhaps, then, this is the legendary "weigh station" of good and bad encountered on the road to eternity, a place where "larger" issues are discussed. Morton, though, never interested in defining such specific intentions, always allows the lack of concrete information to confound the situation, to insist that we see in the work what we will. The eerie, almost haunting, silence of this piece, too, contradicts the conception of a bench, especially one within an enclosed compound, as a comforting place for rest.

Untitled, November 1972 (installation, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York, 1973)

Wood and watercolor on paper
 Dimensions unknown
 Partially destroyed

Outdoor Piece, October 1972
 Mixed Media
 Dimensions unknown
 Whereabouts unknown

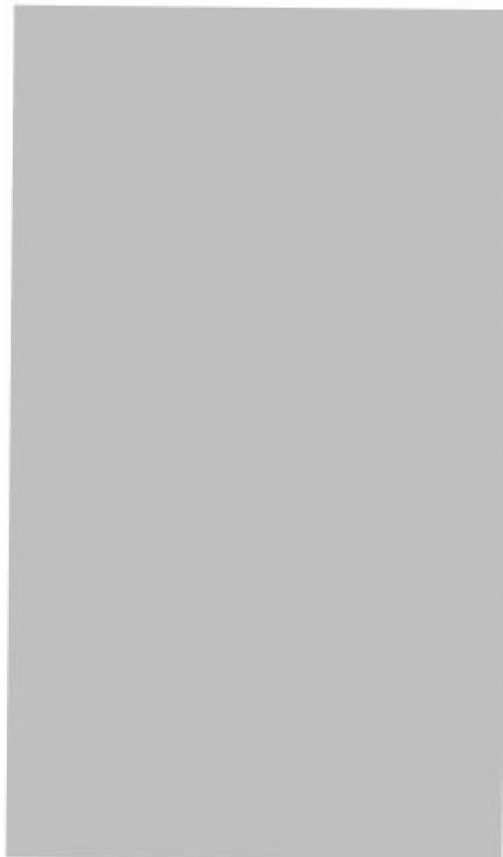
Outdoor Piece, October 1972
 Mixed Media
 Dimensions unknown
 Whereabouts unknown

*Is
 a place
 do
 a place
 find
 a lot*

*PLACE
 an image
 bend
 an image
 delay
 an image
 it - it
 an image*

*IMAGINE
 a poem.*

Notebook, 1973



Paintings and Objects, January 1973
Paint on logs and watercolor on canvas
70" × 26" × 70"

Paintings and Objects, February 1973
Acrylic and pencil on canvas and wood
53½" × 66" × 60½"



At the beginning of 1973 Morton became more interested in the particular character, function, and self-assertion of objects themselves. In a series of *Paintings and Objects*, the objects assumed more individualized distinctions, and are imbued with a poetic mystery based more on oblique association than on apparent identification, whereas the paintings appeared less referential to a common statement. They had lives, personalities, and functions of their own. The paths were more internalized—either simply delineated or omitted entirely—and movement or transition was a product of conceptual, rather than physical correspondence. Many of the situations within which the objects were placed seem immersed in internal dialogue between the components and undoubtedly were reflective of Morton's own personal redefinition at this time.

Beginning in 1973, Morton's work expanded in an acutely metaphoric way to suggest more explicit origins, themes, personifications, and allegories. Within the space of a year (from the spring of 1973 to the spring of 1974) she executed three extremely complex, large-scale installations: *Sister Perpetua's Lie* (March–April 1973, at The Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia), *Souvenir Piece* (September 1973, at Artists Space in New York, New York), and *To Each Concrete Man* (March–April 1974, at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, New York).



Paintings and Objects, 1973

Casters, clay bricks, ink on wood, twigs, and watercolor on canvas

Dimensions unknown

Partially destroyed

Photo courtesy Droll/Kolbert Gallery, New York, New York

Untitled, 1973

Watercolor and pencil on paper

22½" × 30"

Collection of Cynthia Carlson



Sister Perpetua's Lie was inspired by Raymond Roussel's *Impressions of Africa*,³⁶ a novel first published in 1910, which is a complex, highly descriptive discussion of a succession of ceremonies, activities, and performances. The book concerns the shipwreck upon the coast of Africa of a French ocean liner transporting a group of French eccentrics from Marseilles to Buenos Aires. Roussel, who is known to have made two world tours in which he rarely ever left his state-room or hotel facilities,³⁷ interlaces obscured, illusive, disjunctive, and constantly changing events through the use of surrealist techniques of automatic writing and personal fantasy.

Shortly after immersing herself in Roussel's complex web of bizarre incidents, Morton developed a literary or narrative thread through her work. According to Norberg-Schulz

Whereas the place is determined by the proximity of its defining elements, and eventually by closure, the path is imagined as a linear succession. Primarily it is a direction to be followed towards a goal, but during the journey events happen and the path is also experienced as having a character of its own.³⁸

As in Roussel's novel, the images of *Sister Perpetua's Lie* initially appear simple and clear, their boundaries carefully designated. Three areas are enclosed and connected by means of nar-

Impressions of Africa was a book that just sort of invaded my life, and I couldn't think about anything else for a period of maybe nine months and finally I just incorporated it into a piece. It's the only one where I've taken a book and dealt directly with it.

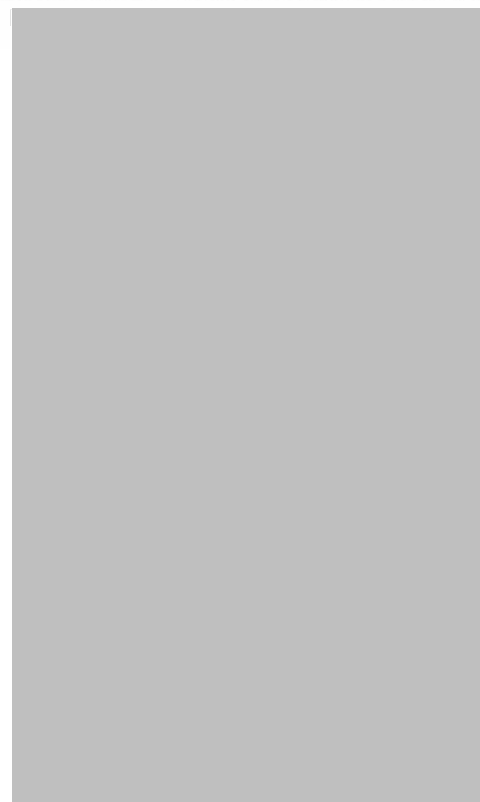
Horsfield/Blumenthal Interview, 1974


Sister Perpetua's Lie, 1973 (detail, installation at
the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of
Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
Mixed media
Approximately 108" x 116" x 66"
Partially reconstructed for exhibition

Sister Perpetua's Lie, 1973 (detail, Installation at
the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of
Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
Mixed media
Approximately 90" x 120" x 105"
Partially reconstructed for exhibition


row wood strips painted black. This black band becomes the thread connecting and controlling the path and concentration of the audience. To the left, two log segments painted black, each three feet high, rest on the floor five-and-a-half feet from a wall. The black strip connects the logs to the wall like a mini-runway, and then mounts the wall, enframing a centralized arrangement of twelve watercolors which in turn surround a larger written phrase. The black strip then leads to the right and forms an upright tall frame which supports a hanging wood plaque suspended above another low flat log slice, guillotine fashion. The adjacent area is likewise linked to the whole by means of the black wood stripping, now forming a low crib/cage-like construction which envelopes floor drawings and a low stump. A large gray canvas with simple circular markings is stapled to the wall above this area.

Rather than being a consolidated whole composed of many fragments, as in Morton's earlier works, *Sister Perpetua's Lie* implies a specific narrative order, literally "outlined." Just as Roussel uses the novel as a format, Morton establishes parameters within which the observer/reader is urged to make visual and verbal associations. Yet though one "reads" from left to right—from start to finish—there are other dimensions or overriding tones that appear to ignore or be unrelated to any implied schema or plot. While Roussel accomplishes this through surrealist techniques, Morton uses cross-references: within the piece (cage construction/gambling den watercolor), with the audience (logs/people), with topological referents (corners, paths, dotted lines, markers), and undoubtedly with autobiography, which, however, is more difficult to substantiate.





Sister Perpetua's Lie, 1973 (installation view,
Institute of Contemporary Art, University
of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
Mixed media
Partially destroyed



Sister Perpetua's Lie, 1973 (detail, installation at
the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania)
Mixed media
Partially reconstructed for exhibition



Leslie Harris

The Secret Correspondence, 1973 (from *Sister Perpetua's Lie*)
Ink, pencil, and watercolor on paper
15" x 22½"

The Secret Correspondence, which began a new row of sketches, showed the woman in the cloak offering Flora one of those special grids which are necessary to decipher certain cryptograms and which consist of a single card with oddly placed perforations.

Roussel, *Impressions of Africa*, p. 12



Leslie Harris

The Guilty Man Dies, 1973 (from *Sister Perpetua's Lie*)
Ink, pencil, and watercolor on paper
15" x 22½"

The Guilty Man Dies, which was underlined by the order "Fire!" showed a firing squad, who, at the sergeant-major's command, were aiming at the heart of the fair-haired Zouave.

Roussel, *Impressions of Africa*, p. 12

Though least dependent on formal arrangements of sculptural elements, the watercolor/drawing area promises to reveal the key to Morton's visual puzzle through the use of language and drawn images. Each of the twelve delicately painted renderings is an abstract schema—devised by Morton—relating directly to Roussel's descriptions of a series of enigmatic pictures in *Impressions of Africa*.³⁹ These small paintings are positioned around a larger sheet of paper on which is written in large print: "To the question, 'Is this where the fugitives are hiding?' the nun, posted before her convent, persistently replied 'No' shaking her head from right to left after each deep peck of the winged creature." This quote, again taken directly from Roussel,⁴⁰ bears no obvious relationship in the novel to the described drawings. In *Sister Perpetua's Lie* it may visually make reference to the two logs "posted" before the drawings.

The drawing of *Police in the Gambling Den* exhibits a bird's-eye view of a configuration similar to the crib/cage area of the installation. This third section of the piece also bears similarities to Morton's earlier wood installations, with their low spatial confines often combined with rows of vertical elements or lines. This configuration, as well as the guillotine-like structure, may relate to descriptions in Roussel's book of the confinement of prisoners in a wooden shed, the



Leslie Harris

The Police at the Gambling Den, 1973 (from *Sister Perpetua's Lie*)
Ink, pencil, and watercolor on paper
15" x 22 1/2"

The last row began with Police at the Gambling Den, this time Flora was throwing herself into space from a large balcony, behind which, through an open window could be seen a large gaming table, surrounded by players in great dismay at the untimely arrival of a number of men in black.

Roussel, *Impressions of Africa*, p. 12



Leslie Harris

The Fatal Blow, 1973 (from *Sister Perpetua's Lie*)
Ink, pencil, and watercolor on paper
15" x 22"

The Fatal Blow terminated the series with a nocturnal scene; in the shadows, the dark-complexioned Zouave could be seen slapping Sergeant-Major Lecurou's face, while in the distance, outlined against a forest of masts, a notice board, lit by a powerful street lamp, bore these two words: Bourgie Harbour.

Roussel, *Impressions of Africa*, p. 12

front of which was made of "thin wooden bars painted black"⁴¹ and an execution scene in which victims are decapitated with an axe reported to have a "curious wooden blade."⁴² Notes in Morton's sketchbook refer to Celtic mythology and practices of torturing and burning prisoners in "cages of wood."⁴³ At the bottom of the same sketchbook page is written in bold letters (undoubtedly at a later time) "MELODRAMA," a more than plausible characterization of the mood of *Sister Perpetua's Lie* which in turn echoes the dramatic overtones of such diverse formats as detective thrillers or secret rituals.

Given the likelihood of emotional conflicts in Morton's adjustment to life in a new place without her children for the first time ever, *Sister Perpetua's Lie* assumes another level of sublimated significance. One cannot help but notice the occurrence within the crib/cage area of three drawn shapes, obviously shadows or silhouettes of logs now missing, positioned beside the one remaining log. The title of the piece itself implies a serious breach by Sister Perpetua, a person whose assumed name means "everlasting." As noted before, references to punishment and confinement are strongly indicated.

Morton and her three children spent the summer of 1973 together, living in a cabin in New-

In art it is always a mistake to push a concept to its logical conclusion. Art comes into being not through correct reasoning but through contradiction of reason in the ambiguities of a metaphor.

—Harold Rosenberg

Notebook, 1971–72

Souvenir Piece, 1973 (Installation view, Artists Space, New York, New York)
Mixed media
Dimensions variable
Photo courtesy Drofi/Kolbert Gallery, New York, New York

foundland. Her oldest daughter, Linda, fifteen at the time, recalls that most of the vacation was spent taking walks, fishing, swimming, and visiting with neighbors. *Souvenir Piece*, installed at Artists Space in 1973⁴⁴ is probably just that: a memento of the summer. Though also arranged into areas of concentrated activity, *Souvenir Piece* was not consecutively ordered to be read in a narrative way as was *Sister Perpetua's Lie*. Rather, each area, like a separate island or land mass, shared in a continuous reciprocal dialogue through positioning and implied meaning and was thus approachable from any "angle." The work commemorated what Morton considered to be "the happiest summer of her life."⁴⁵ With the place reference now specific, and the movement circuitous and less directed, the mood was, as in the earlier installations (1971–1972), one of comfort and repose.

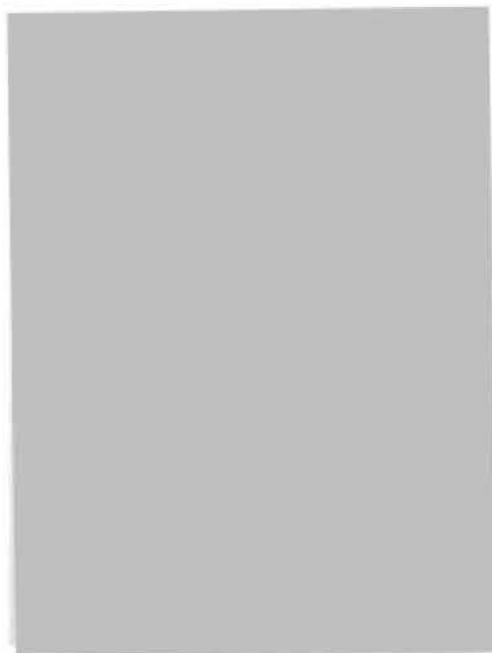
On one side of the gallery stood a low green platform supported by fairly evenly spaced white stakes nailed all around its sides more like stilts or pier pilings than table legs.⁴⁶ On this platform simple combinations of log segments and various-sized rocks were placed—mementos collected in Newfoundland. The generalized form, materiality, and vertical structure of these hand-sized objects situated on a grass-green field suggest miniature, archaic architectural sites (such as Stonehenge), by virtue of their simply contained mystery. Yet an obvious "display" quality (in addition to the title of the piece) hints at a more specific phenomenon, that of curio shop objects, also put together from the rewards of combing local beaches and countryside.



On the adjacent wall hung six drawings (black, gray, and white, aggressively handled dotted lines, enclosures, or amorphous shapes) crudely affixed to the fronts of deep, raw wood, box-like frames. These were hung at such disparate heights and uneven intervals that a specific intention—even one of random placement—is implied. Her sketchbook quotes Jean Arp

I declared that these works, like nature, were ordered according to the laws of chance being for me merely a limited part of an unfathomable *raison d'être*, of an order inaccessible in its totality.⁴⁷

The same impression of "determined randomness," as observed in earlier installations, is demonstrated in the placement of several single picket fence-like boards wired and shorn up by small sticks at one end of the room.⁴⁸ The thin cluster recalls a barren field, isolated in its unwelcoming starkness. Yet these are confined behind a wall of eighteen low white plaques, calculated in their even placement.



Untitled, 1973 (from Souvenir Piece)
Charcoal and paint on canvas on wood
20" x 12½" x 5"

Souvenir Piece, 1973 (detail, installation at Artists Space, New York, New York)
Mixed media
Dimensions variable
Photo courtesy Droll/Kolbert Gallery, New York, New York



I really love Stonehenge or any kind of situation where there is location which somehow has been set aside for a purpose whose meaning is not clear, or a place where there have been left markings by people whose meaning is not clear but you know that people were there and that they were doing something with that space.

Horsfield/Blumenthal Interview, 1974

Souvenir Piece, 1973 (detail, installation at Artists Space, New York, New York)
Mixed media
Dimensions variable
Photo courtesy Droll/Kolbert Gallery, New York, New York



Souvenir Piece, 1973 (detail, installation at Artists Space, New York, New York)
Mixed media
Dimensions variable
Photo courtesy Droll/Kolbert Gallery, New York, New York

Souvenir Piece, 1973 (detail, installation at Artists Space, New York, New York)
Mixed media
Dimensions variable
Photo courtesy Droll/Kolbert Gallery, New York, New York

*If sticks and stones can BREAK
your Bones But names can never hurt you,
why is there so much pain?*

Notebook, June 1973

Another low flocked platform supports four split log sections apparently first outlined in charcoal on the panel and then propped at various angles in ascending heights with small wooden blocks. The number of elements used here, as well as the lush coloration and texture (rich brown bark against the bright green flocking), and their placement — snugly close to each other, yet not crammed — may possibly be attributed, once again, to the family unit. A large canvas stapled to one wall cross-references an end-view of these logs and their placement in a diagrammatic way, suggesting at the same time traces of landscape or climatic conditions.

Next to another wall is a human-scale greyish log without bark, "standing at eye-level" in front of what seems to be a small green canvas. A series of wooden blocks semicircle this "stump/viewer's" area of contemplation, protecting or defining by surrounding it.


A fond impression of the Newfoundland countryside, a grassy expanse punctuated by scatterings of trees and rocks, undoubtedly accounts for a particular topographic quality of the piece, its focus on insular areas, curving coastlines, fallen trees, and boundaries and barriers, natural as well as man-made. Above all, *Souvenir Piece* is serene, comforting, and secure, existing as the concrete expression and remembrance of a wonderful summer.

See-Saw, an installation done in 1975 and shown at Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York in 1975, marks a further internalization of space. Unlike earlier installations, it was conceived as totally independent of a specific architectural setting. A circular ring of small white wooden blocks, ten feet in diameter, delimits the domain. Within it, a plank of a slightly shorter length is

balanced on the flat fulcrum of a three-foot sawed off log, like a crude replica of the familiar playground apparatus. Yet here the physical resemblance ends. A large metal handle is mounted on top of the plank at the center point. An up and down motion is suggested, yet simultaneously prevented by two wooden plaques, one resting upright on top, the other suspended underneath, pegged on either end of the plank. Two carved wooden markers resting on the floor below them anchor the structure, like suggested magnetic poles holding the plank or "hand of the compass" still. Affixed to these plaques are diagrammatic drawings which appear to self-reference the potential dynamics of the piece or to establish the more cryptic significance of external activity. A more feasible, suggested motion for Morton's construction would be a circular swivel, like a compass. Accordingly, the small ring of blocks acts as counters, markers, or limits, and designates the circumference of such a potential spin.

Once again, *See-Saw* is an open-ended adventure in interpretation. Associations are universal, overlapping the realms of entertainment, enlightenment, or ceremony. In this regard, Norberg-Schulz speaks of the interdependence of past and present, how they affect and are affected by actual or perceived personal orientation in space. The title, *See-Saw*, literally dissected, implies present and past viewpoints. The drawings, mounted on and off the ends of the plank, cannot be seen simultaneously from any one position; one must be seen before or after the other, with no implied order, for

The ring has neither beginning nor end, it begins and ends everywhere. Curved back into itself, it is the most sincere and potent of all figures, the most unanimous.⁴⁹



See-Saw, 1974
Mixed media
Approximately 48" x 120" diameter

*Drawings based on the mating habits of lines—
mating season
the orgy
psychic attraction between lines
is there an abstract voyeurism?*

*The world may be organized around a set of
focal points, or be broken into named regions,
or be linked by remembered routes. (Lynch)*

*Do a series of drawings
Remembered routes
Named regions*

*parting of the ways
stand in one's way
on the right road
around the bend
right of way
right away*

Notebook, December 1973

*Line Series, 1974
Crayon and watercolor on paper
22 1/4" x 30"*

*Line Series, 1974
Crayon and watercolor on paper
22 1/4" x 30"*

The configuration itself also expresses unity. According to Norberg-Schulz, "certain centres are 'externalized' as points of reference in the environment.... In many legends the 'centre of the world' is concretized as a tree or a pillar symbolizing a vertical axis *mundi*."⁵⁰ Yet, "it is difficult to reach the centre. It is an ideal goal, which one can only attain after a 'hard journey,' "⁵¹ and Morton's whimsical placement of a strong metal handle at the center pokes fun at, yet bears out, such philosophic reckonings.

Another reference to the piece is contained in the following verse by T.S. Eliot

At the still point of the turning world.
Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor toward; at the still
point, there the dance is.
But neither arrest nor movement. And
do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered.⁵²

This excerpt, tacked over Morton's desk, is the title of Lucy Lippard's sensitive early article on Morton's work, which appeared shortly before *See-Saw* was made.⁵³ If this were in fact one of Morton's sources, the metal handle affixed to the center of the "still point" compounds the enigma. Like Marcel Duchamp's bicycle wheel on the wooden stool, it contains both moving and stable possibilities, while canceling the actual context and designating an "art" one.

Line Series, a group of drawings done at this time, are "drawings based on the mating habits of lines."⁵⁴ The lines of the drawings—soft, lyrical, spare watercolors in muted tones—meander in and out and around the paper, and are punctuated by dots and squiggles, like the chromosomes Morton observed under a microscope during her early nursing training.⁵⁵

Several notations in Morton's sketchbook of 1973–74 are encircled or bordered with dot and dash patterns, configurations which she had also "drawn" in sculpture in both *Souvenir Piece* and *See-Saw*. One of these pages is embellished with the following quote, credited to Gaston Bachelard

Each one of us, then, should speak of his roads, his crossroads, his roadside benches:
each one of us should make a surveyor's map of his lost fields and means . . . thus we
cover the universe with drawings we have lived.⁵⁶



A growing preoccupation with theater and theatrical presentation stimulated Morton's thinking and infiltrated her forms more directly at this time, and she discovered a kindred spirit in the Polish drama theorist Jerzy Grotowski through his writings. He writes

... if during creation we hide the things that function in our personal lives, you may be sure that our creativity will fail. We present an unreal image of ourselves; we do not express ourselves and we begin a kind of intellectual or philosophical flirtation—we use tricks and creativity is impossible. We cannot hide our personal, essential things... we must open the door to the cycle of associations. The creative process consists, however, in not only revealing ourselves, but in structuring what is revealed.⁵⁷

In March 1974, Morton installed *To Each Concrete Man* in the small ground floor gallery of the Whitney Museum of American Art. In this work, Morton "opened the door" so fully to "the cycle of associations" that this remains one of her most mysterious, poetic, intensely personal, hermetic works. It particularly evidences a consciousness of theatrical structuring to the extent that the overall effect is that of a dramatic vignette. Lighting played a crucial role: the room was dim, its illumination appearing to emanate from the work itself. The viewer entered through the gallery's large centralized "open door." To the right, at one end of the room, a stage-like platform was covered with flagstone-patterned vinyl, a synthetic version of the actual Whitney slate floor. A low serrated wooden railing bordered the platform's front edge. On the platform were positioned four wooden structures of simple construction and oblique association; each a wooden plaque supported by two stakes of wood, resembling public signposts or side-of-the-road markers, of the kind commemorating historical events or indicating "scenic vistas." The faces of

I had looked at the space a lot and one of the hardest things about that space is the heaviness of the floor. That was one reason for putting the work up on a platform, also that I realized that it was very stagelike and I wanted that kind of theatrical association to go with it. I found that flooring by chance. I had seen some linoleum flagstone which I thought was really fine, and I was getting ready to buy some when I was in a display supply house and saw a sample of that and just went nuts about it. I just knew that I had to have that. It turned out that some people have asked if I painted it myself or made it. I didn't. I didn't touch it, I found it absolutely the way it was, and just loved using it and finding it just exactly the way I would have made it if I had made it. But I didn't have to. . . .

Well, the meaning [of the latex flagstone material] was just that. Being separate, but also making a kind of comment on the floor. Also that I just loved the material, that it's latex and that you can punch it. I think it's funny.

Horsfield/Blumenthal Interview, 1974

To Each Concrete Man, 1974 (installation view,
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York,
New York)
Mixed media
Dimensions variable

two of them were blank; the other two affixed with canvases, one painted white, the other gray, all "notice boards" apparently "reserved" for or "awaiting" inscription. A string of empty lightbulb sockets was suspended between two tall upright beams rising from the rear corners of the platform. Gray paint had been rolled onto the surrounding white walls off the gallery in short multidirectional strokes so as not to cover the wall surface completely. The resulting tumultuous gray atmosphere obscured all evidence of an even planar surface. Yet this surface was simultaneously recalled by small tabs of innumerable hues of Color-aid paper (a hand-screened paper of high-

To Each Concrete Man, 1974 (detail, installation at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York)

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

It seems that art, almost perversely, creates tasks that cannot be mastered by our normal faculties. Chaos is precariously near.

Contribution of unconscious in controlling substructure of art appears chaotic and altogether accidental, only as long as we rely on the gestalt-bound discipline of conscious perception.

UNCONSCIOUS SCANNING

Motifs preserve their fertility only if their connection with the final result remains obscure. Otherwise they turn into mechanical assembly devices.

Notebook, 1974

To Each Concrete Man, 1974 (detail, installation at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York)

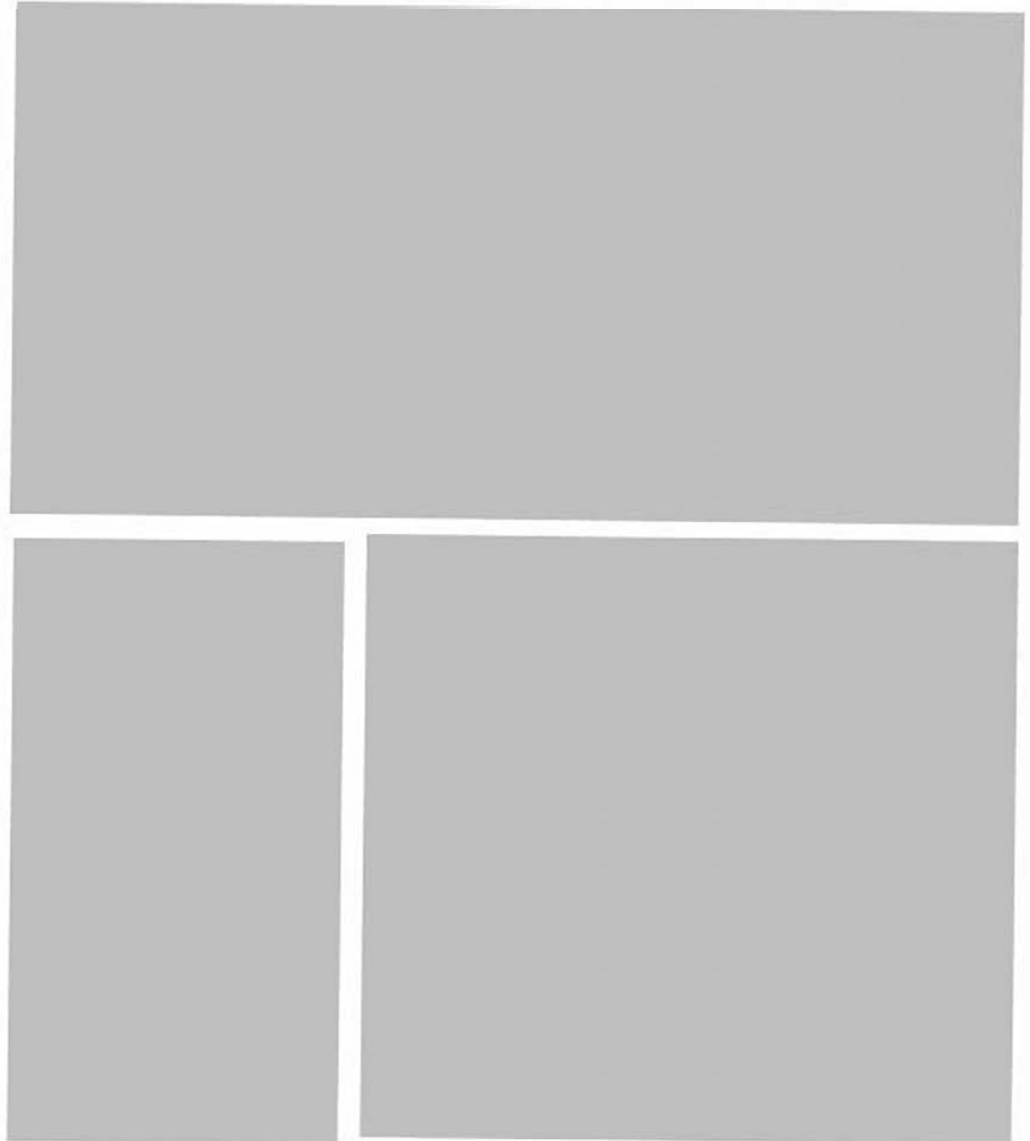
Mixed media

Dimensions variable

To Each Concrete Man, 1974 (detail, installation at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York)

Mixed media

Dimensions variable



density colors) which Morton had pushpinned onto the wall and encircled in pencil at various intervals: flickers of color in an otherwise gray void, an "unpainted" wall reserved for future color. A semicircular area of the wall behind the platform was allowed to remain white—"a drawing or painting space, vacated or vacant, 'a place where at another time I might have done a drawing, but now the space is just reserved for it,' according to Morton"⁵⁹—creating an ambience, like a huge halo effect, which appeared to radiate from the stage structure itself.

To the left of the entrance, at the opposite end of the room, were placed four flat stumps supported or propped up by short lengths of rather spindly sticks, with rawhide stretched over the top of each stump. Suspended from the ceiling directly over each of these logs at various levels hung a light, its shade an inverted bulbous shape, resembling a mushroom cap, also formed from rawhide, "giving the ensemble somewhat the air of belonging in a nightclub for forest gnomes."⁶⁰ In the catalog for the exhibition, Marcia Tucker wrote that "While making the lamps, she became interested in leaving out the sculpture and using the other parts, that is in dealing with negative forms and shapes as well as with a subversion of the two traditional sculptural concerns, the base and light."⁶¹

A sketchbook notation by Morton at this time includes the title of the piece and embodies a concept present throughout all her work. The writing concerns Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo, a Spanish philosopher and writer (1894–1936).

Unamuno—proclaimed creed of ideophobia—ideas were not to be worshipped nor followed blindly, but were to be spent, by using them as shoes are used: they were to be subordinated to and made part of life, the basic reality. Not life in a general and abstract sense, but the life of each individual, [each concrete man] of flesh and bone, who in Unamuno's view, is the subject and supreme object of all philosophy. . . . The novel was to Unamuno chiefly a medium of expression for a philosophy which could not be systematized—a method of vitalizing thought.⁶²

Morton also used her medium as a "method of vitalizing thought," as a conceptual tool for viewer contemplation and speculation. This pragmatic attitude, the conviction that ideas (manifested in art) are functional and fully integrated with the reality of existence, coincides with so-

documentation
communication
demonstration
fixations
mutilations
confrontations
dramatization
finalizations
conclusions
solutions
questions
manipulations
intensifications
acceleration
molestations
affectations
visualizations
manifestations
concretizations
deliberations
reverberations
restatements
simulations
reproductions
duplications
retranslations

Notebook,

Some of the greater discoveries consist mainly in the clearing away of psychological road blocks which obstruct the approach to reality; that is why post factum, they appear so obvious

*from the Watershed
Koestler*

The Keplerean discoveries here not of the kind that are "in the air" of a period, and usually made by several people independently; they were quite exceptional one-man achievements. That is why the way he arrived at them is particularly interesting.

The measure of Keysler's genius is the intensity of his contradiction, and the use he made of them. Not only his waking mind, but his sleepwalking unconscious self was

saturated with every conceivable aspect of his problem, not only with the numerical data and rations, but also with an intuitive "feel" of the physical forces, and the GESTALT configurations which it [the problem] involved. A locksmith who opens a combination lock with a crude piece of bent wire is not guided by logic, but by the unconscious residue of countless past experiences with locks, which lend his touch a wisdom that his reason does not possess.

called primitive attitudes and practices. In her notes on the southwest Indians, Morton wrote that Indian artifacts and paintings contain the

Sandpainting—

belongs to a world where expression is subservient to the idea—where the forms of art are never collected or hoarded as such, but the idea or image is tenaciously held and preserved through centuries.

Notebook, 1973–74

*I have certain feelings about the mood of the space at the Whitney, [installation of *To Each Concrete Man*] as being a very soft space because of what happens to the walls . . . I think it's really a one person space and I think ideally you should go into that space alone. I think it's really sort of about one person being in the middle of a room between those two pieces.*

Horsfield/Blumenthal Interview, 1974

. . . probably the only thing that I absolutely insist on is that you can't see it [the work] wrong. I guess it's from being opposed to looking at work and reading so much about work where you have to be able to understand, you have to get involved in the . . . philosophical or phenomenological or whatever implications of the piece and that's where it exists much more as an idea than as an object. Whereas, I think that I'm really dealing also with ideas, but I'm also involved with very immediate, tactile, emotional response to what's there I mean it should trigger associations that you have because of who you are and that's exactly what I want to allow you. I want it closed, but I also want it open.

Horsfield/Blumenthal Interview, 1974

essence of reality through devices unassociated with the reproduction of superficial objects of nature. [They are] derived through centuries of selective observance of natural constructions and operations. Earth and sky represented in elemental forms and spare lines . . . Hides are stretched on wooden frameworks . . . and painted to represent moisture tablets or sun discs . . . Painted stone slabs and ceramic tiles were used as or in connection with alters. Mortuary slabs from other prehistoric sites attested through rain symbolism that the deceased became rainmakers.⁶³

Contemplation of these visual allusions in Morton's written preoccupations adds yet another dimension to *To Each Concrete Man*. The vinyl flagstone floor becomes a "painted stone slab" and the "elemental forms"—the markers and log structures with their "hides stretched on wooden frameworks"—take on the character of altars or "mortuary slabs" in this undesignated region of extinguished lights, where a mysterious ambiance radiates. The "sun discs" reflect an overhead light and echo the prehistoric "rain symbolism" of the deceased. In any case, the stage is set; only the unidentified ceremony or rite remains to be enacted.

A consciousness of theatricality pervades—frontally oriented proscenium stage, lighting, props—and the log/light and marker structures participate as characters in the drama, all awaiting their cues. Morton writes that "In one aspect or another, my sculptures are always torsos."⁶⁴ Innocence and poignancy, arising from a sense of simple construction and quiet contemplative placement, exist in and between these protagonists: four on stage, somehow indicators or signs for other phenomena outside of themselves, and four counterparts, off-stage, which appear to illumine and refer only to themselves. This is a world of certainties and uncertainties; the real and the imaginary overlap: empty light sockets, lights which shine to reflect themselves, synthetic flagstone covering authentic flagstone, walls which are obscured by grayness, yet colorfully indicated.

As always, Morton concentrated on a situation—physical and existential space structured and punctuated with indicators, signs, and emblems of the assimilations, dissections, and syntheses of ideas and images. The viewer is invited to make connections and associations not present or even necessarily implied, only suggested or hinted at, at best. This process—which "completes" the work—imbues it with everlasting vitality. According to Cynthia Carlson, "She was fanatical about there not being a particular way of interpreting the work . . . that how the viewer interpreted it was the way it was. The viewers had the right to discover for themselves what the work was to them."⁶⁵ Discovery—the unraveling of a mystery, the sorting out of a rebus, the resolution of a drama—was the viewers' experience, and for Morton, "from a sociopsychological point of view, anyone's reaction to a work of art is as 'true' and 'valid' as anyone else's."⁶⁶

To Each Concrete Man was still on view at the Whitney in April of 1974 when Morton participated in a small exhibition at the Philadelphia College of Art, where she continued to teach, now commuting from New York City. Although this exhibition seemed rather insignificant to her at the time, ultimately it was to have profound effects on her way of working. According to Cynthia Carlson, the option to participate in this token "Women's Faculty Show" received generally unenthusiastic—and some hostile—response from those eligible. "There were few women on

the faculty in the first place, and the gallery was small and unimpressive."⁸⁷ Nevertheless, Morton decided to make a piece for the show, "in a spirit of irony, as a joke or a dig."⁸⁸ Purchasing dime-store materials—paper doilies, small cheap "Old Master" reproductions, contact paper, glitter, and candy gumdrop-like "jubes"—she urged her students to bake and decorate cakes for which she constructed a masonite table covered with contact paper of feigned 1950s marbleized bathroom tiles. The adjacent wall was draped with a pink swag and scattered with three-dimensional pastel bows fabricated from celastic.⁸⁹ The small round reproductions were hung against paper doilies and all was sprinkled with glitter and "jubes," lending the spirit of a carnival or grade school "fun night." The *Bake Sale*, as it was titled, received little notice from the press or public. However, it prompted Morton to approach the issues of decoration, pure emotion, sentimentality, and "feminine sensibility" in her work. Though this area had been touched upon since the early 1970s by various feminine artists, rarely had it been attacked with such enthusiastic fervor, independent of organized sexual politics.

Bake Sale, 1974 (installation, Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

Mixed media

Dimensions unknown

Destroyed

new material opening up possibilities

*What is the meaning of the fakeness—artificial surfaces—
the object can be identified—the surfaces are falsified—imitation*

*TO IMITATE
MIME
CARICATURE
TO REMIND*

*MEMORY AND FANTASY
IS*

*STIFF
DRAPED*

FOUND WORDS—

SOURCES OUTSIDE OF ONESELF IN ORDER TO GET AT ONESELF.

*EMBOSSSED WORDS—
IMPORTANCE OF EDGE*

*SPECIFIC SITUATIONS VIA MEMORY
RATHER THAN GENERAL SITUATIONS
VIA MEMORY*

STAGE LIGHTS—LOW WATTAGE BULBS

OXYMORON

COMMERCIAL THEATRICAL

POETIC—RELATION OF AMBIGUITY TO POETIC IMAGE

WEED—WILDFLOWER—COMMON NAMES—

*PLANTS HAVING ATTRIBUTES OF HUMANS—CAPABLE OF GOOD AND EVIL—
SINNING—GOING AND COMING—ESCAPING—BEING IMPRISONED*

TIED TO POETRY—ALSO OBJECTS—LIGHTS BLINK ON AND OFF—

*RELATION TO TIME—SEE WORDS, READ THEM—LIGHTS BRING
YOU BACK TO OBJECT NATURE OF THE SCULPTURE. NOT JUST
A VEHICLE FOR WORDS (REPLACEMENT FOR PAGE) BUT ITSELF AN IMAGE
WHICH WILL BE DEALT WITH THROUGH MEMORY.*

RELATION OF COLORS—BRIGHT, DECORATED—CONTRADICTION TO

*FUNERARY LOOK/REMINDER OF FORM—WITH (SOMETIMES) SADNESS
OF THE WORDS—*

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL. When you select anything—object.

*The found words, when they seem to jump out at you off the page, I realize that it's because
you are investing with meaning and importance of your own. A question of focus,
appropriateness. Giving special significance to ordinary things.*

its own title.

*express attitudes that I have
related to Victorian funerary monuments.*

form is not illustrative

*commemorative drapery existing in stone
slogans*

formal or narrative

*Banners commercial lights, beer signs
God Bless Our Home
relation to publicness—*

previous work implied words—
 about Advertising auto things painful + private
 Souvenirs

What are the intellectual ?s— L.S.S.
 Things that have to do with
 nature of words/objects— ways of commemorating, affirming

What happens when you put words on an object?

Verbal message—
 if that was all that was important could paint a wall, put in book, etc.

Working out your problems AFFECTION FOR THE WORK.
Barricade— ILLUSION—to make further away
 flatter, fuller

Colonies rounding edges What can you say other
 than human aspects of
 sarcophagus—FINDING artist-space work?

I like then while TO INCORPORATE YOUR EXISTANCE
 I make them surfaces—always surface

LIGHT— flocking for lines
 reflective/non-reflective surfaces
 tactile surfaces HUMOR

PAIRING—
 INANIMATE OBJECTS IN CONFRONTATIONAL SITUATIONS—
 GESTURAL SITUATIONS

Whimsy?
 dumb, clumsy ATTITUDES OF PAYING ATTENTION—(To what?)
 POTENTIAL MOVEMENT continues in the work

theatrical
 anti-dramatic

finding a new tool—

painting related to an object (painting on cart)
 objects related to (drawing) or painting
 the importance of drawing. to draw with objects
 to leave a message—traces—
 to leave a mark—where is your marker?
 different ways of making a line.

RITUAL AND RELATIONSHIP TO RITUAL—PROPER PLACEMENT

Associative spaces—is that ok.
 kinds of places get more specific.
 no longer demarcation

The following month, May 1974, Morton was a visiting artist at the University of Montana at Bozeman. This was the first of a series of successive short-term teaching positions she held from that time on in universities in various regions of the United States. For her, "teaching was a given."⁷⁰ and the interaction with students and new locales provided fresh and everchanging stimuli for artistic investigations.

The period in Montana appears to have been a time of diversion and artistic crisis. Much of her time in Bozeman was spent fishing, and the recent uncorking of "cheap sentimentality"⁷¹ in *Bake Sale* fed her thinking. Linda Morton recalls that she even wore a T-shirt with the phrase "I'd rather go Fishing" emblazoned across the front.⁷² Later, she recalled: "Right after the Whitney show I took some celastic to Montana to demonstrate the potential to the students. I made my name out of clay and pushed the celastic around it. As soon as I saw the words embossed on a hard surface, well, that was it."⁷³ Whereas she had previously utilized writing as a narrative device, she now became fascinated with the emblematic function of words, in names, aphorisms, and good old American clichés.

Having made certain decisions about a radically reoriented approach to making art, she mounted celastic plaques, each sporting a word of the phrase "THIS IS A NOW I KNOW WHAT

Bozeman, Montana, 1974 (detail)
Mixed media
Approximately 7" x 11"

Bozeman, Montana, 1974
Mixed media
Approximately 84" x 132" x 3"

EMBLEMS:

Quintilian describes some Greek orators as being in the habit of preparing and committing to memory certain highly finished clauses TO BE INSERTED LIKE EMBLEMS IN THE BODY OF ORATIONS. By a very easy and natural step figures and ornaments of many kinds, when placed on smooth surfaces were named emblems; and as the figures and ornaments were very often symbolical i.e.c signs or tokens of a thought, a sentiment, a saying, or an event, the term emblem was applied to any painting, drawing or print that was representative of an action, of a quality of the mind, or of any peculiarity or attribute of character. Emblems in fact were and are a species of hieroglyphics, in which the figures or pictures, besides denoting the natural objects to which they bear resemblances, were employed to express properties of the mind, virtues and abstract ideas, and all the operations of the soul. Heraldry throughout employs the language of emblems; it is the picture-history of families, of tribes and of nations, of princes and emperors. Many a legend and many a strange fancy may be mixed up with it.

EMBLEMS DO NOT NECESSARILY REQUIRE ANY ANALOGY BETWEEN THE OBJECTS REPRESENTING AND THE OBJECTS OR QUALITIES REPRESENTED, BUT MAY ARISE FROM PURE ACCIDENT. THEY MAY BEAR ANY MEANING THAT MEN MAY CHOOSE TO ATTACH TO THEM, SO THEIR VALUE STILL MORE THAN THAT OF SYMBOLS DEPENDS ON EXTRINSIC FACTS AND NOT INTRINSIC FEATURES.

Notebook, 1974

TO DO NEXT DAY" (each letter in a bright color, all against silver foil backgrounds) between two large red painted brackets on a sheet of blue painted plywood, accompanied by tiny red celastic tabs and a flashing yellow "idea" light. This seemingly effortless release to "throw ideas up in the air," thus abandoning a deeply rooted structural past, led to the more sophisticated piece entitled *Bozeman, Montana*. In this work she mounted two large green brackets with flashing yellow, white, and red bulbs, and separate celastic forms, each embossed with a name of one of her students (and even her good nature friend, the "fish") directly on the wall. Each of the plaques was brightly colored, with decorative stars and banners on the fabric-like folds. All appear to have been literally tossed up in the air and affixed directly to the wall, a metaphoric juggling of ideas.

During the summer of 1974 Morton stayed with her children in Tannersville, a small upstate New York town. At this time she became fascinated by *Weeds of the Northeast*,¹⁴ an old book of Victorian flavor which attributed emotional and moralistic significance to the esthetics and functions of various plants. The book provided endless subject matter for a number of celastic pieces and drawings. One series of drawings consists of pastoral forest scenes in crayon, naturalistic colors, each with the name of a plant and various foreboding characteristics—sometimes connected to obscure narratives—isolated dumbly in banner-like, darkly bordered sections, which appear as advertising-like slogans. Their tones are ominous, almost forbidding, with a gothic flair similar to that found in *Sister Perpetua's Lie*. On *The Broom-Rape Family* we are gloomily told that "Nature brands every sinner somehow; and the loss of green from a plant's leaves may be taken as a certain indication that theft of another's food stamps it with this outward and visible sign of guilt." Other slogans speak of more exacting, petrifying fates: "Some are doomed to stay in prim, rigidly cultivated flower beds forever."

Another series, *Weeds of the Northeast*, consists of ten drawings, each with several kinds of weed leaves brightly drawn with their generic names against a colorful pebbled background, surrounded by feigned wood panelling borders, with additional borders accented with glitter. The quirky names—as well as vivid color—serve to enliven an otherwise dry subject, for example, "Poverty Weed," "Corn Cockle," "Sticktight," and "Teasel."

Weeds of the Northeast (#8), 1974

Pastel, pencil, glitter, watercolor, monoprint on paper
19" x 25"

Weeds of the Northeast (#2), 1974

Pastel, pencil, glitter, watercolor, monoprint on paper
19" x 25"

Broom-Rape Family, 1974
Crayon and pastel on paper
29½" x 41½"

Jack-in-the-Pulpit, 1974
Crayon and pastel on paper
29½" x 41½"

**EVENING PRIMROSE
A BALL-ROOM BEAUTY
JADE, BEDRAGGLED APPEARANCE BY DAY
OF PREVIOUS DISSIPATIONS
FADING FLOWERS FROM LAST NIGHT'S
REVELRY**

Notebook, 1974

Leslie Harris

LOVE-LIES-BLEEDING

Amaranthus coudatus

Love-lies-bleeding is a pleasant old-fashioned plant seldom seen nowadays and perhaps considered too gaudy for dainty gardens. Amaranthus, as it gets its growth (3-5 ft.) is inclined to become tall and straggly. The flowers are long, showy drooping panicles. The terminal spike in each cluster is longer than the stems and whiplike. Red-flowered clusters are more common, but there are also yellow and white varieties. This is an annual and may be sown right in the garden bed. If the soil be too rich, the plants are liable to ... lose their bright coloring.

Notebook, 1974

Installation view, John Doyle Gallery, Chicago, Illinois, 1974
(left to right, *Terminal Clusters*, *Weeds of the Northeast*, *Many Have Run Away to be Sure*)

Morton showed many of these drawings and celastic pieces at the John Doyle Gallery in Chicago in December of 1974, while she was a visiting artist at the School of The Art Institute of Chicago. A bittersweet quality permeates all of the work. Much of it addresses the child's world, where friendly objects and comforting phrases can assume monstrous overtones. A light bulb tops each of five celastic strips, hanging prize-ribbon style from a pink banner that reads, *The Plant That Heals May Also Poison*. Each of these "ribbons" bears the name of a potentially poisonous plant: Cyclamen, Nightshade, Aconite, etc. The piece was hung against a background of a child's bedroom wallpaper of patterned lions, tigers, and giraffes in brown and black tones, a jarring placement, to say the least, of potential tormentors. Other of these celastic works utilize phrases taken directly from plant books, and are applicable to both individual and universal emotional states—the kinds of phrases we all wish we had thought up—and undoubtedly serve as direct references for Morton's personal feelings, all in the form of discrete, intimate objects. *Antidotes for Madness*, a green embossed festoon, draped along an eight foot plank painted with tiny dots and lines in a purely decorative fashion hanging on one wall and surrounded by celastic bows and two horseshoe shaped floor pieces, both illuminated by light bulbs around the frame, with the phrases *Fading Flowers* and *Terminal Clusters* emblazoned across their fronts, monumentalize poignant transitory states. Others, such as *Love-Lies-Bleeding*, and *Many Have Run Away to Be Sure* (shaped somewhat like an elongated apron with pink sashes, its top border serrated) contrast decorative folded drapery forms, warm lights, and sometimes bright coloration, with loss, in a melancholy tone. Still another work, *I'll Only Read You the Good Parts*, is as comforting as a mother's embrace. Through these works Morton reveals soft yet sinister undersides. They are almost painfully honest, dumb yet profound, so truthful that it hurts.

A Chicago reviewer, Alan G. Artner compared the work in the Chicago exhibition to T.S. Eliot's *Burnt Norton* as follows




In Eliot's poem, one place of revelation was to be found in a garden where "the leaves were full of children." It was "our first world," innocent yet deceptive, since its bird sang of an ominous reality. The same might be said about Morton's realm.⁷⁵

Formally, the works have little, if anything to do with traditional concepts of art. Morton introduces words into painting as sculptural embossments, another fresh and irreverent combination of idioms often thought to be opposing. The words are not solely expressive of commerciality, as in Pop Art; they do not directly refer to the self, as do Bruce Nauman's neon writings; nor do they

The Plant That Heals May Also Poison, 1974
(installation view, John Doyle Gallery, Chicago,
Illinois)
Celastic, glitter, and paint on wood against
wallpaper
46" x 64" x 4"





Antidotes for Madness, 1974
Celastic, paint on wood
40" x 108" x 4"

Age of Surrealism—Wallace Fordie
The echo of syllables may be so strong in men,
that we are perhaps more guided by words
than by any other single power.

Slogans convince us politically, and phrases
from old songs shape us sentimentally.


Rimbaud speaks of this power in his Saison en
Enfer when he evokes the imaginative
forcefulness in our memory of such words as
tavern signs, fairy tales, pornographic books,
the Latin of the Mass;

Kaleidoscopic view of life—a new arrangement
of signs, an unexpected set of formations
which may cast new lights and shadows in life
but without thereby deciphering it.

Notebook, 1974

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE NOT TO BE DEALING
WITH CLICHE WHEN DRAWING FLOWERS.
HOW TO DO IT AND LET THAT SHOW?

Notebook, 1974



Fading Flowers, 1974 (installation view, John Doyle
Gallery, Chicago, Illinois)

Celastic, paint on wood
48" x 48" x 8"

Of Previous Dissipations, 1974
Celastic and paint on wood
43" x 73" x 8"

represent the statement of idea as in Conceptual Art. Instead, Morton's words are effusive, reflecting a playful nostalgia for the kind of emblematic clichés found on dime-store plaques based on early American samplers of the "Home Sweet Home" variety. Their hackneyed flavor is tempered by a homespun freshness, a flare for decoration, the logic of practicality, and a hint of the foreboding. Starched curtains draped in dynamic swags, they serve as "trite but true" reminders, salutations, portraits, warnings, proverbs, and commemorations.

In a later work Morton gained full command of manipulating celastic. In *Of Previous Dissipations* (1975) the salmon-hued celastic frame billows around an elongated plywood oval with two blue roses painted on the salmon background, and is tied like the bow of a bonnet under a prim chin. Tender, romantic, mindful of its own nostalgic reckoning, like most of the celastic pieces, it has a satiric bite as strong as its heart.

The notion of place in Morton's work moved from one of arcane, ritualistic spatial "worlds," through narrative or journey, to rest in emotional "dissipations." In 1975, Morton "went public," that is, outside the traditional museum/gallery system, in the open air through the act of identifying herself with her extended family of friends and relatives. In order to fulfill a public service requirement for the New York State Creative Artists Public Service Program (CAPS) grant, Morton hoisted an installation of flags at the South Street Seaport Museum in New York City in June of 1975. Over one hundred nylon flags, each sewn, painted, and appliquéd with images and the name of a friend or family member, were flown above the Lettie G. Howard, a nineteenth-century fishing schooner anchored in the East River. "The images dealt with being-in-the-air, and were of such things as butterflies, birds, clouds, kites, flags, and fans."⁷⁶ According to Morton, "Each flag is a present for the person it's about. The work goes full circle. I got to think about each person as I made the flags; then I flew them together; then I gave the person that time and that object."⁷⁷

PERSONAL LOCATION SINGLE SIGNAL

IDENTIFICATION PIECE (RELATIONS-SHIP)

Historically, flags have been a means of identification. By specifically identifying each person I feel, or have felt, close to I am locating myself within the world of people.

Associations PERSONAL LOCATION: FLAGS FLYING
Identification
Translation

play, or have played some important role in my life

Translate experience into signals

Let me explain ...

In which I celebrate aboard the Lettie G. Howard.



Leslie Harris

Untitled, 1975 (drawing for poster for installation at South Street Seaport Museum, New York, New York)

Ink on Paper
9 1/2" x 15"

Something in the Wind, 1975 (installation view,
South Street Seaport Museum, New York,
New York)
Paint on nylon
Dimensions variable
Photo courtesy Droll/KoBert Gallery, New York,
New York

Her proposal notes for this project abound in references to the history and significance of banners, hangings, and heraldry, from the Middle Ages to the present.

Heraldic flags developed their great variety and intricate symbolism during the middle ages. They were a colorful means to identify friend or foe at a distance, particularly after the introduction of closed helmets made recognition of faces impossible.... Heraldry employs the language of emblems. Historically, it is the picture-history of tribes, families, and nations.⁷⁸

Morton literally "rallied" to the occasion (rather than to her usual "situation") in conceiving a work with direct emotional public appeal, incorporating fanfare, glory, and nostalgia for the sense of the heroic and patriotic, tied to the age-old tradition of heraldry.

I MADE A FLAG FOR EACH PERSON IN MY LIFE THAT I HAVE GOOD FEELINGS FOR, OR WHO I FEEL CONNECTED TO IN SOME WAY. IT WAS A CELEBRATION FOR THEM, AND A MEANS OF IDENTIFYING AND LOCATING MYSELF IN THE WORLD BY NAMING THE PERSONS WHO SURROUND ME. THE FLAGS WERE MADE OF NYLON, THE NAME OF THE PERSON WAS APPLIQUED, THE IMAGES WERE PAINTED. THE IMAGES DEALT WITH BEING-IN-THE-AIR, AND WERE OF SUCH THINGS AS BUTTERFLIES, BIRDS, CLOUDS, KITS, FLAGS, AND FANS. THE FLAGS WERE FLOWN ABOARD THE LETTIE G. HOWARD, A 19TH C FISHING SCHOONER, FOR THREE WEEKS. I KEPT THE FLAGS FOR A YEAR, UNTIL I HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW THEM PINNED FLAT TO A WALL, SO THAT THEY COULD BE SEEN CLOSE-UP AS DRAWINGS. I AM NOW IN THE PROCESS OF DISTRIBUTING THEM—EACH FLAG IS A PRESENT TO THE PERSON IT NAMES.

Reprinted by permission of Mount St. Mary's Art Gallery, Los Angeles, California, from the catalog for the exhibition, *Attitudes Towards Space: Environmental Art*, January 10–February 20, 1977.

Whatever became of the written word, and why do you feel that you just can't get anything down in sentence form that would be substantial. It seems to me that there has to be a way of getting at a way of talking about the work without being dry and specific and trying to fucking explain it. The misinterpretations continue to bewilder me, and the reactions from the show in Chicago that are now filtering in, seem to be suspicious.... isn't that weird.... of what? Is it the old paranoia that the artist is, after all, trying to put a good one over on the public?... and the public is now too sophisticated to let anyone get away with that, hence the accusations. Am I really naive and not able to see it? The work always has been a

way at getting to answers to questions that present themselves, seem interesting, provocative. Poets aren't asked to defend their subjectivity, so I wonder where the idea came from that art at this time needs defending, justifying. How do you go about justifying your own existence, for Chrissake? If what you want is not to present graphically a resolution of a theory, but to lay out all that wild input of sensations, complications, contradictions, and the old, already dog-eared word, ambiguity, that continually comes rolling in off the beach, then why does that meet so much resistance? If I were to figure out what my answers are, and say them to you, then how quickly would that close off the possibilities that the work

Something in the Wind, 1975 (detail)
Paint on nylon
25½" × 31"

has a life of its own and can continue to grow of itself, and find new meanings, and change its meaning, and contradict its original meaning, and live? The responsibility of the artist... to be free, and while in that freedom, to look, and to see while looking, and to feel, and to respond while feeling, and to be romantic, and to love the romance. Analysis may be better suited to the couch. Goddamnit, never explain what you're doing. Why is it that everyone seems to want to deal with conclusions? as if it were an activity that finalizes in that way. What are the results of your research? I have found that after you have spilled your guts into the work, there still are questions.

Invent tool/machine/method for getting that object from one side of the room to the other.

*total construction to be considered
you may not accompany the object
object may be disguised or contained*

Starting with an object—

- (1) Select an object*
- (2) Analyze its properties, list them*
- (3) Photograph it in 10 different contexts*
- (4) Draw it*
- (5) Take it places*
- (6) Find it a friend*
- (7) Have your photograph taken with it*
- (8) Make it a place to be.*

Assignment to students, 1975-76

In the fall of 1975, Morton went to San Diego with Sally and Scott to take a one year visiting artist position at the University of California, while Linda entered the State University of New York at Brockport. Cynthia Carlson remembers Morton's exhilaration at being reunited at least with two of her children, especially in the Southern California environment.⁷⁹ The last of her works derived from weeds, *Devil Chaser*, which marks a conceptual transition through a shift in materials employed, was made there in the fall. Although presented differently in two subsequent installations (at the University of California at San Diego in 1976, and at the Rhode Island School of Design, later in 1976), the original, which coils on the floor, consists of the spindly plant-like form, called a "devil chaser" sitting on a rectangle of bright green mock lizard skin, with a low, thin, swag fence marking the perimeter on three sides, and an elegantly scrawled title (with a large gapped opening in the center) forming the fourth. The piece, modest in size (perhaps two feet by four-and-a-half feet), was formed by coiling yellow, blue, red, black, green, and maroon celastic around a thin wire armature, around which short celastic "remember" knots are tied; in making the form Morton literally drew spirals in space, in contrast to earlier use of celastic as relief. On the lizard skin floor cover were situated three small engraved plaques identifying the functions of the devil chaser plant: "to reveal the presence of witches, to ward off destruction by lightning, to cure demoniacs. You never know when you might need one." The frail swag fence, with its lyrical lines, identifies the space as a literal and metaphoric "child's garden of verses," a place where all can be sheltered from evil, within the reaches of the towering protector. Yet the lilliputian scale reminds us that this is a fantasy world, a diorama to be explored by mind and emotion without physical participation.

The year in San Diego was a time of celebration. The early works made there (with the exception of *Devil Chaser*), like the flags that preceded them, are festive and bold, with a previously unmatched self-confidence. In a series of paintings, each candidly entitled *One of the Beaux Paintings*, Morton presents a large iconic centralized bow, enframed with celastic, and sometimes incorporating celastic stems, against real and feigned wallpaper backgrounds, all in

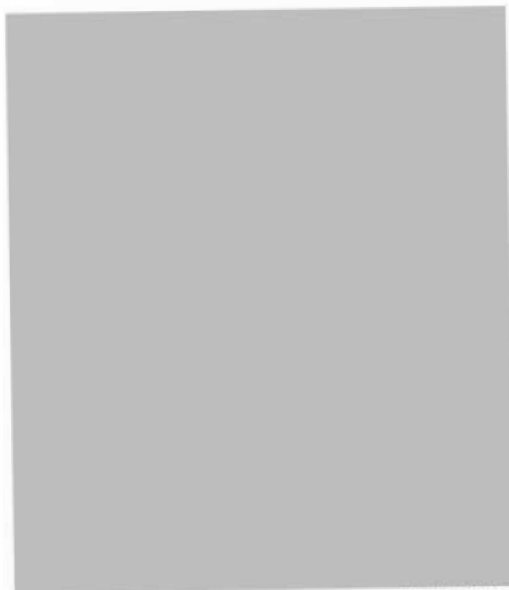
COMMON ST. JOHN'S WORT

'DEVIL CHASER' TO CURE DEMONIACS
TO WARD OFF DESTRUCTION BY LIGHTNING
TO REVEAL THE PRESENCE OF WITCHES

TERMINAL CLUSTERS HAVE A SOFT, FEATHERY EFFECT,
AN UNKEMPT, UNTIDY LOOK.

Notebook, 1974

Devil Chaser, 1975
Mixed media
Partially destroyed

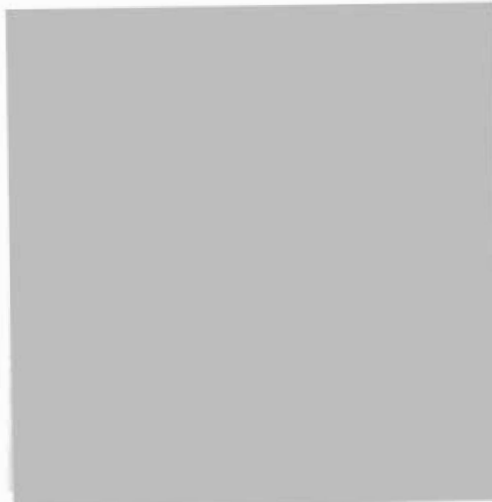


Leslie Harris



Untitled (Beaux drawing), 1975
Crayon and pencil on paper
17" x 14"

One of the Beaux Paintings (#1), 1975
Oil on wood with celastic
24" x 24"



One of the Beaux Paintings (#2), 1975
Oil on wood with celastic
24" x 24"

One of the Beaux Paintings (#4), 1975
Oil on wood with celastic
24" x 24"



One of the Beaux Paintings (#3), 1975
Oil on wood with celastic
24" x 24"
Collection of Sally Morton

problems

1. take an everyday object and make it appear frightening and menacing by virtue of its surround or context or transformations in the object itself.

2. take an object that the culture regards as important and serious and make it look ridiculous by virtue of its surround or context or transformation.

3. take an everyday object and give it the quality of a robot, or of a person.

4. in your notebook, scribble a page, covering whole page ... do not look at page when you do it

1. angry 2. humor 3. with extreme caring
no more than five minutes per page.

object or image accompanied by a pun
for it

5. everyday object, and make it impossible for it to fulfill its function.

6. find an object and invent a function.

7. surrealist games—
exquisite corpse
photograph collages of
magazine images

Class assignments, no date



Let Us Celebrate While Youth Lingers and Ideas

Flow, 1975

Paint on canvas, celastic, and wood

96" x 72" x 6"


Partially reconstructed for exhibition

if there was time, I would read to you from my notes ... in which some ordinary occurrences are treated as significant events ... in which the method is gradually revealed ... in which the meaning is clearly stated, and a plan for the future frontally exposed. Some other time. A path, though ... a first path, The Way To Grandma's. Down the hill, past the Grand Union, and up the stairs. Artificial roses ... doesn't she know they aren't pretty? I can't find my purse ... here it is, ma, under the bed. First signs of a loosening mind ... then it detached, and went. Grey hair piled up on top. Too many raps on the head loosened the hairpins, and everything fell down. Vague family mysteries. Will my pins begin to loosen, too? Sometimes I can't find my purse. It has never been under the bed, but once it was in the refrigerator.

Ree Merton, reprinted by permission of the University of California at San Diego, California, Department of Visual Arts from the catalog for the exhibit, *UC San Diego Faculty Art Exhibitions*, 1976.

intense, varied colors. *Let Us Celebrate While Youth Lingers and Ideas Flow* consists of three vertical pink celastic streamers—attached with a portion of this flighty phrase written in black—affixed by scallop-edged deep blue wooden disks (with a Pennsylvania Dutch-type overlay design) to a large blue sky complete with white clouds. A white celastic curtain enframes the piece like a suburban living room picture window on the world. Most spectacular of all was the carnival aura of the “poetically heightened artificiality”⁸⁰ of her Women’s Building studio, with its brightly colored celastic coils (many wrapping around the room’s architectural columns), banners, bows, streamers, and floor and ceiling swags and curlicues and their “here we go round the maypole” exhuberance⁸¹

Being in California brought out the most relaxed qualities of Morton’s personality. Her notes recall many hours spent by the ocean, watching sunsets, having her children with her, and even “being ested.”⁸²



*Studio at Woman’s Building, Los Angeles,
California*

Mixed Media

Dimensions variable

Installation view, University of California at San
Diego Art Gallery, San Diego, California, 1976
(Left, *Devil Chaser*, 2nd version, and right,
For Kate)

PLACES: REE MORTON

i watched the other day while the horizon line softened, and the ocean and sky turned the same pink. in almost no time at all this big orange ball fell back behind the water, courtesy of California Special Effects. who could have guessed the reason behind all those paintings catching *The Moment*, now i know.

the story is called ree looks back to see if any of the other places she has been have changed her work, in order to try and answer the question, do you think california, the California Experience in general or in particular or in any way at all, has or ever will now or in the near or distant future influenced, altered, affected, or fed your work. give it two bean tacos, and some organic san miguel. let me tell you what i think ... let me let me let us lettuce prey.

when i was a young girl and talked to my sister about what we wanted to do when we grew up, we both wanted to get married, she would travel and i would live in a house down the street because i liked it there. she stuck around, and i haven't lived anywhere for more than a few years at a time. florida, georgia, virginia, rhode island, pennsylvania, new york, montana, illinois, colorado, oh well. i think plans are only good so you can have something to gage whether it all worked out the way you said it would ... things happen whether you have a plan or not, so it doesn't make any difference to me.

you see lots of good stuff when you keep moving around, although it doesn't always register right away. delayed reactions allow for the Fermentation Theory. i have this theory that the hot stuff goes into a storage bin labeled Good Visual Information, cooks around

awhile, and jumps on out whenever it is damn good and ready. some of the best visual information i have gotten (excluding very distant memory, which i think happens in a somewhat different way) has been from camp sites, construction sites, roadside stands, traffic jams, horticulture schools, tidal pools, victorian cemeteries, scenic overlooks, race tracks, and regattas.

here are two examples of places generating work:

Montana

Chicago

so as you can see, sometimes it is looking around, and sometimes it is freezing your ass off with Manuel Voulkos that will do it.

since i came to california in september, i've stopped smoking, gained five pounds, gone clamming with mike and elizabeth, gotten ested, bought chinese paper cutouts in tijuana, and gotten an amfm 8-track for my van (installation by island services, Thank You George). it's important to have good music while you're driving around.


i sleep more and cry less than i did in New York.

these are some of the things i've noticed here:

1. most of the men have mustaches.
2. sunsets.
3. the sky can be a weird aquamarine.
4. mailboxes.
5. washed out color.
6. acid color.
7. stars at night.
8. palm trees.
9. dry skin.

thank you ...

Reprinted by permission of *Journal* (Southern California Art Magazine, The Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art), from the March-April 1976 issue.



Ree Morton
Installation at Women's Building
Los Angeles, California, 1975

By indicating the variations and equivalency of perceptions at every level of experience, I am emphasizing a relativistic concept of art in contrast to the traditional independent or objective one. By discussing learning, I am stressing the particular relationship of the total perception to things, events, and states that preceded it rather than to the sensory data of which it is also comprised; the aesthetic experience is placed in the continuum of time rather than entirely in the perceptual present.

Notebook, 1975–76

The Regional Pieces, a series of vertically paired oil paintings of "seasets and sunscapes" done in 1976, are some of Morton's most mysterious and enigmatic works. Painted on long rectangular, horizontally oriented panels, these lushly painted "sunscapes"—sunsets or sunrises—portray dramatic cloud formations hovering over vast expanses of ocean, brilliant illuminations and reflections resulting from multi-colored bursts of light permeating the scenes. They recall the swirling paint and luminous vistas of J. M. William Turner or Frederick Church, implying both an impassioned homage and yet a fresh approach to the history of paintings of the sea. Each corresponding "seaset," complimentary in its lavish brushstrokes and colors, is a close up view of a fish submerged in clouded water, or surrounded by underwater rock and coral formations or ocean plant life. "Sliced" views beneath the ocean surface, they depict how we view tropical fish in an aquarium, how we must contain them to see and appreciate them. The fish are all depicted in profile, as in the Chinese postage stamps pasted in Morton's 1974 journals. They suggest a romantic ode to those ocean dwellers usually neglected in most historical marine painting. The wordplay of the title also serves a doubly ironic function, connecting and confusing traditional categories.

Placement and presentation, as in all of Morton's work, play a crucial role here. The spatial vistas depicted in each work become abruptly identified as *painting*, because of the celastic curtains which drape each panel. The curtains also personalize the scenes, providing a transition from nature to home, as if the elaborate framing device is what gives Morton the right to paint

Regional Piece (#4), 1976
Oil on wood with celastic
Two panels, each 20" x 50"

Regional Piece (#6), 1976
Oil on wood with celastic
Two panels, each 20" x 50"

Regional Piece (#6), 1976
Oil on wood with celastic
Two panels, each 20" x 50"



straightforward landscapes in the first place. Taking into account her previous preoccupations with the theatre, the device also functions as a direct pun on the dramatic qualities of these "scenes" and "sets."

The sense of place is now totally disoriented, being more specific in reference, yet more varied in association. The essential importance of place is acknowledged, yet the scenes are all generalized. The light is so varied that they can be linked with almost any boundless sea setting or with the dramatic contrasts in the atmospheric and climatic conditions of a singular locale. Separation of the panels suggests that while the two places exist simultaneously in nature, the individual viewpoints cannot. What connects these disparate times, places, orientations, and scales are the viewer, the artist, and the mind's ability to bridge such spatial, visual, and temporal contradictions under the rubric of "meaning."⁸² Place, then, can be defined in these paintings as a state of mind, a "non" site-specific or time-specific attitude, again particular to the individual.

This major jump from the manipulation of forms to a total indulgence in one of the most romantic of painting traditions — the antithesis of contemporary approaches — is again typical of Morton's sensibility. It is as if she had firmly established her position as an artist and could now delight in her wildest pleasures under that protective celastic "curtain" of credibility.

R.L. Gregory Eye and Brain

The seeing of objects involves many sources of information beyond those meeting the eye when we look at an object. It generally involves knowledge of the object derived from previous experience, and this experience is not limited to vision but may include the other senses; touch, smell, hearing, and perhaps also temperature or pain. Objects are far more than patterns of stimulation: objects have pasts and futures; when we know its past or can guess its future, an object transcends experience and becomes an embodiment of knowledge and expectations.

The function of the frame is also related to the psychology of figure/ground. Frame as we know it today developed during the Renaissance from the facadelike construction of lintels and pilasters that surrounded the altar-pieces. As pictorial space emancipated itself from the wall and created deep vistas, a clear distinction became necessary between the physical space of the room and the world of the picture. This world came to be conceived of as endless—the boundaries of the picture designated only the end of the composition but not that of represented space. FRAME= WINDOW. 19c-Degas-frame made to cut across human bodies and objects much more ostentatiously than ever before. Emphasized accidental character of the boundary. At same time, painters began to reduce the depth of pictorial space and to stress flatness.

Untitled (Sunscape drawing), 1976
Crayon and pencil on paper
11" x 14"

Untitled (Red Hind drawing), 1976
Crayon and pencil on paper
11" x 14"

Study for Regional Piece, 1976
Acrylic, crayon, pastel, pencil, and watercolor on paper
29½" x 41"
Collection of Sydney and Frances Lewis,
Richmond, Virginia

An energetic set of drawing/paintings testifies to Morton's careful working out of the *Regional Pieces*: explorations of composition and presentation, as well as research on various species of fish. They display central images of the celastic paintings against a background of bright wallpaper patterns, a strong decorative thrust which perhaps suggests a possible installation plan.

During the summer of 1976 Morton was an artist-in-residence at Artpark, in Lewiston, New York, upstate on the Niagara River. There she further developed many of the interests in theater that had previously been a part of her work. *Regarding Landscape*, "a performance without performers,"⁸³ consisted of a long low wall—a 100-foot path-like pedestal decorated with celastic arches, roses, and streamers—which ran parallel to Artpark's high gorge wall and the waterfalls cascading down it. Morton dealt with the majesty of the site by working through her interest in isolating and conceptually and actually enframing sections of it. Unstretched oil paintings of the immediate surroundings, bordered in brightly colored celastic—often juxtaposed to the actual scenes depicted—were glued to some large rocks adjacent to the wall. Like postcards or snapshots, they pay tribute to exhilarating visual experiences by attempting to replicate them. Yet these are no longer souvenirs of a place visited and experienced, for Morton gave a part of her talent back to the landscape as well as paying tribute to it by making paintings of the specific place. Across the concrete path from the wall was a bank of several theater seats. Contemplating the awesomeness of nature became a structured, group activity which humorously delineated one possibility of the artist's intended role for the figure in a landscape: that of passive observer who can appreciate but not interfere with nature. Morton later stated her purposes: "To increase the theatrical, dramatic quality already present at the site; to make the location as much like a diorama as possible; to falsify the real; to give an artificial quality to: to isolate; to clear; to make visible; to set apart; to have noticed in a special way; to point to . . . dis di place."⁸⁴

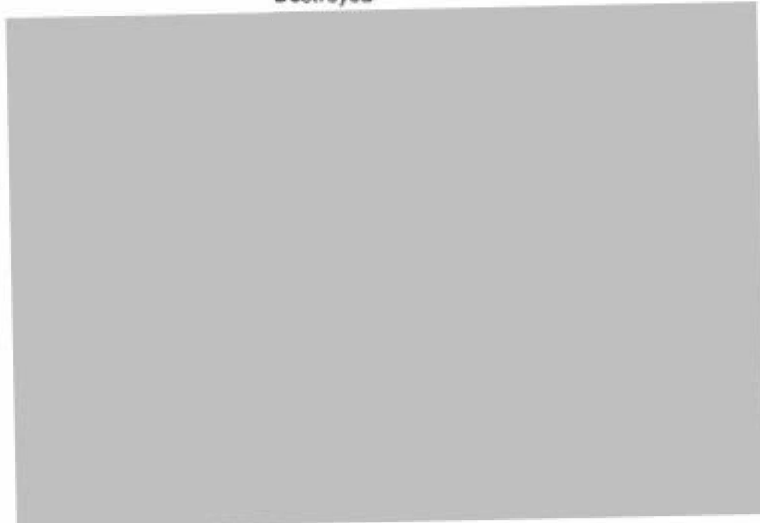
The Maid of the Mist was a live performance, or "symbolic rescue," of the legendary Indian maiden who "each year . . . in a canoe filled with flowers and fruits, was sent over the falls as a bride of the river."⁸⁵ A thirty-five-foot celastic ladder and two life preservers, lavishly decorated with celastic ribbons and roses—one cast into the river, the other attached to the ladder and

Regarding Landscape, 1976 (detail, installation at Artpark, Lewiston, New York)

Paint on celastic
100' in length
Destroyed

Regarding Landscape, 1976 (detail, installation at Artpark, Lewiston, New York)

Paint on canvas, celastic border
Dimensions variable
Destroyed



Prop from *Maid of the Mist*, 1976 (detail,
prop for performance at Artpark, Lewiston,
New York)
Paint on celastic on wood
35' in length
Destroyed

Prop from *Maid of the Mist*, 1976 (detail,
prop for performance at Artpark, Lewiston,
New York)
Paint on celastic on life preserver
31" diameter

THE ARTPARK PIECES

REGARDING LANDSCAPE

IN AND OUT OF FRAME.

A PERFORMANCE WITHOUT PERFORMERS.

ELAPSING TIME.

IN TWO PARTS: (ONE) A WALL (TWO) PICTURES.

LIMITED SEATING AVAILABLE.

THE WALL A PRE-EXISTING WALL, ABOUT 100FT LONG, AND 3FT HIGH, IN FRONT OF A WATERFALL ALONG THE UPPER GORGE TRAIL. I DECORATED THE WALL WITH ARCHES, CELASTIC DRAPERIES, ROSES AND STREAMERS. TO INCREASE THE THEATRICAL, DRAMATIC QUALITY ALREADY PRESENT AT THE SITE; TO MAKE THE LOCATION AS MUCH LIKE A DIARAMA AS POSSIBLE; TO FALSIFY THE REAL; TO GIVE AN ARTIFICIAL QUALITY TO; TO ISOLATE; TO MAKE CLEAR; TO MAKE VISIBLE; TO SET APART; TO HAVE NOTICED IN A SPECIAL WAY; TO POINT TO. DIS DE PLACE.

ADJACENT TO THE WALL WERE SOME FAIRLY GOOD—SIZED ROCKS. TO THESE I GLUED PAINTINGS, (OIL ON CANVAS) OF THE SURROUNDING LANDSCAPE. . . . UP THE GORGE; DOWN THE GORGE; ALONG THE TRAIL; THE CLIFFS; ONE ROCK; CLOUDS; FLOWERS. TWO OF THE PAINTINGS WERE POSITIONED SO THAT THE LANDSCAPE COULD BE COMPARED WITH THE PAINTED IMAGE WITHOUT MOVING. EACH PAINTING WAS SURROUNDED WITH A BRIGHTLY COLORED FRAME. DIRECTLY ACROSS THE PATH FROM THE WALL, WAS PLACED A ROW OF THEATER SEATS FROM WHICH THE WHOLE "PRODUCTION" COULD BE VIEWED. THE PAINTINGS WERE IN A FLAT, "POSTCARD" STYLE. I TOOK POLAROID OF THE SITE, AND PAINTED THE PICTURES FROM THE PHOTOGRAPHS.

THE MAID OF THE MIST A SYMBOLIC RESCUE.

THE GESTURE TOWARDS BEING FEMALE.

THE LEGEND EACH YEAR, A MAIDEN, IN A CANOE FILLED WITH FLOWERS AND FRUITS, WAS SENT OVER THE FALLS AS A BRIDE OF THE RIVER.

THE PROPS A 35 FT LADDER, PAINTED YELLOW, WITH RIBBONS AND ROSES OF CELASTIC, TWO LIFE PRESERVERS, DECORATED WITH FLOWERS AND STREAMERS.

THE ACTION THE LADDER AND WREATHS WERE CARRIED DOWN THE GORGE TO THE SITE ON THE LOWER GORGE TRAIL. THE LADDER WAS PLACED ON THE HILL, WITH ITS FEET IN THE WATER, AND ITS TOP REACHING THE PATH. ONE OF THE WREATHS WAS TIED TO SHORE, NEAR THE LADDER, AND FLOATED IN THE WATER. I TIED THE OTHER TO MY WAIST, WITH A 70 FT ROPE. I THREW THE WREATH INTO THE WATER, AND THE CURRENT TOOK IT AWAY. WHEN THE ROPE WAS TAUT, I CUT IT WITH A KNIFE, AND THE WREATH FLOATED FREE. THE RESCUE HAD BECOME A MEMORIAL EVENT.

(Reprinted from *Attitudes Toward Space: Environmental Art*, Mount St. Mary's College Art Gallery, Los Angeles, California, January 10-February 20, 1977.)

placed in the water—provided a way out for the doomed maiden, a hopeless but valiant attempt to surreptitiously restore to life an individual already lost in the fulfillment of a mythic rite.

In the fall, Morton participated in a theater workshop for visual artists conducted by JoAnne Akalaitis, Director of the Mabou Mines theater group. Subsequently, she designed the egg-dress prop as well as a number of scarves for *Dressed Like an Egg*, a Mabou Mines performance based on the writings of Colette. Each of the garments was made of unpainted celastic. Akalaitis recalls

We decided to do this dress taken from a photograph of Colette leaning against parallel bars. It looked very noble and Grecian in its unpainted state, so we left the celastic that way. . . . She understood how it was to work in the theater, that it's practical and that the work has to be theatrically viable. . . . She never would have made an unpainted piece as an art work, but realized that it worked best in the theater in that state.⁶⁶

The pieces appeared to be frozen in movement, and Akalaitis would step in and out of the dress whenever necessary. The pieces

were so funny because you always think that theater is fluid; so freezing a prop like that was hysterical. There was a scarf in the continual act of being blown by the wind. We're used to nothing being solid in theater. She made something that's always transitory stop. She froze it.⁶⁷

*The Masks of God—Creative Mythology—
Joseph Campbell*

In the context of traditional mythology, the symbols are presented in socially maintained rites, through which the individual is required to experience, or will pretend to have experienced, certain insights, sentiments, commitments. In what I am calling "creative" mythology, on the other hand, this order is reversed: the individual has had an experience of his own—of order, horror, beauty, or even mere exhilaration—which he seeks to communicate through signs; and if his realization has been of a certain depth and import, his communication will have the value and force of living myth—for those, that is to say, who receive and respond to it of themselves, with recognition, uncoerced.

Notebook, 1976

Egg Dress, 1976 (costume/prop for Mabou Mines production, *Dressed Like An Egg*, 1977)

Celastic

Dimensions variable

Property of Mabou Mines, Inc.

A work of art has a unique quality—it is that of clarifying and concentrating meaning contained in scattered and weakened ways in the material of other experiences.

Notebook, 1975–76

—2nd Surrealist Manifesto—

"There is a certain point for the mind from which life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the uncommunicable, the high and the low cease being perceived as contradictions."

Notebook, 1976

Previous accomplishments

My career probably began at the age of three, when I took up watching ant hills and protecting lady bugs. This caused a long interruption in my artistic progress, because my family read it as an interest in science, and directed me to nursing.

These days, almost anyone would be able to say that keen perceptual skills and patience are sure signs of an artist, but in 1939 the mistake was easily made.

As soon as I realized the mistake, I started studying art, but it was already 1963, and I had a Naval Officer husband, three children, and a house in a middle class neighborhood in Norfolk, Virginia.

The story from there resembles the feminist classic, "Out of the Kitchen, and into the Studio." I started watching art the way I used to watch ant hills. I got a BFA and an MFA. I learned to use power tools and to know the difference between needing help and just thinking I did. I got a teaching job in Philadelphia. I moved to a loft in NYC. I learned to take myself seriously. I learned not to take myself THAT seriously.

I did some good work, got some shows, and some reviews.

Not bad, for a girl.

My program of activity, if I were to be awarded a grant, would be to develop a series of sidewalk pieces. This past summer I worked at Artpark, and I was concentrating on color and image in the landscape as a theatrical referent to questions of scale. As an extension of this, I would like to see pathways made of ceramic tiles, brightly colored, handpainted with designs and images referring to the pathway's specific location and appearance. Combinations of illusion and allusion in concrete situations has been a thread running through my work, and I am excited about the potential in flat images to be walked on, outdoors. I am most interested in paths which would exist in the country—in the landscape; if they are successful, a series could be developed for cities.

It will be necessary for me to have technical assistance with this. I know of a tile works in Pennsylvania where the tiles could be made, and I could work with the craftspeople there on the glazes. I would have to spend some time on the processes—acquiring skills in the making, the painting, and the laying of the tiles. Once I have this information, and some of the pieces have been realized, it would be possible for some of the work to exist in the form of drawings and proposals, which could be submitted when opportunities for public sculptures arise. The problems of weight, storage and transportation that are so often present in the making of sculpture seem easily solved with this method of working. I would be handling boxes of tiles, designated to be laid in a pathway designed for a particular site.

I am very hopeful about receiving assistance from the foundation for this work. It could open up exciting possibilities for me in the making of a large body of flexibly scaled outdoor pieces.

One of Morton's most complex visual orchestrations resulted in *Signs of Love*, also done in the fall, a veritable rococo feast of celastic ladders, curtains, swags, roses, ribbons, and small panel paintings. This work combines various modes previously isolated by Morton in a shallow proscenium "apron" space, on all levels of the wall and nearby on the floor. Like her *Women's Building* studio of the preceding year, *Signs of Love* is a joyous celebration, satirically ephemeral in tone, almost saccharine in its sentimentality. Place is now an emotional reckoning, a state which resides as much in the past as it does in the present. Like theater props in storage awaiting use, the components also chronicle future expectations that flutter between fantasy and actuality. Visceral fleeting aspects of love are not stated, but are clearly articulated through verbal suggestion; the words "atmosphere," "gestures," and "moments" are written out in black felt pasted on the wall (in one version) or elegantly scrawled in script on small hung and propped can-

KANDINSKY:

IT IS NO PART OF MY PROGRAM TO PAINT WITH TEARS, OR TO MAKE PEOPLE CRY AND I REALLY DON'T CARE FOR SWEETS, BUT ROMANTICISM GOES FAR, FAR BEYOND TEARS. TODAY THERE IS A NEUE SACHLICHKEIT (NEW OBJECTIVITY) WHY SHOULD THERE NOT BE A NEW ROMANTICISM. THE MEANING, THE CONTENT OF ART IS ROMANTICISM AND IT IS OUR FAULT IF WE MISTAKE A TEMPORAL PHENOMENON FOR THE WHOLE NOTION.

Notebook, 1975-76

Signs of Love, 1976 (installation at the University of California, Santa Barbara, 1977)

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Photo courtesy of the University of California at Santa Barbara Art Museum

Signs of Love, 1976 (installation at the University Art Museum, Berkeley, California, 1978)

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Photo courtesy of University Art Museum, Berkeley, California

Matisse—

I do not think the way I thought yesterday. My fundamental thoughts have not changed but have evolved and my modes of expression have followed my thoughts. I do not repudiate any of my paintings but I would not paint any of them in the same way had I to do it again. My destination is always the same but I work out a different route to get there.

Notebook, 1976

if there is nothing definitely erotic in such twining, embracing, swelling, and relaxing shapes, there is a sensuous character inseparable from the broadly understood erotic experience.

Notebook, 1976

My perspective is situational, meaning here a concern for what one individual can be alive to at a particular moment, this often involving a few other particular individuals and not necessarily restricted to the mutually monitored arena of a face-to-face gathering.

Further, it is obvious that in most "situations" many different things are happening simultaneously—things that are likely to have begun at different moments and may terminate disynchronously.

(Experience varies—good parts/bad parts—players on opposing teams at a game.)

All of which suggests that one should be uneasy about the easy way in which it is assumed that participants in an activity can be terminologically identified and referred to without issue. For surely, a "couple" kissing can also be a "man" greeting his "wife" or "John" being careful with "Mary's" makeup.

My aim is to try to isolate some of the basic frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense out of events and to analyze the special vulnerabilities to which these frames of reference are subject. I start with the fact that from an individual's particular point of view, while one thing may momentarily appear to be what is really going on, in fact what is actually happening is plainly a joke, or a dream, or an accident, or a mistake, or a misunderstanding, or a deception or a theatrical performance, and so forth.

"strip"—an arbitrary slice or cut from the stream of ongoing activity, including sequences of happenings, real or fictive, as seen from the perspective of those subjectively involved in sustaining an interest in them.

"frame"—I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify.

Slaves were exhibited for sale in a wooden cage, their feet being smeared with white wash, and tablets stating price and qualifications being around their necks.

Here again I argue that the meaning of an object (or act) is a product of social definition and that this definition emerges from the object's role in the society at large, which role then becomes for smaller circles a given, something that can be modified but not totally re-created. The meaning of an object, no doubt, is generated through its use, as pragmatists say, but ordinarily not by particular users. In brief, all things used for hammering in nails are not hammers.

Notebook, 1976

vases (in another version). In its theatrical presentation, *Signs of Love* suggests the dramatic impact of love as emotional response. The frilly celastic bows, streamers, and roses strongly relate in subject and style to those of the love cycles of Fragonard, with his feathery brushwork and dreamlike atmospheres. The colors are strong and bold, pushed to their most vital hues. Ideal fairy tale love is reckoned in prince and princess paintings on the wall, depicting the proverbial ideal knight in shining armor and the beautiful virgin maiden. Other small panel paintings contain landscapes with centralized iconic roses, as well as a fragment of a circular architectural structure, perhaps a temple, a pavilion hideaway, or a monument to love itself.

During the winter of 1977, Morton went to teach for one semester at the School of The Art Institute of Chicago. Once again, her work was influenced by her immediate surroundings, this time through a total immersion in the monumental, majestic work of one of Chicago's great heroes, Louis Henry Sullivan (1865–1924), the architect who is credited with laying the foundation for the Skyscraper Style, and who is also celebrated for his theories of ornamentation, and for his famous dictum, "Form Follows Function."⁸⁸ Morton, who had previously translated graphic works into three-dimensional sculptural situations and embossments, and who had abandoned pure two-dimensional painting because of its "unreality," now chose to treat Sullivan's architectural theories in terms of drawing and painting alone (though some of her notes scribbled on studies suggest the possibility of making the forms out of celastic and wire). In Sullivan—who developed all aspects of an architectural structure in terms of a conceptually unified, yet often visually diverse, program—she discovered the power and strength of an idealist who had made large urban buildings with the human passion of a visionary.

Diagrams in Sullivan's book, *A System of Architectural Ornament*,⁸⁹ provide the direct source for the paintings exhibited first at the Walter Kelly Gallery, Chicago, Illinois in April and later, in December at the Droll/Kolbert Gallery, New York, New York. In each of the fourteen paintings, a small white elementary leaf-shape form on the left is enlarged, extended, expanded, divided, twisted, and elongated into a richly colored bulbous flower-like form on the right, barely held within the confines of the canvas. This dynamic blossom exudes all of the raw energy of Mor-

*The dreamer is known by the character of his dreams
the ornament is a necessary commentary on the building*

"It is not now good weather for prophets."

*"Have I not lived for my art? Must then I die for it? And, dying, leave nought behind else a few
precious scattered seeds, overlaid with snow—when my heart was so filled with fertility..."*

*Individuality is ... natural and inevitable, the child of one's emotional discovery of the world and
of what one accepts and rejects.*

Sul:


"Emotion is simply the attention that the heart gives."

Notebook, March 1977

[quotes probably from Louis S. Sullivan]

Study for Manipulations of the Organic, 1977
Ink, pastel, and watercolor on paper
29" × 39½"

Drawing for Manipulations of the Organic, 1977
Crayon and pencil on paper
14" × 17"



Drawing for Manipulations of the Organic, 1977
Carbon and pencil on paper
14" x 17"

De Chirico is aware that we are, what Gaston Bachelard calls, corner dwellers; that we sometimes need a shallow space to dream in.


Notebook, 1975-76

ton's simple, direct, strongly gestural images. These transformations were initially developed in a series of drawings of the same forms in which the axes and boundaries of the simple leaf shapes become directional lines of force, indicated by arrows and radiating lines.

The paintings were arranged side by side in a continuous frieze around three walls of a room, within a gray painted register about three-quarters up the wall, with the following quotation from Sullivan⁹⁰ in block-typed letters below them

THE DREAMER-MAN BECOMES THE SEER, THE MYSTIC, THE POET, THE PROPHET, THE PIONEER, THE AFFIRMER, THE PROUD ADVENTURER. HE DREAMS HIS DREAMS WITH OPEN EYES, WITH CLEAR VISION OF REALITIES, WITH FAR FORESEEING OUTLOOK, WITH INTENSE PERSISTENT CONCENTRATION UPON AN IDEA, A PURPOSE.

The paintings, through their identification with decorative, formerly three-dimensional, continuous plant motifs (as with Sullivan), cannot be separated from the room. They only function as art when they are so integral to the space that they cannot, or at least, should not, be viewed as individual or serial works. They shape and characterize the environment, creating a sheltered, womb-like atmosphere, soothing, yet mysterious. The Walter Kelly Gallery space was a small rectangular room with a fairly high ceiling and when *Manipulations of the Organic* was shown there — softly lit and casting a gray aura — the entire space was like a deep, almost underwater sculptural form, with organic plant life wavering up the walls. The work's quiet, calm, enigmatic glow, and its seemingly substantial but really nonmaterialistic feeling, marked the beginning of a new direction in Morton's art, one which cannot be fully appreciated due to the absence of informa-



Manipulations of the Organic, 1977
(installation, Droll/Kolbert Gallery, New York,
New York, 1978)

Untitled, 1977 (drawing for announcement for
exhibition at Walter Kelly Gallery, Chicago,
Illinois)
Crayon and watercolor on paper
14" x 17"

WE, THE WILLING,
LED BY THE UNKNOWNING,
ARE DOING THE IMPOSSIBLE
FOR THE UNGRATEFUL.
WE HAVE DONE SO MUCH
WITH SO LITTLE,
FOR SO LONG
WE ARE NOW QUALIFIED
TO DO ANYTHING
WITH NOTHING.

Statement accompanying
Morton's announcement for
Manipulations of the Organic, 1977

Leslie Harris

Thinking about art and other artists—feeling an affinity with other artists, and that this is a good way to do your life. The important thing is that we are here. And trying to make a difference, and giving a damn. There aren't any ultimate answers, only how and what can be done with that. Very liberating notion. Makes me more interested in the artists, and their lives, than in making a categorical judgement about their work. Let time and history make the judgement. To attract attention you can either do something sensational, or something so significant, that makes such a contribution that it can't be overlooked. Notice of the contribution may not come in your lifetime, which may be a reason for making things that last. The theater is content with the present. A work in a public place or a museum may have a larger audience than a theater production—so what is all the ... It seems to me that things have to be more serious—that the lightness and joyousness of the last three years has been a good thing, but now it is time to clarify, and to find the meaning. The MEANING and the APPLICATION has been obscure—the AFFINITIES have been vague. It's nice doing this work from Sullivan—RM x LS—Ree Morton loves Louis Sullivan, looking at his work, thinking his thoughts, and then making them my own. What happened today was a set of drawings—3—Manipulations of the Organic—the three are really one drawing, and shouldn't be separated—the key to the work I'll do from that idea of shape. The drawing is wonderfully decorative, but I think the seriousness comes through—it seems now that the ability to be light and free has been learned, and now it becomes necessary to use that towards some end, in order not to be totally frivolous and irresponsible. Light and ironic on serious subjects, without frivolity. The joy is there. I don't know where it's going, but I can feel the alteration in substance—it's important to continue that—to make a contribution. Today it was in focusing on shape—from Sullivan—simple and complex leaf forms—copied his shapes carefully, and then translated them into gestures—painted some of them—brilliant basic colors—simple colors. The effect is decorative, but the substance is there—the spirit is working—the drawing is breaking—I'm sure it is art, and that it is a major drawing, and an important breakthrough, whose implication I'm not clearly seeing just yet. I'm feeling very moved, and tired—a major expenditure of energy, although it took just a couple of hours to do the 3 drawings.

tion from successive work. Perplexed, yet excited by her new direction, Morton wrote "I don't know where it's going, but I can feel the alteration in substance."⁹¹

Ree Morton had a strong sense of her priorities and the ability to adapt to any situation; she was challenged by change. She had planned to move with Sally and Scott to Boulder, Colorado, where she was to assume a full-time teaching position at the University in the fall of 1977, as she sensed that this was best for her children as well as herself.⁹² Since the nature of communication itself was central to her vision, teaching was an essential ingredient for her vitality and livelihood. Her travels took her all over the country, and she shared her ideas, enthusiasm, and dedication with those whose lives she touched. With no esthetic axe to grind, she was an aggressor, attacking various visual means only to move on to new and different modes before her audience could even begin to digest preceding work. Above all, she was an idealist. Those who knew her well have stressed her positive attitude, warmth, gentle sense of humor, strength, and vulnerability. Her universal language—forms, emotions, and schemas relating to all people, things, places, and activities inside and outside of art—was at once simple and complex, specific and expansive. She manipulated her objects and renderings as integrals: protagonists or props in a play, pieces in a puzzle, components of a system, segments of her life. The broad scope of her vision embraced extremes, from rawhide to cement, devil to cupid, passion to death, dreams to the "raw stuff" of life. Hers was "a power located somewhere between motherly embrace and heraldic flourish."⁹³ The borders of the disparate realms she addressed in her work and life constantly touched and accommodated one another. Her volatile development spiraled rapidly, swirling through time, constantly redefining itself by turning back into itself. Her work was always fresh, new, even startling, since, for her, as for T.S. Eliot, one of her favorite writers,

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.⁹⁴

Allan Schwartzman
Kathleen Thomas

*I don't even know the muffin man
wish I did*

Notebook, 1975

FOOTNOTES

1. Ree Morton, Notebook, undated. (All of Morton's notebooks concerning her work are in the possession of Droll/Kolbert Gallery, New York, New York. The dates are estimated, as most of her personal documentation is undated.)
2. Marcia Tucker, interview with the authors, November 1979.
3. Ree Morton, Notebook, 1968.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Marcia Tucker, interview with the authors, November 1979.
6. Ree Morton, Notebook, 1968.

7. *Ibid.*
8. Marcia Tucker, interview with the authors, November 1979.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. Ree Morton, Notebook, 1968.
12. Marcia Tucker, interview with the authors, November 1979.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Cynthia Carlson, interview with the authors, November 1979.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space*

- and *Architecture* (Praeger Publishers, New York and Washington, 1971), p. 27.
17. Marcia Tucker, interview with the authors, November 1979.
 18. *Ibid.*
 19. Norberg-Schulz, *Existence*, p. 14.
 20. *Ibid.*
 21. Martin Heidegger, as quoted in Norberg-Schulz, *Existence*, p. 16.
 22. Norberg-Schulz, *Existence*, p. 15, note 33.
 23. Ree Morton, taped interview at Oxbow, Michigan, Summer, 1975, tape in possession of Linda Morton.
 24. Marcia Tucker, interview with the authors, November 1979.
 25. Norberg-Schulz, *Existence*, p. 27.
 26. *Ibid.*
 27. *Ibid.*
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. *Ibid.*
 30. *Ibid.*
 31. Lucy R. Lippard, "Ree Morton: At the Still Point of the Turning World," *Artforum*, vol. 12, December 1973, pp. 48-50.
 32. Ree Morton, taped interview at Oxbow, Michigan, Summer, 1975, tape in possession of Linda Morton.
 33. Norberg-Schulz, *Existence*, p. 18.
 34. *Ibid.*
 35. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.
 36. Raymond Roussel, *Impressions of Africa*, (University of California Press, Los Angeles and Berkeley, 1969).
 37. *Ibid.* see book jacket.
 38. Norberg-Schulz, *Existence*, p. 22.
 39. Roussel, *Impressions*, pp. 12-14.
 40. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
 41. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
 42. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
 43. Ree Morton, Notebook, 1971-73.
 44. The policy at Artists Space at this time was to invite artists to select other artists' work for exhibition. Morton's work was chosen by Nancy Graves.
 45. Marcia Tucker, interview with the authors, November 1979.
 46. Linda Morton recalls that the only access to and from the island was by ferry.
 47. Ree Morton, Red Composition Book, no date.
 48. This image may have been suggested by Roussel's description of the drawing, *The Fatal Blow*, quoted earlier in the section on the installation, *Sister Perpetua's Lie*.
 49. Rudolf Schwarz, as quoted in Norberg-Schulz, *Existence*, p. 20, note 18.
 50. Norberg-Schulz, *Existence*, p. 18.
 51. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
 52. T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," *Four Quartets* (Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., New York, 1943), p. 5.
 53. Lippard, *Ree Morton*, p. 50.
 54. Ree Morton, Notebook, December 1973.
 55. Morton acknowledged this connection to microbiology courses she had taken in nurses' training in an interview with Marcia Tucker, recorded in notes dated 1974, in the possession of Marcia Tucker.
 56. Ree Morton, Notebook, 1973-74.
 57. from a pamphlet, "An Interview With Grotowski," (no author, publication information or date) which was in Morton's possession, now in the possession of Linda Morton.
 58. Ree Morton, Notebook, 1974.
 59. Marcia Tucker, *Ree Morton*, catalog of the exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York, March 21-April 21, 1974.
 60. Peter Schjeldahl, "Of Primitive and Enigmatic Mysteries," *The New York Times*, April 14, 1974, Section II, p. 23.
 61. Marcia Tucker, *Ree Morton*.
 62. Ree Morton, Notebook, 1973-74. (brackets and underlining added by Morton)
 63. Ree Morton, Notebook, 1973-74.
 64. Ree Morton, Red Composition Book, no date.
 65. Cynthia Carlson, interview with the authors, November 1979.
 66. Ree Morton, Notebook, 1975-76.
 67. Cynthia Carlson, interview with the authors, November 1979.
 68. *Ibid.*
 69. Morton explained the nature of this unique material in a later published interview: "It comes in a roll and has a slick sort of claylike surface, but when you dip it in acetone, the solvent, it gets soft and handles like a wet chamois. It more than bends, it's slippery, and you can work it for about five minutes. You can use clay underneath for a quick mold and when it's wet, celastic sticks to itself." Barbara Schwartz, "Methods and Materials: New and Old," *Craft Horizons*, December 1975, p. 48.

70. Cynthia Carlson, interview with the authors, November 1979.
71. Ree Morton, Notebook, 1974.
72. Linda Morton, interview with the authors, November 1979.
73. Schwartz, "Methods and Materials," p. 48.
74. Publication information and whereabouts unknown.
75. Alan G. Artner, "Current Clue to a Deceptive Realm," *The Chicago Tribune*, January 5, 1975, pp. 16-17.
76. Ree Morton, description in catalog for the exhibition, "Attitudes Toward Space: Environmental Art," Gallery Mount St. Mary's College, Los Angeles, California, January 1977.
77. Schwartz, "Methods and Materials," p. 48.
78. Ree Morton, Notebook, 1975.
79. Cynthia Carlson, interview with the authors, November 1979.
80. Ree Morton, Notebook, 1975.
81. A form of a psychological treatment/approach which was currently popular in California.
82. According to David Bourdon, "The tongue-in-cheek 'regional' character of the pieces obviously alludes to the work of John Baldessari, Edward Ruscha, Eleanor Antin, and other California practitioners of deadpan visual jokes." David Bourdon, "Art," *Village Voice*, volume 22, September 26, 1977, p. 73.
83. Ree Morton, description in "Attitudes Toward Space: Environmental Art," catalog for the exhibition at Gallery Mount St. Mary's College, Los Angeles, California, January 10-February 20, 1977.
84. *Ibid.*
85. *Ibid.*
86. JoAnne Akalaitis, interview with Allan Schwartzman, November 1979.
87. Marcia Tucker, interview with the authors, November 1979.
88. Louis H. Sullivan's impressive Chicago Stock Exchange Trading Room reconstruction had opened in 1977 at the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, to an overwhelming enthusiastic response.
89. Louis H. Sullivan, *A System of Architectural Ornament* (Eakins Press, New York, New York, 1967), originally published by the American Institute of Architects, 1924.
90. *Ibid.*
91. Ree Morton, from writing dated February 1977, Notebook, 1977.
92. JoAnne Akalaitis, interview with Allan Schwartzman, November 1979.
93. Carol Squires, "Ree Morton 1936-1977," *New Art Examiner*, volume 4, Summer 1977, pp. 3, 23.
94. T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," *Four Quartets* (Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., New York, 1943), p. 39.

Ree Morton collaborated with Mabou Mines on a theater piece, *Dressed Like an Egg*, taken from the writings of Colette, which I conceived and directed.

About the time we were starting to rehearse, Ree and I were talking about romanticism. I was interested in the fact that she was then dealing with romantic narrative and style. We talked about the problems of the theater piece, how to formalize romanticism and maintain its emotional energy. We talked about Colette and looked at photographs from her life.

Ree was interested in making some pieces for *Dressed Like an Egg*. The main one was to be a celastic dress modeled after a real one worn by Colette in a photograph taken of her in her studio leaning against parallel bars. This dress was to be velvet with an egg pattern (based on a dream of mine). Finally we dropped the idea of flocking, or coloring, the dress because it looked so noble and "Grecian" in the afternoon light from our studio window. How much more so it would look, we projected, with theater lighting, and indeed, it did. The other pieces, based on the concept of freezing motion, were scarves blowing in the wind, worn by two men. They were colored. And last, there was a celastic bridal veil on which Ree had painted a lace pattern. This piece didn't work and we dropped it.

I appreciated Ree's understanding of the function of her work in the context of the theater, that is, that her pieces were primarily props before they were sculpture. In some areas she actually relinquished aesthetic control of them. For example, she said that the dress as sculpture she would have painted.

This dress was particularly successful as a sort of "totem" prop. All of the actresses in the piece wear it at different times. It seems to me unique in theater design because it functions all at once as costume, prop, scenery, and sculpture. The psychology of it as feminine form, defined and frozen, both trapped and expansive, is very moving. In that heightened space backstage before the performance begins, I think of Ree when I put the dress on for the opening speech.

—JoAnne Akalaitis

A verse from "Walk the Dog" (for Ree Morton)—

I went to the movies
And I saw a dog thirty feet high,
And this dog was made entirely of light,
And she filled up the whole screen.
And her eyes were long hallways—
She had those long, echoing hallway eyes.

—Laurie Anderson

SHE WAS EMILY DICKINSON IN LOVE WITH RAYMOND ROUSSEL.

—Scott Burton

One of the things that always impressed me about Ree Morton's work was her ability to traverse the notion of an idea, or intention, find an appropriate material, get to know both thoroughly and expressively, and then throw it all away and move on. Neither ideas or materials ever got too much control over her, because she somehow knew when to let them go. Perhaps only another artist can understand how difficult it is when work begins to undergo major changes. Leaving off something which served so well and leaping into an unknown before it has been tested is always painful. In that sense Ree was always an example to me of what an artist *could* do. She had fears about trying some of the things she did, but they never prevented her from going ahead. The proportion of wonder was always greater than the proportion of fear.

Another thing that always amazed me was her extraordinary ability to manipulate materials. When she used celastic, she turned it into a pure liquid flow of forms. She made magic! Likewise, when she turned to a painterly use of oil paint in the "Sunsapes and Seasets" she did it automatically like an old pro. Being in her studio, surrounded by work of the past and present, bits and pieces of thoughts and ideas, working notes, and various assortments of references and materials was like being surrounded by pure energy, always moving, never stetic.

Ree had an endless curiosity and need to make sense of the common everyday things and occurrences in her own life, and her work attempted to do that. But not too much sense. That wouldn't have been any fun. She liked the end results to be open enough to be able to mean different things to different people, without being right or wrong. She was seduced by myth and magic, but never to a point of losing sight of common sense, or an ability to be critical. It was a very good balance. Her use of decorative ideas (before it became popular) and her blatant, intentional use of sentiment were extremely conscious positions. The "Flag" piece at the South Street Seaport was a celebration of friendships.

She made huge strides with her work during the relatively short time of her working career as an artist. I believe that that was due to her ability to keep a very open mind about other work (and people). It kept a flow of connections available to only those not immersed in dogma. That ability also made her a good teacher, as well as a good friend. She said in her journal "I learned to take myself seriously, and then I learned not to take myself THAT seriously."

—Cynthia Carlson

In 1973 I saw *Sister Perpetua's Lie* at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. To move the eye from floor to wall. To draw on the wall, to place on the wall, to layer, to diagonal, to hold, to lean, to prop, to join, to frame, to place on the floor, to indicate, to lead on. To build, to square off, to circle, to band, to boundarize, to span an open interior space. Circles, rectangles, organic lines leading—from wall to floor, from floor to wall. Incongruous materials: sand, wood stumps, sticks, paint, artists' paper, stones, light bulbs. Incongruous materials to make incongruous objects about the outdoors to be juxtaposed in incongruous physical relationships indoors.

—Nancy Graves

Our most perceptive writers, when confronting Ree Morton's work, have evidenced puzzlement and acknowledged many unanswered questions. Now that she is gone, she is no longer present to bear witness to her own works which are now "memorials to lost intentions."^{*} The work is more difficult to interpret than that of some others whose lives were tragically shortened. Smithson, for example, left a legacy of his own writings to ease the works into critical discourse. Ree Morton's writings (mostly poetry) are themselves a rebus, as arcane as the works themselves. At the same time the art sufficiently resembles that of other work done in the seventies. When one realizes the similarities and differences between her work and that of her contemporaries the enticements and the difficulties ensue.

One is seduced by the strangeness of her work. Frustration arises when we expect to find some kind of ordering principle that exists in some contemporary work which resembles hers. She arranged organic materials and objects in ritual "mise en scenes" analogous to Roussel's "Impressions of Africa" and so she could be categorized as a neo-primitive. Insertions of language—diaristic or quotations from literary sources—are a semblance of narration. Her installation pieces conceived for exhibition occasions are ephemeral marks in history; but individual parts were reused carrying with them resonances of earlier projects, so that memory recycled impermanence into something more durable. Celastic (plastic which she colored and shaped irreverently) was her informed nod to the anti-formalist strain of the seventies. Yet, as her work negotiated with each of these issues it refused a commitment to any single one, further tantalizing and challenging our expectations.

The reason for this, I think, is that her work is all of a piece, and its key, I suspect, is ultimately in her linguistic interests. Her arcane analogies for verbal disorder are consistent; the delta-like extensions into space mark the meandering borders of a privacy, often infiltrated by quotations from Roussel, that we are invited to carefully trespass. Her concern with language (she shared a passion for Roussel with Duchamp) was quirky, intelligent, fantastic, punning, and paradoxical. It explored association, nomenclature, memory, and souvenirs. Her art, as I understand it, translated the completion of meaning available to language into objects and color. In translation they became virtually indecipherable—yet are held together by a poetic system to which we still do not have the key. We await then, the enlightenment of a brilliant study of Ree Morton's "Poetics."

—Janet Kardon

Remember the first line. Ree Morton is a conglomeration of good memories. Artist first (I knew her work before I knew her); then beautiful real person (her house with a porch in Philadelphia and the trellised, branching spaces she was making for herself inside; we talked like women about children and art); then, as my respect for her and her work deepened, the courageous artist-person who had almost been cheated out of her art-destiny—nurse first, then mother/housewife taking art courses, then a commitment to art reality that overwhelmed everything else. Ree started late but she caught up. In the process her talent and her honesty

^{*}Ree Morton, "Analects," Sondheim, Alan, *Individuals: Post Movement Art in America*, E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1977, pp. 226–245.

made her a role model all over the country for young women who had been getting the message that a life like Ree's was impossible.

What happened finally is that we got cheated. While she may have conceived her work at "the still point of the turning world," she herself was an active, thinking point in an often passive artworld. I miss her as a friend and as an ally. The last lunch we had together we talked about the collaborative work she was doing, about ways to open art up to what it could mean to people. Ree's successes in the artworld meant a lot to her; she had worked hard for them and she deserved them. But she wasn't so invested in the rewards that she wouldn't take risks with the system, just as she was taking risks in her work, punning in paint, balancing on the line between Daring and Dumb. Her death at this point, and at the point where her art and her family were about to be reunited, still seems particularly unreasonable. When the news of her accident came, the image of her "rescue piece" at Artpark (*Maid of the Mist*) kept nagging at me. I loved the piece and I hoped that it would be prophetic. That Ree too would emerge from the depths of wherever she was for those weeks, pulled back by the cords around the waists of those who loved her, with a wreath of flowers around her neck, reborn. Remember the last line.

—Lucy Lippard

Morton's Recollections & Reflections

In the fall of my sophomore year in college I received a package in the mail from my mother. It was not my birthday or Christmas, how wonderful to receive a present for no particular reason at all. Ree had a way of making any ordinary day special. Enclosed was a 3 x 5 woven tapestry of a little green frog with a flower which read:

DON'T HURRY
DON'T WORRY
DONT' FORGET
TO SMELL THE FLOWERS

I loved the gift and tacked it to the bulletin board over my desk. It was not until later that I realized the significance of the little green frog and his/her message. This was the very essence of what Ree had demonstrated and taught me all of my life.

childhood memories
read me a story mommy
coloring easter eggs
boardwalk art shows
going to the zoo
chitty chitty bang bang
watts towers
making christmas ornaments
birthday hats

trees aging
i hate you
i love you
in my chevy van
hair brushes
road side scenic views
new foundland, thank you wyn
collecting rocks on the shore
230 of dirt road
viking excavations
fishing for cod
no refrigerator
"that's a nice piece"
tannersville
rainbows fading
flowers blooming
waterfalls falling
rain
smells of acetone
county fair
venison and frogs legs
woodstock pizza
am track
heavy suitcases
dirty feet
galleries, again
brunos
san diego
long distance phone calls
the wish book
health food
suns setting
disneyland
skateboards
fish swimming
crazy post cards
kites flying
book stores
no stamps
big bows
rivers winding
big hug and kiss
well, m'dear

long distance phone calls
where are you now?
i miss you
too busy
i miss you
too far
i miss you
too much
i miss you
too late
i miss you

—Linda Morton

Ree's last work was in a changing place—a necessary place where there is a lack of balance. Very much as though she was taking a dive into an emotional, expressive place—looking for new forms to fit new desires.

I always feel Ree's work is trying to fit together very different kinds of materials and ideas. Things that have a surface or physical difference but in a deep sense are all one. The first piece I saw of hers was in the small room on the Whitney first floor, 1974. I loved the space she made there. It was like walking into a suburban living room that had been decorated by an ice-age cave dweller. It was intriguing and touching because it was so carefully and forcefully sensed.

Ree in her work wishes to be fully conscious of her past—and wed this to her discovery of art. This is every artist's need but with Ree it seems to me to be especially poignant. In her adult life she was first housewife and mother and after being fully those she is fully an artist. Ree's work is in the process of being open to all things in the world—trivial and grand—the last work about her willingness to make painful until new forms are found.

—Elizabeth Murray
12/9/79

Ree knew who she was and kept changing. She moved around her work, and her life, the way she seemed to look at other people's sculpture—trying always to get another view from another side.

She could take an object, or an idea, and split it up. She could string each part of an oblique line of associations. And then she could rearrange them all—lie them up again so that they were just barely and wonderfully incomplete. She was a poet-sculptor, an image-sculptor, a nervous-sculptor. Her work was beautiful and funny and sad. And it was strong. And confusing. —So was her life.

She seemed always alone, despite her friends and family. Not aloof or even resigned, but just separated into herself. I learned a kind of jagged rhythm from her; a rhythm of dissociation-become-connection. What I remember now is: a friend who kept moving off in slightly different directions than I expected her to.

—Richard Nonas

The Marionette

A painting of Ree Morton's hangs in my home in San Diego. It is a straight line figure of a man in oils of deep blue and greens. She titled it "Marionette."

We were neighbors at the time she painted it, living in identical split-level, rented homes in Norfolk, Virginia in 1964. As young navy wives we were living in quiet stoicism while our husbands were at sea on the same ship.

That year she painted her living room with its cathedral ceiling a sea-grotto blue. She got her first dishwasher with a beautiful butcher block top. Our children fought and made up. Ree and I watched soap operas at midday and drank vodka gimlets before hot dog and bean cookouts in the back yard.

The small house had no ideal spot for her to paint, and with three small children around, privacy was at a premium. However, Ree found refuge in the large unfinished bath just off the ground floor playroom. This workspace must have been below sea level, because frequently the bathroom was swamped as the septic tank overflowed up through the shower drain.

The day Ree gave me the painting she was sorting canvasses in her living room. As I recall, most were of flower arrangements. She asked me which I'd like to have, and, as I was making my choice, she said, "I asked members of my family when they visited recently to take whatever they liked best, and they left empty handed." She added, "Some day all my paintings will be for sale. Maybe yours will be the last I give away."

Ree and I stayed friends thereafter communicating by mail through the years. Both our lives changed from the days so long ago when she took refuge in her bathroom studio.

—Janis Porter

Ree had a great time figuring out what was going on and where she fit in. She ate Bar-B-Que like a Texas roper, was tender and kind to the troubled and less fortunate, like a nun, and was a mother also, who brought actual life into the world. No matter where she went she always sent cards, always remembered birthdays and little things; her kinder fibers showed often.

Ree got a late start; she married, familyed, and housewifed before the art pursuit began, and this initial commitment to love of family and devotion to lasting values infused into her art human concern factors which contrasted her work to the reigning impersonal minimalism of the late 60s and early 70s.

And what a great teacher and symbol she was to the young ones coming up. Untiring in her encouragement to students; wherever Ree taught over the years, bright spots emerged, young students became young artists, and they would tell later that Ree had gotten them on track. We all miss her very much.

—Jim Roche
Havana, Florida
12/13/79

"Lovely Lady, dressed in blue, teach me how to pray..."—reciting poems for the Mary-knoll nuns at age three; dancing and dramatic lessons to follow a few years later. If Ree wasn't pirouetting around the living room, she was engaged in some intense scenario which resulted in her siblings referring to her as "The Weeping Willow."

I feel that Ree ultimately found in her art a stage on which she was able to recite her poetry, utter her soliloquies, entertain and, in her own subtle way, amuse.

—Sheila Rockefeller*

We sat on the floor of the shop trying to figure out the angles for the complicated stretchers she wanted to make for her seminar project. Ree was so intent on learning to use the power tools . . .

Our first visit after Ree left Rhode Island was at the house way out in Jenkintown, Pa. We went into the cold, dim garage to look at her new shaped canvasses. She was struggling with buying a bigger spray gun set-up

She had the pine-paneled basement rec room of the house in Melrose Park, Pa., filled with new work. Constructions combining fiberglass insulation, wire, strips of felt insulation, and tar; materials she had "discovered" during trips to the hardware store

It was a second floor over a three-car garage in Philadelphia and it was loaded with new constructions using painted tree branches and unstretched canvas. It was Ree's first studio separate and away from the house. She loved that private space

We both installed work in the "26 x 26" exhibition at Vassar on a lovely spring day. Ree installed a suspended wire screen, wood, and canvas construction. She had been looking at catalogues of canning and preserving apparatus

Ree had hauled logs from the country into her Waverly Place loft. She intended to gently reshape them and wanted to know about saws, chisels and mallets

There were small clay pieces and fragments all over the loft; spin-offs from problems Ree had been assigning her students. She was so enthusiastic about what her students were making

Being thrilled with the colors of nylon she was able to buy, Ree was sewing night and day on the flags. We discussed her procedure for selecting the image she would paint on each flag

On a warm, sunny day we spent the afternoon at the Seaport enjoying her flags flying from the ship's rigging. Ree loved taking friends to the Seaport and sharing her celebration with them

Ree backed her van to the loading dock. We unloaded baskets of celastic bows, roses, and rolls of hand-painted borders for her exhibition. Later Ree talked of wanting to paint a prince and princess. she wanted them to look "romantic"

—Robert Rohm

By throwing off the shelter
Restraints—
 of her earlier life
And carrying with her
Pride
 in and of her children
She developed
 into an artist
 who used everything
Needing form
 for her energies
She started to pick
 from places in her life
 a tree
 a ribbon
 a myth
 a joke
 a friend
These became her sculpture

This small quiet woman
 was bursting
With discordant images
 an art
 form
that pushed
 the boundaries of the new

As her art grew strong
As her many many friends
Said—
 YES
A wonderful laugh also grew
 A Delight
 in strength
Now
Her ship still sails
Her friends still
 Flying on
 That Art

—Arlene Slavin
November 1979

Ree was strong, generous, funny, gentle, and warm. Her intelligence was formidable, her determination absolute, and her faith in others indomitable. An extraordinary combination of irreverence, love, humor, and courage made her a wonderful friend and a unique, visionary artist.

—Marcia Tucker

Before she left for California to teach in 1975, Ree and I made an exchange of our work. The language elements from the 1974 drawing which I selected and a passage from a letter written from La Jolla constitute the body of my statement.

From 1974 Drawing:

MADDER FAMILY

April-June. Sometimes again in Autumn

waxy, cream-white, pink-tipped

velvety, lilac scented

Moist meadows

Wet Rocks

Where the white variety grows one might think
a light snowfall had powdered the grass,
or a milky way of tiny floral stars
had streaked a terrestrial path.

From Letter October 15, 1975:

"Did two weird paintings for Garry's 24 x 24" show* and liked them so much I cut some more plywood and will do six more—They're frontal portraits of some very obnoxious bows—on plywood with celastic frames that become part of the painting—Am also fooling around with wire and trying to learn to solder so that the joints don't break apart."

Ree combined with such wonderful wit the familiar and the exotic. She was much like those floral "stars which had streaked a terrestrial path." Her freshness and light have not faded.

—Jeff Way

When Ree Morton answered the phone, it always sounded as if she were smiling. Not only was she disarming, she was generous. It was from Ree that I learned about celastic and flocking—where to buy them and how to use them.

When she came to New York in 1973, she knew exactly what she was doing; she had geared herself, and arrived intent on getting her work out within two to three years. She had a strong commitment to her children, and that amount of time was all she felt she could endure without them (she temporarily relinquished custody while living in New York). She talked often about "the kids"; I knew them in my mind from our talks long before I actually met them. I also knew her work

before ever having met her. In 1971–72, when A.I.R. was coming together, some of the first members looked through the Women Artists Slide Registry, and Ree Morton's work came singing out—it looked so wonderful and so particular. She decided not to join A.I.R., but as a result of that initial contact, we became friends. It's not possible to calculate Ree's influence on me; I admired her work tremendously. I felt she was a better artist than I. Many of our concerns overlapped; we were interested in each other's work and had a good critical dialogue.

I loved going to her studio. It was humble; she only spent her cash on her work. But I was never, ever bored there. I was always uneasy: the run-right-home-and-work-like-hell kind of uneasy that is the artist's response to looking at good art.

Ree was absolutely direct where her work was concerned. She met and was friendly with an enormous number of people in the art world within a very short time. She received critical attention, grants, museum exhibitions, and did several visiting artists stints. She was preparing for her first solo New York City uptown gallery show before she died. Ree was just beginning to hit her stride. Even so, I think she was quick enough. She was pressed for time and she made a strong, joyous statement.

In reading through some of her journals, I found a quote which appeared several times—I guess she'd planned a piece for it. "At all costs, the deities must be made to laugh."

Barbara Zucker
November
1979

Lo Guidice showed . . . sculpture by . . . REE MORTON. Morton's work is more than idiosyncratic. She presented two constructions, each using materials in a very personal way. The first was a rectangular pattern marked off on the floor by what looked like bricks. But the "bricks" were made of pieces of wood painted red. A piece of canvas, also painted red, was glued to the top surface of each brick. The rectangle of fake bricks neatly encircled the several gallery columns in its path. An opening was left in the brick-indicated rectangle as a kind of entrance into the inner area. Inside was a low platform on little wheels like a dolly. The top of the platform was covered with paper on which Morton had drawn a plan for the arrangement of bricks.

Morton's second piece was constructed in a corner of the gallery and used both floor and walls. Paper on the walls was marked with an outlining broken line, the usual sign for something there but not visible. (Was Morton indicating the reverse of a painting, i.e., a painting can present something that is visible but not really there, while Morton attempts to indicate that the paper which is really there is invisible?) Upright white boards lined the wall. A projecting row of other boards formed a sort of collapsing pen extending out from the wall. Inside the 'pen' were three small wooden constructions. They were built with unnecessary cross-pieces which served no structured purpose and seemed as quirky as Morton's fabricated bricks.

In one respect Morton's work seemed like an elaborate joke about materials and about process art. At first sight, because of her choice of materials, it seems she's doing one of those very serious "this is how it works" pieces. Then you see how impractical and nonfunctional the parts are, i.e., the collapsing fence, or the extra boards on the three small constructions inside. Morton's manufactured bricks could be

seen as a jibe at works which deal with showing the inherent qualities of certain materials. Her rectangle of bricks is made comical too, first by how neatly the bricks encircle the columns in their way, and then by the repetition of the whole scheme of bricks, columns and entrance on the paper-covered dolly platform. Is she here joking about all those artists who, with one material or other, reproduce circles, spirals and other geometrical configurations?

It is also possible that while Morton's work involves commentary of other art it is also and more straightforwardly concerned with a new and different approach to materials. Morton seems to be using materials in ways that investigate their non-functional, non-structural aspects. The objection to such a use of materials is that it would have no logic in itself. But what Morton does is to suggest the possibility of a function for each part of her structures and then to subvert the suggestion. She chooses materials normally found in the kind of work she is referring to and then uses those materials to make constructions that suggest the appearance of "how it works" pieces at first glance but really are beginning to collapse or contain unnecessary parts. What she is pointing out is that collapse, or unnecessary parts, are just as possible as states of material constructs as the strict functioning of only necessary parts. (Lo Guidice, Dec. 13 Jan. 3)

—Rosemary Mayer

REE MORTON: AT THE STILL POINT OF THE TURNING WORLD*

She likes Raymond Roussel's *Impressions of Africa* because "the mental pictures are always changing; you can't make them concrete. There's no frame of reference, no story line or location." Her own work offers a private sign language which engenders a private space partly constructed from memory, which accounts for the flavor of dislocation. I first saw Ree Morton's work in the 1970-71 Whitney Annual. It didn't look like everything else — a wood and screen "manger" with twigs and branches in and beneath it. She still works with containers and enclosures, but after the neatly constructed screened racks, the object status became more ambiguous and, at the same time, innocent, obsessive, repetitive. Bundles of branches, cut logs, used more loosely, led her later in 1971 into a curious area between painting and sculpture, between welcoming "environment" and a closed, pictorial space.

Morton uses fences and paths and dotted lines, tables and platforms and panels, to isolate forms and directions, to make new connections between them. What appear to be fragments are drawn together by shared shape or connota-

tion into a common space. But once that space is established, it disappears by allusion from its boundaries. A large framed and gated and three-part piece shown in Philadelphia last year revolved around "Sister Perpetua's Lie" from Roussel. A series of drawings reflecting the shapes of the sculptural elements surround the quotation: "To the question, 'Is this where the fugitives are hiding?' the nun, posted before her convent, persistently replied 'No' shaking her head from right to left after each deep peck of the winged creature." I harp on these literary sources because Morton's work conveys a highly abstract and hermetic narrative quality. Signs and shapes repeated again and again as though to say "Now do you see?" are islands in a landscape, things that seem imbued with meaning, but *what* meaning?

Most sculptors working in an area between sculpture and painting limit themselves to bending one or the other medium toward the other (e.g., boxlike, planar, relief sculptures, or bulging shaped or assembled canvases). Ree Morton, on the other hand, straightforwardly combines the two without altering the identity of either. Her drawn or painted sheets of paper on the wall could stand on their own as two-dimensional art, were they not enticed into real space to interact with three-dimensional elements which,

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in turn, might stand on their own as sculpture, or as natural “finds.” Often the sculpture provides the frame by unconventionally drawing it out from the wall, radically changing the scale of the hanging rectangle. The materials used to perform these sleights of eye are frequently wood—large gracefully sloping tree branches, logs, twigs, stumps, 2×4s. (The lines of the branches resemble “drawn” lines without resorting to the forced naturalness of expressionism.)

(Other components: not quite arcs, not quite circles; posts, trunks, logs split lengthwise; dirt and wooden floor sections; the ubiquitous dotted line in two or three dimensions; flattened and rounded tree sections, clay patties, plaques, boards, stones; a rock, a dolly, benches, wheels, trunks that open on spindly legs, fence posts and lopsided pickets; doors, shelves, roofs; hanging, lying, leaning, supported, supporting; a lot of little objects rather plaintively lost in space and then found again echoed in drawings on wall or floor or remembered in similar shapes on the other side of the room—the most precarious aspect of Morton’s work, dangerously close at times to fussiness, but usually conquered by associations and alienations clear enough to be provocative, not coy.)

Until recently, Morton’s work has lined up against at least one wall, providing an almost Surrealist space by which the sculptural elements elude illusion, but bar entrance. Now some of the pieces lead from the dotted paths of pictorial space into real roads around and into the sculpture. The roofs, shelters, paths, gates, and yards imply architectural plans and an ambiguous area between interior and exterior space. In the multipartite piece shown recently at Artists Space, based on materials and memories from a summer in Newfoundland, a Magrittean contrast between careful arrangement and natural materials, outdoors and indoors, was intensified by the diffused, artificial “daylight” and the black shuttered windows that pushed one back into the room. In the last two years the “places” have become more schematic, a necessity as they more ambitiously expand and fragment. The ritual quality is also

heightened in newer works. The Newfoundland piece was all green and gray and white and natural wood and stone—clean and fresh and peaceful with an almost “homey” intimacy laid over the ominous clarity of a dream. Morton seems to be topographically mapping her own exposed zones, making Japanese gardens of her fantasies, within the limitations of her own loft and house life. The influence of memory is very strong (the stones on wooden pedestals ranged on a “table” in the Newfoundland piece look a bit like souvenirs in a gift shop).

All of Morton’s pieces exist in that very controlled, but still dispersed and uncaptured space which hovers between the pictorial and the sculptural (not necessarily in respective relation to the drawn and three-dimensional elements). The space in both her sculpture and her drawings recalls that of the American Indian or of other so-called naive artists. At the same time, my reference may be to the highly sophisticated use of multiple viewpoint found in ancient Chinese and other Eastern landscapes. And there is also an openness that is rooted in repetition and “uniformity,” the slight awkwardness or confrontational innocence that is an attribute of so much of the best American art. The spaces are compact but welcoming, like little shelters for the expanding imagination, the legendary door in the wall.

— Lucy R. Lippard

*The title is taken from T.S. Eliot; the following quotation has hung above Morton’s desk for several years:

At the still point of the turning
world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still
point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And
do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered.

This essay is a revised and expanded version of a text first published in the catalogue for “Made in Philadelphia” at the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, March–April, 1973.

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

REE MORTON

Ree Morton's work is based on a visual system of discrepancies, poetic reversals, multiplicity and abstract narration.

The pieces she has done since 1970 are large, usually filling an entire space, yet the component parts or modules are often small and function as major elements through repetition. Her work re-orders space, with tracks, log slices, ridges of sand, painted (sometimes dotted) lines on the floor or wall, rows of tiny clay forms as borders or enclosures. Abstract drawings incorporated into her work refer obliquely to real forms; branches, color swatches, weights and balances, signs and markers are among the elements that constitute her pictorial language. Morton makes objects and molds spaces, offers options, lays out territories, paths, boundaries and directions that both exclude and protect; her enclosures are places of internment and refuge at the same time.

Morton sets up situations in which the viewer explores and discovers. The work has an archeological look to it, an archeology not only of things and places, but ideas as well; it is the excavation and evocation of a culture that relates to the private life of

one person, "to each concrete man" (the title of the present piece).

Although Morton is interested in illusion, she does not create illusion in the classical or traditional painting sense. In one piece, for instance, she painted a tree trunk in bright colors according to the actual markings of its bark, then removed it from illusion by placing it on a low platform, facing another tree trunk painted differently, according to its markings. She likes to use wood-grained wallpaper as a backdrop, making a reference to real things by using blatantly artificial ones. In a 1972 piece shown at Oberlin she utilized a large branch, leaning it against a wall at an acute angle; the branch was painted from dark brown at the bottom (nearest the viewer) through greens and blues to white (the color of the wall) at the top. The colors used were those of traditional landscape painting, but graded on a real tree in the way one would paint the image of a tree to make it seem to recede into space.

Her pieces have a narrative thrust which is unusual in abstract sculpture. For her, some kinds of narration involve the evolution of an event, the viewer's own movement, through time and space. In other works, especially some pieces and drawings of 1973 based on Raymond Roussel's novel *Impressions of Africa*, chapter titles and paragraphs from the book are used as references to events taking place in the pieces themselves. Occasionally, her

Essay from the exhibition brochure titled *Ree Morton* by Marcia Tucker published by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York, 1974.

drawings are based on mundane events in her own life, unimportant in themselves and illegible in the final product. In still other works, narration is provided by markings (like those of topographic maps) which stand for something specific but whose meaning is unknown to us; they are modules, signs or units whose signification is mysterious but insistent by virtue of repetition. In certain recent drawings, the narrative element consists of what Morton calls "the mating habits of lines"; she says that now "the pieces don't have an outside source, like Roussel; they're telling their stories in a more relaxed way."

Notes from her varied and extensive reading are scattered throughout her notebooks like the elements of the work itself. There are quotes from Rilke ("try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign language...") and Unamuno ("ideas were not to be worshipped nor followed blindly, but spent, by using them as shoes are used..."); notes on Celtic torture devices ("cages of wood," wickerwork frames in which people were burned); lists of things ("borders, edges, ends, boundaries, enclosures, isolators, narrative keys, directors, paths"); and charts (a pamphlet of hand signs for deaf-mutes, a page of Japanese stamps with fish images, a diagram of buoy markings). These elements are brought to bear on her work indirectly, as if they were archeological field notes.

"To Each Concrete Man" has two parts. One, situated in the right-hand section of the space, consists of a low platform on which a fake latex flagstone "floor" is situated—a uniquely ironic way of assuring that the Whitney Museum's real flagstone floor cannot interfere with the sculpture itself. On the platform are four different sculptural forms that resemble markers or signposts on which public announcements might be made. Unlike earlier works in which actual drawings were tacked onto the walls around a piece or placed on sculptural forms, there is no drawing on these markers. For her, the fake flagstones act as the drawing. The loosely painted gray wall, activated by color swatches selected at random, includes an open, unpainted rectangle against which the platform is set off; it is a drawing or painting space, vacated or vacant, "a place where at another time I might have done a drawing, but now

the space is just reserved for it," according to Morton. There is a stage-like feeling about the piece, a logical extension of other works in which a theatrical aura was created by their animate quality.

The frontality and general structure of the new work relates to the proscenium of a stage on which a series of events is about to take place or has already taken place. These "ghosts" in the work are references to things that once existed in the space, or could have existed there but do not. Shapes, spaces and solids seem to be in the act of transferring themselves from one section of the piece to another. The markers appear to have emerged from the white space behind them; they have a slightly anthropomorphic quality which makes them, as abstract shapes, suggestive of certain human activities. Some of the parts in her sculpture, Morton notes, are involved *themselves* in the act of looking, as well as being looked at.

The second part of the exhibition consists of a number of mushroomlike rawhide lamps, suspended over stumps of wood on which other rawhide scraps are stretched. While making the lamps, she became interested, "in leaving out the sculpture and using the other parts," that is, in dealing with negative forms and shapes as well as with a subversion of the two traditional sculptural concerns, the base and light. The aggregate of rounded shapes constitutes a place in which the natural and artificial engage in an intense dialogue, the rawhide-covered log stumps reflecting their own material back into the lamps. The incongruity of a forest of lamps has the same kind of humor and visual double meaning as some of the word plays in Morton's notebooks, word plays which refer to real things as well as to figures of speech—such as "parting of the ways," "on the right road" or "around the bend."

Morton's work is unusual in its totality; it incorporates painting, sculpture, real and crafted objects, natural and artificial materials. The work is intelligent without being intellectual, narrative without being literary and ironic without being whimsical. Its multiplicity, contradictory and slightly perverse nature, its response to natural forms and its sources in primitive human phenomena result in a unique sculptural mode.

—Marcia Tucker, *Curator*

Art in America

Ree Morton at the Whitney

Fantastic imagery has reared its head in a number of guises recently, from the bizarre self-transformations of Lucas Samaras to the sado-masochistic cavortings of the more extreme body artists to the nut-funkery of Bay-Area eccentrics and Chicago Hairy Whos. These manifestations all derive in one way or another from a preoccupation with negative psychology—a critical belief that evil must lurk beneath a surface of seeming normality. Ree Morton's work is cryptic evidence that the images of subjective exploration needn't all be laden with malice.

Morton's previous objects and environments evolved from experiences of actual places visited and things remembered; her primitivist constructions, which included rocks, sticks and branches and crude drawings, were documentations of a personal and poetic vision. Her most recent work, which occupied the small main-floor gallery at the Whitney, was a complicated and ambitious environment titled *To Each Concrete Man*; it abandoned the crudeness of her earlier found objects for conscious fabrication. Her travels have become imaginary, metaphorical; this new work represents an exploration of the nature of fantasy itself.

On the right as you entered the gallery was a low platform surrounded by a diminutive picket fence; its floor consisted of a commercially produced imitation-flagstone covering, a gentle parody of the museum's

real stone floor, perhaps intended to underline the work's peculiar relation to the "real." Four "figures"—three easel-like structures and a sort of blank signboard—occupied this strange stage. Posts at its rear corners supported a string of empty light bulb sockets.

At the other end of the room were four tree stumps standing on stick legs and covered with tightly stretched rawhide. Lamps with crude rawhide shades, suspended from the ceiling, hovered over them. Three of the stumps were grouped together; the fourth was placed several feet away. This arrangement seemed to refer obliquely to the positions of the platform objects.

The walls of the room were painted a splotchy, thinned-out gray over white, which was punctuated by small colored-paper strips pushpinned on at random. These altered the walls' character by activating their surfaces, calling into question their traditional function as flat planes. A rough outline of an arch on the wall behind the platform remained white, adding to the work's spatial ambiguity by indicating a sort of negative proscenium which could be read either as a backdrop or as an opening into illusionary, undefined deep space. If the platform, with its empty sockets and scattered easels, gave the impression of abandonment, the lighted stumps had an air of anticipation about them, like carefully placed tables awaiting guests.

Unlike many environmental works, which emphasize their spatial occupation by requiring the viewer to step over, crawl through or only look into them, Morton's work offered an access as effortless as drifting into a dream. Though this gentle entry might signal that the ensuing experi-

ence would be subjective rather than physical, Morton's "concrete," straightforward presentation delayed this awareness. The *mise-en-scène* was filled with objects that seemed familiar, accessible. But a careful analysis of the situation brings the viewer up against a blank wall. A resorting of initial impressions reveals that the objects are not at all what you thought they were, and, in fact, cannot be assigned any identity connecting them to reality. The artist, though inviting you in, reserves her right to privacy.

This ultimately mysterious quality of the objects underlines and confuses the question of scale—a major ingredient of any environmental work. It is easy enough to assume, especially when considering the contents of the platform, that we are dealing with human—"real" or "full-size"—scale. But if the stumps are accepted as tables, then the environment is established as a miniature, a sort of Lilliputian picnic ground. But the stumps are not necessarily tables. They could just as well be functionless forms, their own "real" size or even greatly enlarged in the artist's imagination, in which case their scale need not be consistent with that of the platform.

J. R. R. Tolkien would have been the first to agree that the success of a fantasy depends on establishing its credibility. This happens when everything is laid out and presented in accordance with its own definitions; a foothold on our own reality is not important. Morton's references turn in upon themselves, making her fantasy totally believable as such but also assuring that the work itself will remain as enigmatic as its title.

—Nancy Foote

REE MORTON:

“Antidotes For Madness”

To date, Ree Morton's work has been characterized as enigmatic, “remote and self-contained” and as having a “highly abstract and hermetic quality.” (1) Using elements like sticks, slices of logs and other variations on tree-trunks, sand, sweeping compound, picket fences, shingle awnings, rocks, boards, bricks and referential drawings, she created environments which could not comfortably be entered. “...at the time I was doing these pieces I began reading books on architecture and was using (that) vocabulary... There were words like boundaries and zones and pathways and entrances... there are lots of pathways, for example, but where one can't go. In that sense I really resist the word environmental because environmental means to me that you go into that space and these are really spaces to be viewed, like mausoleums and altars and entryways and spaces which are set aside for particular purposes or are unavailable in a certain way.” (2) That certain way was seen as dream-like, allusive and elusive, at times grounded in the artist's own past and at times in generalized kinds of placed. “I really try and make them general enough and with human enough references so that they begin to trigger individual memories that begin to have nothing to do with what I've placed there...” The specific places which she began to construct were compounded not of directly apprehensible objects but of things that were like shadows or after-images of unknown factors, and of diagrams that were schematic portraits or “records of events.” In one, two painted log-stumps face a drawing based on old engineering topographical symbols for orchard, clearing, sand and gravel; they view a situation which could be about themselves. Despite the primitive quality generated by the presence of wood and sand and rocks and their arrangement in

space, and despite Morton's admission that the pieces gradually became more autobiographical and therefore more impenetrably private, the potent dislocation of viewers suggests a more universal influence than any of these explanations allow.

Working steadily in her studio, assembling pieces, photographing them and taking them down, few people saw the greater part of her output. Marcia Tucker kept track of her work and Morton exhibited in two Whitney Annuals. In 1973 she showed “Souvenir Piece” at Artist's Space, based on a summer spent in Newfoundland. Lucy Lippard described it as “...all green and gray and white and natural wood and stone—clean and fresh and peaceful with an almost ‘homey’ intimacy laid over the ominous clarity of a dream.” Out of that piece came “To Each Concrete Man,” shown at the Whitney's small gallery in March, 1974, which Morton sees as a culmination of certain aspects of space she was working with.

The next piece she exhibited was conceived and born in a fit of pique and marks the beginning of a conspicuously different imagery and involvement with materials. “...all of the parts in this piece are fake, the wooden supports that hold the awning up are covered with contact paper... I made lots of bows out of material called celastic... and did them with glitter and nail polish and buttons and stars.” The piece was a bake sale and was inspired by the attitude of the women at the school where she teaches who were organizing the women's faculty show.

“I thought they were being really chicken-shit about putting their work out. They wanted the show to be self-explanatory with lots of preliminary drawings and explanations and I thought that that was terrible, to finally have a chance to show your work in the school and to insist on remaining a teacher.”

The newest work, at John Doyle Gallery, seems almost diametrically opposed to pre-bake sale pieces. Instead of the comforting properties of wood and stones, Morton now presents us with shiny, painted surfaces, patently false and obviously manipulated. Implicit mystery seems to have given way to blatant explication. Instead of unstated multiple references, the embossed words on the new reliefs appear to proclaim a less complex intention. (But this is just playing the devil's advocate on my part, anticipating mental wavering.)

No longer drawing with objects in space, Morton instead commands the entire environment and continues to “pull the walls” into her work. She painted six of the gallery walls in alternating candy pastels, covered two walls with patterned wall-paper and ran a strip of flowered, semi-colonial wall-paper trim around the baseboard. Consequently, a showing space of contemporary elegance is transmuted into a life-size sampling of Suggested Shades In American Bedchambers.

Muddy and dark and saccharine colors intermingle on reliefs based on banners and drapery. ("I look at Victorian funeral monuments a lot... drapery that exists in stone.") Oversized colored lights flash on the two horseshoe-shaped pieces that sit on the floor, drawing attention to the words "Fading Flowers" and "Terminal Clusters" embossed on dingy green streamers flatly arrayed across the middle of the structures. Both their shape and proximity to the ground recall the wreaths given as prizes at events like horseraces (in the movies) or as memorials at funerals and governmental holidays. The insistently flashing lights, which Morton associates with her interest in commercial lights, especially in advertising, can also signal gaiety (a carnival) or danger (a squad car). Words that suggest dwindling or decay are coupled with gentler nouns.

Although absorbed by these strange associations, the words which have continued to preoccupy me are "Antidotes For Madness," which repose, *sans* lights, on a nine-foot banner. Somewhat off above the piece hang two gaudy bows. There are no tangible antidotes anywhere in sight (art?), no diagrams or directions for counteracting the dread disease. There is just the announcement, an out-of-context proclamation, heraldic and nonchalant at the same time.

The formal quality of the pieces seems willfully awkward and naive. Where in the "Madness" piece the drapery has a certain tautness to it, a graceful frozen movement, the banners on the horseshoe structures are openly flat and gawky, as are the structures themselves. A feeling of artlessness has strung itself throughout her work all along and becomes most obvious in the small drawings exhibited. In the past her drawings have been highly symbolic or diagrammatic, marked by an innocent, languorous line. These depictions of leaves from a book of weeds seem more concerned with themselves as object-statements, little islands of leaves floating on terrazzo backgrounds, rimmed with glitter and fake wood. The names of the leaves and small comments that float on the ground resemble Jim Nutt's handling of words in his work. Indeed, the installation of the drawings, with their flocked wood-grain borders played against fake wood-grain wallpaper, is strikingly reminiscent of the show 'Don Baum says, "Chicago needs famous artists"' at the MCA. When an interviewer noted the affinity of Morton's current show to Chicago art, she acknowledged both a liking for it and a possible influence.

An impressive aspect of her work is her *way* of working, a kind of subliminal discovery process which she allows free reign. From that vantage point, one sees that her current work springs from the same personal resources that it always has, from following an inclination and noting the result. When she

found some elements in her work beginning to look very figurative her reaction was, "... oh my God, they're figures and you didn't think you were doing that. Somehow, if you're believing your own rules, in a sense, then you eliminate that from your work and so what I do instead is to let them be alive and see what happens, let them function as people without making them look like people."

The same empirical tendency manifests itself in her relationship with the outside sources for her work. Around the time she was finishing her graduate work (about 1970), she found diagrams of food drying racks in the back of an old cookbook. Using the materials specified, i.e., wood, screen, canvas and hardware, she greatly enlarged their size and reproduced them. "I found that it was a wonderful way to work at that time, to make a decision to make *that* and then what you would get was, to me, this very strange object." The relief pieces are based on words she found in an old wildflower book whose moralistic text attracted her. It talks about flowers "as if they were people, as if they could make moral judgments... be thieves, liars, escaping or trapped." When queried about the similarity of her works to the 'feminine' art that deals with buttons and bows: "I know that whole rap about female imagery—I'm almost involved in it because I don't believe it. I think it's quite possible that there is (a female image) and I think it has nothing to do with what I see identified as female imagery at this time."

I suppose Ree Morton's method and art could be dismissed as mere autobiographical process, as visual stream-of-consciousness. It would partially depend on one's value of the personal in art as to whether it was seen as positive or negative. Whatever one's reaction is to the formal quality of her art or the impulses which produce it, there is an expansiveness and an assuredness which flows from her into her art. "I read... a book of David Smith's writings... and one thing he was talking about was affection for the work and I got really excited when I read that, that was not a word you heard connected with work ever recently, it's logical, it's systematic, it's reasonable, but never talking about affection for the work..." The spirit which transformed John Doyle's gallery is one which encompasses and strengthens and questions instead of working within strictly defined parameters and as such is liberating for both the artist and the viewer.

—Carol Squiers

(1) Lucy R. Lippard, "Ree Morton: At the Still Point of the Turning World, Artforum, December, 1973.

(2) All quotations, unless otherwise noted, from the artist's lecture at Artemisia Gallery, Nov. 7, 1974 or in conversation with the author.

ARTS EXCHANGE

REE MORTON: 1936–1977

I never met Ree Morton. In fact, outside of photographs, I saw only one of her pieces. But that one piece, which I stumbled on by accident at a show at the Institute of Contemporary Art in 1973, excited me more than I have ever been excited by any contemporary work of art. It was *Sister Perpetua's Lie* and I didn't understand a thing about it except that a) it seemed to bridge the gap between drawing and sculpture, between two and three dimensions, something I was very much interested in, and b) it was so pointedly obscure, scattered with clues which provided no hints at all to the ultimate mystery of who was Sister Perpetua and what was her lie, that I felt sure the work, with its elaborate but meaningless system or mere appearance of system, was in some way a send-up or rebuke of the even-then prevailing conceptualism. Thought was not all and I was glad to see somebody say so in a manner that was progressive, not reactionary. She really seemed to offer a way out, to free compulsive activity of its pretensions to rigorous logic. Enthused, I saw connections between Morton and Pynchon, both of whom seemed to be saying that all things are paradoxically connected in a way that is finally unknowable, and that therefore systems are both profound and trite. Later, I found out who Raymond Roussel was and read his novel, *Impressions of Africa*, on which Morton had based *Sister Perpetua* and understood that he had argued similarly. The book presents a string of bizarre but extremely

complicated rituals and feats, overly ingenious apparatuses, and rigidly organized tableaux in a narrative vacuum without plot, without character, without time, in short, without any apparent *raison d'être*. Suffice it to say that the book is hardly clearer about the identity and dilemma of Sister Perpetua than Morton was.

Of course, before all this I had been struck by the "look" of the sculpture, something regenerative in the rough tree stumps, the naive presentation that was refreshingly new at the time, although now it is seen as an early manifestation of a resurgence of interest in primitivism.

A year or so after this encounter, I opened the "Arts and Leisure" section of the Sunday *New York Times* and saw the photograph of the installation at the Whitney of *To Each Concrete Man*. To each concrete man, and there were four of them in the composition, four anthropomorphic-looking constructions of wooden rectangles on substantial, high "legs" or solid, squat "feet," to each concrete man there was, across the room, a reciprocal, antidotal organic man, fantasy man, four crude tree stumps with rawhide coverings and attenuated legs, the thickset trunks and spindly legs of dwarves. The legs of the gnomish entities seemed too thin to support the bulk of the trunks and they maintained the precarious balance of cripples; the legs of the "concrete" specimens seemed unnecessarily long or thick, or both, for the minimal weight they had to bear. These latter suggested to me somehow a vision of our outward, upright, ordered selves, the selves we present to the world, which would account for their sitting on a little

stage, a raised platform covered with imitation slate flooring and bordered by a diminutive picket fence. There was a white painted arch for a backdrop as well, "a sort of negative proscenium," as one reviewer I subsequently read noted.¹ They were our middle class, bourgeois selves, I thought, inhabiting a kind of suburban yard, complete with fence and clothesline or telephone poles and wires or whatever that string of empty light bulb sockets stretching from perpendicular to perpendicular was supposed to be. A miniature picket fence for a tacky house.

But the stumps were not stunted inner selves, our pre-evolved, crouching avatars. With the inverted dome lamps, also covered with rawhide, hung a little above and spotlighting each lump, the impression was of luminous mushrooms growing out of the surrounding dank, limitless gloom. Weird but rich. And more real, I judged. If the weight of approval was not to be centered on this half of the room, then why did Morton use natural rawhide on the stumps and their lamps in opposition to the synthetic slate of the dais, why the individual, specific, almost-halo of light, as opposed to the empty light sockets? If a light bulb represents an idea, does that mean that the "concrete" men were mindless? Why else deep space, as opposed to artificial boundaries?

That was before I read what Lucy Lippard wrote about Morton. "Morton seems to be topographically mapping her own exposed zones, making Japanese gardens of her fantasies."² Then I began to realize the importance for Morton not only of fantasy, which I had already recognized, but also of limits, of boundaries, of zones and maps. In the article Lippard wrote, I saw reproductions of her earlier work where the picket fence and string of sockets had been presented as dotted lines which, having crossed, one was no longer in Morton's territory. (These lines had been in *Sister Perpetua's Lie*, too.) I read a brief "poem" she had written about her work, every line of which began with or revolved around a word prefixed by *re*, meaning, of course, back, again, anew. Apart from a concern for doubleness and contradiction which was to be almost a signature for Morton and which was so obvious in the dichotomy of *To Each Concrete Man*, there was a glimpse of her impulse for possession, to be territorial, if you will, in the lines:

Rearrange this space.

Rebel against that space.

Recast nature.

Recharge images.

All puns, since Morton was, in effect, making space, nature, images, and the other items in Lippard's list, her own, that is, "Ree-ing" them. This urge for ownership may have been less a matter of aggression than of survival: inside the magic circle was the safety and identity of organization and memory (her scenes were often, apparently, recalled scenes); outside, the ego-less void of unmastered time and space. Although I think that that air of *noli me tangere* about her work, of defense against trespass, eased as she developed, it was strong in the beginning, and while she closed herself in, Morton devoted a great deal of energy to exploring her modest areas. *See-Saw*, dating from 1971, and included in a 1975 show at Vassar, was an utterly complete dissection of a demarcated area. A ten-foot length of wood surmounting a tree stump of a fulcrum was the see-saw, set inside a circle of wooden blocks on the floor. Rather than going up and down, the plank rotated; a raised diameter for the circle on the floor, it acted as a kind of compass needle as it revolved. There was this diameter in the air described by the plank. There was a diameter implied between two diametrically positioned markers interrupting the flat blocks in the circle on the floor. There was the circle in the air, exactly equal to but above the circle on the floor, described by the plank as it turned. There was the implied crisscrossings of diagonals in the other smaller cylinders described by the imaginary joining of the recollected up and down, vertical motion of any see-saw with the swiveling, horizontal motion of this particular see-saw. No magician, proving his good faith by plunging his swords into and around a basket, could be more thorough.

In the Lippard article, there were illustrations of Morton's other early pieces, several untitled works, circa 1972, including one which, it seemed to me, must have done for the angle what *See-Saw* did for the cylinder. It was a definition of the corner, a demonstration of what Joyce, after Plato, would have called the whatness of cornerness. Arranged in the angle between two walls, upended boards supported two horizontal two-by-fours which met in the corner. Every other upright was planted just slightly out from the wall, the others against it, creating a complexity of shadow that was compounded by two sheets of trompe l'oeil **x** patterns affixed to the walls and visible in some of the intervals between the uprights. These crosses were in turn echoed in several self-supporting inverted v's, one of which functioned as a horse for a board that extended from one free end of the horizontal board to the floor. This board fell just beyond intersecting another board likewise extended from the other free corner of the horizontal to the floor (without the aid of a horse). Together these two barricades virtually barred entrance to what looked like a construction site reced-

ing behind the wall. The joist-like arrangement of the two-by-fours suggested revealed structure. On the one hand, the jutting barricades wedged between floor and wall seemed to be holding up the wall, as if advising the viewer of imminent collapse, their barring function therefore protective; on the other hand, they formed the two collapsed sides of an incomplete box, which is perhaps, after all, what a corner is. In that sense, their leaning position might have been seen as an invitation to step in.

Formal concepts of the same sort informed a very different-looking piece of the same period. If a title were to be given to this work, "Bisected Teepee" would be a good one. What would have been the center support pole of the tent remained, a freestanding tree limb. The tent itself was pushed back in two triangles against the wall as one would pin back the flaps of skin of a dissected frog. Each triangle was in turn bisected by a stick. Small, uniform sections of tree limbs were spaced along a white semi-circle coming out of the wall to render the cross section of an original, imaginary teepee, the after-image of which was reinforced by the preservation of its low door frame, an entrance, but, again, too small to be inviting. When I looked at these photographs, I wondered whether Morton's illusion of recession behind the wall in the corner piece, her hint in this other piece that one-half of the original whole teepee was behind the wall, hidden, and cut off, weren't another reaction against influential modes, specifically against the literalness of the frame which Minimalism inadvertently reinforced. In its denial of the frame around the canvas, minimalism embraced the walls, ceiling, and floor of the gallery space as a larger, inescapable frame. Was Morton denying the limitations of a room even as she set so many arbitrary limits of her own?

All this is not to neglect the affective side of even the early work. I am not forgetting Lippard's conjunction of fantasy and topography. In *See-Saw*, elements of the remembered scene were displaced or transformed as in a dream in order to serve the power of suggestion. For instance, two wooden rectangles were attached to either end of the plank, one resting on it, above, one hanging from it, below; this topsy-turvy position, a sacrifice of precision for dramatization, captured the essential one-up-manship of the see-saw game. An iron handle, a kind of axle in the middle of the plank, served as a counterpart of the iron safety grips usually placed at opposite ends of a teeter-totter, and pointed up the absurdity of a functionless handle pull at precisely the point where one would hope, *pace* Yeats, things would not fall or be pulled apart, would hold, namely, at the center.

There was almost always a touch of poetry in Morton's presentations, but in an untitled assemblage from 1972, she moved away from

the establishment of mere place into the creation of landscape. There was the usual multi-directional piercing of space: a rectangle drawn directly on the wall and filled with pencilled lines was repeated in various rectangular frames or boxes on the floor which formed two sides of the box which was the entire arena of the environment. A long limb formed one loose diagonal, another was formed by a path of stepping stones (slices of tree trunk) spilling out from a column of lines drawn in the corner. There was a drawn circle on the wall, picking up the shape of the wooden discs, nestled in a drawn, curved continuation of the limb. Mnemonically and mimetically, the circle on the wall, the leafless branch, the scattered stones or pads evoked some moonlit, watery expanse. Interestingly, with its discurve trail of plaques, this seemed a more open-ended, less embattled piece than the ones previously discussed. The tension between two-dimensional and three-dimensional components that was evident in *See-Saw*, where a cylinder could be inferred from two circles, where diagrams appended to the rectangular end boards could be seen as obscure or rudimentary blueprints for the whole, impositions of abstraction on the *fait accompli*. That was evident in the landscape as well, with its drawings of incipient sculptural shapes, and each became almost a metaphor for artistic process. Things came out of the wall for Morton in the same way that, in a moment of inspiration, a blank canvas begins to take shape, or in the same way that technique then fleshes out concept.

One of the last things I read about Morton had to do with her 1976 Artpark creation. Coming across a remnant of cement wall at the base of a cliff in the park, she painted it pink, topped it with a series of metal loops, and twined swags of Celastic about the arches. She painted views of the site and placed them to the right and left of the wall, against the cliff. These views were severally framed with paint, with a border of canvas, with more Celastic curtains. Facing all this, at a remove from but parallel to the wall, on a cement slab, a row of six new seats of modern design waited. Clearly, this was a theatre, but who was watching whom? The viewers sat looking at the mountain whose very immobility insinuated watchfulness. Was it a game to see whether the mountain would come to Mohammed or Mohammed to the mountain? Certainly it culled all of Morton's preoccupations. There were traces of *To Each Concrete Man* in the use of the stage and in the confrontation between natural (mountain) and artificial (the concrete slab, the chairs, the synthetic curtains). The picket fence and dotted line were there in the arches of the stage. The painted views were the apotheosis of her habit of abutting the second and third dimensions. But, as was noted about *Regarding Landscape*, Morton, in "placing artificial materials in a natural setting reversed the earlier

pieces which brought natural materials into the great indoors."³ There was indeed a reversal of a basic attitude that may have been precipitated by the necessity of facing not a room but boundless nature. The belligerently busy framing of the view in the postcard-like paintings, little theatres in themselves and possibly comments on the whole genre of landscape painting, combined with the defiant staking out of a human claim (the chairs), came off as rather inadequate in the face of the looming mountain. And that must have been intentional, since Morton deliberately chose the wall which shoved against the mountain in such a way as to suggest the most tenuous of dams against landslide and inundation. There was a certain recognition in *Regarding Landscape* of the insufficiency of boundaries, perhaps even of the

limits of art, which in its very ordering becomes a view, a limitation, but there was also a certain both heroic and ant-like persistence as well — Ree, guarding landscape, tenaciously, but without illusions.

—Jeanne Silverthorne

Notes:

¹Nancy Foote, "Ree Morton at the Whitney," *Art in America*, July/August, 1974, pp. 81–82.

²Lucy Lippard, "Ree Morton: At the Still Point of the Turning World," *Artforum*, December 1973, pp. 48–50. This article is substantially the same as one Lippard wrote earlier for the catalogue of the ICA show, *Made in Philadelphia*.

³Barbara Baracks, "Artpark: The New Esthetic Playground," *Artforum*, November, 1976, ppl. 28–33.

Chronology

- 1936 August 3, Helen Marie Reilly (Morton) born in Ossining, New York to John W. and Helen Reilly. Grew up and attended school in Ossining.
- 1944-45 Attended High School, Marymount Academy, Tarrytown, New York.
- 1953-56 Attended Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York, studied nursing.
- 1956-60 Lived in Jacksonville, Florida.
- 1956 Married Ted Morton.
- 1957 Daughter born, Linda Susan Morton.
- 1959 Traveled through Europe for three months in conjunction with husband's Navy career.
- 1960 Spring, lived in Jacksonville, Florida. Attended first art classes at the Jacksonville Art Museum.
- 1960 Daughter born, Sally Lorene Morton.
- 1960-63 Lived on St. Simons Island, Georgia.
- 1962 Son born, Scott Chandler Morton.
- 1963-65 Lived in Norfolk, Virginia.
- 1965 Lived in Los Angeles, California. Taught in Watts Towers' art program for children.
- 1965-68 Lived in East Greenwich, Rhode Island while attending the University of Rhode Island Kingston, Rhode Island and received B.F.A.
- 1968-70 Lived in Horsham, Pennsylvania.
- 1970 Attended Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and received M.F.A.
- Group exhibition, "Contemporary American Sculpture Annual," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York.

- 1972 Moved to New York, New York and lived at 12 Waverly Place.
- 1973 March, installation, *Sister Perpetua's Lie* exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
 Summer, vacationed in Newfoundland, Canada with children. Installation, *Souvenir Piece* was directly influenced by this trip.
 September, installation, *Souvenir Piece* exhibited in first solo exhibition at Artists Space, New York, New York.
- 1974 Awarded Creative Artists' Public Service (CAPS) fellowship.
 March–April, installation, *To Each Concrete Man*, solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York.
 March, first use of celastic in installation, *Bake Sale*, in the exhibition, "Women's Faculty Show," at the Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
 May, visiting artist, Painting and Sculpture Department, Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana.
 Summer, vacationed in Tannersville, New York with children.
 October–November, visiting artist, Painting and Drawing Department at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.
- 1975 Awarded National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant.
 Spring, visiting artist, Sculpture Department at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.
 June, installation, "Something in the Wind," at the South Street Seaport Museum, New York, New York.



- Summer, took part in Midwest Women Artists' Conference, sponsored by West East Bag (WEB), in Oxbow, Michigan. Spoke on "Women Artists in New York City."
- 1975-76 Visiting artist at the University of California at San Diego. Taught five courses in Visual Arts program in Painting and Sculpture Departments.
- 1976 January and February, visiting artist for the School of Art and Design at the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, California; traveled to Mills College, Oakland, California, as a visiting artist. Spoke at a graduate seminar for the Art Department on "New York City Women Artists" and gave a lecture on her own work.
- Summer, exhibited outdoor installation, *Regarding Landscape*, and performance, *Solum Ceremony*, at Artpark, Lewiston, New York.
- 1977 Visiting artist in the Painting and Drawing Department at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois.
- March, presented a lecture concerning her work for the New York State College of Ceramics, Division of Art and Design, Alfred University, Alfred, New York.
- March, solo exhibition, *Manipulations of the Organic*, exhibited at the former Walter Kelley Gallery, Chicago, Illinois, subsequently reinstalled in December 1977 at the Droll/Kolbert Gallery, New York, New York.
- April 30, died of injuries sustained in an automobile accident, Chicago, Illinois.
- May, costume/prop designed by Morton for the Mabou Mines production, "Dressed Like an Egg," New York, New York.
- September, *Regional Pieces* exhibited at the Droll/Kolbert Gallery, New York, New York.

Selected exhibitions

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1969 McLennan Community College, Waco, Texas
- 1973 Artists Space, New York, New York
- 1974 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York
John Doyle Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
- 1975 "Something in the Wind," installation, South Street Seaport Museum, New York, New York
- 1976 University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island
- 1977 Walter Kelly Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
Droll/Kolbert Gallery, New York, New York
- 1978 Droll/Kolbert Gallery, New York, New York

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1970 Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
"Untitled, 1970," Cheltenham Art Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
"Whitney Museum Sculpture Annual," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York
- 1971 "Depth and Presence," Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
112 Greene Street, New York, New York
"Twenty-Six By Twenty-Six," Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, New York
University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island
"Youth in Art," Philadelphia Art Alliance, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- 1972 LoGiudice Gallery, New York, New York
Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- 1973 "Biennial Exhibition: Contemporary American Art," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York
"Contemporary American Drawings 1963-1973," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York
"Four Artists," New York Community College, Brooklyn, New York
"Four Young Americans," Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio

- "In Spaces," Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York
"Private Notations: Artists' Sketchbooks," Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
"Twenty-Four By Twenty-Four," Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York
University of California at San Diego Art Gallery, San Diego, California
Women's Building Art Gallery, Los Angeles, California
"Artists' Sets and Costumes, 1977," Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
"Primitive Presence in the 70's," Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, New York
"Seven Sculptors," Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts
- 1975 "Artpark Art II," Hallwalls Gallery, Buffalo, New York
Artpark, Lewiston, New York
North Texas State University, Denton, Texas
"Preparatory Notes—Thinking Drawings," Womancenter, Boulder, Colorado
"Made in Philadelphia," Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
"New Reflections," Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut
"Nine New York Artists," Hartwick College, Oneonta, New York
- 1974 "Art in Landscape," Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois; University of California, Irvine, California, Organized by Independent Curators, Inc.
"Focus on Women," Civic Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
John Doyle Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
Loretta Yarlow Fine Arts, Toronto, Canada
Marion Locks Gallery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Museum of Modern Art Members' Penthouse, Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York

- 1977 "Attitudes Towards Space: Environmental Art," Gallery Mount St. Mary's College, Los Angeles, California
 "Biennial Exhibition: Contemporary American Art," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York
 "Collection in Progress," (Selections from the collection of Milton Brutton and Helen Herrick), Moore College of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 "Contemporary Tableaux/Constructions," University of California, Santa Barbara, California
 "Contemporary Women: Consciousness and Content," Brooklyn Museum Art School, Brooklyn, New York
 "Improbable Furniture," Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, California; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois
 "Ree Morton 1936-1977," Grey Art Gallery And Study Center, New York University, New York, New York
- "Tableaux Constructions: 1974/77," University Art Galleries, University of California, Santa Barbara, California
- 1978 "Four Alone," Hallwalls, Buffalo, New York
 "Matrix/Berkeley 2," University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, California
 "Oil at the Bleecker Renaissance," New York, New York
 "Six Contemporary Artists," The List Art Center, Kirkland College, Clinton, New York
- 1979 "Sixth Anniversary Exhibition," Artists Space, New York, New York
 "Ten Artists/Artists Space," Neuberger Museum, State University of New York at Purchase, New York
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researched by Alexandra Halkin

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Works in the exhibition

Unless otherwise indicated, all dimensions are in inches, height preceding width and depth, and are courtesy Droll/Kolbert Gallery, New York, New York.

Wood Drawings, 1971 (Installation at the Museum of Modern Art Members' Penthouse, 1974)
Felt-tip pen and hardware on wood
Dimensions variable

Untitled, October, 1971
Branches, metal tacks, wire, and wood
Approximately 96 × 96 × 96
Reconstructed for exhibition

Paintings and Objects, 1973
Acrylic and pencil on canvas and wood
53¼ × 66 × 60½

Souvenir Piece, 1973
Mixed media
Dimensions variable
Reconstructed/reassembled for exhibition

Sister Perpetua's Lie, 1973
Mixed media
Dimensions variable
Reconstructed/ reassembled for exhibition

See-Saw, 1974
Mixed media
Approximately 48 × 120 diameter

To Each Concrete Man, 1974
Mixed media
Dimensions variable

Line Series, 1974
Crayon and watercolor on paper
22¼ × 30

Line Series, 1974
Crayon and watercolor on paper
22¼ × 30

Line Series, 1974
Crayon and watercolor on paper
22¼ × 30

Bozeman, Montana, 1974
Mixed media
Approximately 84 × 132 × 3

Weeds of the Northeast (#2), 1974
Pastel, pencil, glitter, watercolor, monoprint on paper
19 × 25

Weeds of the Northeast (#8), 1974
Pastel, pencil, glitter, watercolor, monoprint on paper
19 × 25

Broom-Rape Family, 1974
Crayon and pastel on paper
29½ × 41½

Jack-in-the-Pulpit, 1974
Crayon and pastel on paper
29½ × 41½

Terminal Clusters, 1974
Celastic, paint on wood
48 × 48 × 8

Fading Flowers, 1974
Celastic, paint on wood
48 × 48 × 8

The Plant That Heals May Also Poison, 1974
Celastic, glitter, and paint on wood against wallpaper
46 × 64 × 4

Antidotes for Madness, 1974
Celastic, paint on wood
40 × 108 × 4

Of Previous Dissipations, 1975
Celastic, paint on wood
43 × 73 × 8

Flags, 1975
Paint on nylon
Each 25½ × 31

One of the Beaux Paintings (#2), 1975
Oil on wood with celastic
24 × 24

One of the Beaux Paintings (#3), 1975
Oil on wood with celastic
24 × 24
Collection of Sally Morton

One of the Beaux Paintings (#4), 1975
Oil on wood with celastic
24 × 24

Untitled (Beaux drawing), 1975
Crayon and pencil on paper
17 × 14

Let Us Celebrate While Youth Lingers and Ideas Flow, 1975

Paint on canvas, celastic, and wood
96 × 72 × 6

Partially reconstructed for exhibition

Regional Piece (#1), 1976

Oil on wood with celastic
Two panels, each 20 × 50

Regional Piece (#3), 1976

Oil on wood with celastic
Two panels, each 20 × 50

Regional Piece (#6), 1976

Oil on wood with celastic
Two panels, each 20 × 50

Untitled (Red Hind drawing), 1976

Crayon and pencil on paper
11 × 14

Untitled (Sunscape drawing), 1976

Crayon and pencil on paper
11 × 14

Study for Regional Piece, 1976

Acrylic, crayon, pastel, pencil, and watercolor on
paper

29½ × 41

Collection of Sydney and Frances Lewis,
Richmond, Virginia

Prop from *Maid of the Mist*, 1976

(life preserver prop from performance at
Artpark, Lewiston, New York, 1976)

Paint on celastic on life preserver
31 diameter

Signs of Love, 1976

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Study for Manipulations of the Organic, 1977

Ink, pastel, and watercolor on paper

29 × 39½

Drawing for Manipulations of the Organic, 1977

Crayon and pencil on paper

14 × 17

Drawing for Manipulations of the Organic, 1977

Crayon and pencil on paper

14 × 17

Untitled, 1977

Crayon and watercolor on paper

14 × 17

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