

MEMORY

at C Space
81 Leonard
New York City

curated by
Marcia Tucker
and The New Museum

INTRODUCTION

This C Space Memory project is the first exhibition to be curated under the auspices of The New Museum. The New Museum, begun in January, 1977, is a not-for-profit organization formed to exhibit work and disseminate information about art and artists from 1970 on.

We intend to show works of art which have not yet gained public visibility or acceptance and to present them within a critical and scholarly context.

The New Museum's first priority is to focus on living artists and the work they make; to this end, we are providing information about lesser-known artists on a national level. We intend to move from our present office to a temporary exhibition and office space by the end of the year.

THE NEW MUSEUM

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Contributions are tax-deductible

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MEMORY

Memory is common to us all. It can be considered, if not completely understood, in scientific, psychological, or poetic terms, but it is our primary means of understanding ourselves, sorting information, and sharing our lives with others.

Every work of art addresses the subject of memory either directly or by alluding to it in some way. The title of this series of exhibitions is applicable to a wider variety of work, but the eight artists in this portion of the exhibition were selected because of an intuitive, rather than specific, relationship to the subject. The work ranges from drawings which address intensely psychological aspects of recalled experience, to paintings which deal with elusive, poetic visual phenomena--analogous to the fleeting sparks of remembered images.

For Brenda Goodman, memory is narration, translating private events into readable, intimate notations. Her work is figurative; it utilizes a vocabulary of organic forms which are the visual equivalents of specific events and exchanges between people. These organic shapes are located on the page in an illusionistically depicted space which stands for the real space of the original event. In her drawings, Goodman delineates not just the actual events but the emotional and physically sensate states which accompany the reconstruction of the events. Her work is always specific; the edges of her drawings contain notes, times, dates, names--personal, diaristic reminders, like psychological shopping lists--which locate the events.

Martin Silverman's eccentric, evocative clay figures, ambiguously situated in relation to their surroundings, also seem to refer to the memories of situations or tensions between people. The moment of encounter or dislocation is frozen, but its edges are softened by distance. Like Giacometti's figures, Silverman's remain at the same distance from us no matter how physically close or far away from them we are. Like memories, they seem to exist neither in real time nor actual space, but are pervasive. Small in size, firmly rooted by gravity, and modelled in a fashion reminiscent of 1930's WPA bas-reliefs, these mysterious and poignant figures have a primordial silence and timelessness about them.

Earl Ripling is the only artist in this group to use a photographic image. His pieces are sequential, concerned

in a humorous and yet formal way with spatial memory; spatial perception, intrinsic to the work, is dependent upon the artist's manipulation, rather than upon the viewer. In these serial pieces, images appear and disappear, because they are examined from a different vantage point each time. The author of the images, photographing himself as subject, looks at parts of his body--usually his feet--so that occurrences are revealed through changing points of view. This is akin to the memory process; the memory of an event changes according to the perspective from which one recalls it.

Katherine Sokolnikoff's small structures are drawn specifically from a store of archeological forms. The houses, granaries, funerary monuments and temples of Africa, ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Greece are used by Sokolnikoff not as representations of the original forms, but as prototypes for sculptural interpretation. The pieces themselves, in part due to miniaturization, are non-functional, poetic evocations of other cultures and periods of history. They are intimate, structurally complete, and minutely detailed, but their surfaces retain the touch of the hand and the generalized, absorptive light which reminds us of an entire landscape. The condensation of large, functional forms into compact, tiny ones is analogous, in one sense, to the condensation of time required in the act of remembering.

Ronald Morosan's small, vulnerable wall pieces and the larger, but no less enigmatic "tables" are occasionally suggestive of archaic structures, but they have an aura of dark magic about them; the memories involved (traces of former physical activity) are confounded by the disappearance and re-emergence of parts in a new configuration. Although the sculptures themselves are non-illusionistic, even deadpan in their awkward vulnerability, an atmosphere of occult, mysterious ritual and game playing can also be felt. Relationships appear that do not make sense, except in the way that memory, from time to time, orders events that could not otherwise be ordered--that is, by collapsing and reordering them sequentially. Here, perhaps, the possibility is that memory exists as the White Queen in Alice in Wonderland suggested, both backward and forward; any moment in a sequence has its antecedent and successor, so that the memory of a moment might be not only the reconstruction of past events but the intimation of future ones as well.

Kent Hines' rice paper wall pieces also involve metamorphosis and transformation--that is, the elusive moment. Here, the

focus is on the quality of changing light, the embodiment of the fleeting instant, the shadow of a gesture. They capture the moment between light and shadow, movement and stillness, when a form (or an event) is perceived rather than actually seen. In one way, the quality of Hines' work expresses the sensation of deja-vu, of particularized physical memory which, at the moment of its recapture, becomes fragile, weightless and transient.

Another way of remembering, more evolutionary in nature and concerned not with the transient moment but with change itself, is found in Steve Gwon's exquisitely precise serial drawings, which are presented either in book form (that is, one at a time, as pages to be turned) or on the wall in linear fashion, to be "read" from left to right. Because the evolution of form from drawing to drawing is slight, imperceptible except over a considerable number of drawings, visual or eidetic memory is necessary to apprehend a series. One must remember in order to understand both the preceding images as well as to anticipate the subsequent ones. In this sense, Gwon's drawings, although non-objective, are narrative, since they involve the evolution of an event in time and space.

The most abstract paintings of the group are those of Sarah Canright. Consisting of one or two linear marks on a near colorless ground, they are visually elusive. The ground appears as an area of luminosity upon which lines seem to emerge from the depths of the paint and, at the same time, appear to have emerged as negative spaces not covered by the field. Because the work appears to be straightforward, even simple, we take for granted our mental ability to retain the painted image when the painting is out of sight. What remains in the mind, however, is not a gestalt, but a delicate atmosphere of remembered feeling which is in tension with the seeming logic and clarity of first impression.

Memory is at once selective and all-embracing; we are the inheritors both of personal, individual memories and collective, archetypal ones. We carry our lives with us because we remember events, people, feelings, relationships, places. We transmit them in an attempt to share ourselves--as we were, as we are, as we might become--with others. Each artist in the exhibition transforms this aspect of the human organism into a language for the eyes.

Marcia Tucker

