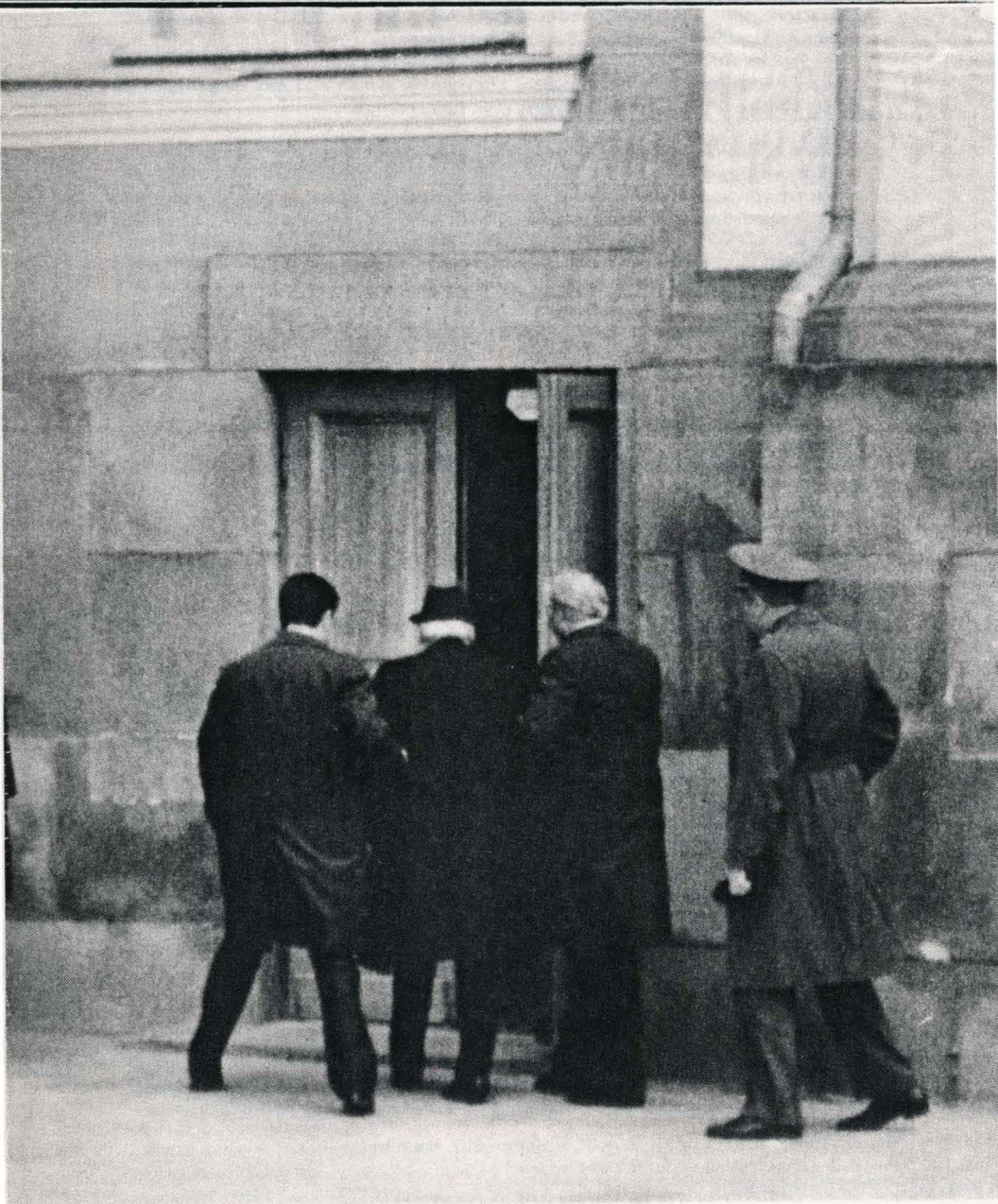


REAR WINDOW

The New Museum of Contemporary Art



WALLACE & DONOHUE

February 1 - March 30, 1986

Wallace & Donohue make tremendously stylish paintings, ones which look like the works of art we see in galleries and museums. In fact, they adhere rather deliberately to a conventionalized and familiar minimalist format, generally characterized by a drastically reduced range of geometric forms and colors. Yet these works possess an uncanny eccentricity. In particular, their oblique hanging and incongruous attachments make them sit uncomfortably on the wall. They strain the credibility of their formalist heritage. They garble syntax and mix metaphors. Like bratty children, they threaten to upset the proceedings.

Wallace & Donohue's paintings are radically fake paintings. They are neither metaphorical nor abstractions. Rather, they serve as functional devices or dumb props which establish an ambient sensibility or mood. These paintings, with their "mix 'n match" quality, discourage a fixed or singular reading. This is not to say that there is not a specific program for meaning within the work, but that the mechanism by which the work means is not programmatic. It might be useful to think of this mechanism in terms of a theatrical posturing where the works' (inverted) intentionality (process) is perceived as if through staged cues. Think here of intention resting precariously on the comical haunches of a theatricalized purposefulness.

The collaborative sense of these works is not that the paintings are literally made by two people, but that they seem to harbor an internal dialogue. This discursive character is reflected in the incongruous juxtaposition of formal painting and eccentric attachments (rearview mirror, swimming pool ladder, etc.), in the refusal of a specific signature style, and in their humor. Moreover, between such conscious incongruities there is an element of "play." As Roland Barthes suggested, play involves simultaneously the notions of slippage (as in a mechanism with "play") and—as in a game—strategy, fun, and competition. This "play" characterizes the way we approach meaning or define meaning in these works: open-endedly, empirically, and with a sense of collaboration between artist and viewer. We do not simply decode the work's meaning, rather we construct—through free play and desire—works which understand us.

Wallace & Donohue's paintings then may be said to be "situational." This suggests that while the paintings are not, say, site-specific, they do draw a large measure of their meaning from the viewer's involvement in the context and conditions of their exhibition. In this respect, they constitute less of a critique of specific facts of exhibition than attentiveness to the awkwardness of displaying and viewing art. The peculiar hanging of works such as *Go* and *Painting Is Photography* emphasizes the way in which painting is often observed: obliquely, out of the corner of the eye. Finally, then, given this type of chance encounter, this oblique approach to meaning, Wallace & Donohue's work questions whether determinate meaning is ever possible in art. Articulate critics themselves, Wallace & Donohue recognize that "You can control the appearance of something," but at the same time they ask, "how do you control meaning?"

**GRAZING THE MIND
WHERE COMPLICITY FALTERS**

by Wallace & Donohue

If there is an issue now in art making, what would you say that issue is, given what is around us and what we feel we're left with—

Being given what you already have.

(Laughter)

Deconstruction is precursory, not the end-game in work. You want the fact of your work to be inextricably close to, or one and the same as, the fact of your person. As if to say, culture's scalpel is in your hand.

How is work infused with some kind of recognizable or working meaning structure?

Good work is not effectual in delineating a complete picture. On *our* terms, the critical structure can only tend toward an invisible nature, which is not to say it is not there, it is simply not receptive to what we might call the failure of the finite critical vehicle.

Would you call this work detached?

Yes, it is. Aloof work—it seems to want to work peripherally. It's not head-on work—it's not pretentious, it understands its own limitations.

Where do we start?

I'm thinking of the importance of the awareness of the immediacy of being with a jerk.

(Laughter)

I think ideally, we'd like to point to the singularity of *that event*.

(More laughter)

When Estelle said, "There's something going on," I thought that was very good. Where our work would fail would be, "There's nothing going on," and, actually, visually, there might be a very subtle difference between the two.

What you really want the work to do is to posit a way of looking at things. Our foundation is something like, there's value in self possession.

That's good, as opposed to object possession, which is where I think almost everybody fails.

(Abjectly poised on the parameters of someone else's dictum.) (Laughter)

(In light of a more malleable discourse than that which proffers a purely intellectual interpretation, there is, quite unnoticeably, an almost utopian ground of unsought-after information—of pure specificity, so to speak.)

Can we talk about this work in terms of the idea of its having a subjective texture?

Well, we know that we can't dictate another person's subjective responses (and we're deeply disappointed about this) but I think that we're setting up a situation that allows subjective associations to *mean* without our trying to possess those associations.

There are components, but each component is allowed to be what it is, not tainted by wishful thinking.

PAINTING IS PHOTOGRAPHY

(Think of the proximity between one's faith and one's presence or the fiction of the relationship.)

WALLACE & DONOHUE

Born in New York, 1959
Hartford Art School, 1977-1981

Exhibitions

- "Group Show," Jay Gorney Modern Art, New York, N.Y., December 6, 1985-January 5, 1986.
"Paravision," Postmasters Gallery, New York, N.Y., May 3-June 2, 1985.
"Final Love," CASH/Newhouse, New York, N.Y., March 15-April 14, 1985.
"Exposed," Bedrock, Brooklyn, N.Y., July 1984.
"Cave Painting," Bedrock, Brooklyn, N.Y., July 1984.
"Turn It Over," sponsored by White Columns at the studio of Sandro Chia, New York, N.Y., October 25-November 25, 1983.
"Who's Kidding Who," 172 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y., June 1983.
"Look Where We Are," Hartford Art School Gallery, West Hartford, Conn., June 1981.

Published Works

- "The Fear of Gilbert and George," *Art & Text*, no. 20 [forthcoming].
"The Artist Disappears" (photowork), *C*, no. 7 (Fall 1985): 78-79.
"An Interview with Gary Stephan," *C*, no. 4 (Winter 1984-1985): 68-70.
"Split Analysis," *ZG*, no. 11 (Summer 1984), and *Art & Text*, no. 15 (Spring 1984): 29-30.
"Untitled" (photowork), *New Observations*, no. 20 (November 1983): 24.
"Connected by a Conjunction (Specifically Convention or Formality)," *Effects*, no. 2 (1984): 14.
"The Desert Has No Furniture," in *Turn It Over*, catalogue for an exhibition sponsored by White Columns at the studio of Sandro Chia, New York (1983).
"The Fallacy of Universals," *Effects*, no. 1 (Summer 1983): 2-4.
"The Distance from the Feeling to the Face," *ZG*, no. 8 (Fall 1982): n.p.
"Edit DeAk: An Interview by Joan Wallace and Geryl Donohue," *Real Life Magazine*, no. 8 (Spring-Summer 1982): 2-4.
"You Wish You Were Closer To You," *ZG*, no. 7 (Fall 1982): n.p.
"The Difference Between Absence and Not Being Missed," *LAICA Journal*, no. 33 (Summer 1982): 38-41.
"Ballsy Writing: By Two Girls With Balls," *White Trash Magazine* (1981): 2-3.

Works in the Exhibition

Rear Window:

Hugo Ball Hinged to a Painting, 1985, acrylic on canvas, black-and-white photograph pinned to wood frame, metal hinges, 65 x 45" and 96 x 60".
Give Head, 1983, oil on canvas, 72 x 60".

Stairwell and Lower Level:

Go, 1983, oil on canvas, rearview mirror, 68 x 56".
Time Fuck, 1985, triptych of black-and-white photographs (each 60 x 40"), pinned to wood frame, 66 x 131".
Painting Is Photography, 1986, latex on canvas, stainless steel swimming pool ladder, 72 x 60 x 30".
Institution of Green, 1983, oil on canvas, 68 x 56".