



Gordon Motta-Clark, *Substrait* - Film in Progress

ART \longleftrightarrow WORLD

The artists included in this exhibition reveal or comment on the functioning of the natural and social systems which affect the contemporary world. These systems may be biological or ecological, political or economic. Writing about the integration of art with other disciplines, artist Allan Kaprow states:

While artists have long been more or less concerned with the nature of the physical universe, with ideas and with human issues—i.e. with “life”—their primary models were life in *translation*, namely other artworks. Life itself was a secondary model; an artist didn’t go to school to study life, but art.

Now the procedure seems to be reversing. Large numbers of experimenters are bypassing the defined linguistic modes of poetry, painting, music, etc., and are going directly to sources outside of their professions. (Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the un-Artist, Part III,” *Art in America*, January-February 1974, page 88.)

Intentionally blurring the boundaries between art and other disciplines, this art remains art by existing in an art context: the information presented is not directed at advancing knowledge in a specific field of inquiry, as in scientific research; rather it illuminates an all-over life experience.

The visual material presented here may take the form of documentation, photography, videotape or maps; or installations that directly collect or disseminate information, surveys or legal agreements. The art consciously emphasizes the transmission of ideas or information rather than the physical properties of art objects. On this trend away from the commodity nature of art, critic Jack Burnham has written:

We are now in a transition from an object-oriented to a systems-oriented culture. Here change emanates, not from things, but from the way things are done. . . . through the early stages of industrialization it remained possible for decorative media, including painting and sculpture, to embody the esthetic impulse; but as technology progresses this impulse must identify itself with the means of research and production. (Jack Burnham, “Systems Esthetics,” *Artforum*, September 1968, page 31.)

Among the works in **Art↔World**, there is a minimum of purely personal symbolism; the art communicates on a level that relates to areas of common experience. It often incorporates the environment in which people work and live and subjects which are mundane rather than heroic. It frequently enlists people other than the artist to actualize it.

In Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ *I Make Maintenance Art Every Day*, the maintenance staff responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the large office building housing this museum carries out the artist’s wish as stated in the memorandum she wrote to the management of 55 Water Street outlining her event. Under the subheading, “What Happens?,” Ukeles writes:

Mierle Laderman Ukeles invites the maintenance personnel to take and use her “brand” (i.e. maintenance work as art work) and to *consider one hour per day of their regular maintenance work as art*, throughout the exhibition. ALL MAINTENANCE WORK PROCEEDS THE SAME AS IT USUALLY DOES. THIS MAINTENANCE ART WORK TAKES PLACE IN THE IMAGINATION OF ITS PARTICIPANTS AND VIEWERS. (Mierle Laderman Ukeles, “Memorandum to the Management of 55 Water Street,” July 5, 1976.)

Don Burgy must enter into contractual relationships with members of the public for his *Legal Agreements* to be realized. Joseph Kosuth initiates a dialogue which the curators of this exhibition complete by writing on his posters. Don Celender’s *Attitudes of Working People Concerning the Arts* documents the public’s attitude toward contemporary art through their responses on his questionnaire.

The videotapes *The Selling of the Video Artist* by Les Levine and *Media Burn* by Ant Farm comment satirically on the medium of television. Levine attacks the self-promotional and blatantly commercial aspects of television while ironically showing that TV’s commercial practices have deeply infiltrated the art world. Ant Farm, a video collective, questions the nature of real news versus fabricated media events. Using excerpts from the evening news which covered their event, the driving of a Cadillac through a pyramid of television sets, the group also reveals how television reporting can trivialize and depoliticize radical art events.

Biology and ecology are central concerns for several artists in the exhibition. For Newton and Helen Harrison and Don ZanFagna the exploitation of the environment is a major issue. The Harrisons, known for their aqua-farming endeavors, breed crabs in man-made lagoons. They engage in scientific and commercial enterprises as entrepreneurs while as artists they create rich metaphors for birth, growth, and death. For ZanFagna, an advocate of miniaturization, traditional artmaking has evolved into environmental planning. He proposes fitting everything essential for living—from a person’s gene make-up to an enormous library to a soil sample—into tiny, portable plastic cases. Agnes Denes explores the meaning of human existence in relation to Nature in her meditation on various forms of dust which include the bones of a cremated person. In his film *Substrait—Film in Progress* Gordon Matta-Clark exposes the former vitality and current neglect of underground structures in New York City.

The economics of the art world and society at large is a subject for Douglas Huebler. In *Location Piece*

#25, oil, an erratically-priced commodity, serves as a metaphor for the fluid and often slick art market. Levine's videotape, *We Are Still Alive*, documents how a vogue among collectors for the art of the Inuit eskimos has changed the tribe's economic structure and thereby affected its members.

These artists are attempting to integrate their political beliefs with their art by making their work accessible to a wide variety of people. The inexpensive books by Celender and Burgy's charge of one dollar for his *Legal Agreements* make art accessible to an audience frequently excluded by high pricing. Joseph Kosuth requires that his posters be destroyed when the exhibition closes, thereby avoiding completely the dilemma of pricing.

Much of the work in **Art↔World** is an explicit challenge to the institutions and systems with which art is concerned, and the museum and gallery system comes under particular scrutiny. Some artists feel that museums and galleries operate at cross-purposes to their art. Either the art object is marketed as a precious commodity equivalent to rare gems or gold bullion, or it is set apart to be revered as a cultural monument. This tends to separate art from other aspects of life and inevitably defuses the immediacy of the political or social content of much art. Because this separation virtually neutralizes their art, several artists have refused to participate in this exhibition.

By relating to events and activities of everyday life, the art in this exhibition reflects a democratization of art. It strives toward an ideal in which art directly addresses the nature and functioning of society.

Art↔World has been organized by Mitchell Kahan, Miriam Roberts and William Zimmer, with assistance from Madeleine Burnside-Lukan, Susan Buckler, Andrew W. Kelly and Judith F. Romer all recent Helena Rubinstein Fellows in the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program. The Downtown Branch of the Whitney Museum is operated by these Fellows under the direction of David Hupert, Head of the Education Department.

The Downtown Branch of the Whitney Museum of American Art, located in the Uris Building at 55 Water Street, is supported by the business community of lower Manhattan. It is open Monday through Friday, 11 to 3. The Independent Study Program is supported by the Helena Rubinstein Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

EVENTS

Video showings Tuesdays and Thursdays at 12:00
Scheduling to be announced

Substrait—Film in Progress showing Fridays at 1:00

Mierle Laderman Ukeles will perform on Wednesday, October 13, from 11-3.

Don Burgy will be at the museum to conclude legal agreements on dates to be announced

CATALOGUE

ANT FARM

Media Burn 1975
Color video
Distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix

DON BURG

Legal Agreements 1976
Paper and office furniture
Lent by the artist

*Three Selections: April 21,
Food Observation Idea, and
Notebook Excerpts* 1973-1976
Color Video
Distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend
Tapes and Films

DON CELENDER

Museum Piece 1975
Unbound book pages in plastic sleeves
Courtesy of O.K. Harris Works of Art

*Opinions of Working People
Concerning the Arts* 1975
Unbound book pages in plastic sleeves
Courtesy of O.K. Harris Works of Art

AGNES DENES

Exhibition of Human Dust 1974—

1. *Study of Dust*
Photograph and mixed media
Lent by the artist
2. *Human Dust*
Photo enlargements
Lent by the artist

NEWTON and HELEN HARRISON

*Environmental Impact Study #3
(second version)* 1976
Paper wall hanging
Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Inc.

DOUGLAS HUEBLER

Location Piece #25 (Houston) 1975
Typed statement, mineral deed, three
black and white photographs mounted
on paper
Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery

Variable Piece #70 1975
Typed statement, printed FBI
statement and black and white
photographs mounted on two panels
Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery

JOSEPH KOSUTH

untitled 1976
Posters
Lent by the Artist

LES LEVINE

Going Uptown 1976
Black and white photographs
Courtesy of M.L. D'Arc Galleries

The Selling of the Video Artist 1976
Color video
Courtesy of M.L. D'Arc Galleries

We Are Still Alive 1975
Color video
Courtesy of M.L. D'Arc Galleries

GORDON MATTA-CLARK

Subtrait—Film in Progress 1976
8mm film, stills and maps
Lent by the artist

MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES

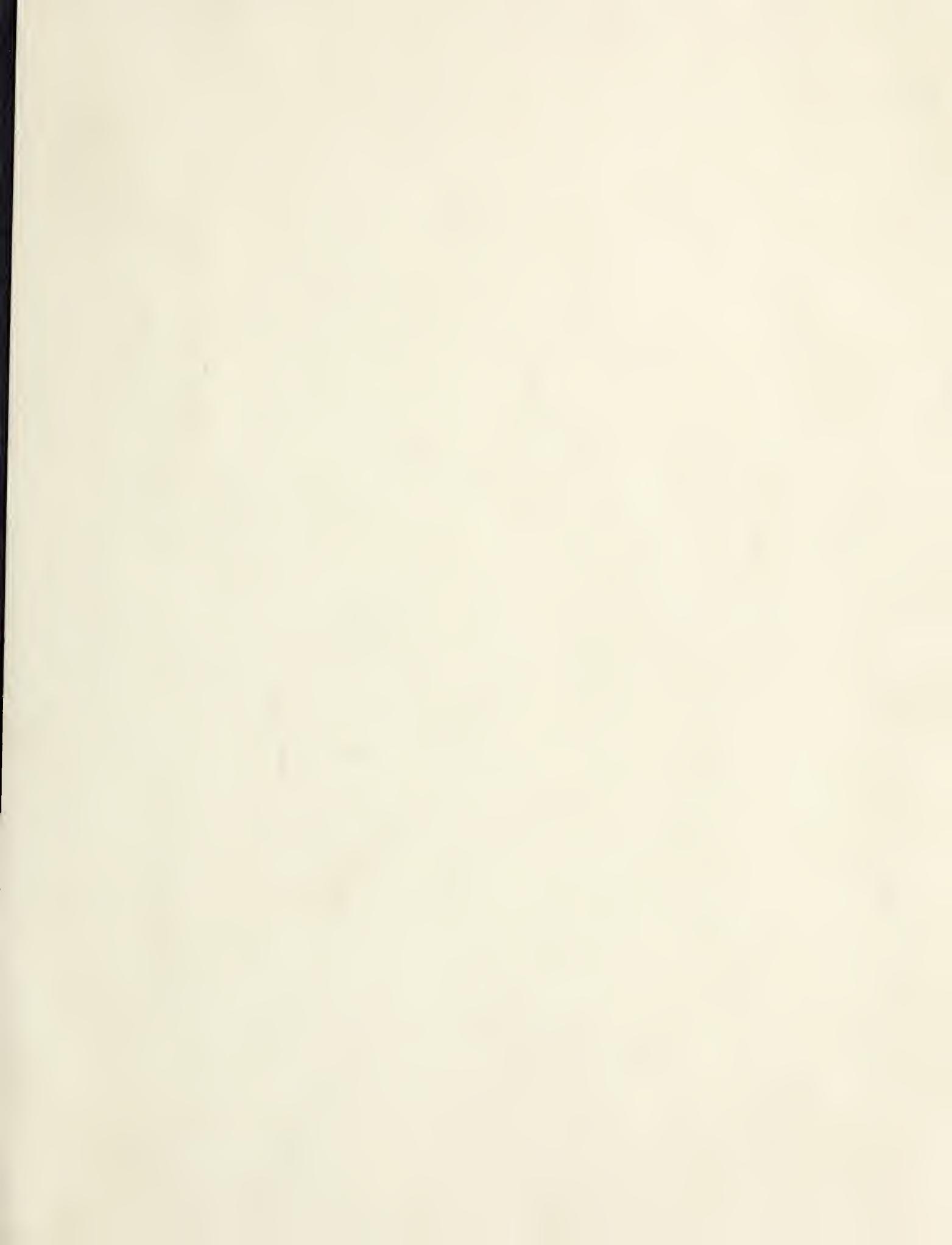
I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day
1976
Event, photographs, forms to be filled out by
maintenance people

Maintenance Art Questionnaire 1976
Questionnaire to be filled out by
visitors to the museum

Notebook of Real Life Systems Projects 1976
Notebook
Lent by the artist

DON ZANFAGNA

Micro-Max Pocket Systems I and II 1975-1975
Plexiglass, wood, formica, mixed
natural and synthetic materials
Lent by the artist





Agnes Denes, Human Du

MONDAY-FRIDAY 11-3

Free Admission



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Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day*

WHITNEY MUSEUM 55 WATER STREET

SEPTEMBER 16-OCTOBER 20, 1976