

A LABOR *of* LOVE

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Symposia

Distinctions and Beyond

Monday, January 29

American Craft Museum

Tied to Tradition

Thursday, February 1

The New Museum
of Contemporary Art

The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York

A LABOR *of* LOVE

An exhibition organized by Marcia Tucker
January 20–April 14, 1996

A Labor of Love

Organized by Marcia Tucker

Coordinated by Fernando Barenblit, Meg Linton, and Isabel Venero

The New Museum of Contemporary Art

January 20 - April 14, 1996

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A LABOR *of* LOVE

“Can this be love?...”

At a curatorial meeting in the mid eighties, Bill Olander, then The New Museum’s Senior Curator, mentioned that he’d love to do “a craft show” one day. We all knew he hardly meant a traditional exhibition of crafts, but what he might have meant—the show he might have done—was forestalled by his death in 1989. Bill was prescient in so many ways: only years later did I begin to focus specifically on issues of crafts and “high” art, questioning the boundaries that had kept them, along with “folk” and “outsider” art, separate from the field of contemporary art at large.

For some years now in my public lectures on contemporary art, I’ve introduced the thorny issue of “quality” by explaining what I think Americans as a whole consider important in works of art. Usually the explanation accompanies a slide of a 1972 Richard Tuttle piece consisting of a two-inch piece of rope attached to the wall horizontally by a small nail. More recently I’ve added, by way of comparison, a slide of Jeff Koons’ *Puppy*, 1993, a thirty-three foot high shaggy dog made of live flowers. The scenario goes something like this:

Art is generally valued by the American public according to three standards. The first question asked is “How long did it take to make that?” If the answer is “A very, very long time,” that’s good. If the answer is four minutes—or worse, four seconds—you’re in trouble. The second factor is size—the larger the better, the best being nothing short of monumental. If, alas, it’s neither of these, then ideally the artwork should be made of precious materials (gold or jewels will do nicely) to have any validity at all.

This view of things usually gets a laugh, because the audience recognizes that (a) it’s true, and (b) it doesn’t make much sense as a measure of what constitutes “art.” (To find out what does, of course, is part of the reason they came in the first place.)

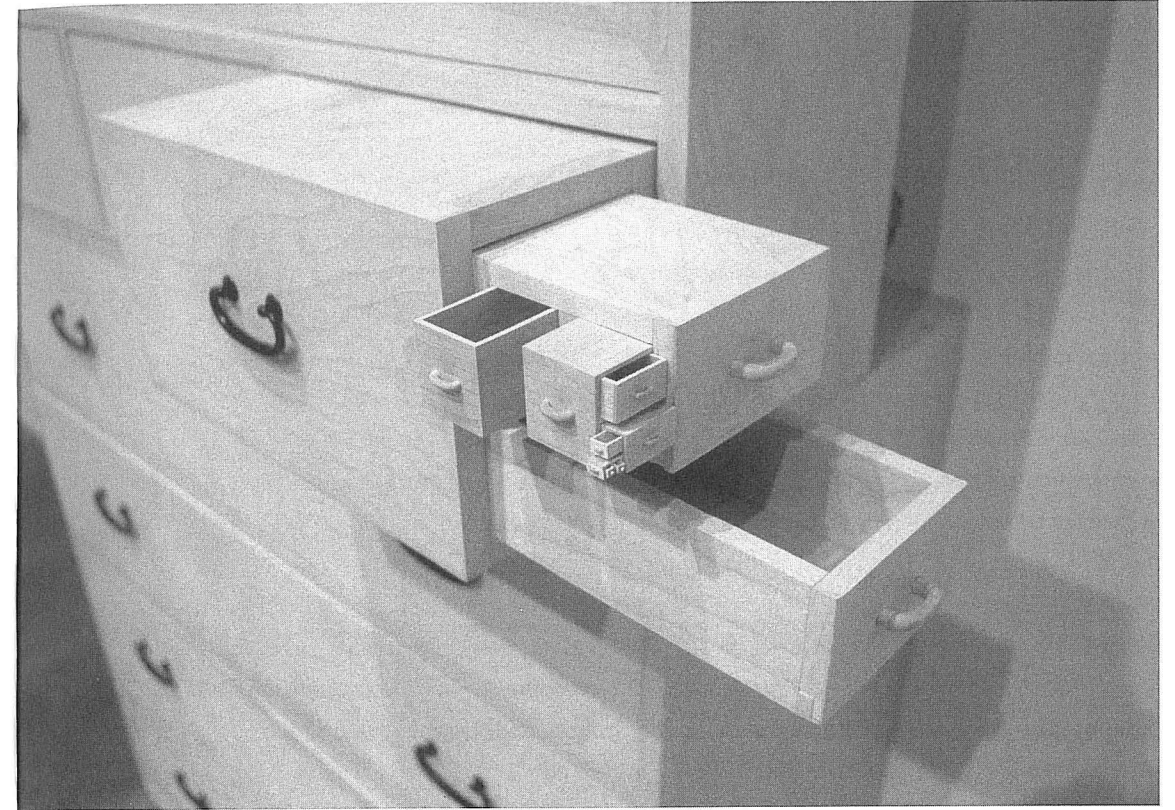
Recently, while talking to Liza Lou, one of the artists in this exhibition, I realized that *A Labor of Love* was in part an outgrowth of thinking further about the peculiarities of the scenario I had created. I had begun to ask what was on the other side of my setup: what happens when a work of art does, indeed, take a very long time to make, is large, and/or uses precious materials? Does this mean that it’s *not* good? Or that it was created with the aesthetic preferences of a potential audience in mind, and may thus be crassly commercial in nature? What exactly would this kind of an artwork look like? At that moment, sitting in Liza’s studio, it occurred to me that her project, a twelve-foot by twelve-foot beaded kitchen that’s taken her over five years to make, was the answer. It’s exactly what such a work *does* look like—in fact, it’s not just exemplary, it’s a monster paradigm. The creation of the “kitchen” was hardly market-driven—to the contrary, as large and labor intensive as it is, it’s virtually impossible to sell it for a price that would reflect even a modest hourly wage for the artist. As to whether or not the work is “good,” it’s a moot point for me, since I could barely tear my eyes away from it, even after an hour or so of looking.

Despite the work of some breakthrough artists who’ve been fudging such categories for years, the worlds of craft, folk and outsider art have been kept apart (and not arbitrarily, either) from the world of high art in a number of ways. For one thing, the general public thinks of them as popular forms of artmaking—by comparison to conceptual art, or nonobjective painting, for example—because the works are easier to appreciate, or because you don’t necessarily have to go to art school to learn or practice them, or because they’re cheaper to buy than, say, the average Picasso or Lichtenstein. Contemporary popular arts—television, movies, raves, rap and other forms of music, romance novels, even spectator sports—are enjoyed and appreciated in American society, but only rarely have they been thought of as an important part of our future

cultural heritage. (The newly opened Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, resplendent in its new \$92 million I.M. Pei building, may yet put the lie to this observation.) High art forms, on the other hand, while considered indispensable to civilization, are rarely popular.¹

Anything the fine arts experts don't consider fine art, nevertheless, is inevitably deemed suitable for appropriation by it. (This occurs despite the fact that the appropriated work may itself be the result of styles, skills and methods that have been borrowed, recouped and/or adapted from still other forms of artmaking.) The Museum of Modern Art's *High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (1990) was a large-scale exploration of some of these issues, in which the two categories were described by one essayist as "perennial alter egos, which at times interact directly. High and low art, like Beauty and the Beast, go hand in hand."² In the words of the exhibition's organizers, "high needs low, as Lear needs his Fool,"³ although it's always clear which one is boss. Conceptually, then, the exhibition was scored by heavy vertical lines of influence and authority.

Horizontal lines, on the other hand, were literally drawn on the labels of the outsider works in Maurice Tuchman and Carol Eliel's *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1992) in order to show, ostensibly, that they were separate but equal to the fine arts pieces, much the same way Jean Lipman's 1975 book *Provocative Parallels* did with folk art—juxtaposing a Shaker pine chest with Richard Artschwager's *Chest of Drawers*, or comparing the superimposed acrylic washes in a Paul Jenkins painting with the surface of an 1830 glazed redware jar.⁴ *The Parallel Visions* exhibition went back to an older, European view of what "outsider" art is, namely the art of the "insane," those institutionalized artists who are so out of it that they are completely unaware not only of art worlds but of culture in general.⁵ (A trained contemporary artist who has been hospitalized for mental illness wouldn't be classified as "outsider," because he or she presumably carries the history of art and culture into the psychiatric ward.) Like the thesis of

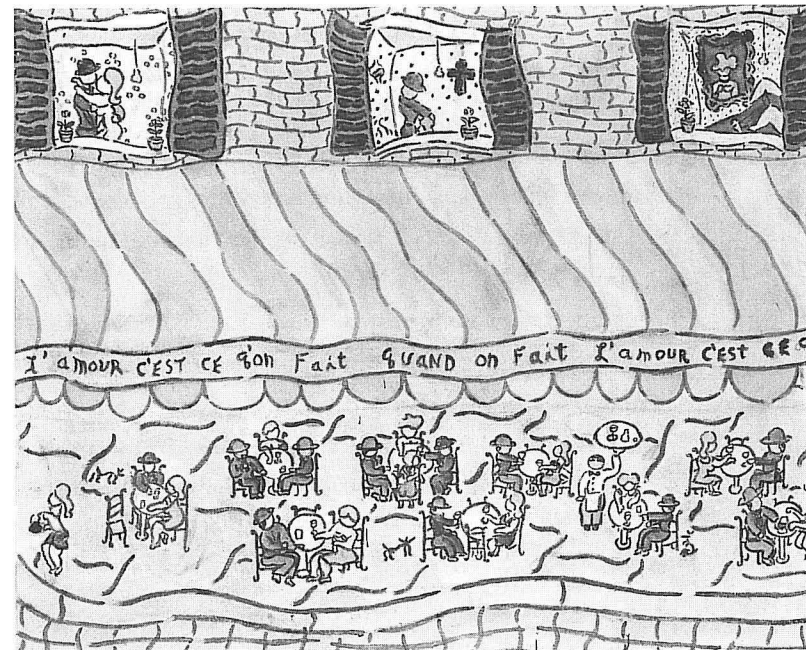


Kazumi Tanaka *The Chocolate Boot*, detail, 1994-95
Wood, stone, string, chocolate. Dresser: 77 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 41 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
Courtesy Kent Gallery, New York

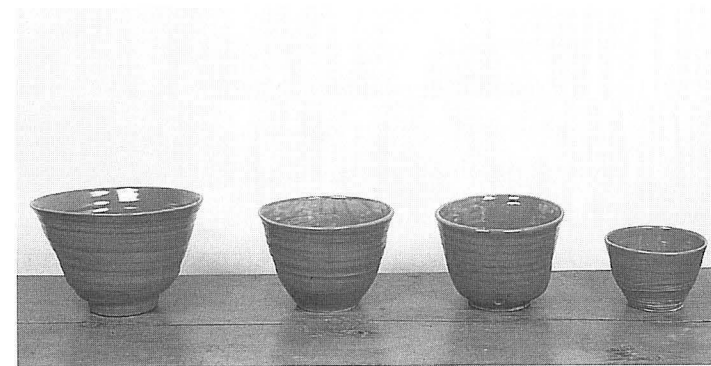
High and Low, the “separate but equal” paradigm of *Parallel Visions* only serves to point out the ways in which insider and outsider are separate and unequal in the eyes of the exhibition’s organizers.

While the exhibition *A World of Their Own* at the Newark Museum in 1994 was perfectly straightforward—all folk artists—the lines of influence and ownership at the symposium organized in conjunction with it were tangled.⁶ There seemed to be a consensus among the panelists that the artists didn’t talk—whether they couldn’t or they refused to wasn’t clear—and the curators and critics were best able to speak *for* them. Rarely are contemporary artists in the fine arts arena referred to as unworlly, naïve, or incapable of knowing what’s best for themselves. But at the Newark symposium, as in other situations where folk artists were discussed, most specialists portrayed the artists as unaware of what was going on, “innocent” and “childlike,” stating that they “cared only about making the work,” and that they “didn’t really understand the value of money.” A troubling sense of proprietorship, a kind of Great White Hunter syndrome, permeated the air. Here, the curator/explorer ventures into uncharted territory, “discovers” the work, and thus becomes the only one qualified to advise the artist, protect the pieces and/or environments from the ravaging hordes waiting to buy/destroy them, and to decide whether, how and where to finally share the work with the world. More recently people in the field have tried to upgrade the status of the folk artist by using the term “self-taught.” However, this is hardly a helpful or definitive category since so many of today’s successful, high-profile artists avoided art school like the plague. And changing the terminology hasn’t altered the patronizing and self-congratulatory tone of the “experts” at all.

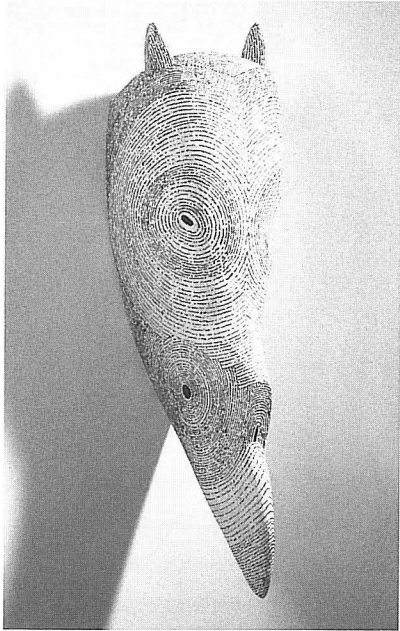
Craft artists seem to have suffered a similar, although not identical, fate. In the fine art hierarchy of value their work too is thought of as old-fashioned, of a lesser order, hobby-related, or simply as emphasizing form at the expense of content. Throughout the 1980s, there were many attempts by the crafts world to reposition itself more centrally within the context and history of the fine arts, but efforts to meld content



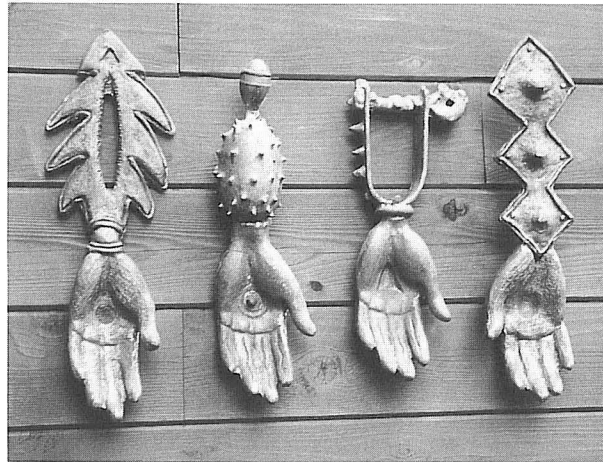
William Copley (Cply) *L'amour c'est ce q'on fait*, 1993
Acrylic on linen, 52 x 64"
Courtesy Nolan/Eckman, New York



Mary Heilmann *Four Bowls*, 1981
Ceramic, 8 - 4½" high
Courtesy Michael Klein Gallery, New York



Robert Brady Untitled Mask, 1988
Stoneware, glaze, 35 x 9 x 11"
Collection Stephen and Pamela Hootkin,
New York



Indira Freitas Johnson Handwork, 1995
Cast iron, 17 x 22 x 3½"
Courtesy of the artist

and use-value ultimately were unconvincing to others. Only recently have similar attempts been undertaken by the fine arts, but here the crafts are presented as historical (that is, “old”) or non-Western (read “exotic”). Most of these shows seem confined to the decorative arts or, at best, organized and presented in historical or anthropological museum exhibitions such as the thoughtful and appealing installations mounted by the *Musée Nationale des Arts et Traditions Populaires* in Paris.

One reason that crafts, decorative arts and folk art are seen as outside the high art tradition is because non-artists don’t have the same kind of respect for things that we could make ourselves (or *think* we could, given enough time, patience, and money!). Still hanging in the closet is a hand-me-down of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Romanticism, the notion that artists must be better, smarter, on a higher plane and closer to The Truth than mere mortals. To complicate the problem, while folk processes are about what one musicologist calls “the ordinary and basic modes of human creativity,”⁷ folklorists themselves have contradictory views of the meaning and importance of these modes. On the one hand, they insist that all denigrated forms should be paid attention to, thus practicing, at least theoretically, a kind of egalitarianism. On the other hand, folklorists as a group tend to see themselves as cultural arbiters and salvationists, picking from among these denigrated forms those they feel are most important. In the folk music world, for instance, an inherently democratic recognition of the accomplishments of “ordinary” people is undercut by the folklorists’ insistence that only special geniuses—discovered by them—can express true creativity.⁸ This is a curious state of affairs, since it’s clear that if one admits that “great” works of art can also be done by regular guys, what does it say about the geniuses?

A Labor of Love was inspired by the fact that some of the most interesting work that I’ve seen recently has tackled these issues in fascinating ways. Although I’ve chosen to focus for the most part on work which is likely to be unfamiliar to The New Museum’s usual audience, as well as to folk and craft aficionados, the armature for the exhibition



Chelo (Consuelo) Gonzalez Amezcua *Armour; Winged Horse*, 1975
Ink on matboard, 13½ x 10½"
Courtesy Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York

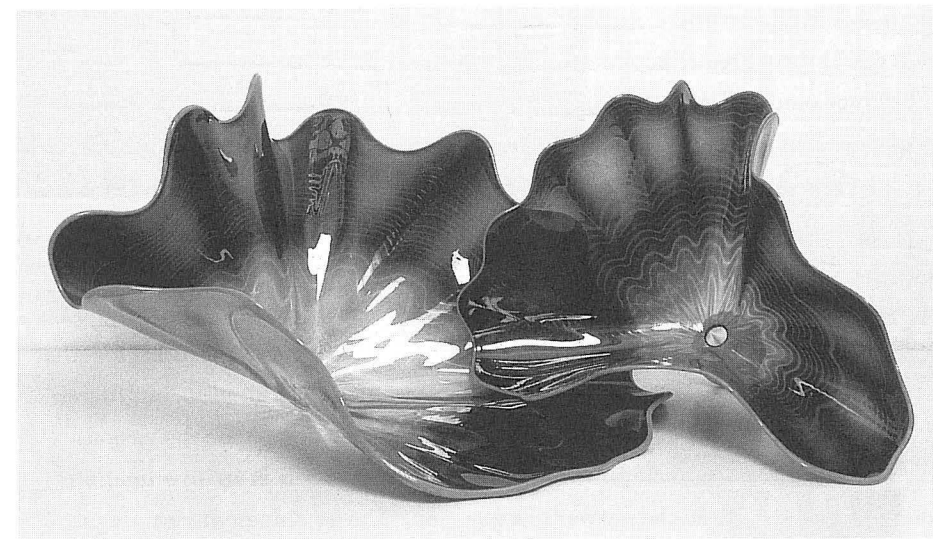
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was built by many artists who are its forbearers, and while not included, have been crossing back and forth over this Great Divide for some time. For example, Viola Frey, Ken Price and Adrian Saxe come immediately to mind as having used crafts traditions in ways that share aesthetic concerns with the fine arts. Tina Girouard, Jimmie Durham, Rafael Ferrer, Amalia Mesa-Bains, Martin Puryear and David Hammons have for many years used both folk idioms and craft materials to turn their respective cultural traditions into living artistic processes rather than art historical products.

In the early 1970s, Harmony Hammond, Faith Wilding, Miriam Schapiro and many other feminist artists were first to recoup skills denigrated as “female” by mainstream artworlds; Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* also raised important questions about the nature and responsibility of collaborative efforts in the employ of feminist practice.

Others, such as Bettye Saar and Howardena Pindell, fused craft and fine arts idioms as a political gesture throughout the late 1960s and the decade of the seventies, a gesture which went largely unrecognized until recently. Men such as Lucas Samaras, Jim Isermann, Mike Kelley and Jeffry Mitchell have also used traditionally female, detailed crafts like sewing, stitchery, knitting or crocheting in their work, further complicating the debates.

In terms of abstraction, the powerful formal languages of William Edmington, Thornton Dial, and Lonnie Holley have forced the consideration of their work side by side with that of their “trained” peers. The contributions of younger artists such as Terry Adkins, Manuel Ocampo, and Kerry James Marshall, whose work derives from folk or craft idioms, have broken new ground as well. And Ann Hamilton, who



Dale Chihuly *Colbalt Seaforms with Red Lip Wraps*, 1994
Glass, 16 x 34 x 30"
Courtesy Charles Cowles Gallery, New York

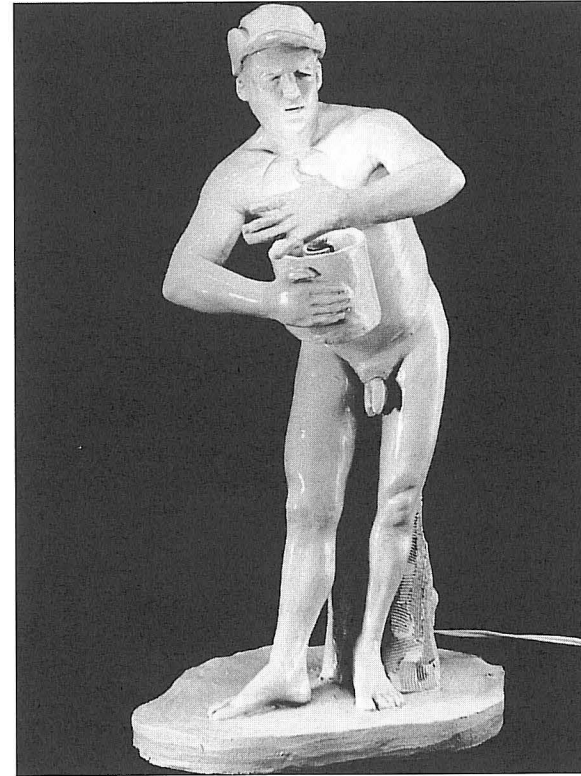
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articulates complex concerns by invoking intersections of handcraft, temporality, memory and site in monumental and poetic installations, has set a new standard for the term “labor intensive.”

Taken as a whole, the work in the exhibition builds on these foundations and raises larger questions about the role of art in society, a pressing concern in the light of the fact that what were once debates over government support of the arts have now become punitive measures to limit its production and dissemination. *A Labor of Love* is the most recent foray into what for me is a long-term investigation of the ways in which art and daily life—from the mundane to the profound—are inextricably interwoven. The separation and hierarchization of categories of artmaking corresponds to those divisions found in all aspects of contemporary American life, affecting the way we think about everything from artistic “quality” to the verdict in the O.J. Simpson case. The exhibition features work which melds process and product, sensuous appeal and critical content, tradition and innovation with a specific end in mind: it destabilizes artistic boundaries in order to reflect, comment on, and critique other kinds of boundaries in the lived world of social relations. Issues of quality are issues of power; at any given time, there are reasons that some expressive forms are supported while others are marginalized. For me, the most interesting and significant activities are usually found at the edges rather than at the center of artistic discourse.

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A Labor of Love is also an attempt to organize a group show—that much maligned form in today’s art world—which goes beyond putting disparate works of art together under a subject heading. There are many ways to organize an exhibition, but there’s no one “right” way to answer the questions, resolve the debates, please the various factions and include *all* the relevant work. The exhibition itself is an investigation and an inquiry, rather than the answer to a question. The accompanying catalogue isn’t meant to be didactic or definitive, but an essay in the real sense of the word—an attempt to understand a complex field, and a process in and of itself.



Pier Consagra Ceramic figure with bulb, 1994
Ceramic, 17 x 13 x 9"
Courtesy of the artist



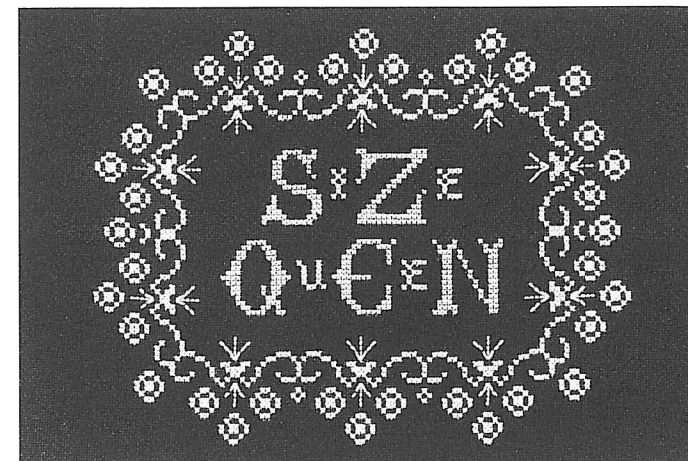
Charles LeDray Untitled, 1995
Fabric, thread, plastic, paint, wood, wire,
gold-plated brass buttons, 20¼ x 12¾ x 4"
Collection Kim and John Knight,
Larkspur, California

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Why include so many artists, making it impossible to discuss them individually, rather than narrowing the selection to a few quintessential examples? Because the terrain I've chosen to navigate is so rich and so variegated, it requires an equally diverse selection of work to represent it. Even so, what I've been able to explore in the show and the catalogue is just the tip of the iceberg, and it's certainly conditioned (and limited) by the fact that my own background is in the fine arts rather than crafts or folk art.

The exhibition focuses only on work made in the United States. The extraordinary political and economic transitions that are taking place in America at the present time have made the arts crucially important as a locus of independent, even oppositional, thought and expression, particularly in the light of the harsh and sometimes repressive criticism they've been subject to. I can only hope that by starting with a local exploration, some headway toward a broader perspective might be set in motion.

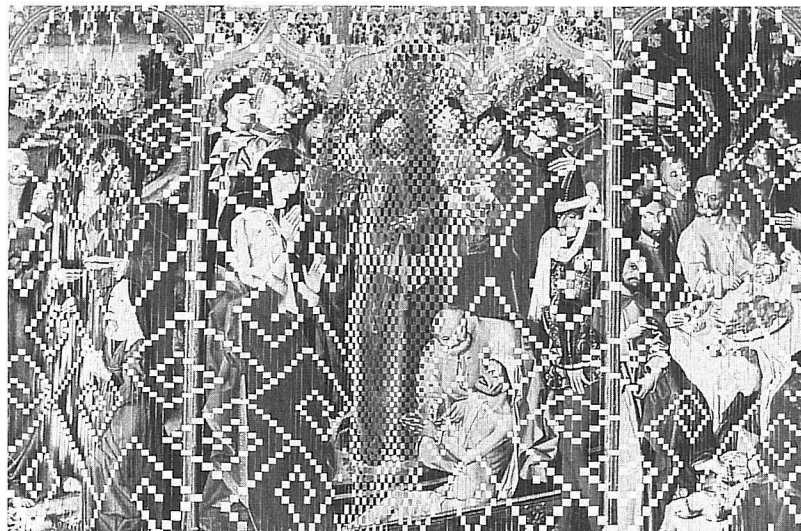
At present, it's not just art with difficult subject matter, overt sexual or political content, or work which is conceptual or nonobjective that bites the hand that feeds it. In the practice of art, setting the so-called avant-garde against the traditional creates a false polarization. Traditional-looking work that is highly "aesthetic," that's extremely pleasurable to look at and that has its origins in humble and quotidian practices, is also produced by rebels—feminists, gays and lesbians, and American artists from a wide variety of communities and backgrounds, intellectuals and non-intellectuals alike. The very work which is considered apolitical, that has no overt subject matter or polemical bent, also bites. And does so with no warning bark. Why and how it does so is the subject of this essay.



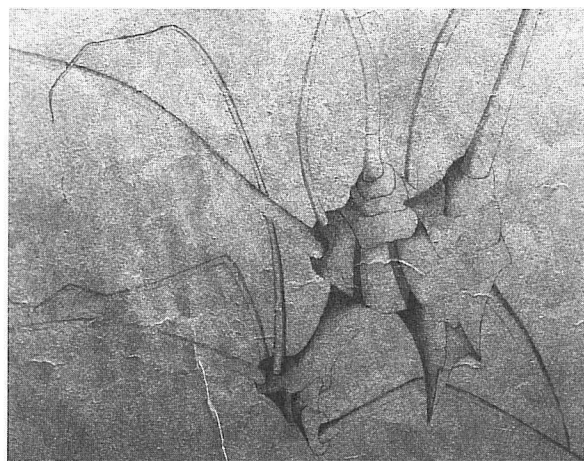
Richard Rule *Sampler Self-Portrait No. 2*, 1995
Cross-stitch on cotton, 6½ x 8½"
Courtesy of the artist

"Turn back the hands of time..."

As I began writing, the papers were full of news and speculation about the latest demands of the "Unabomber," the sender of lethal explosive packages which have killed three and maimed twenty-eight academics, students, airline executives and workers, and several "accidental" victims since 1978. The Unabomber claims his vendetta is against the evils of a postmodern, technological world. He advocates "revolution against the industrial system and a return to wild nature," insisting that his agenda is "strictly anti-Communist, anti-socialist, anti-leftist" but at the same time "apolitical."⁹ With his fellow neo-Luddites,¹⁰ he blames technology for the loss of individuality, alienation from nature, and the dissipation of old-fashioned values that he feels result from the use of computers, the field of genetic engineering, and other forms of "advanced" technology.



Dinh Q. Lê *Self-Portrait after N. Froment, Raising of Lazarus*, 1991
C-prints, tapes, 40 x 60"
Courtesy of the artist



Willie Wayne Young *Untitled (WY 012)*, detail, 1979
Pencil on brown paper, 29 x 23"
Courtesy Ricco/Maresca Gallery, New York

As the millennium approaches, individuals like the Unabomber, antigovernment terrorist cells like that of Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, as well as assorted militias, anti-abortion rings, and white supremacist groups, operating out of a variety of motives, seem determined to turn back the clock to a time when the West was wild, women were tame, men were manly, and the good guys were always white.

"I believe in yesterday..."

These kinds of longing also characterized the previous turn of the century, which was in no less a state of flux and uncertainty than our own times—hardly the “good old days.” To the contrary, a veritable *tsunami* of change and upheaval followed in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. As folklorist and historian of material culture Eugene Metcalf has observed, the nineteenth-century desire for a so-called return (or, more accurately, “retreat”) to the past resulted from the fact that the present had become increasingly uncomfortable; what’s more, it was hardly the “real” past that people were nostalgic for, but a greatly simplified and romanticized view of it.¹¹

The profound changes resulting from the mechanization and industrialization that shook nineteenth-century society included the growth of cities and the transition from a rural to an urban economy; demographic shifts;¹² new waves of immigration; and alterations in labor practices, family structures, and religious customs, to name just a few. A new class of citizens emerged who were able to purchase services rather than trading them, thus freeing up time to engage in newly created, commercialized leisure activities.¹³ Individual achievement, largely measured by wealth, was promoted at the expense of cooperative values.

In the 1880s, five and a half million people of foreign birth lived in the United States, creating a labor surplus which pitted Irish, German, Southern and Eastern European immigrants against each other; white schoolboys attacked Chinese miners, Italians

fought Jews, Jews resented blacks and blacks resented Latinos. Women and children worked long hours in mills and factories; immigrant children were bought and sold into contract slavery; striking workers and police battled savagely.¹⁴ As a result, one of the main roles of public education was to foster unity and to create a sense of Americanism; this was accomplished through required history classes which established a sense of the patriotic in children at an early age.¹⁵

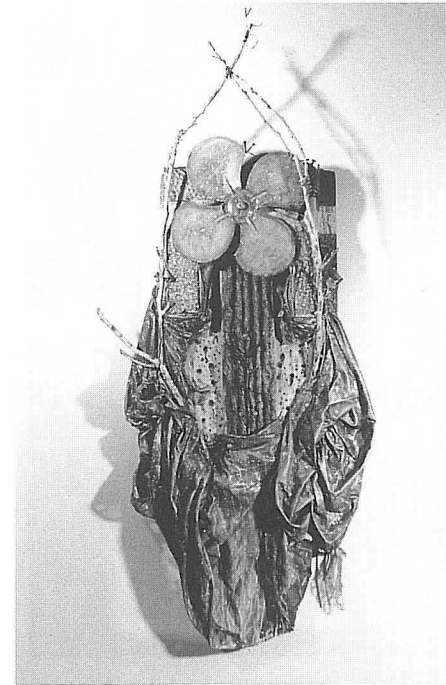
Accompanying the desire for a national identity was a revival of handicrafts among artists, and widespread public enthusiasm for American folk art and craft, a result of what Metcalf cites as Americans' struggle "to develop new conventions to accommodate modern experience, and new symbols to mark and contain not only new categories of meaning but bygone ones too."¹⁶ Craft and folk art were important precisely because they seemed to relate to a pre-modern period, to a world which was *not* new.¹⁷

"I'll build a stairway to paradise..."

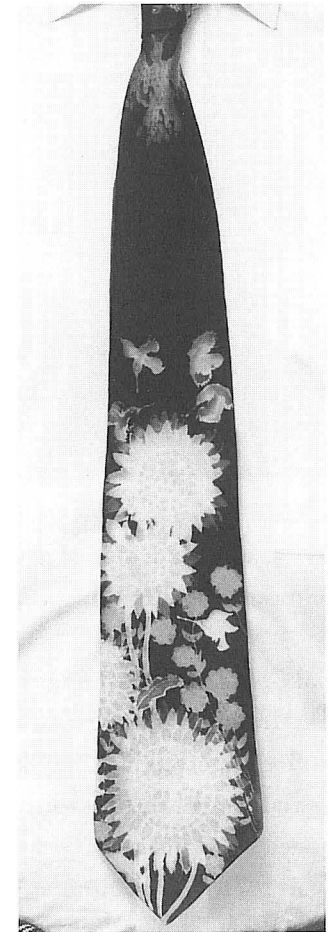
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The Arts and Crafts movement was the locus of this handicraft revival, which was not so much a cohesive social movement as it was a broad polemical ground on which a variety of ideological debates were played out.¹⁸ Deeply antimodern, anti-intellectual and conservative, the crafts revival tended to idealize manual labor and the work ethic and to see in them the possibility of self-renewal and regeneration, what historian T. J. Jackson Lears calls a "therapeutic" view of the artisanal.¹⁹ At the same time, handicraft was also seen as a revolt against the American work ethic, reflecting the overall social and cultural confusion of the time.

As the British historian Roszika Parker describes it, "the division of art forms into a hierarchic classification of arts and crafts is usually ascribed to factors of class within the economic system, separating artist from artisan. The fine arts—painting and sculpture—are considered the proper sphere of the privileged classes while craft or



Kevin B. Sampson *The God Puddle*, 1994
Cloth, wood, metal, oils, stains, dyes, ink, 41 x 30"
Courtesy Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York



Oliver Herring *Untitled*, 1992-95,
Hand-painted silk ties
Approximately 2' long when worn, 3½" wide
Courtesy of the artist and Max Protetch Gallery,
New York

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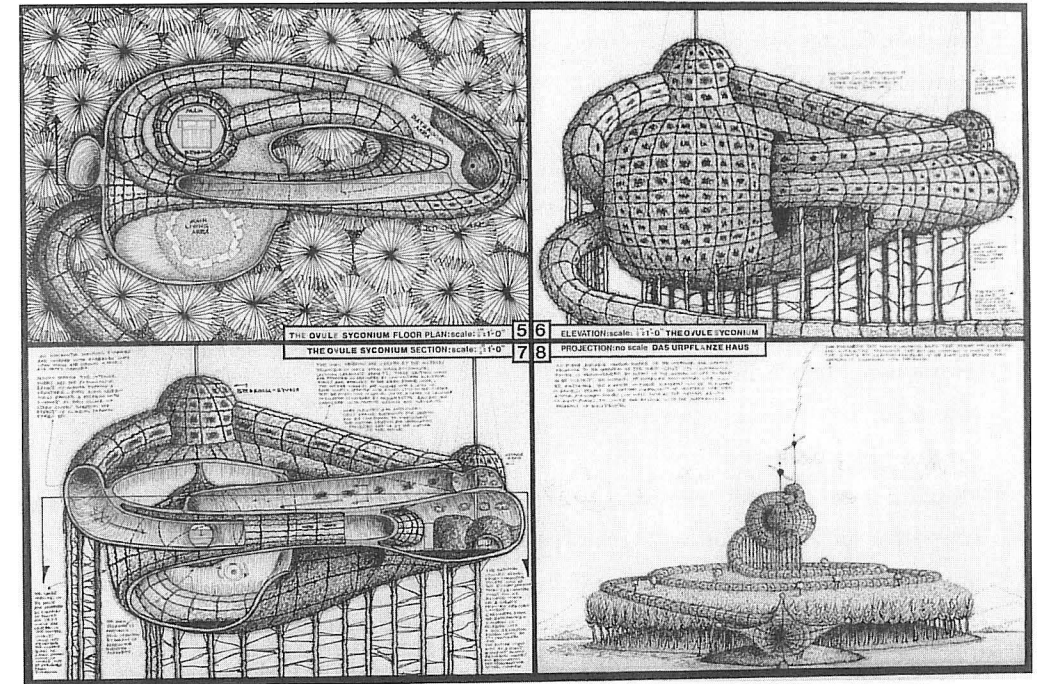


Nöle Giuliani Untitled (Mickey Mouse Organ), 1994
Kombucha fungus, myrrh resin, thread, sandarac resin, 7 x 8 x 8"
Courtesy of the artist and Paule Anglim Gallery, San Francisco

the applied arts...are associated with the working class.”²⁰ Thus the Arts and Crafts movement, first in Europe and later in America, had a socialist agenda, equating craftsmen with the working class and attempting to recognize and to elevate them in the public eye. But the term “working class” was hardly praise in the premier era of upward mobility. (Even today, as David Pye points out, “‘workmanlike’ is a laudatory word and ‘workmanship’ is at least neutral, while the word ‘workman’ tends to be used as though it meant the same thing as ‘labourer.’”²¹)

22

The Arts and Crafts movement originated in England under the leadership of the art critic John Ruskin and the artist and writer William Morris as a revival of medieval art forms, techniques, and skills which they advanced as a panacea for the ills of industrial capitalism. In a spirit of communitarian idealism typical of the time, Ruskin founded the Guild of St. George, the period’s first utopian pre-industrial community, in 1871.²² His enthusiasm for Gothic design, paired with an emphasis on simplicity and function, became a stylistic cornerstone for the Pre-Raphaelite and Art Nouveau movements, and even inspired Frank Lloyd Wright, who also believed that the fine and the minor arts were inseparable.²³ William Morris, taking Ruskin’s concern with “good” decoration, tradition, and the dignity of the craftsman to another



Paul Laffoley *Das Urpflanze Haus II*, 5, 6, 7, 8, 1983-1995, Architectural proposal
India ink on acid-free board, 29 7/8 x 37 1/8"
Courtesy of the artist and Kent Gallery, New York

level altogether, devoted much of his life to worker’s rights. Morris hoped that eliminating the division of labor between workman and intellectual would result in a social utopia and, in his words, “art made by the people and for the people, a joy to the maker and the user.”²⁴

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The first major Arts and Crafts exhibition in America, held in Boston in April of 1897, was a hit. In America, however, Arts and Crafts revivalism was less a matter of social reform than a clever marketing strategy. Although the movement initially spread to the United States through the intelligentsia—its chief proselytizer being Ruskin’s friend, the art critic Charles Eliot Norton—it was a furniture manufacturer and

designer, Gustav Stickley, who moved things along from theory to practice. While positioning his elegantly severe furniture on the high moral ground of communitarian and utopian ideals, Stickley also made it commercially viable through mass production. Through his magazine, *The Craftsman*, Stickley reached a large number of middle class consumers and shaped the taste of millions, effectively becoming the Martha Stewart of his time. But in America the utopian and reformist ideas of the Arts and Crafts movement were lost in the shuffle of making bucks.

At the same time, a disproportionate number of whiners and moaners *kvetched* constantly and publicly about the decline of the family, women's rights (pro and con), the growing numbers of immigrants and socialists, and the dangers of "race suicide," all smothered in a thick porridge of domestic idealism.²⁵ Individual welfare was stressed at the expense of broad social reform. The belief in the inevitability of progress and the reassertion of bourgeois values were accompanied by a search for "authenticity" and the revival of mystic and transcendental beliefs. The result was a pervasive spiritual escapism in which twin concepts of selfhood and irresponsibility tiptoed off into the woods hand in hand—narcissism bedding down with a "higher" power, be it God or one's personal astrologer, who was privileged to make all individual decisions in the social realm.

"I can't get no satisfaction..."

Does all this sound familiar? Along with the Unabomber and rightist terror tactics, the millennium has brought to the forefront a singularly unimaginative but loud chorus of woe. Racist, misogynous, homophobic radio talk programs, TV tell-all shows, and the proliferation of twelve-step programs and self-help books are only the superficial manifestations of a spiritual crisis. Many of the previous *fin de siècle's* rallying cries parallel our own era's complaints against "big government," affirmative action, women's reproductive rights, "lax" immigration laws and taxpayer support of



Richard T. Notkin *Pyramidal Skull Teapot: Military Intelligence I*, 1989
Stoneware clay, luster, 6 x 9¼ x 7"
Collection Stephen and Pamela Hootkin, New York

the arts. There's a mad scramble on the right to return to "basics"—to the land, to so-called family values, and to the traditional Western core curriculum of writers and thinkers.

This is not to mention the outspoken insistence on the part of many government officials and candidates that the only valid art is an art that we can all understand—one which doesn't disgust and offend the American public with what former Secretary of Education William Bennett calls its "homosexual and lesbian self-celebration; Marxism; neo-Marxism; radical feminism and multiculturalism; deconstructionism; and various manifestations of political correctness."²⁶ According to Republican presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan, "culture is the Ho Chi Minh trail of power; you surrender that province and you lose America."²⁷ The crisis of cultural authority



Chuck Genco *Influence Generator/Transmuter*, 1987-92
Oak, brass, glass, computer, electrical and mechanical parts, 50 x 31 x 78"
Courtesy of the artist

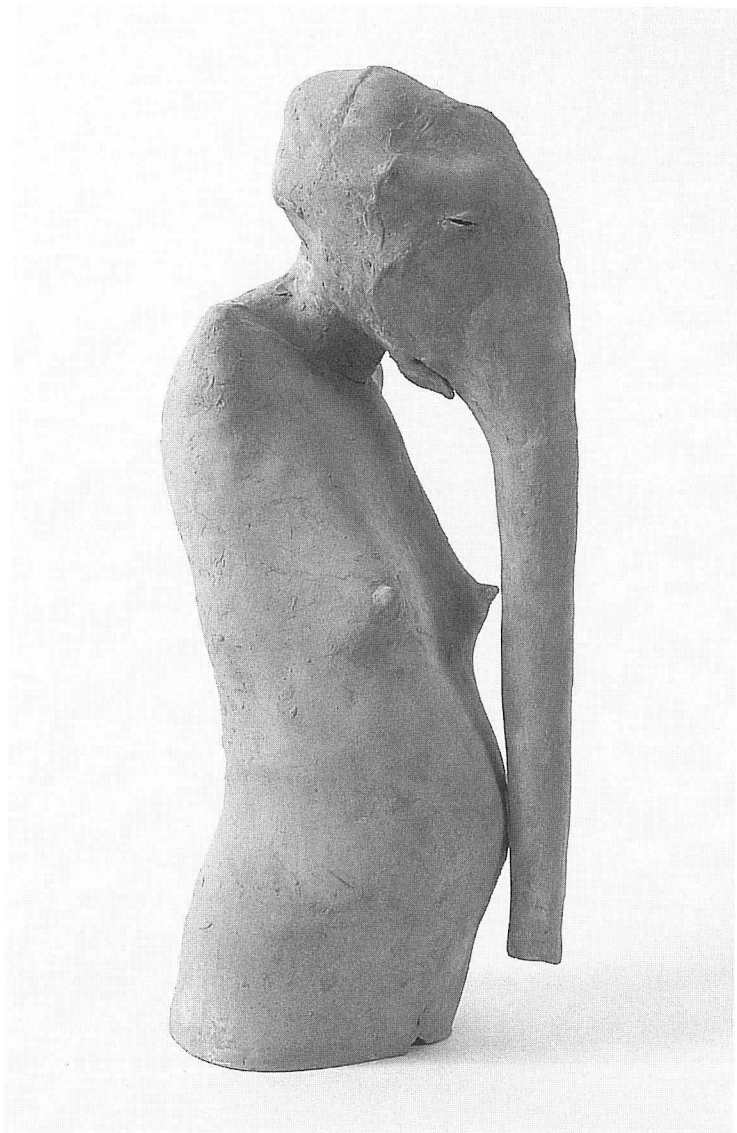
is clearly still with us. In public as well as private life, antimodern longings are expressed politically by a resurgent neoconservative movement which, talking out of both sides of its mouth, promotes capitalism through the return of traditional “values” such as rampant corporate expansion and military campaigns waged under the banner of moral regeneration.²⁸

How did yesterday’s cucumber become today’s pickle? What does *A Labor of Love*, an exhibition of handcrafted works that challenge the categories and distinctions that privilege some forms of artmaking over others,²⁹ have to do with terrorist acts? Is there really a connection between the extremist political activities of late 1990s Aryan separatists (or the frenzied pieties of the Christian Coalition) and conditions brought about by the Industrial Revolution a century earlier? Between the internecine quarrels of the contemporary art world, folding in on itself as government funding is pulled out from under, and the antimodernist sentiments of the early 1900s? Between art and politics? Art and everyday life? And are artists who are making labor-intensive, handcrafted work, whether in a craft, folk art or fine arts setting, doing so with a different end in sight than their nineteenth-century counterparts?

“I’ll take the high road and you’ll take the low road...”

First, it would be helpful to explore the distinctions and categories that are being called into question by the work in *A Labor of Love* and to understand how they came to be established. There’s a venerable history for such constructs as “high” and “low,” fine art and popular culture, and for the separation of “folk” or “outsider” art and “craft” into distinct arenas, each with its own rules, values, aesthetic judgments, practitioners, critics and supporters.

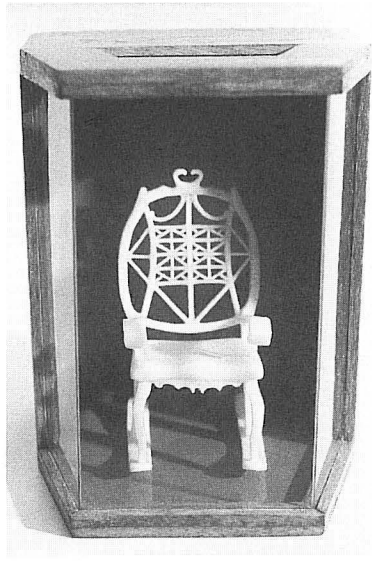
Whether or not this history begins in Europe with the birth of the Rococo style around 1730,³⁰ or with Enlightenment aspirations toward “high culture,”³¹ or even a great



Daisy Youngblood *Romana*, 1987
 Low-fire clay, 21 x 8 x 10"
 Collection Stephen and Pamela Hootkin, New York

deal earlier, is open to debate. The distinction between high and low may also have originated with the different values accorded unique and mass-produced objects in the late nineteenth-century.³² As Lawrence Levine points out in *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, his remarkable study of the popular culture of that period, things which were mechanically reproduced were considered “inauthentic” by the cultural arbiters of the time, a view reinforced by their unhappiness with the impact of the Industrial Revolution.³³ But it was really in our own century that high art and popular art became firmly established as distinct categories, class markers intended to keep elevated or educated tastes distinguished from “lowbrow” or unrefined ones.³⁴

In 1970, as a Ph.D. candidate in art history and a newly appointed curator at the Whitney Museum, I took a course called “Art since 1945” from a professor who was also a curator at another major New York museum. Showing a slide of a painting by a famous Abstract Expressionist, he began to talk about what he portentously termed “the authentic art of our time.” He then showed a slide of several of Nancy Graves’ 1969 camel sculptures, which he referred to, by way of contrast, as “novelty art.” Since those very pieces constituted my first curatorial enterprise at the Whitney, I was nonplussed to see the work held up as a negative example. The implication that the painting was timeless, rooted in tradition, and had intrinsic value whereas a contemporary work that stretched the boundaries of conventional sculpture in any way was—*had* to be—a flash in the pan, was distressing, to say the least. I left graduate school permanently that day, deeply dissatisfied with what I felt was the arbitrary privileging of personal taste under the authority of higher education—especially since I later discovered that the painting shown was owned by the professor himself. Whatever its rationale, for me authenticity would remain a highly problematic concept.



Michael Harms Untitled (soap chair), 1993
 Soap, Popsicle sticks, Brillo rust, plastic
 3 x 2¼ x 2¼"
 Courtesy American Primitive Gallery, New York

"Leader of the pack...."

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Other assumptions underlying both art history and conventional museum practice are a residue of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century ideology, when Western culture configured the artist as an outsider, doomed by relentless Romantic mythologizing to a position along a narrow spectrum of roles ranging from hero, mystic, genius, seer, and saint to eccentric, misfit, rebel, outcast, or lunatic. In my own grad school scenario, the famous painter was located at one end of the spectrum, Graves at the other.

Historically, no matter into which of these roles an artist was pigeonholed, he (and rarely, she) was seen as someone whose activities were different, or as curator and writer Joanne Cubbs puts it, "consigned to a place outside ordinary experience and beyond the bounds of normal social discourse."⁵⁵ The emphasis on the force of

individual genius and agency, a holdover from an earlier time, has become part and parcel of the way in which much folk and outsider art is packaged today. A focus on "authenticity" necessitates the presence of colorful artists' histories. These narratives include overcoming adversity, turning to artmaking after an epiphany, troubles with the law, "divine inspiration" as a motivating force, poverty, lack of education, etc., and they can be found scattered liberally throughout the wall labels, catalogues and public discussions which accompany most exhibitions of folk or outsider art. That's why the artists in *A Labor of Love* were asked to write their own biographical statements, and why there's no indication of their backgrounds in the show.

The Romantic vision of the artist in society enshrines the myth of Truth and Beauty. Work that is "purely" aesthetic, untouched by mundane concerns and uncontaminated by the "natural"—that is, by the baser instincts and senses—can only be apprehended through proper distancing and objectivity. The mind/body dichotomy set in motion by the Enlightenment was typified in the writings of Immanuel Kant, who insisted that "the pleasures of the senses [are] tyrannical; only in the contemplation of the aesthetic could people be free. The object that insists on being enjoyed threatens ethical resistance to it, and denies the distancing required by the aesthetic."⁵⁶ Simply put, the reasoning goes something like this: that which is associated with the mind is of a higher order, of a purer and rarer form, than that which is associated with the body. Bodily experience threatens to unsettle "pure" taste, which has been hard won through intense mental discipline and training. What the bodily senses ("mere" sensuousness) have to offer is natural, therefore "low" and impure, reduced to being only appealing. Dispassionate pleasure, the very best kind, is produced only by the experience of true beauty.⁵⁷

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It's no wonder that crafts and decorative arts, particularly those which are detailed and labor-intensive—a sure sign of the body at work—came to be considered inferior, capable of immediate visual appeal but lacking in higher purpose. And the influence of Kant's writings has continued down to the present to separate the formal from the



Darren Brown *Silk Coat*, 1982
Mixed textiles, 35 x 30"
Courtesy of the artist

informal, the sublime from the decorative, thinking from feeling, the intellectual from the corporeal, high art from *kitsch*.

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“Don’t fence me in...”

Throughout the 1960s and 70s particularly, art critic Clement Greenberg’s delineation of “high” (a self-referential, nonobjective, and reductive focus on the formal qualities intrinsic to painting or sculpture) and “low” (popular arts, decoration, pleasurable and accessible figuration) put Kant’s theories into critical practice, defining for an entire generation what was, and what was not, “the authentic art of our time.” Interestingly, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” arguably Greenberg’s most famous essay, was published much earlier, in 1939, at the peak of Hitler’s rise to power. While Hitler’s nationalism was built on the foundation of an ideology which

emphasized the common man or *volk*, Greenberg’s confused socialism promoted what Robert Storr calls “a retreat and retrenchment on higher ground,”³⁸ that of “art for art’s sake.” Here, pure aesthetics and the continuity of tradition marched side by side at the forefront of the long, unbroken line of Progress.

In the essay, Greenberg’s description of *kitsch* clearly marks it as the Black Plague of modern times. He describes it variously as “ersatz,” “a gigantic apparition,” rear-guard, content-driven, and appealing only to the masses who have always been indifferent to culture. It is full of “devices, tricks, [and] stratagems”; it “draws its life blood from a reservoir of accumulated experience,” reaping enormous profits which are a source of temptation to the avant-garde who are scarcely able to resist them; it has “flowed out over the countryside, wiping out folk culture,” showing “no regard for geographical and national-cultural boundaries.” It is “virulent” and “irresistibly attractive,” but not “genuine.” In summary: “Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times.”³⁹

If this view seems to be a bit over the top, it may simply be because vernacular forms in art are quite familiar by now. They no longer strike terror in the hearts of the *cognoscenti*, having been appropriated widely by very well-known artists. Greenberg’s idea of a singular painting style in which form and content are so thoroughly dissolved into each other that only pure form remains doesn’t seem particularly viable in our postmodern world. But Greenberg’s anti-*kitsch* diatribe hides a more problematic underlying attitude, one which he sees developing logically from a Kantian perspective. Greenberg puts it succinctly:

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There has always been on one side the minority of the powerful—and therefore the cultivated—and on the other the great mass of the exploited and poor—and therefore the ignorant. Formal culture has always belonged to the first, while the last have had to content themselves with folk or rudimentary culture, or kitsch.⁴⁰



Liza Lou
Kitchen, 1991-95
Beads, plaster, wood
and other materials,
196 feet square
Courtesy of the artist

Many critics, curators and collectors of art today remain wedded to some variation of this view; witness the relief with which the supposed return to “pure” painting was heralded last year as a welcome change from years of didactic and strident politicization of art by the disenfranchised.⁴¹ The idea that the former kind of art has no politics, whereas the latter is nothing but, is to position art and politics on two distinctly different playing fields, as Greenberg did. Doing so implies that art’s highest function is to provide viewers with a disengaged and heightened sense of pleasure rather than to participate actively in the social and political constructions of the real world. Many people both inside and outside the art world continue to believe that the content of a work of art has no relationship to its artistic merit, that aesthetic quality alone is important. In this view, art has nothing to do with our lives, and therefore has no potential for affecting them.⁴² It’s safe, defused, ineffective. The determination of integrity and aesthetic purity was then, and is now, the purview of the few, acting on behalf of the many.

“*It’s been a hard day’s night....*”

How, then, to fight the growing insistence on separation, encapsulation, categorization, hierarchies? Certainly not by throwing the baby out with the bathwater; knowledge of the past is necessary if we are to have a future at all. For many, if not most of the artists in *A Labor of Love*, the answer lies in the deliberate recuperation of the past in order to understand the present. The kinds of work in the exhibition were at one time historically associated with popular forms of artmaking and culture, forms which were progressive rather than revolutionary, but which nonetheless affected the micropolitics of quotidian life.⁴³ Art which uses the everyday as a source of resistance and inspiration, which constantly returns to viewers a sense of their own ability, creativity, and imaginative potential, may be forced to operate at the boundaries of artistic discourse, but remains central to the discourses of lived reality. Its predilections are supported by the increasingly visible work of analysts of the

everyday, who explore the ways in which resistance in popular culture harnesses the power of the quotidian, whose manifestations include “the adaptation of the body, time, space, desire: environment and the home...work and works of art; the ability to create the terms of everyday life from its solids and spaces.”⁴⁴

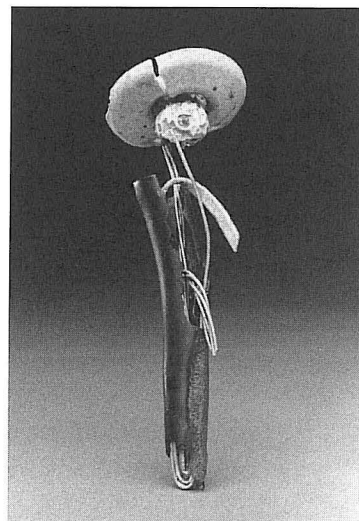
Such forms of resistance can be found across the entire spectrum of American culture and artistic practice; some are the result of very specific cultural traditions. Cherokee cultural critic and spokeswoman Rayna Green has observed that for Native Americans “making art that crosses boundaries constitutes one way of fighting back and reclaiming culture, redefining it for ourselves. It is the voice of survival, persistence, and cultural self-definition.”⁴⁵ Similarly, critic and historian Tomas Ybarra-Frausto points out that because Chicano art is seen as “going against mainstream cultural traditions of art as escape and commodity, [the art object] should provide aesthetic pleasure while also serving to educate and edify. Chicano art is envisioned as a model for freedom.”⁴⁶

Still other forms of resistance are gender specific. Naomi Schor’s *Reading in Detail* is a (detailed) analysis of the ways in which detail has been configured and criticized as decadent, superfluous, contingent, negative and above all feminine. Associated with such mid-nineteenth-century phenomena as secularization, democratization and the “invention of the quotidian,” the detail was configured in opposition to the Ideal, the Sublime, the Classical.⁴⁷ Schor underscores that what is most threatening about the detail is “its tendency to subvert an internal hierarchic ordering of the work of art which clearly subordinates the periphery to the center, the accessory to the principal, the foreground to the background.”⁴⁸ (Any similarity to events and situations outside the art world is purely coincidental. Surely there is no *real* relationship between art and politics....)

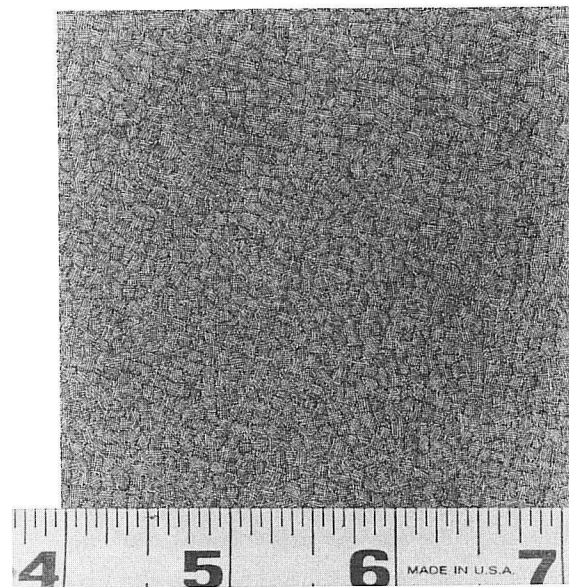
Trying to unravel the Gordian knot which confounds the terms high and low, mass and popular, folk and fine, is a formidable task. Those who might like to try their hand



Larry Calkins *1219944*, 1995
Mixed media, 37 x 25"
Courtesy MIA Gallery, Seattle

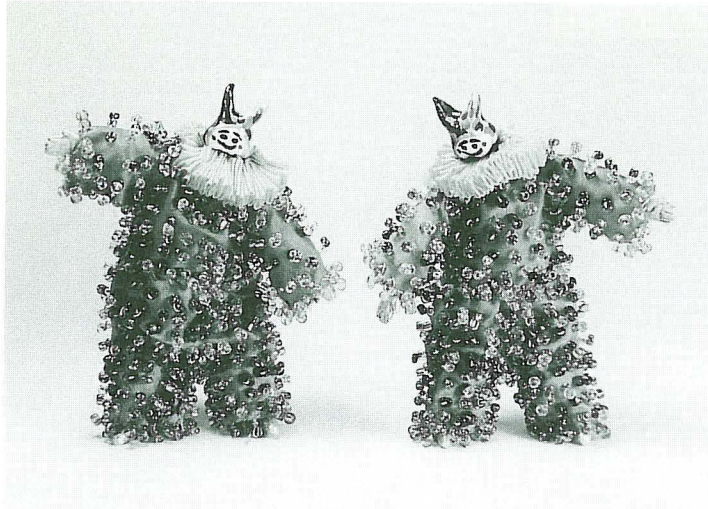


Tom Emerson *Mexican Hat*, 1994
Found material, 4 x 1½"
Private collection, Santa Fe



Jacob El Hanani *Nigud*, detail, 1986-87
Ink on paper, 18 x 18"
Courtesy Yoshii Gallery, New York

at it are stopped by multiple and overlapping definitions that sound as though they'd been formulated by kids playing a particularly rowdy game of "Mother May I Cross Over?" And classifications are tricky things in and of themselves, especially since they're usually used to rank people and practices considered inferior, because they're most unlike those of the classifier.⁴⁹ Perhaps this explains why so much time and effort are spent by the majority of the art audience—largely composed of upper-middle class, educated whites—mulling over what belongs where in the lexicon of art forms and formulating endless categorical imperatives for different types of work.⁵⁰ While artists also can participate in categorical and systemic formulations, they tend to be less rigidly bound by them, understanding that the meaning of any body of work will always change with the context the work is seen in. Viewers who aren't part of the professional art world probably won't care which pieces fit into which categories either, especially if they're having a good time just looking.



Larry Krone *Identical Twin Tooth Dolls (Janet)*, 1995
 Wisdom teeth, enamel paint, sterling silver, silk,
 glass beads, 4" tall
 Collection Janet Krone, New York

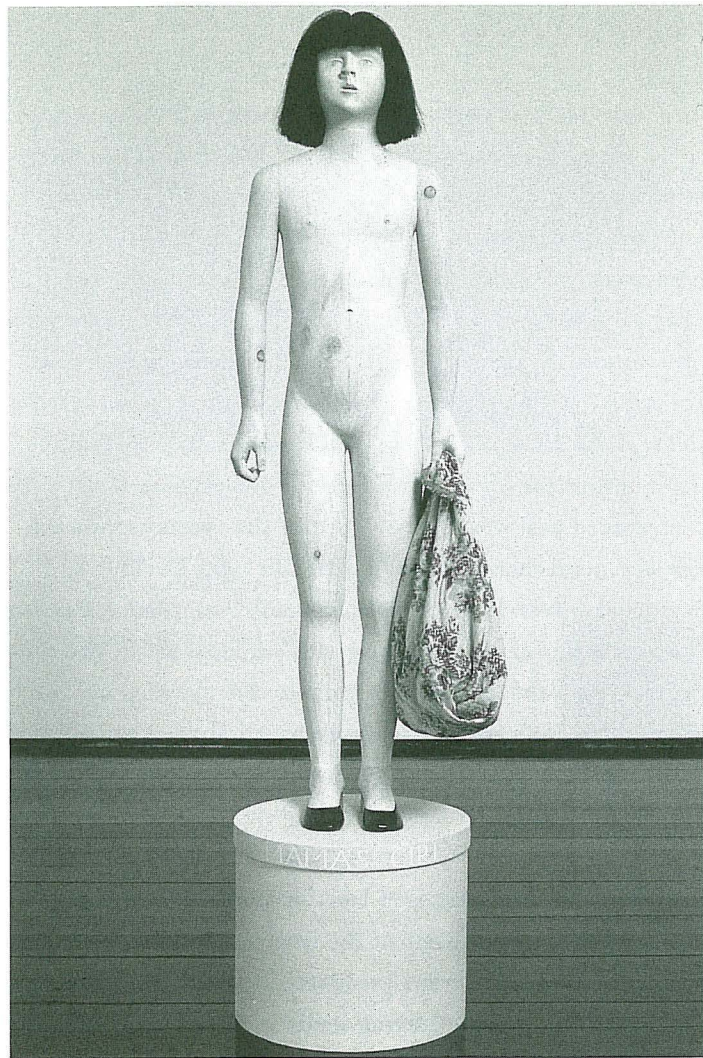


Beverly Semmes *Pot #9*, 1994
 Satin glazed ceramic, 17 x 10 x 12"
 Collection Phyllis Mack, New York

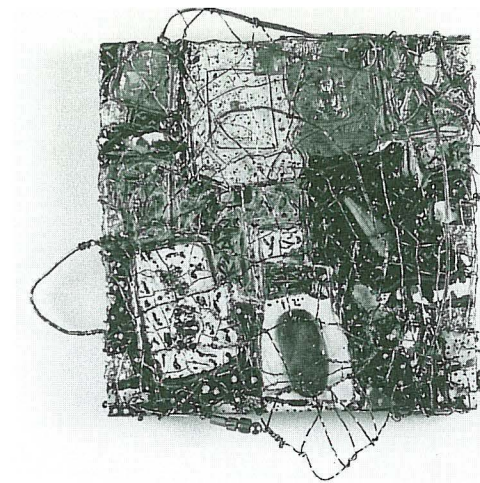
"Lovely to look at, delightful to hold..."

The work in *A Labor of Love* is really enjoyable to look at. Some of the pieces are so amazing that they deserve to belong in a Ripley's Believe-it-or-Not of what the human hand and mind can accomplish. Others catch me off guard by reminding me of my grandparents' houses, or of the earnestly laborious products of the Home-Ec classes required of Brooklyn schoolgirls in the 1940s. But a work of art doesn't have to be obsessively worked to be beautiful to look at or to feel pleasurable familiar. At the turn of the previous century, the simplicity, honesty, integrity and functionality that were considered integral to the craft idiom linked it to work and the practicality of everyday life, making the practice of crafts at *fin de siècle* seem both aesthetically desirable and socially ethical. Promoted as anti-technological, as the process and product of the hand alone, the craft ethic accorded well with the new turn-of-the-century emphasis on clean, functional design as a moral characteristic. Writing in 1968, David Pye cogently defined the differences between kinds of workmanship,⁵¹ suggesting that "our traditional ideas of workmanship originated along with our ideas of law in a time when people were few and the things they made were few also. For age after age the evidence of man's work showed insignificantly on the huge background of unmodified nature. There was then no thought of distinguishing between works of art and other works, for works and art were synonymous."⁵²

Surely today's crafts practitioners must feel a sense of loss that this is no longer so. In protest, many see themselves at the opposite end of the spectrum from the fine arts, whose acolytes seem permanently wedded to avant-garde strategies and concepts of innovation. It falls to the crafts to plug the dike, saving tradition from the threatening forces of change with a single finger. But the possibility that traditions themselves are subject to change unsettles the tradition/innovation dichotomy, and consequently has been an issue at the heart of many of the crafts debates.⁵³



Judith Shea *Mama's Girl (V.1)*, 1993
Pine, wood, horse hair, cloth, 67¼ x 16¼"
Private collection, New York



James Hill *Where the Rivers Change*, 1995
Mixed media on canvas, 12 x 12"
Courtesy Bill Maynes Contemporary Art,
New York

Pye, unlike most of his counterparts in the previous century (and many in this one as well), sees crafts as a complement to industry rather than in opposition to it.⁵⁴ Furthermore, he argues, fine arts and craft are not in the same league because craft competes with the market for inexpensively manufactured objects of the same kind, which is not true of the fine arts. People today, he says, tend to think of crafts as “hairy cloth and gritty pots,” but crafts are actually closer to the manufacturing industry than to the fine arts; they can compete, therefore, only on the grounds of exceedingly high quality.⁵⁵

Because such craft work takes a considerable amount of time to achieve, Pye concludes that it needs to be motivated by love and not money, and urges craftspeople, like poets and painters, to earn their living by doing other work. Pye’s support for the “true” amateur, whom he describes as a part-time professional, expands the definition of the crafts practitioner, and by extension, of the artist. In his view, “‘amateur’ after all, means by derivation a man who does a job for the love of it rather than for money, and that happens also to be the definition, or at least the prerequisite, of a good workman.”⁵⁶ That this is hardly the generally accepted use of the term seems

obvious, since it's often employed disparagingly to describe artists whose work doesn't accord with still prevalent Romantic notions of what an artist is and does. But "amateur" is never the word used to describe those untrained or "self-taught" artists who produce the very collectable commodity called folk art.

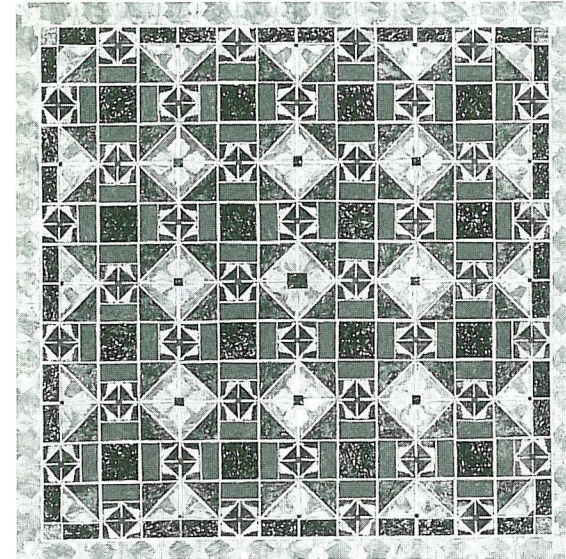
"Someone to watch over me..."

Coming from a fine arts background, I had a monolithic idea of "folk art." But the field is far more complex and diverse than the term suggests. Briefly stated, it divides into several main camps. One is the work first "discovered" by modern American artists, and then collectors, in the early decades of the twentieth century, and appreciated largely because of its similarity to the contemporary art they themselves were making and/or buying.⁵⁷ Its makers, while untrained, were mostly white and not necessarily poor, and included "primitive" painters and sculptors, quilters, decoy and weathervane makers and artisans working in metal, wood and ceramic. The simplicity, straightforwardness and stylistic innovation of folk art forms connected them to a modernist high art aesthetic.

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As modernism developed and claimed its own adherents, folk art became valued not so much for its innovation as for its connection to tradition. In this model, championed by collectors like Holger Cahill and Jean Lipman, folk art was seen as historical artifact, consisting of pure forms which were no longer practiced once the old traditions succumbed to the lures and demands of mechanization. Like craft, folk art was seen in relation to notions of "the common man," promising freshness, simplicity, honesty, and unselfconsciousness, qualities threatened by urbanization and industrialization.

Another group consists of those folklorists who believe that folk art and objects are traditional, passed down from generation to generation by practitioners living in



Margaret Wharton *The Palace Floor*, 1994
Mixed media, 54 x 54"
Courtesy Jean Albano Gallery, Chicago

closed communities. In this ethnographic model, communal rather than individual ideas predominate, creating a particular, distinctive style such as those found in Shaker, Mennonite or Amish religious communities or in the "ethnic" art of immigrant cultures. This work is made by people from many races and backgrounds, most of whom did time on the lower rungs of the economic ladder when they first arrived in the U.S. While viewed suspiciously by those descendants of English immigrants who considered themselves to be the only *real* Americans, ultimately this work became part and parcel of what constitutes American culture today.

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In the 1970s, ideological battles broke out between the folklorist/communal/traditional people on one side, and the art-historical/individualist/fine art people on the other. In the 1980s, the field splintered further when Herbert Hemphill and



Elaine Reichel *Sampler (Dress Suitably)*, 1992
Embroidery on linen, 25 x 19"
Courtesy Michael Klein Gallery, New York

Michael and Julie Hall began to collect oddball, quirky pieces by living untrained artists, work which traditionalists were unwilling to consider as being folk art at all. Today, folklorists like Michael Owen Jones, who studies housing tracts and corporate organizational behavior as folklore, have split the folk art world in unpredictable ways once again.⁵⁸

In Europe, the idea of a “folk” tradition was a late eighteenth-century Romantic notion. It was popularized through the work of Johann Gottfried Herder, a Prussian doctor and theologian who made folklore and folksong the basis of national character, encapsulating his theories in *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Humankind* (1784-1791). He developed a democratic, anti-Enlightenment rationale based on the creative accomplishments of common people, which was intended to provide a foundation for national culture by proceeding from the local to the national to the global.⁵⁹ His views would later be appropriated by Nazi ideologists, who turned them into a support structure for the racism, anti-Semitism, and fervid nationalism which ultimately resulted in the Holocaust. That Herder himself was an anti-Semite doesn’t help today’s reader to separate out his views from those of his appropriators.

But Herder’s original concept of the relationship between folk art and national identity is the operable one in America, where folk art was and still is considered “the representative art of the American nation [and is] thought to embody the vision and accomplishment of the common American. Folk art is believed to be an everyday art form, made by ordinary people from the materials of everyday life [and] said to evidence the positive attitudes and values of an individualistic, unpretentious, and democratic nation.”⁶⁰

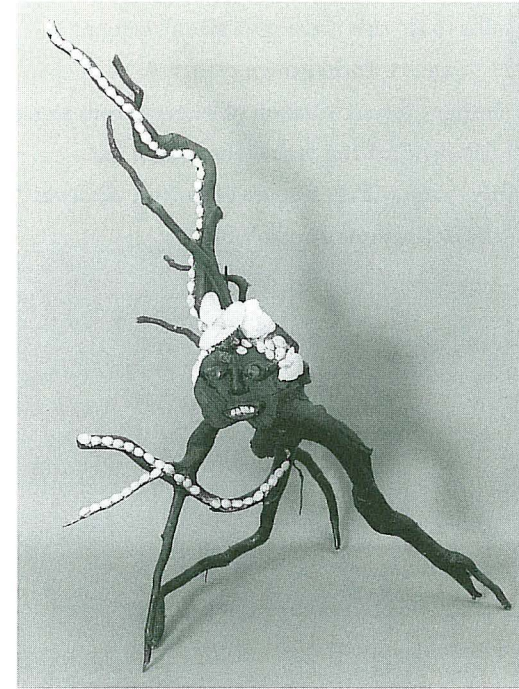
Folk and outsider art have paradoxically also been defined in terms of their difference from mainstream fine arts, indicating the extent to which their presence as “other” functions to reaffirm and maintain the premise of high art. As Eugene Metcalf suggests, the establishment of a separate folk category is a way of preserving the status

and power of the leisure class by creating a “dumping ground” for all maverick forms of expression made by artists who don’t share the high art values of that portion of society and might therefore pose a potential threat to it.⁶¹

“Are you warm, are you real, Mona Lisa?...”

Nevertheless, here as in the high art discourse, authenticity plays a central role. For the folk and outsider art community, authenticity is not a matter of whether a particular artist actually executed the work in question, but whether the artist is personally “authentic,” that is, visionary, honest, pure—untainted by the values of the high art community or by any cultural or material concerns whatsoever.

Maurice Tuchman in his catalogue for the 1990 *Parallel Visions* exhibition, which compared outsider art to modernist works, sees authenticity as indigenous to non-Western art. He writes: “In reaction to the rise of conceptualism and other strategy-oriented art movements more than two decades ago, authenticity and emotional sincerity have been increasingly appreciated in art. This factor underlies the growing regard for artistic expressions from cultures outside the dominant Euro-American traditions.”⁶² For many curators and collectors of folk and outsider art today, authenticity, while not necessarily confined to “outside” cultures or to the sanitarium, has become a rare commodity because it is seen as being in jeopardy. There’s been some discussion, for example, about the dilemma of using drugs to treat schizophrenia, because it might alter, if not eliminate altogether, the production of outsider art.⁶³ Jane Livingston, in a recent essay on folk art, warns that there is “a possibility that we are dealing with a truly dying cultural form,” that “the sense remains that the end of a precious tradition is drawing near.”⁶⁴ For others, though, there’s no sense in bemoaning the loss of an authentic folk culture because in capitalist society, unlike tribal or folk societies, people don’t produce their own commodities, so there’s no authentic folk culture to bemoan.⁶⁵



Bessie Harvey *Face of Africa I*, 1994
Polychromed wood, beads, shells, 33 x 25 x 18"
Collection M. Anne Hill and
Edward V. Blanchard, New York

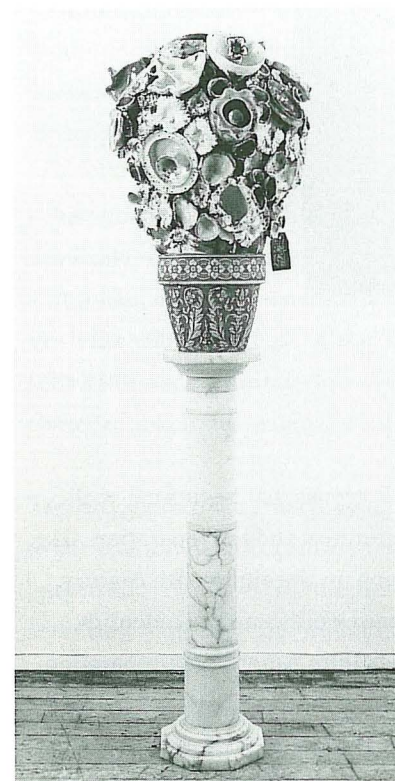
The concept of authenticity in contemporary folk art literature—the formulation of an innocent, pure, “primitive” other—is a metaphor of colonization strikingly parallel to what ethnographer James Clifford calls “the salvage paradigm.” Saving the artifacts of a dying culture for posterity is a means through which the exoticized “other” can be appropriated, collected and preserved.⁶⁶ Like the increasing popularity and frequency of railroad travel to the “wild” West and passenger steamship travel abroad in the late nineteenth century, this overwhelming fascination with the exotic has been motivated by escapism. Metropolitan Museum curator Lowery Sims, discussing the celebration of manual work in the African-American tradition, has argued that the search for authenticity may be an attempt to “counteract the perception of widespread social, political, and economic excesses” of the 1980s.⁶⁷ And Susan Larsen, in an impassioned analysis of how and why self-taught artists have

been isolated from the mainstream, maintains that “this art sings a siren’s song of freedom and as such is a seductive influence to an art world grown overripe, increasingly uncertain of its direction and hungry for an infusion of energy from some source at once alien and yet accessible.”⁶⁸ My own feeling is that the search for “authenticity,” like the insistence on “quality,” camouflages issues of power; whoever gets to define it (and gets others to believe the definition), controls it.

“She’s an artist, she don’t look back....”

In the establishment and application of definitions, women have been on the receiving end; they were no more players in the Romantic scenario than they were in the late 1950s Greenbergian one. Nineteenth-century women were excluded from formal art schools and training, and the art they made—quilting, embroidery, knitting, sewing, crocheting and the like—was relegated to the domestic, the useful, and the everyday rather than to the exalted or sublime spheres of high art.⁶⁹ These same distinctions and hierarchies of value are still at work today in the museums and art markets of the world.⁷⁰

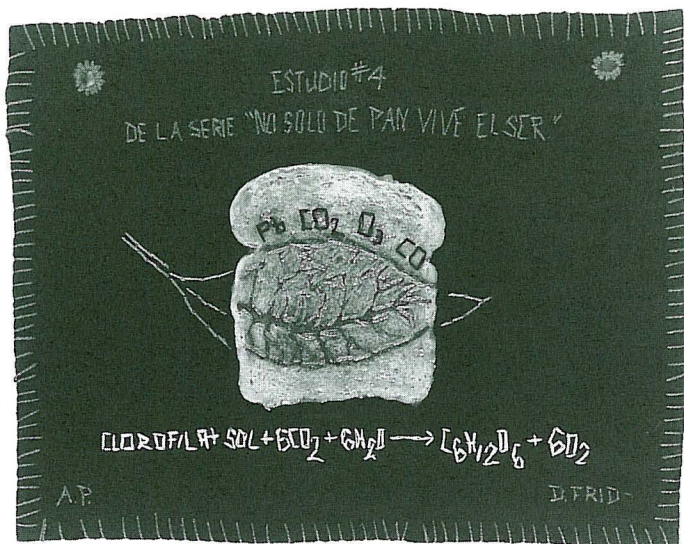
Many of the skills employed to make the handcrafted, or highly detailed, or labor-intensive and time-consuming pieces in *A Labor of Love* have traditionally been considered women’s work. Because they were made within the domestic rather than the public sphere, were done for love rather than money,⁷¹ or were simply done by women (deemed incapable of creating great art), these handicrafts were *ipso facto* inferior to fine art—made in the public sphere for money by men.⁷² It followed that in the world of crafts, embroidery had a lower status because of its unique identification with the feminine. William Morris’s daughter May, reviewing a major exhibition of medieval embroidery which opened in London in 1905, commented on how surprised people were to see such fine work in this medium, considering their unquestioning assumption of quality in the other arts of the same period.⁷³



Michael Lucero *Arrangement*
(*Reclamation Series*), 1995
Clay with glazes, cement pot, marble, 71 x 21 x 23"
Courtesy David Beitzel Gallery, New York



Manuel Pardo *Mother and I in Technicolor*, 1995
Oil on linen, 24 x 20"
Courtesy of the artist



Dianna Frid *Study #4 (Bread Series)*, 1993, Artist proof
Bread, thread, felt, acrylic medium, 7¼ x 9¼"
Courtesy of the artist

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Roszika Parker, in her 1984 study *The Subversive Stitch*, argues that beginning with the Renaissance the construction of the concept of femininity and the separation of fine art from crafts coincided; they were reflected later, in the eighteenth century, by changes in art education, particularly from craft-based workshops to academies, each consigned to the “appropriate” gender.⁷⁴ In antebellum America the separation of men and women’s realms became so extreme that virtually all activities except for travel, writing, and getting oneself published were strictly gendered.⁷⁵ A society that “required women to be ornamental” threatened those women who in any way resisted or deviated from the requirement with being mocked as “coarse, ugly, even monstrous.”⁷⁶ No middle ground here.

The Arts and Crafts movement approached the female problem laterally with a kind of “mental health through domestic design” attitude. Bolstering artistic claims

with a seductive appeal to women’s rights, house design based on arts and crafts principles purported to relieve the housewife of drudgery and provide increased interaction between family members. A 1905 article in Stickley’s magazine, *The Craftsman*, announced: “Woman is a slave, and must remain so as long as ever our present domestic system is maintained....[E]very additional object in a house requires additional dusting, cleaning, repairing, and lucky you are if its requirements stop there.”⁷⁷ While this pronouncement may not have contributed much to the fight for women’s suffrage, it was at least a recognition of the difference in gendered roles of the period.

When not occupied with dusting and polishing and sweeping and mopping, women were able to find genuine social pleasure while gathering together to sew, knit, embroider, quilt, crochet and mend because they were also able to talk to each other. With the widespread use of the sewing machine by the 1860s, however, a once shared activity became a solitary one. For women the social body began to dissolve into the clatter of machines originally intended to reduce drudgery.

Tapestry, embroidery, needlepoint and such were much admired from the Renaissance to the late nineteenth-century because they were seen as evidence of upper class leisure and wealth. With the Industrial Revolution, however, these kinds of “female” activities, requiring fine-motor skills, dexterity, patience, and of course, good eyesight, came to be considered just work rather than art. Women’s products, particularly embroidery, were dismissed as decorative, “pretty,” or mindless, that is, without content. But according to all accounts, and as most personal experience confirms, what actually happens is that the meditative and self-contained quality of this kind of work reclaims and interiorizes the mind and body, returning them to the sole proprietorship of their owner. For women, as for the incarcerated, time and work can, for brief or long periods of time, become one’s own.

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Kukuli Velarde *Apu Potosi*, 1995
Clay, enamel, gold leaf, 29 x 17 x 18"
Courtesy of the artist and Carla Stellweg Gallery, New York

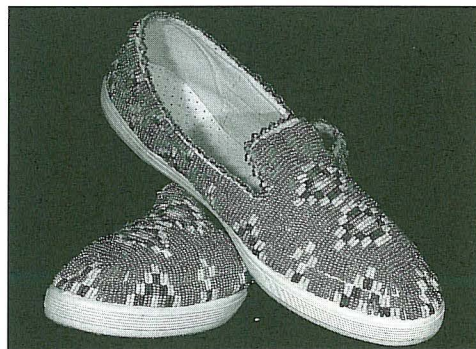
In the early days of the Women's Movement, circa 1969, "feminist" work was winning out (publicly, at least) over such forms of "feminine" activity as knitting, sewing, needlework, and the like. That these same forms could today be the object of such intense theoretical scrutiny and debate, as well as the locus of political engagement and resistance, is a tribute to the dynamic and self-critical nature of feminism. *A Labor of Love* includes both male and female artists who quilt, embroider, knit, crochet, sew, bead and do appliqué and needlepoint. Many contemporary artists have recouped these traditional skills and materials and used them to newly trenchant and generative ends, indicating just how saturated with meaning they remain.⁷⁸

"Far away places with strange-sounding names..."

The historian Kenneth Ames, talking about how and why people classify others, identifies two primary and undoubtedly universal categories: men and women, us and them.⁷⁹ Both groupings played a major part in gender, class and racial divisions at the end of the nineteenth century. In the frantic avoidance of these problems, a cult of Americanism emerged, bolstering hostility to things foreign by an essentialist and ethnocentric sense of unity.⁸⁰ Paradoxically, the exotic or "primitive" qualities that Americans both sought and at the same time dismissed were not to be found among their own kind—the white, urban, male, sane "us"—but in things foreign—the not-white, rural, female, insane "them."⁸¹ This love/hate relationship with difference caused white, well-to-do Americans to label all art made outside their own cultural traditions as folk art,⁸² while at the same time they hungrily bought it up as fast as possible, and at a good price, too.



Alan Belcher *Untitled Self-Portrait (Fire)*, 1995
Black and white photograph, thread, matches,
human hair, blood, bed sheets, fingernails
11 x 5 x 2"
Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York



Imogene Jessie Goodshot Arquero *Untitled (shoes)*, 1995
Mixed media, womens' size 8
Courtesy of the artist

M.H. Dunlop's extraordinary account of nineteenth-century travels to the American interior recounts, for instance, the ways in which Native American art and artifacts were acquired.

Travelers cast the sharp eye of the international shopper on the products of Indian hands, drove sharp bargains for those goods despite the sellers' obvious poverty, and on occasion bought what they wanted directly from the bodies of the sellers, [...] rejecting what an Indian offered for sale and instead demanding an object or a garment that was obviously too significant or essential to be up for sale. When travelers came upon an Indian settlement whose occupants were temporarily absent, they ransacked it, stole from it, and destroyed anything they did not carry away. Travelers seemed to operate on the theory that the fewer the possessions the less was a person's right to keep them; only non-Indian possessors of many objects could insist upon ownership and value.⁸⁵

The attitude of travelers toward the objects they acquired was highly ambivalent: Dunlop cites the account of one woman who "found Indian needlework excellent—and bought plenty of it—while simultaneously judging it 'deficient in taste and knowledge of design,'" as well as overly colorful.⁸⁴

But what was this art to its makers? Then as now, Indian objects were statements of collective and communal values as much as they were individual statements. "To put your name forth via a material object," says Rayna Green, "is to engage in the survival of your people."⁸⁵ The process of making was at once the embodiment and confirmation of tradition, a distinct way of seeing the world. Ironically, it was also an attitude once shared by Europeans, at least until the advent of the Renaissance when individualism, uniqueness and universality came to be asserted as Western, and inherently superior, paradigms.⁸⁶ Cultural misunderstandings and slippages of this kind can be found everywhere, and are certainly not confined to a single culture, much less an Anglo-American one. Virtually all contemporary cultures are hybrid or

“impure,” but the legacy of the Enlightenment is particularly prevalent in the West, where expressive modes deriving from other traditions are downplayed or ignored.

In Chicano culture, as with Native Americans, art objects and social contexts, artistic practice and everyday life, are inseparable. Both folk and fine art are hybrid, transformational, living forms, “a visual narration of cultural negotiation” among multiple class-based and regional and national traditions.⁸⁷ Vernacular art forms deriving from religious icons and images, calendars, posters and advertisements and the artifacts of youth culture continue to influence contemporary Chicano art. But like “Hispanic” art in general, it’s often seen by mainstream critics as colorful, folkloric, decorative, and lacking in content.⁸⁸

Take for example *rasquachismo*, an attitude, taste, or stance which Tomas Ybarra-Frausto describes as “rooted in Chicano structures of thinking, feeling and aesthetic choice [and] a visceral response to lived reality.”⁸⁹ A prevalent form of vernacular, it is likely to be unfamiliar to the viewer from another culture, or to be misunderstood.

In the realm of taste, to be *rasquache* is to be unfettered and unrestrained, to favor the elaborate over the simple, the flamboyant over the severe. Bright colors (chillantes) are preferred to sombre, high intensity to low, the shimmering and sparkling to the muted and subdued. The *rasquache* inclination piles pattern on pattern, filling all available space with bold display. Ornamentation and elaboration prevail, joined to a delight for texture and sensuous surface.⁹⁰

Overstatement, alien to an Anglo modernist sensibility, is also rejected by the Chicano middle class, in much the same way my own second-generation Russian-Polish Jewish parents recoiled in horror from the spectacle of Borscht-belt comedians or scoffed at the *nouvelle* Yiddish harmonizations of the Andrews Sisters. *Rasquache* is a sensibility which, in the hands of the contemporary Chicano and Chicana artists, is a double-edged sword, collapsing visual seduction and formal subversion into each other to drive critical commentary home.

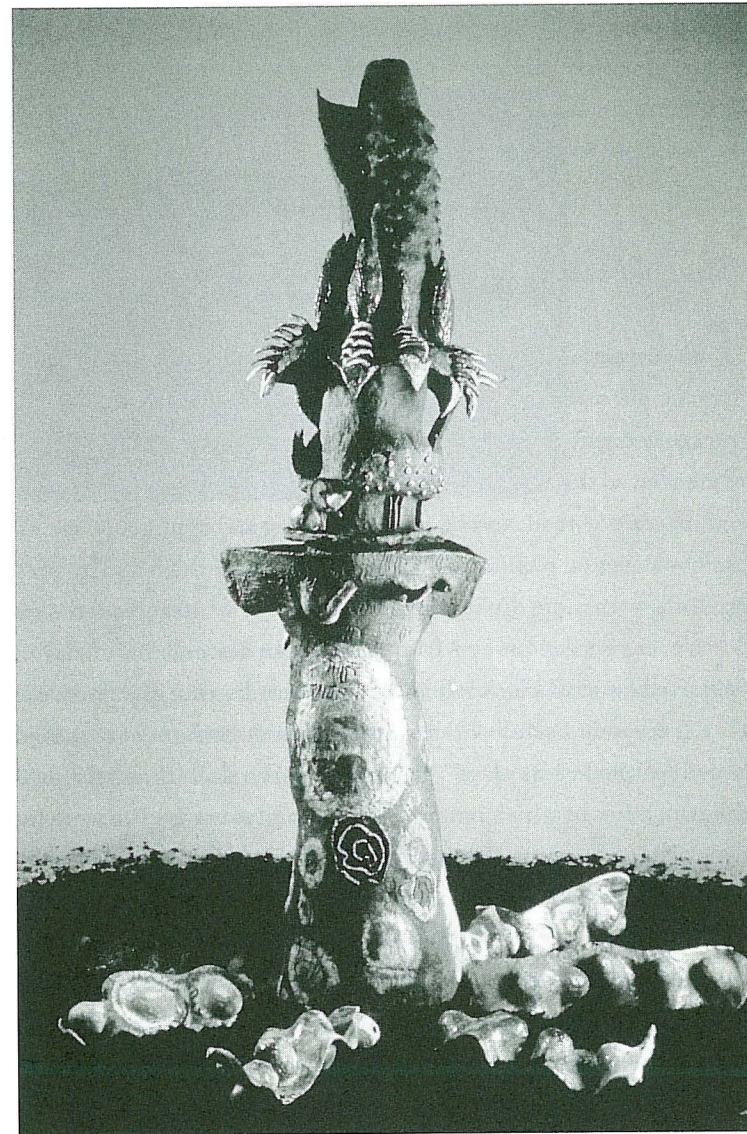
Equally misunderstood, Asian art was highly valued in the West as exotic artifact (still a giant step down from fine art), an idea reinforced by collectors returning from late nineteenth-century forays to the far-off, exotic lands of the Orient with new acquisitions. Asian art traditions, of course, vary greatly, and one can scarcely lump together the many cultures, languages, and traditions of the entire continent. But that didn’t stop nineteenth-century Americans from trying. At the end of the century (and well into the present one), they voraciously acquired the art of the Asian peoples to whom they at the same time attributed an inferior physiognomy, unclean social practices, strange manners and dress, use of pidgin English, “barbaric” eating habits, and dubious ethical practices.⁹¹ I remember clearly how, when I was a child, Jewish families like mine religiously “ate Chinese” on Sunday nights with a pleasure that contrasted starkly with an embarrassingly voluble, pointed criticism of the restaurant’s hygiene, the waiter’s temperament, the outspoken mistrust of dishes never tried, etc.

Throughout most of Asia there is a deep interweaving of art and everyday activities. Precisely because a wide variety of Asian art forms and practices were inseparable from each other, they were particularly apt to be subsumed by the West under the heading of “curio.” (Hence the “cabinet of curiosities,” that peculiar display form in which, up until the twentieth century, “strange” and rare objects from disparate places, customs and practices were apt to be jumbled together.⁹²) In India, for example, “ritual practice, education, commerce and pleasure are interwoven and arguably more completely and appropriately understood than when considered in isolation.”⁹³ In Japan, craftspeople and performers can be designated as Living Treasures, and the culinary arts are on a par with other “fine” arts whose remarkable range includes gardening and package, automobile and fashion design, not to mention archery, woodcarving, pottery, architecture, and flower arranging.

Contemporary Asian-American artists, unwilling to have their work crammed willy-nilly into a single category or style or confined within any kind of artistic boundaries,



Alison Saar *El Bato Loco*, 1987
Fabric, beads, sequins, 61 x 32"
Courtesy Phyllis Kind Gallery,
New York



Sana Musasama *Maple Tree Series #10*, 1992
Ceramic, 67 x 39"
Courtesy of the artist and June Kelly Gallery, New York

are deliberately exploring “multiple, layered, and even contradictory identities”⁹⁴ in the process of self-definition. And this means using and adapting the artistic skills of their individual, specific cultural traditions in order to speak to critical issues outside those traditions.

“That old black magic has me in its spell...”

The adaptation of past to present can be seen clearly in the melding of various African folk traditions with those of the countries to which Africans were originally transported and exiled as slaves. Among the many artisanal skills brought by those who survived the Middle Passage were blacksmithing, goldsmithing, pottery, beading and macramé, woodcarving, weaving, dying and appliqué; these skills were widely used by slaves on plantations, although credit for them and ownership of their products were more often than not claimed by whites. Nonetheless, they were handed down over generations by African-American descendants of slaves; today, the most neglected kinds of black folk art are those utilitarian objects, because, as Metcalf says, they “represent useful work that has not been performed at the behest and for the benefit of the leisure class.”⁹⁵ More than the skills themselves, Africans brought with them an ethos in which material culture and everyday life were inextricable, and which runs counter to the modernist ideology that divides the creative and the quotidian into separate spheres of activity and thought.

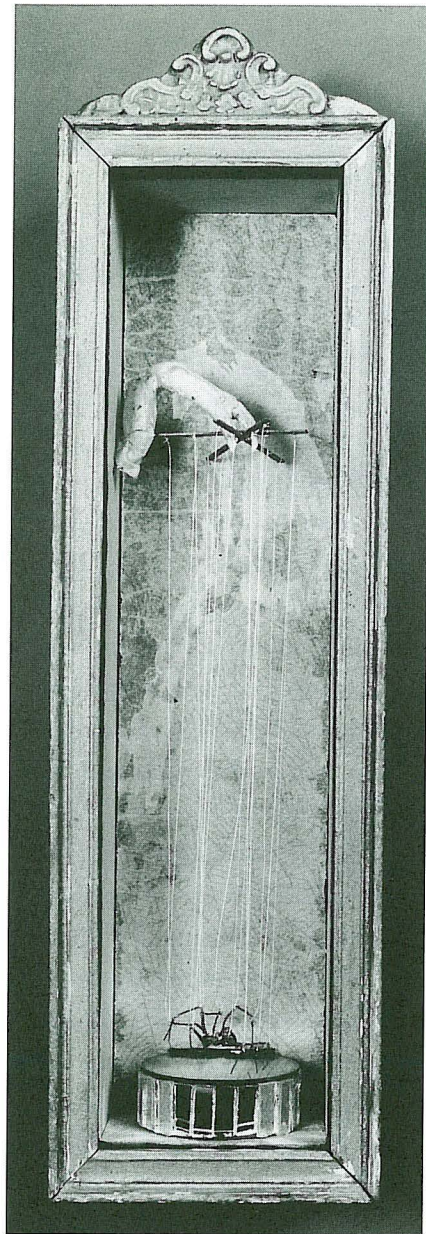
In effect, the extensive contributions of African-American painters and sculptors from the 1850s on have been invisible until recently, so that the fine arts world for the most part equated art by African-Americans with popular art and folk art, an attitude which carries over to the present. This exemplifies the class distinctions that are called into service to keep their work controlled and out of the marketplace. Such marginalization, of course, isn’t limited to artists from non-Western backgrounds. Artists of Western and Anglo-European descent as well have been able to draw on



Jane Kaufman Three-panel beaded screen, detail, 1982-83
Beads, garnets on velvet, 3 panels: 66 x 33" each
Courtesy of the artist

their own cultural histories to locate and carry forward artistic practices in which the quotidian and the artistic are inextricably interwoven. But because their work is not marketed to the high art audience, it also is effectively kept off the playing field.

The melding of the two spheres is most obvious in music, where it is scarcely contested; even classical music, seemingly so removed from the everyday because of its association with the upper classes, was common fare during its own period. Music figures prominently in *A Labor of Love*, in large part because current debates in the folk music field so closely parallel those in the visual arts, and also because to separate folk music from other forms of artistic and material folk culture is arbitrary and reinforces the kinds of boundaries the exhibition is designed to break down. (Hence my use of old song titles as markers in this essay.) Like art critics, ethnomusicologists seem to be divided between those who feel that tradition itself is constantly growing and changing (and that therefore “folk” music continues to be written and performed



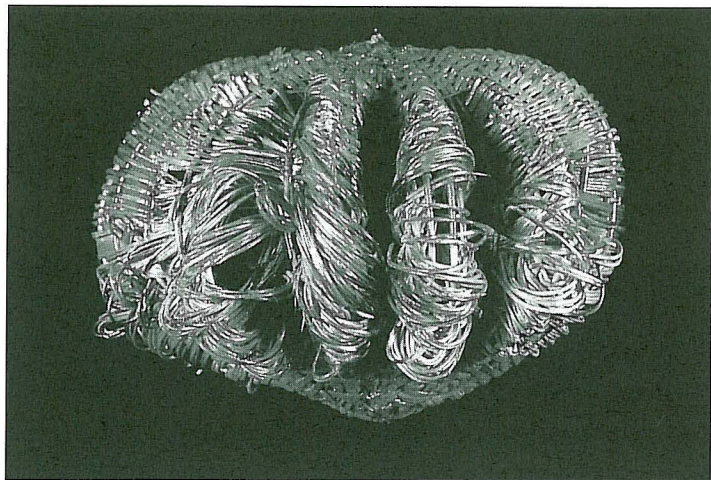
Bette Burgoyne *Spider Puppet*, 1990
Wood, crab claw, wired spider, 18 x 5 x 5½ x 4"
Collection Dorothy Robinson, New York

today), and those who consider it immutable. Folk musicians, like folk artists, are seen by the latter camp as either living within the tradition (i.e., untrained, rural, impoverished, and thus genuinely “authentic”) or as, of necessity, attempting an end-run “return” to the past, struggling to recapture it—second best, but almost as good as the real thing.

American folk music is (or was, depending on the musicologist’s persuasion) ultimately the result of the blending of many cultural traditions, including Anglo-Celtic, Hispanic and Latino, and African and African-American. Common to all the cultural traditions in American folk music is a deep and abiding connection to lived reality, from the slave songs of the antebellum South to the tragic love ballads of the Mexican *vaqueros* in the early decades of the twentieth century. Folk music set moral and ethical standards; it mitigated the loneliness of cowboys, sailors and miners; it established rhythms for stowing cotton, hauling line, cutting lumber, taming broncos, laying track, weaving, spinning, dyeing, stamping, digging; it gave people a sense of unity and shared experience. As a tool for cultural as well as personal survival, folk music was, and continues to be, a means of transmission for crucial values, memories, and practices which can’t be taken away from its makers.

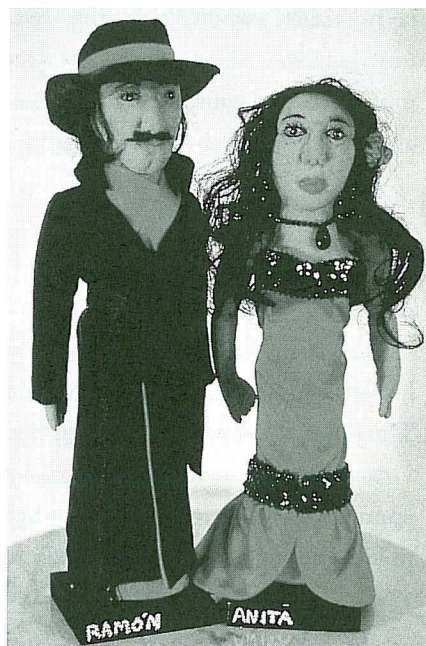
“As time goes by...”

Time passes quickly when you’re singing; hard work seems less painful, repetition less boring; feelings of loneliness and isolation melt away in the melding of voices. The sense of community created through shared song is well-known and exploited by virtually everyone from kindergarten teachers to dictators. Is it any wonder that U.S. appropriations for military bands hold firm while the NEA is being gutted? Music is used right and left to support and inspire revolutions as well as to prevent them.



Rene David Chamizo *Concha III*, 1994
Reeds (rattan), acrylic, 60 x 44 x 26"
Courtesy of the artist

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Faith Ringgold *International Doll*
Collection: *Ramon and Anita*, 1978-79
Mixed media, 18" high
Courtesy of the artist



Diego Romero *American Highway*, from
the *American Highway Series*, 1995
Native clay, native red and white slip,
commercial black, 7 1/4 x 14 1/2"
Courtesy Robert Nichols Gallery, Santa Fe

To say time flies means that it ceases to have any specificity or urgency. Westerners tend to think of this as meditative—what happens when you’ve gone exploring in the computer, or you’re deep into a really good book, or falling madly in love. It’s unusual, something other than the ordinary temporal sensibility that gets us to work, the kids to school, the assignments done, the dinner on the table. How paradoxical, then, that the most rewarding and satisfying activities are those where it seems as if time ceases to exist.⁹⁶

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The way people in any given culture think about time seems natural to them, but the experience of time is a highly variable process. In America, people living in the same household can have entirely different concepts of time because of differences in internal proprioceptors or processing mechanisms. Thus older people experience time as moving faster than young ones do. People from different cultures may have altogether mutually incomprehensible attitudes toward time. For example, if you believe that the past must be kept alive in order to experience the present, as is common in the Near East, time will appear to slow down.⁹⁷ Arriving “on time”

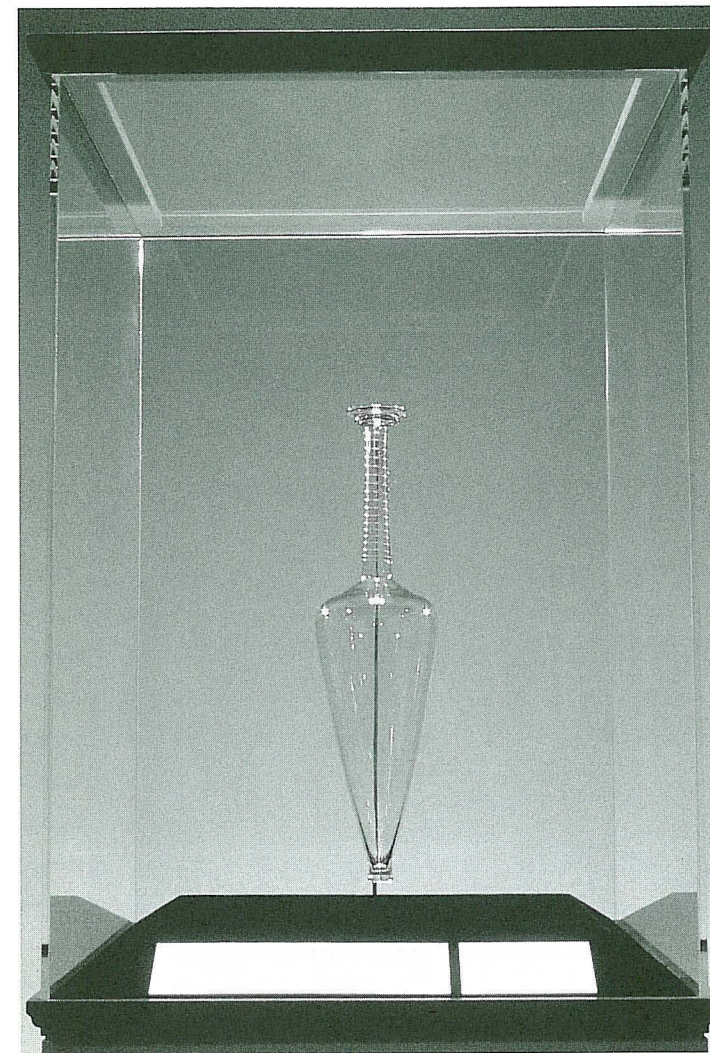
in São Paulo may mean a two-to three-hour leeway; in Cologne, you'd be perceived as incredibly rude if you were twenty minutes late.

Since labor-intensive and handmade works of art take a long time to make—sometimes a very long time—they seem to be at odds with the evolutionary, progressive, monochronic sense of time that informs the high art tradition. (Liza Lou was asked by someone, clearly overcome at seeing her beaded kitchen, “When do you find the time to do all this?”) It's quite different from polychronic time, which is interactive, mutli-tasked, social, and in flux rather than linear or goal-oriented. It's the kind of time experienced in the long and complex processes of embroidering, lace-making, knitting, and quilting. Polychronic time is inherently nonhierarchic, and doesn't lend itself to scheduling or prioritizing in the way that monochronic time does. The “outsider” artist, for whom time is not likely to be experienced monochronically, is therefore said to be disconnected from a sense of temporality altogether.⁹⁸

Polychronic time weaves the past and present together, connecting the spiritual with the material dimension of life. In the West, this sense of temporality is found most clearly in the religious communities of the Amish, Shakers and Mennonites, who pursue a simple, harmonious way of life and make beautiful objects for everyday use. For them, as for Native Americans, the products of the hand and mind are inseparable. Work is creation, creation work. Through objects, spiritual traditions and communal values and practices are brought forward into the present.

“I’m all shook up...”

Just as Arts and Crafts reformist ideology was bound up in the racial and class anxieties of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, who felt threatened by the proliferation of socialists, anarchists, and immigrants,⁹⁹ today's attacks on contemporary art reflect similar anxieties, barely cloaking a deep fear of art's ability to upset the apple



Josiah McElheny *From the Grave of a Woman*, 1995
Blown glass, text, display, Case: 31½ x 21½ x 21½"
Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Seattle



Carmen Lomas Garza *Nopalitos para ti*, 1989
Gouache, 15 x 12½ x 4"
Private collection, Courtesy Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, New York

cart. Lynne Cheney, the former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, complained in hearings that the arts “have become highly politicized. Many academics and artists now see their purpose not as revealing truth or beauty, but as achieving social and political transformation.”¹⁰⁰ But whose idea of truth or beauty does this mean? Does the fact that America consists of people from widely varied cultural and intellectual backgrounds mean that the art they produce is inherently “political”? Under any circumstances, the artists that Cheney disparages do have a number of characteristics in common that put them at odds with the Romantic ideals of individualism, uniqueness and originality, particularly as these are represented by the firm of Cheney, Greenberg, Bennett and Kramer,¹⁰¹ specialists in intrinsically valuable, disengaged High Art products in the Western tradition.

My point is that the maintenance of rigid categories and hierarchies of artmaking is today, as it was at the turn of the century, a conservative project. By fixing certain artistic practices and products in time, according them universal characteristics, and perpetuating them as *the* cultural paradigm, these selected forms of artmaking are kept in a separate and isolated sphere, away from the great majority of people for whom, not surprisingly, they seem to have little or no relevance. Art that raises disturbing questions about society—about race, gender relations, economic issues, moral or religious beliefs—is dismissed as propaganda because it threatens existing power relations. Abstract or nonobjective work (“pure” painting), being free of representational subject matter altogether, seems much safer, much further away from the exigencies of everyday life, but still runs the risk of being incomprehensible to everyone but the experts. And craft and decorative arts, folk art, “outsider” art, and popular culture are separated out and marginalized as “other” by virtue of class; they’re named and controlled not from within but from without, in order to safeguard the artistic “us” from the unenlightened “them.”

The issue, then, is not whether one kind of artwork is better than another, since all work operates in multiple ways, in a variety of contexts. But it’s a fundamental tenet

of those working in the interdisciplinary area of cultural studies that nothing—no object, artistic practice, or type of work—has an intrinsic or fixed value, function or meaning; all are subject to the vagaries of variable and changing social relations and ways of making meaning known.¹⁰² It's art and culture that simply don't have the *appearance* of neutrality that threaten the status quo. The NEA's "Fear of Funding" in cases of controversial work cuts across the cultural and class spectrum, so that it doesn't matter whether the work is "high" or "low," accessible or not, nonobjective or image-based.

Underlying the desire to separate out certain kinds of artmaking is a deeply antidemocratic impulse, an ironic accompaniment to the "my kid could do this" attitude. Because the limited arena of "fine art" is largely foreign to the nonprofessional viewer, or ignores the idea of there being such a viewer entirely, it gives art a bad rep outside the art world. And this limits and constrains the public's experience of *all* kinds of art. Granted, there are no new categories for work which falls into the interstices, but I'd be the last to sponsor a "Name That Category" contest to see if it could, like "Pattern and Decoration," or "Op-Art," have its fifteen minutes of (dubious) fame.

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"So long, it's been good to know you..."

I'm not trying to say that there is *no* difference at all between art and life, aesthetics and politics. Nor do I believe that folk and fine, high and popular art are the same; there are differences in the relation of making to community; differences in intent and value; in function and in form, purpose, training, context, opportunity, reception, etc., that are neither simple nor singular. But when works of art elude and thus destabilize accepted categories, they encourage us to think about how, when, and for what purpose the categories were created.

Robin Winters *Testa Coronata*
(*Val Saint Lambert Series*), 1990
Blown lead crystal heads, dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist



As Howard Becker points out, "distinctions between...kinds of art are not distinctions of quality; work of every degree of interest can be and has been made in every category."¹⁰³

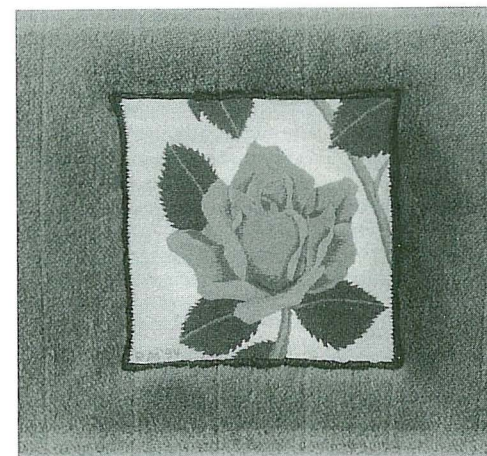
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The difficulties mavericks and naïve artists have making their works and getting them distributed, their difficulties with audiences and authorities, indicate the troubles integrated professionals are spared by participating in art worlds recognized as legitimate parts of society. The difference between the work of integrated professionals, mavericks, folk artists, and naïve artists does not lie in its surface appearance...but in the relation between that work and work done by others more or less involved in some art world."¹⁰⁴

What's at stake? Why keep the doors closed? There are no inherent boundaries in artmaking, at least none that aren't created by our social concerns, interests, needs and values.¹⁰⁵ Boundaries are created because some people need them to be there, somewhat like temporary drawer dividers. Some of us prefer to keep our socks separate from our underwear, but it's not one of life's necessities; you can still get dressed in the morning. No more do works of art have to look a certain way to help change the way people see and experience the world.

But because different types of art have come to be differently valued as a result of distinctions based on race, class and gender, the one has an effect on the other. Aesthetic border crossings and social de-stratification have more than a passing acquaintance. Is it any wonder that the NEA has been brought to its knees by people both outside and inside the art world promoting a specific "family," "Christian," or "Western" hierarchy of values? On the one hand, *Real*politicos like Cheney and Bennett accuse publicly funded art of being "political," when nothing could be more political than their own attacks on art. Along with a number of congressmen, senators, religious leaders, pundits and opportunists who don't know or care about art, they use it solely for career advancement or to promote racist, misogynous and homophobic agendas, not to encourage informed debates. On the other hand, professional critics who attack contemporary art from within, like Hilton Kramer of *The New Criterion* or Arlene Croce of the *New Yorker*, are upset by its democratizing potential. They long for the good old days when museums were elite, audiences small, galleries few, artists selectively supported and white, and the words of the high priests of the field went unchallenged and undeconstructed. The concept of talent and virtue being distributed among ordinary people rather than being the province of the gifted few is anathema to those who dread democratization, who see in the death of "quality"—that absolute monarch of Ultimate Value—the death of a social order which has been highly beneficial to them. That the latter bunch is in bed with the former is testimony to just how cold the weather out there has become.¹⁰⁶

Labor-intensive and/or handcrafted work, folk and outsider art aren't locked into an ideologically pure, outmoded time zone somewhere in the past, inert and neutralized. They're not necessarily nostalgic, nor are they *ipso facto* regressive. The artists in *A Labor of Love*, from a wide variety of backgrounds and training, have made work that elicits critical thinking about the way we experience and understand the past and the present. Through the exhibition, I've tried to undermine preconceptions about this kind of work, hoping to open a potential space for new insights into its meaning and function. For me, and perhaps for many of you as well, the work is an invitation to engage in those larger dialogues which are important not only to the arts today, but to the health and well-being—dare I say the continued existence?—of American cultural life at large.



Raymond Materson *Without Thorns*, 1994
Embroidery, 2¼ x 2¾"
Courtesy American Primitive Gallery,
New York

Notes

1. See David Novitz, *The Boundaries of Art* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), p. 21.
2. Irving Lavin, "High and Low Before Their Time: Bernini and the Art of Social Satire," in *Modern Art & Popular Culture: Readings in High & Low*, eds. Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnick (New York: The Museum of Modern Art and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990), p. 19.
3. Varnedoe and Gopnick, "Introduction," *Modern Art & Popular Culture*, p. 12.
4. See Jean Lipman, *Provocative Parallels: Naïve Early Americans / International Sophisticates*, exhibition catalogue (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1975).
5. The term is a translation of the French *art brut*, coined by Jean Dubuffet to describe what he found as he rummaged through French and Swiss insane asylums in the 1940s. First brought to the attention of Americans by British folklorist Roger Cardinal, "outsider" art eventually came to be used as an umbrella term for all contemporary American folk art, especially in its more idiosyncratic forms.
6. Symposium, January 29, 1995, on the occasion of an exhibition entitled *A World of Their Own: Twentieth-century American Folk Art*.
7. See Gene Bluestein, *Poplore: Folk and Pop in American Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 20.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
9. Tom Morganthau and Gregory Beals, "Chasing the Unabomber," *Newsweek*, July 10, 1995, pp. 41, 43.
10. These particular contemporary antimodernists are named after General Ned Ludd, the mythic hero of a group of British weavers who, in 1811, attacked with sledgehammers the newly technologized factories that threatened their jobs. See Bob Ickes, "Die, Computer, Die," *New York Magazine*, July 24, 1995, pp. 22-29.
11. Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr., "The Politics of the Past in American Folk Art History," in *Folk Art and Art Worlds*, eds. John Michael Vlach and Simon J. Bronner (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), p. 39. I have drawn heavily on Metcalf's writings on the history of folk art, the collecting and exhibition practices which engage with it, and his approach to material culture at large. My own views are informed by his critical—and still controversial—work in the field, to which I am greatly indebted.
12. Jeffrey Stewart, in a lecture at the American Craft Museum symposium, pointed out that between 1910 and 1920 the black population of the U.S. jumped 95%, and Harlem changed from

an all-white New York suburbia to an all-black ghetto. All subsequent citations refer to the symposium entitled "Multicultural and Regional Sources: Craft Revivals," May 17, 1991, the second of eight symposia for "The History of Twentieth-century American Craft: A Centenary Project," at the American Craft Museum.

13. See George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 12.

14. See Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1980), pp. 258-261. These bitter class struggles, ethnic and racial conflicts are still with us today, albeit in slightly altered form. In terms of racial conflict, we need only think of the enormous divide between blacks and whites that opened, or became visible, in the aftermath of the O.J. Simpson trial verdict.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 257-258. Patriotism was enforced by the loyalty oaths that were required of teachers; textbooks were controlled by school officials and "political" books banned by state law in many places.

16. Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr., "Artifacts and Cultural Meaning: The Ritual and Collecting of American Folk Art," in *Living in a Material World: Canadian and American Approaches to Material Culture*, ed. Gerald L. Pocius.

(St. John's, Newfoundland: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1991), p. 228.

17. Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr., "Folk Art, Fine Art and Craft, Aesthetic Definitions and the Search for Modern American Identity," unpublished notes for a lecture delivered at the American Craft Museum symposium, May 17, 1991.

18. See T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Anti-Modernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 60-61. Lears' analysis has altogether informed my own views; I'm grateful to Gene Metcalf for bringing it to my attention.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

20. Roszika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 1984), p. 5.

21. David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (Cambridge, New York, and Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1968, reprinted 1988), p. 25.

22. An excellent synopsis of the movement is found in Leslie Greene Bowman, *American Arts & Crafts: Virtue in Design*, exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991).

23. See Henri Dorra, ed., *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1994), p. 82.

24. Quoted in Coy L. Ludwig, *The Arts & Crafts Movement in New York State, 1890s-1920s*, exhibition catalogue (Hamilton, N.Y.: Gallery Association of New York State, 1983), p. 3.

25. See Lears, *No Place of Grace*, p. 74. The period produced what Lears calls "a vast literature of complaint."

26. William Bennett, "The Case for Abolishing the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities," written testimony delivered before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, January 24, 1995, p. 3.

27. Quoted in Michael Bérubé, *Public Access: Literary Theory and American Cultural Politics* (London & New York: Verso, 1994), epigram.

28. See Lears, *No Place of Grace*, p. 307.

29. That this is so seems self-evident, but perhaps it will suffice to point to the existence, in separate buildings and parts of the city in New York alone, of the American Craft Museum, the Museum of American Folk Art, the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum—not to mention The New Museum of Contemporary Art. The fact that there are also separate museums for work by Native Americans, Hispanic and Latino artists, African-American artists, and Asian artists, past and present, is another, although not unrelated, matter.

30. For a discussion of the democratic, egalitarian, even revolutionary aspects of the Rococo style, see William Park, *The Idea of Rococo* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992).

31. George Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, p. 13.

32. See Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 164.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

34. Novitz, *The Boundaries of Art*, p. 22.

35. Joanne Cubbs, "The Artist as Outsider," in *The Artist Outsider*, eds., Michael D. Hall and Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr. (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), p. 79.

36. Quoted in John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston: Unwin, 1989), p. 53.

37. See Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, p. 52.

38. Robert Storr, "No Joy in Mudville: Greenberg's Modernism Then and Now," in *Modern Art and Popular Culture: Readings in High & Low*, p. 165. Storr's essay is a brilliant analysis and critique of Greenberg's ideas, influence, and politics.

39. Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 3-21.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

41. The 1995 Whitney Biennial, organized by curator Elizabeth Sussman, was strongly criticized by many. See, for example, Hilton Kramer, "The Biennialized Whitney: Closed for Deconstruction," *The New York Observer*, March 29, 1995, pp. 1, 19. The 1995 exhibition, organized by Klaus Kertess, was widely hailed as a refreshing antidote. See Paul Goldberger, "The Art of His Choosing," *The New York Times Magazine*, Sunday, Feb. 26, 1995, pp. 30-62.
42. See Novitz, *The Boundaries of Art*, p. 182.
43. See Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, p. 161.
44. Henri Lefebvre, quoted in Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, p. 35.
45. Rayna Green, lecture at The American Craft Museum symposium, May 17, 1991.
46. Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, "The Chicano Movement/The Movement of Chicano Art," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds., Ivan Karp and Stephen D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), p. 128.
47. Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 4, 15.
48. Ibid., p. 20.
49. See Kenneth Ames, "Outside Outsider Art," in *The Artist Outsider*, p. 261.
50. For example: "Through our research we identified a certain

restricted range of expression among the outsiders that has intrigued five successive generations of artists in the twentieth century. That range of expression includes the following: a distinct compulsiveness, a visionary tone, a fusion of edgy uncertainty and anxiety with a firm certitude, a sense of exorcism, and the need and intent to get it out and place it down and to grasp and anchor the ephemeral. Such expressiveness verges on the hallucinogenic; it grapples with the unknowable; it does not—as is often the case with folk art—affirm the status quo." in Maurice Tuchman and Carol S. Eliel, *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art*, exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles and Princeton: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Princeton University Press, 1992), Introduction, p. 10.

51. See David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship*, p. 17. He distinguishes, for instance, between the "workmanship of risk," the "workmanship of certainty," and "regulated workmanship," the first being where the quality of the finished product is at issue throughout its making, the second where any "operative" applying its rules is unable to spoil the job, and the last whereby "the naked eye can detect no disparity between achievement and idea."
52. Ibid., p. 30.
53. See Sylvia Kleinert, "Do we have a Healthy Crafts 'Critical Culture'?" in *Craft 2000: The National Craft Conference*, (Perth: Crafts Council of Australia, 1992), p. 31. The proceedings are also

- relevant to crafts issues in the United States, particularly as the discussions are both lively and complex.
54. However, as Joanne Cubbs pointed out to me, an interesting reversal occurs just after the turn of the century when artists like those working in the Bauhaus looked to the machine not only to democratize their ideals, but as a means of achieving a more austere and absolute (i.e., moral) aesthetic form. Thus, the ideal of the hand-made evolved to that of the machine-made, while keeping the ideology of the former intact.
 55. See Pye, *Workmanship*, pp. 76-79.
 56. Ibid., p. 78.
 57. Metcalf, "Artifacts and Cultural Meaning: The Ritual of Collecting American Folk Art," in *Living in a Material World*. Metcalf clearly elucidated the history of folk art that follows in "Confronting Contemporary Folk Art," in *Ties That Bind: Folk Art in Contemporary Culture*, exhibition catalogue (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Contemporary Arts Center, 1987).
 58. See Michael Owen Jones, *Exploring Folk Art: Twenty Years of Thought on Craft, Work, and Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987) and Michael Owen Jones, Michael Morre, and Richard Snyder, eds., *Inside Organizations: Understanding the Human Dimension* (Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage Publications, 1988).
 59. See Bluestein, *Poplore*, pp. 30-56.

60. Metcalf, "Artifacts and Cultural Meaning," in *Living in a Material World*, pp. 221-222.
61. Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr., "Black Art, Folk Art, and Social Control," *Winterthur Portfolio* 18 (1984): p. 287.
62. Tuchman and Eliel, *Parallel Visions*, p. 10.
63. See Metcalf, "From Domination to Desire," in *The Artist Outsider*, pp. 218-219.
64. Jane Livingston, "The Art of the Self-Taught/The Art of Our Time," in *Self-Taught Artists from 1940 to the Present*, exhibition catalogue (New Orleans, Louisiana: New Orleans Museum of Art, 1993), p. 27.
65. Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, p. 27.
66. James Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, eds. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West (New York and Cambridge, Mass.: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, 1990), pp. 141-169.
67. Lowery Stokes Sims, "Artists, Folk and Trained: An African-American Perspective," in *Self-Taught Artists from 1940 to the Present*, p. 31.
68. Susan Larsen, "A View of Paradise from a Distant View," in *Self-Taught Artists from 1940 to the Present*, p. 42.
69. See Paul Lauter, "Working Class Women's Literature," in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*,

- eds., Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1991), p. 845.
70. An interesting example can be found in a review of Ann Hamilton's exhibition at the Ruth Bloom Gallery in Los Angeles. David Greene writes: "Hamilton's work...calls to mind Faith Ringgold's quilts, a slew of nineteen-seventies feminist video and performance, and the whole history of installation art...but without the risk-taking that made much of that work interesting, if briefly. Instead, Hamilton signals the end of installation art as we know it: by making it decorative, she ushers installation into the realm of popular folk art," in *Art Issues* (Sept/Oct. 1994): p. 42. Here's a fascinating conflation of categories placed under a single judgment call.
71. See Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, p. 5.
72. See Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Carol Duncan, "Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-century Vanguard Painting" *Artforum*, (December 1975): 30-39; Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* (New York: MacMillan, 1981).
73. See Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, p. 39.
74. Ibid., p. 5.
75. See M.H. Dunlop, *Sixty Miles from Contentment: Traveling the Nineteenth-Century American Interior* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995), p. 144. "Men and women

- had different work, had different access to money and amusement, spoke in groups about different subjects, wore different clothes, ate different food at different rates, were subject to different judgments on their looks, were required to manage their bodies differently, had different manners and different addictions, had different access to both space and information, worked within different limits imposed on looking at and speaking of the other gender, and were subject to different degrees of defineability. Among the few gender-neutral activities available, however, were traveling, writing, and getting oneself published. Anyone, regardless of age or gender, could be a travel writer and, sitting in gender-divided space, perform the gender-neutral activity of writing about gendered space."
76. Ibid., p. 164.
77. Edward Carpenter, quoted in Coy L. Ludwig, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in New York State*, p. 27.
78. A 1994 exhibition entitled *Guys Who Sew*, organized by Elizabeth Brown and Fran Seegull for the University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, clearly made this point.
79. Kenneth L. Ames, "Outside Outsider Art," in *The Artist Outsider*, p. 261.
80. Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr., lecture at the American Craft Museum symposium, May 17, 1991.

81. See Joanne Cubbs, "The Artist as Outsider," in *The Artist Outsider*, p. 89. Cubbs refers to "the relentless fetishizing of difference" in the construction of outsider art as a category.

82. Metcalf, lecture at the American Craft Museum symposium.

83. Dunlop, *Sixty Miles from Contentment*, p. 105.

84. *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

85. Rayna Green, lecture at the American Craft Museum symposium, May 17, 1991.

86. Rick West, Director of the Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C., speaking at a panel, "Why Do Art Museums Matter?" organized by the Association of Art Museum Directors, June 16, 1995.

87. Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility," in *CARA/ Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*, exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, University of California, 1991), p. 147.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

89. *Ibid.*, pp. 155, 156.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

91. John Kuo Wei Tchen, "Believing is Seeing," in *Asian/American: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art*, exhibition catalogue (New York: The New Press and Asia Society Galleries, 1994), pp. 17-18.

92. Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, p. 149.

93. Richard Kurin, "Cultural Conservation," *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, p. 319.

94. Tchen, "Believing is Seeing," p. 22.

95. Metcalf, "Black Art, Folk Art, and Social Control," p. 288.

96. See E.T. Hall, *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time* (New York & London: Doubleday, 1983), p. 148. A more critical and theoretical discussion of time is found in Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

97. See E.T. Hall, *The Dance of Life*, p. 141.

98. See Metcalf, "From Domination to Desire," in *The Artist Outsider*, p. 219. Metcalf describes how the modern concept of time is "viewed as a story of the progressive, evolutionary development of the social stages leading from savagery to civilization, a development which was now thought to be 'natural,' the outcome of the operation of scientific laws."

99. See Lears, *No Place of Grace*, p. 70.

100. Lynne V. Cheney, Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities, 1986-1993, written testimony delivered before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, January 24, 1995, p. 1.

101. Hilton Kramer, former *New York Times* art critic, editor of *The New Criterion* and art writer for *The New York Observer*, has picked up where Clement Greenberg left off, taking Romantic notions to a place where no man has ever gone before—at least not since Royal Cortissoz graced the field of art history with his particular brand of short-sightedness in the 1920s. Kramer's attacks on any and all art which purports to have a relationship with the larger world are by now legendary, and make for lively, if not terribly informative, reading. These days, Kramer devotes much of his writing to separating art from "non-art," a herculean task but one which he feels singularly qualified to tackle. All nontraditional forms of artmaking, all work which addresses social or political concerns (despite the precedents of Dürer, Goya, Picasso, etc.) or appropriates images or techniques from popular culture are suspect.

102. See John Frow, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 145.

103. Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), p. 270.

104. *Ibid.*, pp. 269-270.

105. See Novitz, *The Boundaries of Art*, p. 85.

106. See Bluestein, *Poplore*, p. 22. Thanks also to Tim Yohn for additional background and analysis.

Acknowledgments

This exhibition, which began as a seed planted by Bill Olander over a decade ago, sprouted as a result of having met Eugene Metcalf, a professor at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, when we were fellow speakers at a 1991 symposium at the American Craft Museum in New York. We found ourselves to be kindred spirits across disciplines, professions, and geographies. Through him, I first became aware of the salient debates in the folk art world, and the readings—his own and many others—he so generously shared with me have greatly expanded my intellectual horizons and my thinking about artworks in general. Through Gene, I was also introduced to two extraordinary people who greatly enriched my engagement with these issues: Joanne Cubbs, Curator of Folk Art at the High Museum in Atlanta, and Jan Brooks, artist and crafts theoretician.

Among the many artists who are also (and doubtless unwittingly) responsible for this undertaking are: William Copley, whose uncategorizable work I had the privilege of cataloguing in the early sixties; Jane Kaufman, whom I've known and admired since the late sixties and who has for all of her career made extraordinary work which no one in the art world quite knows what to do with; Judith Shea, a keen intelligence whose ability to work in the spaces between genres has set a high standard for anyone thinking about these issues; and Manuel Pardo, whose uncanny ability to confound the decorative and the decorous, the popular and the perverse, has for some time inspired me to chart my own path through murky artistic seas without necessarily knowing where I'm heading.

Over the years, I've had the pleasure of organizing exhibitions of the works of Alfred Jensen in 1978 and of Markus Raetz in 1988; The New Museum also undertook shows of the work of Howard Finster (1982) and Thornton Dial (1993). Getting to know these artists and their thinking made me question how such categories as "folk," "craft," and "outsider" came to be and what they meant in the context of contemporary art practice.

William Fagaly, Curator and Assistant Director of the New Orleans Museum of Art, whose friendship I've enjoyed over many years, has helped me to appreciate works of art that initially lay—or so I thought—outside my own area of interest. Eons ago, he took me to 'Fess Longhair's funeral, an extraordinary event which has stayed with me ever since. Some years later Bill took me to meet Sister Gertrude Morgan; the many gospel songs she played for me and the works of art crowding the walls of her whitewashed room made an indelible impression. These experiences are partly to blame for my putting the two forms, music and art, together publicly in this exhibition.

An exhibition of this size and complexity would not have been possible without the help of many friends and colleagues. At The New Museum, Registrar John Hatfield and Installation Coordinator Patricia Thornley were enormously helpful, and rendered the nasty bits virtually painless. Mimi Young, Exhibitions Coordinator, who left the Museum in November 1995, helped to assure the smooth working of the many people who participated in the project. Brian Goldfarb, Curator of Education, and Charlayne Haynes, Director of Public Relations, offered advice and editorial suggestions which greatly improved my essay. Dan Cameron, who had just begun work as Senior Curator, took time as well to provide advice and suggestions. In the Director's Office, Victoria Brown, who has an endless bag of amazing skills to pull from, proofread and helped copy-edit the essay and generally made life a great deal easier for all of us working on the project. Susan Cahan, Deputy Director, was instrumental in supporting my curatorial efforts by taking some of the more pressing institutional concerns onto her own highly competent shoulders.

Interns Fernando Barenblit, an energetic and dedicated young art historian from Barcelona, Isabel Venero, our New York-based and enormously talented Multicultural Intern, and Meg Linton, a curator who moved from Southern California for four months to work on the exhibition and the catalogue, were worth their weight in gold and fun to be with, too. *A Labor of Love* couldn't have been done without them, and I'm grateful not only for their hard work but for their friendship as well.

Outside the Museum, many friends and colleagues helped in a variety of ways. Gail Gregg spent time early on helping me to talk through some of the basic concerns of the exhibition, and provided me with initial suggestions and reading materials; Leslie Satin, Carla Stellweg and Susan Unterberg also provided resources, suggested articles and lent me books; Eleanor Heartney put me in touch with Diego Romero. My Santa Barbara "sisters," Marla Berns, Elizabeth Brown, and Nancy Doll, were a wellspring of enthusiasm, advice, resources and books galore; Ro Snell and Rick Sanders were incredibly generous in providing a safe haven for writing, thinking, and enjoyment in August.

The catalogue was made possible by Penny McCall, collector, trustee and longtime pal. Its contents and my essay were edited by Tim Yohn, with whom I have had the pleasure of working for almost three decades. He is a wonderful writer, editor, and friend. Susan Evans and Brian Sisco, of Sisco & Evans, designed the book with sensitivity, grace, and imagination, which are their stock-in-trade. Dean McNeil, my silent partner in crime, once again provided equal parts of patience, pizza, and psychotherapy on an ongoing basis. Thanks, guys!

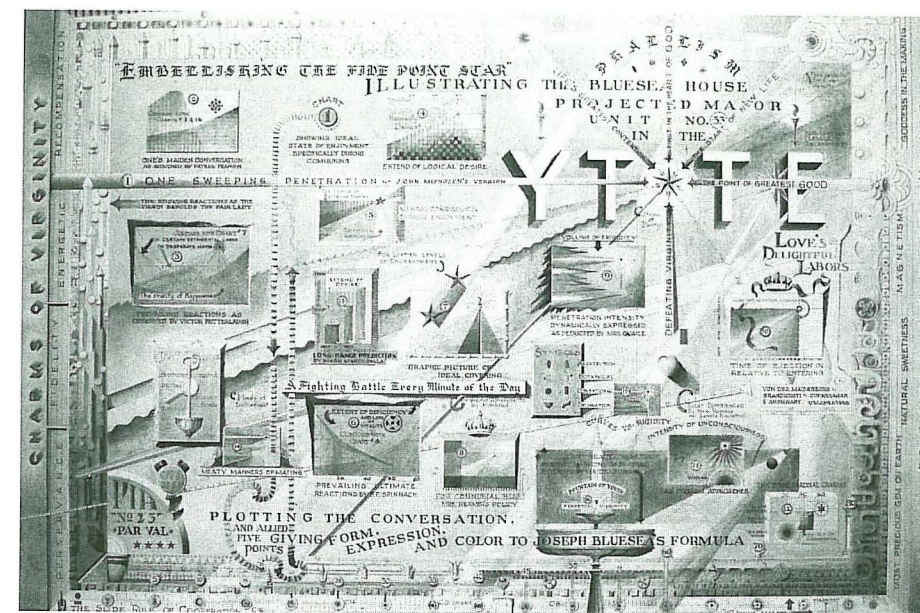
At a time when government funding for the arts is in serious jeopardy, The Peter Norton Family Foundation, with the help of Fran Seegull, provided the means to bring Liza Lou's *Kitchen* to New York. New Museum trustee Robert Shiffler, through Arcorp Inc., lent us the furniture for the exhibition's domestic mise-en-scène, without which we would have had a much less lively installation. We are particularly grateful for a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, bravely holding its own against the rising tide of cutbacks, and we're inordinately appreciative of the agency for its help not only with this exhibition but with so many projects over the years. Above all, our thanks to the Rockefeller Foundation for major support of *A Labor of Love*. The Foundation's deep understanding of unconventional exhibition practices and provocative theoretical inquiries gives all of us in the field the much-needed courage to proceed investigatively rather than didactically.

I'm grateful to the lenders who have been exceptionally generous in their willingness to share beautiful and often fragile pieces with the Museum's public. Our thanks to the many galleries which have helped us to contact artists and collectors, obtain photographs and permissions, and have provided assistance in many other ways as well: special thanks to Braunstein/Quay Gallery, McKee Gallery, Max Protetch and Carla Stellweg. Collectors Pamela and Stephen Hootkin were wonderfully supportive and introduced me and my colleagues to many artists with whose work we would otherwise be unfamiliar.

To all, but especially to the amazing and indomitable artists in the exhibition, my gratitude for making this project its own, extraordinarily pleasurable, labor of love.

—M.T.

This essay is dedicated to my aunt, Mollie Brooks, whose eighty years to date have been characterized by wisdom, commitment, compassion, and joy; she is an inspiration to all who know and love her.



A.G. Rizzoli Bluesea House, Pia 23, 1940

Ink on rag paper, 20 x 30"

Courtesy Michael Grossman and The Ames Gallery, Berkeley, California

Artists' Statements

All statements not provided by the artists are indicated by an *.

Chelo (Consuelo) Gonzalez Amezcua

b. 1903, Piedras Blancas, Chihuahua, Mexico
d. 1975, Del Rio, Texas
*Chelo Amezcua carved white river stones found near her home from the time she moved to Del Rio. She honored her creative spirit daily by drawing, celebrating herself as a *Tejana*.

Imogene Jessie Goodshot Arquero

b. 1948, Pine Ridge, South Dakota
I strive for my work not only to be used as apparel but to be one-of-a-kind collectable items. Most people who know beadwork consider it to be a craft. I've been working toward the idea that it should be known as art.

Alan Belcher

b. 1957, Toronto, Canada
The passé style of the aloof and exhausted device of the ugly has now made the investment of one's self and spirit a requirement in the production of quality contemporary objects. The farming-out of creation to machines or assistants and the resulting loss of craft for the sake of concept now seem an inappropriate waste. Perhaps my laborious production and the mandatory patience required to fabricate my recent works exaggerate my distaste for the outmoded distance between artists and their products.

Robert Brady

b. 1946, Reno, Nevada
In general my work is a response to art, art history, the nature of things and the world around me. The human figure is usually the vehicle for my expression and excitement.

Darren Brown

b. 1968, Kansas
Pretending to be cool, looking like a clown, being average, Pierre Cardin dreams, Gap realities, homemade sadness and making do.

Bette Burgoyne

b. 1959, Seattle, Washington
Lives and works in San Francisco.

Larry Calkins

b. 1955, Oregon
My family history has become a metaphor for the transient nature of life, explored in my work. I find narratives in the lives of known and unknown people. Reoccurring images, numbers and dates signify life-altering events.

Rene David Chamizo

b. 1963, Havana, Cuba
My visual and performance work reflect my bond with my Afro-Cuban heritage. Working with rattan, a natural fiber used by mankind from its very beginnings, puts me in touch with my ancestors.

Dale Chihuly

b. 1941, Tacoma, Washington
*Chihuly received a B.A. from the University of Washington in 1965, an M.S. from the University of Wisconsin in 1967, and a M.F.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1968. He lives and works in Seattle.

Pier Consagra

b. 1954, Rome, Italy
Piazza Navona plus Canal Street equals Muybridge-inspired figures holding light bulbs. The nude in America has to be functional, no?

William Copley (Cply)

b. 1919, New York
The story of my life. Against my better judgment I am brought into this world and study assiduously. I take first communion. I am sent out into life. I lead a life of excess and debauchery. I make my first \$1,000,000. I repent. I marry and become head of a household. I meet the fabulous Yvette, a whore. I am taken into adultery. I am punished. I gain eternal life.

Jacob El Hanani

b. 1949, Casablanca, Morocco
Society has become reliant on instant gratification, demanding efficiency and economy of scale. My work contradicts this phenomenon by prioritizing quality and duration of execution.

Tom Emerson

b. 1951, Independence, Kansas
The Personification of the Modern Relic is at once recognition (of ourselves and our personal deities) and disassociation (from the functional order of industrialized society).

Dianna Frid

b. 1967, Mexico City
I've taught myself how to sew, mostly defiantly, so as to unlearn both contextual and technical parameters: I always suspected that categories were relative.

Carmen Lomas Garza

b. 1948, Kingsville, Texas
My art is a record of the Chicano/Chicana life I knew as a child growing up in Kingsville, Texas in the 1950s and 60s. I am a chronicler of celebrations, healing ceremonies, family stories and shared recollections of the Chicano/Chicana community. I make my art not only for Chicanos but also for others to see who we are as a people. If you see my heart and humanity through my art, then hopefully you will not exclude me or other Chicanos from rightfully participating in this society.

Chuck Genco

b. 1954, Buffalo, New York
My pieces are both more and less than they seem. More in that the mechanism by which they operate is hidden, secret. Less in that the implied transmutations seem miraculous.

Nöle Giulini

b. 1958, Heidelberg, Germany
I pick up discarded and rejected material that I find in my immediate environment, internal as well as external. Stuff others consider dirt or waste, without any value or meaning. I want to make something out of "nothing."

Michael Harms

b. 1962, Peoria, Illinois
I am currently at the Statesville Correctional Center where I've been since 1991. I immediately started carving with soap and currently that is my hobby.

Bessie Harvey

b. 1928, Dallas, Georgia
d. 1994, Alcoa, Tennessee
*Bessie Harvey began to sculpt by finding wood that spoke to her. The right wood held the spirits of her ancestors as well as the message of God. Her sculpture was an attempt to free both voices.

Mary Heilmann

b. 1940, San Francisco
Lives and works in New York.

Oliver Herring

b. 1964, Heidelberg, Germany
These ties belong around my neck. Painting them serves a sometimes necessary break from knitting. My lucky tie, my grandmother's funeral tie and my boyfriend's first show tie are among the selected items.

James Hill

b. 1945, Sherman, Texas
The folk artists I have known got to art later in their lives. Prior to making art they had other interests and occupations. I remember this.

Indira Freitas Johnson

b. 1943, Bombay, India
Hands are a common symbol in my work. They are the primary tools of action and actions determine one's Karma. The focus of my work is to find a process that leads to spiritual growth and balance.

Jane Kaufman

b. 1938, New York City
The hardest problem of any art is to make real and believable the illusion of another reality. To bring people beyond fear, beyond stereotyping and prejudice, beyond dismissal and disdain, to a new way of seeing.

Larry Krone

b. 1970, Chicago, Illinois
In the tradition of clothespin, wooden spoon, and wrinkly-apple-head dolls; in the spirit of something-from-nothing crafts in general: here are my (Wisdom) Tooth Fools.

Paul Laffoley

b. 1940, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Architect, self-taught artist except for apprenticeships with Mirko Baseldella and Frederick Kiesler. Themes: The Visionary Genre, Alchemy, Tantra, Lucid-dreaming, Mind-physics, Time-transformative Physically Alive Architecture.

Dinh Q. Lê

b. 1968, Ha-Tien, Vietnam
I am Vietnamese. I am not
Vietnamese
I am American. I am not
American
I am a Vietnamese-American.
I am not . . .

Charles LeDray

b. 1960, Seattle, Washington
Lives in New York City.

Liza Lou

b. 1969, New York City
I am an artist and I am going to
bead the world. Most of my life
has been spent in the suburbs.
Always hated the suburbs. Went
to Italy when I was 18 to paint
and to study what the masters
had done about *their* landscapes.
Saw grand spectacles for the
eyes. Monuments that took years
and years to create. Entire struc-
tures that were incredible
investments in time, labor and
materials. Went home to San
Diego. To miles and miles of
tract homes and mini-malls.
Decided to build a 3-dimen-
sional alternative reality. Built a
life-size kitchen. Covered it in
millions of beads. Maybe I can't
change the world, but I can
create what I want to look at.

Michael Lucero

b. 1953, Tracy, California
I received a B.A. from Humboldt
State University, Arcata,
California in 1975 and then
studied with Howard Kottler at
the University of Washington,
Seattle, where I received a
M.F.A. in 1978. I then relocated
to New York City, where I
maintain a studio.

Raymond Materson

b. 1954, Milford, Connecticut
Precocity, necessity, and
nostalgia converged. Castaway
socks became the perfect
metaphor as I deconstructed
and re-engineered the unraveled
threads into reborn stories,
silently shouting.

Josiah McElheny

b. 1966, Boston
Artist, glassblower, husband,
Seattle resident, vice-mayor,
Transjö, Sweden; founder
of The Hunter's Glass Museum,
amateur historian, apprentice
to glass masters Jan-Erik
Ritzman (Sweden) and Lino
Tagliapietra (Italy).

Sana Musasama

b. 1954, New York City
My current work is inspired by
the reading of early Abolitionist
movements in our country's
history. I began this series in
1991 and continue pushing my
clay to retell our collective story.

Richard T. Notkin

b. 1948, Chicago
Since the 1960s, I have created
sculptures and sculptural vessels
(predominantly in the ceramic
medium) which explore the
origins of conflict in human
culture—the collective conflicts
between nations, ethnic
groups, religions, etc., and those
inherent in relationships
between individuals.

Manuel Pardo

b. 1952, Cardenas, Cuba
Lives and works in New York
City.

Elaine Reichek

b. New York City
Lives and works in New York
City.

Faith Ringgold

b. 1950, New York
When I was a child I loved to
make dolls, however I didn't like
their "home-made" look. As an
artist, dolls bring an added joy to
making art; they please children
of all ages.

A.G. Rizzoli

b. 1896, California
d. 1981
*"L.D.L." or "Love's Delightful
Labors" appears in A.G. Rizzoli's
very detailed drawings. His
images are filled with an array
of anagrams and acronyms.
The meaning of some he reveals
to us, while others are left for
us to translate.

Diego Romero

b. 1964, Oakland, California
Practicing the living tradition
of the Pueblo potter and the
narrative of historical Mimbres
pottery, I have created a
universal narrative addressing
the human condition with a
post-industrial concern.

Richard Rule

b. 1963, Winchester,
Massachusetts
Dream Job: personal assistant to
Liza Minnelli; Greatest
Aspiration: to meet Nina Hagen;
Interests: Marlboro Lights,
Diet Pepsi, Nina Hagen, Liza
Minnelli, Roseanne, sitting
around doing nothing, my
boyfriend, Pierre, whom I love
dearly.

Kevin B. Sampson

b. 1954, Elizabeth, New Jersey
Single parent, teacher, retired
Police Composite Sketch Artist,
widower. My whole life was
shaped to enable me to construct
work from disparate objects,
rescuing pieces of memory
otherwise overlooked.

Alison Saar

b. 1956, Los Angeles, California
I take great pleasure in the often
tedious process of making my
work. When working alone, the
piecing together of small bits of
sheet metal becomes a sort of
mantra, each shape defining the
next. When working with 1 or 2
assistants, the process becomes
reminiscent of a quilting bee,
except instead of idle chatter,
the space is filled with a constant
hammering. The hammering
soon becomes a rhythm and
often I am tempted to break into
the Chain Gang chant. The
banner *El Bato Loco* was beaded
by artists in Haiti working in
a group also much like a
traditional sewing bee.

Beverly Semmes

b. Washington, D.C.
Lives and works in New York
City.

Judith Shea

b. Philadelphia
Mama's Girl is an image from
a dream which was clearly about
a child's vulnerability to the
parent, in particular at the
pre-pubescent age when one
experiences the conflict between
dependence and independence.
Often it is when a child runs
away from home.

Kazumi Tanaka

b. 1962, Osaka, Japan
When I was a child, the objects
in my house had many hidden
secrets. I am still exploring
them, filtered through time
and distance.

Kukuli Velarde

b. 1962, Cusco, Perú
I come from the mixture of
Western culture and the
indigenous cultures of Perú.
Two usually mixed, never
blended, sometimes opposed
streams that are both my
heritage.

Margaret Wharton

b. 1943, Portsmouth, Virginia
I obtained a B.S. from the
University of Maryland in
1965 and a M.F.A. from the Art
Institute of Chicago in 1975.
I am a founding member of
Artemesia, and a 1984 recipient
of the Award in the Visual Arts,
and an NEA recipient for
1979, 1988 and 1993.

Robin Winters

b. 1950, Benicia, California
"25 Words and a Title"
Some things you can only
identify by their absence.
Self-empowerment, critical
doubt, human rights, urban
suburban, magical results, social
action, personal responsibility,
free will, planned abandonment,
pleasure function, chance
coincidence, fashion meets
death.

Willie Wayne Young

b. 1942, Dallas, Texas
*Young collects seed pods and
plant roots, in particular the
Texas boidock tree. He uses
these objects as a pathway to his
own invention and process of
image making.

Daisy Youngblood

b. 1945, Asheville, North
Carolina
Exposing myself is what I do in
my sculptures . . . Art is my
religion: the process of exposing,
cooking down to essence,
eventually gets me to a place
of shared existence.

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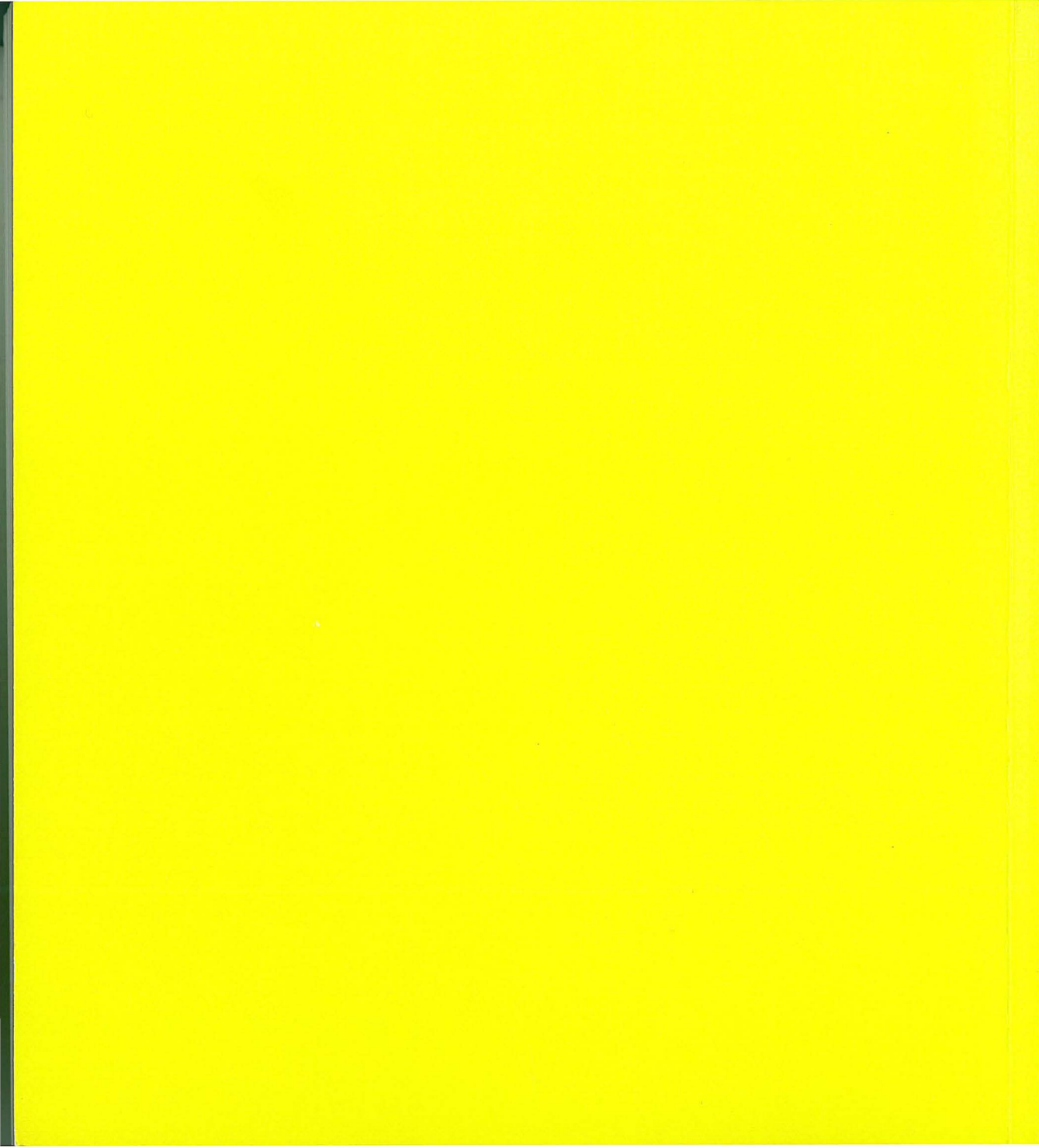
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