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Pictures to be Read/Poetry to be Seen

An exhibition organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago

October 24–December 3, 1987

Shusaku Arakawa
Gianfranco Baruchello
Mary Bauermeister
George Brecht

Oyvind Fahlström
Ray Johnson
Allan Kaprow
R. B. Kitaj

Allison Knowles
James Nizzi
Gianni-Emilio Simonetti
Wolfgang Vostell

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On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Contemporary Art, I would like to thank the many individuals who assisted in the organization of the museum’s opening exhibition “Pictures to be Read / Poetry to be Seen.”

I am grateful to the artists whose works are shown in this exhibition and to their galleries, Dwan, Cordey & Ekstrom, G筈nino, Fischbach, Sidney Janis, Marlborough Graphics, New York, Richard Feigen, New York and Chicago, and Galleria Schwarz, Milan, who cooperated with us in every possible way. Special thanks are due to Allan Kaprow and Alison Knowles for reconstructing or setting up their works in Chicago as an integral part of the exhibition as well as to Mr. and Mrs. D. Franklin Kingsberg, Mr. W. M. Bellenbach, Jr., and Mr. Dick Higgins for granting essential loans from their private collections. Mr. William S. Wilson graciously permitted us to reprint an essay on Alison Knowles which he wrote for Découpage/8, Cologne, 1967. Miss Barbara Berman, Assistant Curator of the Pasadena Art Museum communicated the biographic and bibliographical data she prepared for the current Kaprow retrospective. Mrs. Stephen Goldman helped on the research of artists’ bibliographies.

For cooperation in all aspects of the exhibition and catalogue I wish to thank Kerin Carlson. She shared with me the task of organizing a complex show under difficult circumstances. Her skill and dedication have been essential to the success of this effort.

The catalogue design and other graphics related to the exhibition were in the able hands of Sherman Machine. The museum’s image, all those months during which there was neither building nor program, has been largely determined by its graphics. It was our good fortune to have Mr. Motomick’s professional services available to us.

In the typesetting and printing of this catalogue we were aided by the generous cooperation of Bertsch and Cooper and Weller Printing Corporation respectively. Contemporary Art Lithographers Inc. in Minneapolis donated the printing of a poster.

I hope that our first exhibition will underscore the ambition with which we set out six months ago: to provide a forum for current activity in the arts, to emphasize new trends and experiments, and to offer both education and excitement.

Jan van der Marck
Director
The title “Pictures to be Read/Poetry to be Seen” attempts to paraphrase, but by no means defines the subject of this exhibition. The inversion of Reading and Seen is a mere allusion to the breakdown of traditional categories in all the arts. What sets reading apart from seeing is that the former involves time and direction while the latter is instantaneous and whirlistic. Words as a temporal element increasingly invade the spatial domain of the image. If we consider language and pictorial representation as two species of the genus sign, they can be wedded with varying degrees of intimacy, either conjunctively, by matching illustration to text, or so completely that individual identities are no longer discernible. What characterizes the majority of works in this exhibition is their complex permutation of words and images. The resulting visual language tends towards poetic rather than communicative functions inasmuch as the artist’s attention focuses on the sign itself rather than on what it signifies. The meaning of a work is to be found in its overall perceptual organization and not necessarily in its potential to convey information.

The fusion of visual and descriptive elements has become a distinctive trend in recent art. The tendency toward visualization of music and poetry has a counterpart in the growing emphasis on notation in painting. Critics have variously identified it as “Figurative Narrative” (Gerald Gassull-Talabot) and “immaginato appressa” (Antonio Sguanci). Although applicable, up to a point, to the majority of works in this exhibition, these terms fail to take into account different but related propositions advanced by Allan Kaprow and Wolf Vostell or Alison Knowles. More important to the subject of this exhibition than the joint occurrence of words and images is the nature of their relationship and their extension in space and time. Arakawa’s diagrams which exist on the borderline between word and image are as pertinent in account of their metaphysical references to space and time, as Kaprow’s Words and Knowles’ Big Book, which actually operate in space and time. In analyzing the nature of the varied word-image relationships we discover that the artists in this exhibition have treated them in terms of simultaneity rather than causality, association rather than equivalence, effectiveness rather than sense. The result is pseudo-logical in that it frustrates reading or offers multiple readings: further, it is stopologic, discontinuous, non-sequential and non-explicit. Because of the deliberately complex interpretation between pictorial and literary sign systems, and the absence of reading direction and reference points, the works presented invite speculation but resist interpretation.

A written story this hermetic would remain incomprehensible for the lack of a “code.” Works of visual art, on the contrary, still stimulate, aesthetically and intellectually, even though they allow only partial decoding. Their surface coherence overrides content and message and they act like linguistic primers, refracting and scattering visual information with disregard for immediate comprehension. Assuming a certain amount of shared information, the artist presents us with elaborate strategies that engage the mind, the eye and the imagination.

Marcel Duchamp was the first artist to attempt and achieve a visual integration of the work of art with non-art elements from the surrounding world. In his Large Glass (1915-23) the pictorial composition and the activity behind the transparent picture plane are fused as we view it. Because the subject is painted on glass, the background is supplied “ready-made” and each situation presents a new context for the painted elements. This open-ended work, capable of absorbing its changed environment, has fascinated artists for half a century and is particularly pertinent to this exhibition. We find the same attitude of combined attachment and detachment on the part of the artist, the same ironical attitude toward the idea of art as precious and unique, the same delight in destroying conventional meanings and substituting new or counter meanings for them, and the same attack on our intellectual and perceptual faculties.

The Large Glass has inspired Arakawa’s diagrammatic vision of the canvases into imaginative spatio-temporal and sensorial-psychological zones; Baraballo’s stratification of meaning by spreading his cryptograms and micro-imagos over several layers of inexplicable; Baeumeler and Brecht in their exploitation of the “double imagery quotient” (i.e., the fact of one image being contained in another) in either an illustratory or literal way; Pahlström and Simonetti in their topographical organization of images on neutral backgrounds and their use of game structures and chance imagery. Duchamp’s proposal of the “assisted ready-made” is crucial to the work of Ray Johnson whose fondness for combs is just one of many tributes; Kitaj imprints obscure texts and photographs on ready-mades and juxtaposes this found imagery in a non-sequential way; George Brecht poses the logical question whether the “assisted ready-made” concept would not also apply to literature, the theater and perhaps life itself.

John Cage, through his work, his teachings and his friends, is another major influence on the artists in this exhibition. Paralleling Duchamp’s integration of art and environmental phenomena in the Large Glass, Cage admits integration of accidental, external sounds in his musical compositions. The shift of emphasis towards non-auditory elements in his concerts reflects painting’s increasing incorporation of non-painterly elements. Cage advocates above all the elimination of boundaries between art and life and he favors chance operations and indeterminacy over conscious composition. He agrees with Marshall McLuhan that in the electronic age everything happens at once, that communication has shrunk the world into a global village. Music, therefore, is no longer a “stream falling over rocks,” proceeding from start to finish, but a “flowing” activity. In 1960, for Cage, left an indelible impression (other artists influenced by Cage are Baeumeler, Pahlström, Johnson, Kaprow, Knowles and Simonetti), predicts a future state of mind in which divisions within the arts and between art and life no longer exist.

In the field of linguistics this attitude is shared by Ludwig Wittgenstein who composes attention among artists disproportional to the technical nature of his writings. Unlike the positivists who analyzed what could be said in an ideal language, Wittgenstein concentrated on what is said in actual language. If, in his earlier writings, he contended that language was an exact picture of reality, later, aware of the various language uses, he reconstituted it as a pawn in an insistently
number of language games. His aphoristic arguments have been relieved of their philosophical burdens, as his vivid, rather plastic imagery (chess boards, graphs, pencils, apples, number series) ceased to serve a demonstrative purpose. There is an obvious appeal in such opaque or calegoric statements of Wittgenstein's as: "What expresses itself in language, we cannot express by means of language," and: "What can be shown cannot be said." Wittgenstein has lifted language from its restrictive mold much as Duchamp has freed art and Cage has freed music. His motive was delightfully pragmatic: to someone asking him: "What is your aim in philosophy?" he replied: "To show the fly the way out of the fly bottle."

The greatest breakthrough in the use of media and the mingling of art and life came with Allan Kaprow who acknowledges a debt to Duchamp and Cage. In Kaprow's view there are no clear distinctions between drawing and painting (cf. Araakawa, Baruchello, Bauermeister, Simonetti), painting and collage (cf. Johnson), collage and assemblage (cf. Bauermeister, Nutt), assemblage and sculpture (cf. Brecht, Pahlström), sculpture and environmental sculpture; between environmental sculpture, displays and stage-sets (cf. Brecht, Knowles); between these and environments (cf. Kaprow's own Worlds); between art of any kind and life. In a recent article on experimental art Kaprow asserted that "the American melting pot has become a global stew, and the American mind an assemblage."

In the late 1960s Kaprow expanded his art of wall hung assemblages into an art of environment, including light and sound. Attempting to give structure to spectator participations he developed his "action collages," which extend Pollock's gestural approach and total field painting and are governed by Cage's ideas about chance and indeterminacy. The Happenings, as it became known, have the makings of a new form of theater. It combines environment and action into compartments of varying size and duration; there is no single focus and no separation between actors and audience.

Allison Knowles, author of the Big Book, aligns herself more with Cage than with Kaprow. Four years of creativity, as a writer, silkscreen camera technician, housewife, performer and friend to the inner circle of the Something Else Press, have been crammed into a unique three-dimensional assemblage. Radiating from a central axis, the door-size pages create compartments which function, literally, as rooms of a house, metaphorically as "stills" of an everyday existence, and metaphysically as nests and cradles of the mind. "Reading" the Big Book takes as much time and willingness to become involved as it does engaging in a personal relationship. Crawling through the Big Book resembles a physical and spiritual tour of discovery. Unlike Kaprow's Worlds, one can walk in and out of any given page as one would consult a dictionary or sample an anthology. A sequence may be indicated but is never enforced. In a way, the Big Book caricatures Allison Knowles' "event pieces." It not only sets the stage for, but, through various pedal devices such as light, taped sound and a live telephone and hot plate, partakes in the action. Offering art within art, life within life and a world within a world, the Big Book comes closer than any work in this exhibition to a radical dissolution of the barriers that separate art from life: it proposes life as art.

Introduction and essays on individual artists by Jan van der Mark.
Shusaku Arakawa


Arakawa says he wants to make “diagrams of the unknown,” discover the essential relationship between imagination and reality, trace the sources of the imagination and propose a reality that exists only as a name. That he would present the seven-letter word "MISTAKE" as a picture indicates that Arakawa’s investigations extend beyond semantics or linguistic analysis. Rather, he is declaring summarily that the world is a flawed environment and life is an unaccountable passage in the continuum of death. Arakawa’s world is conceptual to the extent that he never fully allows ideas to become image. Admittedly, he attempts to pictorialize the state of things and feelings before the imagination intervenes. Yoshiki Tono refers to Arakawa’s paintings as “pregnant vacuums” from which a number of possible pictures can spring into existence, a pre-imagery quite different from the study or sketch for a painting. This pictorial limbo or never-never-land of the imagination results from the artist’s abstract consciousness of what surrounds him. He asks himself “How can we find the blood of nature, how can we paint a point?” Moments in time, to him, have a “front” and a “back.” He is more interested in the shadow than in the object, in the echo than in the sound. Death to Arakawa is a reality to which he gives a great deal of thought for, unlike the reality of life which we take for granted, it is not yet within our grasp.

Since 1963 Arakawa’s works have been “diagrams,” in which the silhouetted outlines of feathers, footprints, combs, tennis rackets, umbrellas, fans, egg beaters, and so on, have been transferred with an airbrush onto canvas. In 1963, Arakawa pushed the idea of “conceputality” one step further, substituting stencilled words for his silhouetted outlines. As they alternated between description and allusion, these words refer to fact and to feeling. The diagrams are topological in a non-literal way; movement is indicated by trajectories and bouncy repetitions. People and things by curved or straight lines, boundary markings. Knots in ropes of an ethereal substance signify connections and relationships.

If you consider nature a series of connections,” Arakawa explains, “it falls naturally into a diagrammatic form.” The artist sees people’s lives as a series of “separate continuums,” like electric currents passing through parallel wires. Nothing happens until the wires are once-circuited—this is a “connection.” Judging from the evidence in Arakawa’s painting, the “connection” is a potential that rarely becomes a fact. Arakawa believes that his paintings can be explained like poetry. By describing their genesis he facilitates our reading. First he makes a sketch (pre-image) of nature by transmuting it into language. With words that correspond to facts he draws a diagram of the visible world. Then, with words that correspond to feelings or ideas, he draws a diagram of the invisible world. The painting’s effectiveness depends on the artist’s ability to establish a connection between the visible and the invisible, allowing us “to see his feelings...touch them and know what they are.”

Baruchello writes, paints and thinks in micro-imagery and moves freely from the realm of written and spoken discourse to that of paint and color. He creates in a stream of consciousness and his paintings read like the juggling tricks of an electroencephalograph. With their myriad of ciphers, reference points, scribbles, dotted lines, cryptograms, arrows, equations, telescopic and microscopic, biomorphic and mechanical elements, Baruchello's canvases and layered boxes provoke as much as they frustrate, stimulate as much as they negate perception. They allude to physics, mathematics, and baristics, as well as to biology, pathology and neurology and invite comparison with the Renaissance attitude that man can master all known arts and sciences. The put-on is deliberate for Baruchello admittedly offers "erroneous solutions with a tendency to probability." He heaps mock praise on scientists, chessplayers and psychoanalysts for having discovered the key to a three-cornered truth. In his own work he is intentionally ambiguous and prefers to withhold the key, for he knows that there are no easy explanations. Taking great delight in paradox, he aligns himself with those wacky philosophers who advocate "the abolition of solutions in the proven absence of problems."

Baruchello's mirages of the mind are elegant shams but strangely intriguing. With the persistence of an alchemist's philosophical rummaging, they evoke a network of non-causal relationships. Yet, how can we write off an artist "ready to cover theistine chapel with a second, a third layer of dotted lines" as opaque and inexplicable? While he may not propose a one-to-one relationship to the world of fact, Baruchello conveys a poetic truth more fascinating than reality, images to him, are as complicated as sounds; since the world communicates in complicated sounds, he feels at liberty to communicate in complicated images. A creative atmosphere is emerging all around us that is based on a new relationship between space and image, scientific theorem and game, object and hypothesis, necessity and chance. Averting himself part of this atmosphere, Baruchello seeks to integrate information and perception, painting is his language.

Discovery is a key word for the mathematician-turn-point painter Mary Bauermeister. "To find properties I know or want is the actual reason why I paint," she declares. Her works chart mental voyages, record the process of creation. In one construction she may juxtapose pebbles harvested on the beaches of St. Barts, photographs of pebbles stacked in the same graduated formations, illusionistically treated drawings of pebbles, and her own aim and hand, either drawn or photographed. Performing the operation of collaging the pebbles. The intermediary space is frequently filled by a wavy, elongated handwriting which, in places, skirts or embellishes the painted wood hemispheres and, in others, is magnified or distorted by optical lenses glued to the picture surface.

Mary Bauermeister plays word games in three languages, interchanging them, wedding parts of words to make new words, reordering sentences and creating nonsense, setting up ambiguities and contradictions ("This is not the right corner."). She uses words where writing is quicker than painting or the idea is better expressed in writing than in painting. Usually, however, her writing (i.e., in a calligraphic style all over fashion on a prepared surface) drawing and painting are combined and integrated with collage and assemblage.

Mary Bauermeister abhors a vacuum. Her crowded and enmeshed reliefs seem with the ambiguous and indeterminate emanations of a mind that operates on several levels simultaneously. Objects, images of objects, images of images and images of processes combine with non-linear, non-sequential, straight, reversed and mirrored writing in creating an infinity effect through accumulation, permutation, repetition. The artist holds a pluralistic view of the world that is anti-Aristotelian and anti-Bedevians. It should surprise no one that physicists like Heisenberg and Einstein were her earliest heroes. She remembers that as a child she painted better understood things. She tried to paint infinity but gave up and she did a painting of time in the form of a spiral. Marcel Duchamp’s work was a revelation to her; she especially identified with his attempt at creating not new objects but new attitudes to familiar objects. Mary Bauermeister paints the idea of things rather than the things themselves. Her visionary world is a universe unto itself with its own rules and its own justifications.
George Brecht

“I think being born is one of the great fictions of modern times, hence I allow myself to re-invent my birth-place & time whenever anyone asks me, though my mother doesn’t appreciate this very much...” (George Brecht in correspondence with Jan van der Marck, July 23, 1967)

“Brecht, at that time (1968), still described himself as ‘you might say, a painter’, though most of his work was already remarkable objects, usually with moving parts, things for adults to play with. He made a living as a scientist in the suburbs in New Jersey, in Metuchen, and his life and his aesthetic seemed connected with that. For hour in classes (New School for Social Research, New York) he would talk with Cage about the need for spiritual virtuosity and abstraction from technical virtuosity, both of which were very attractive to Cage... Brecht picked up from Cage an understanding of his love of complete anonymity, simplicity, and non-involvement with what he does.” (Dick Higgins, Postface, Something Else Press, New York, 1984, 45-51)

George Brecht lives at “La Célide qui Sort,” Villeneuve-sur-Mer.


Emmett Williams calls Brecht a “practitioner of art for life’s sake (and vice-versa).” Since life’s demands on art go beyond esthetics, Brecht won’t allow himself to be pigeonholed as a painter, sculptor, composer or playwright, washed in the requirements of these roles—but resisting the temptation of virtuosity—Brecht meets his real challenge as an inventor of subtleties for art. He agrees with Cage that it is art, not life, that has obscured the difference between art and life. George Brecht investigates the relationship between art and life as well as between words and objects by making signs and wall hangings that spell silence and no smoking. In the book of the Tumbler on Fire, a continuing work begun in 1964 of which eight chapters and over 200 pages have now been completed, Brecht “researches the continuity of un-like things, of objects, of events in time, of objects and style, etc.”

Brecht does not admit to the conventional distinctions of media and to him they have already ceased to exist. “We don’t know for example, where music ends and theater begins (and vice-versa, no matter what is on stage).” Subscribing to Cage’s ideas about indeterminacy, he writes “event pieces” that may be composed of as little as one word (e.g. cent). George Brecht is the only painter who has translated, in plastic terms and a figurative method, the practice and ideas concerning chance proposed by Cage. Like Marcel Duchamp he soliloquizes things that appeal or simply occur to him. Ready-made objects present themselves to him to be linked together with a sense of real necessity. Since all these objects relate to his experience, the result captivates the world in terms of autobiography. Thus, his works are personal entities in the book of painting, forever preserved under glass in shallow boxes.

Despite the familiarity they inspire (we recognize familiar objects and brandnames or pictures of familiar art and artists), Brecht’s boxes remain strange and puzzling. The critic David Foulsham calls them a kind of “object-taxidermy in bijouterie.” This does not imply, however, that Brecht’s works have a jewel-or-surprise-box character relating them to such masters of metaphor as Cornell, Samaras or Westerman. Wishing neither to please or transform, the artist keeps his works at safe remove from the banalities quite clearly within his reach. For his real interest lies in probing, as Daniels and Palazzoli have written, that things are more difficult to understand than the metaphors they evoke. At his most effective, Brecht demonstrates the gap between the verbal and the object level of the things he combines and arranges and he shows us the fatal inadequacy of word and thing equations.
Oyvind Fahlström


For Fahlström the world has so many facets and variables that no one picture can give a complete image of reality. The problem lies, of course, in the artist's view of reality. It is discontinuous, alegorical, non-causal, asymmetric, non-sequential and unstructured. Fahlström proposes a more fitting parallel: the variable painting with a game structure. He forces the viewer to involve himself, to make choices and to join in creation.

The variable in Fahlström's pictures is the "character-form" by which he means an abstract form of a particular individual shape, conspicuous as a type, regardless of varying proportions, shades of color, style qualities, and so on. The "character-form" is composed of two or more elementary forms (line, dot, bow, etc.), differing in shape, but of one prominent color, is recognizable when repeated, varied, dressed or rearranged. The association of disparate elements presupposes rules of the game and the work of art assumes a game structure. Equipped with magnets, Fahlström's cut-outs can be juxtaposed, superposed, incised or suspended; they can slide along grooves, fold laterally through joints, and vertically through hinges. They can also be bent and twisted to permanent threedimensional forms.

The arrangement of Fahlström's works depends on the combination of rules (based on chance) and intentions (the artist's); a score in the form of a drawing, photograph, or small painting is provided with the work. While the individual elements are the more "incidental" that compose the picture, the finished picture stands somewhere in the intersection of painting, games and puppet theater. The artist sees a similarity between his techniques and the blank scores of composer John Cage who also provides the performer with a chance to improvise.

Fahlström's sources are popular photography, comic strips and diagrammatic illustrations. The figurative elements, compressed factual images, often of an erotic or political nature, coexist in Fahlström's pictures with the more abstract "character-forms." This style is simultaneously accretive and cryptic. No attempt is made to communicate, there are no moral commitments, no causal connections, no metaphors and no symbols. Presenting his works as "models of reality" Fahlström refuses to focus the viewer's attention, rather, the attention is allowed to focus itself, while the artist assumes a stance of absence, and sometimes cynical, non-involvement.

"Johnson is conscious," Dick Higgins wrote, "that a hole in the ground, a hole in the doughnut, and a hole between the walls of a room are not the same thing. Yet, all holes have a recognizable affinity and to the poet one hole rhymes with another. Ray Johnson rhymes scraps of everyday information with people to whom he dispatches them. If "connection" is the key to Anikawa's diagrams, "correspondence" is the same to the understanding of Ray Johnson's collages.

According to William Wilson, three principles operate in Johnson's world of parables and correspondences: identity or almost identity (i.e., not only similarities, but is identical to, a sure magazine logo after we lower the crossbar in the 'r'), analogy ("Massage Ball" derives its title from the black circles which resemble the rubber balls used in Japan for massage purposes) and focus (two dissimilar images may offer a striking likeness when seen from a certain angle or in a certain frame of reference: e.g. a tissue and a condom—or conundrum as Ray Johnson prefers to call it). A mind which proposes metaphors and a world that yields them are the artist's resource.

Ray Johnson discovers correspondences and corresponds with people. Consequently, the term refers to process and method. The artist has a fondness for filling and, true to his nomadic Finnish heritage, likes to carry things around. In fact, there was a time when his whole production fit in his pockets. Then he discovered that most obsolete of communication methods, the mail, which allows him, for the price of a postage stamp, to "file" whatever his mind has in fantasy with friends, acquaintances or strangers. The tissue of correspondences thus woven extends in time and space, has no material reality and exists in the mind of its designer only. "The New York Correspondence (sic) School" as Ray Johnson has called it, is a spoof both on the School of New York as an invention of art historians and institutions and on the foreign languages to teach people through a correspondence course.

Related to the mixtures he sends and receives, Johnson's meticulous collages, in which everything is suggested and nothing defined, communicate with anyone and nobody in particular. They are the solidifications of essentially fleeting paper scraps, like notes, letters, scribbles, poems, drawings, photographs, menus, announcements, and so on, all "assisted," modified or transformed to look like gamecards and rebuses of another culture (oriental character) or another era (flaked photographs). They have the primitive quality of children's toys that are "ditched" or lost in a garden, and they make people comment "His Art Looks Old."
Allan Kaprow

Words as Art

About "Words" Words in an "Environment," the name given to an art that one enters, submits to, and is in-ture—influenced by. It is different from most art in its impenetrability and changeableness, it is like much contemporary work in being fashioned from the real and everyday world, a world it celebrates, probes, comments on, perhaps, and surely dreams about.

I am involved with the city atmosphere of billboards, newspapers, personalized pavements and alley walls, in the drama of a lecture, whispered secrets, pickpockets in Times Square fun-palaces, bills of stories and conversations overhead at the automat. All this has been compressed and stopped into a situation which, in order to "live" in the fullest sense, must actively engage a visitor.

This may be difficult for those bound by the habits of respectful distance essential for older art. But if we temporarily put aside the question of the sacred in aesthetic matters and see in "Words" activities analogous to some in which we might normally engage—dodging, playing, ambling, or standing, searching for just the right word to express a thought, climbing a ladder to hang a picture on the wall, listening to records, leaving notes for someone—then the accessibility of the work may get across and its art as much as its mystery becomes apparent. I doubt that mere passive observation is very rewarding.

Of course, being active, we can misuse any environment, natural or artificial. We can destroy a landscape through carelessness, and here we can refuse to consider what responses are appropriate to the nature of the idea. For instance, it is inappropriate to staple words strips, onto the floor or anywhere in the smaller room, and it would be just as unfit to write with the colored chalks in the larger room. There are freedoms for the visitor (as there are for the artist), but they are reserved only within the limits dictated by the work's immediate as well as underlying themes.

On one level, "Words" is light-hearted, jazzy, flip. Within this mood, there are contrasts. The larger room is public, bright and more formal in both the character and also in the placement of tasseled strips, cloth-covered and red and white billowing lights. The small room is more subdued, private, organic and less "arranged." On another, less obvious, level, the composition of the environment is intended to confer upon the "pop" material a sense of a Special Place. The rooms within a normal room, their centrality and squareness (5'x5' and 6'x6'), the repeated words and phrases, the passage in gradual degrees from an outer world into an inner one, may suggest to the sensitive participant a sanctuary or tabernacle of sorts, an environment of The Word. In this presence, our acts become ritual and our everyday is transformed.

Allan Kaprow
(Reprinted from Smolin Gallery catalogue)
Allan Kaprow
Words as shown at Smolin Gallery, 1962

"On an appreciation of the
object this art piece. The
centrality and
repeated words
and degree
may sus-
and tension of The
become real.

(Allan Kaprow
gallery catalogue)
Kitać is included with screenprints because they are more pertinent to the theme of this exhibition than his paintings. For most artists the print medium affords an opportunity to summarize or generalize past achievements, but for Kitać it has the freshness of drawing and the challenge of painting. In a recent issue of Studio international the artist wrote: "Printmaking (which is not what it was) is as close to spontaneity as I've managed to come—I can get manifold exterior premises visualized, on sheets, premises, false starts, indications, what have you, which would take me many months to commit to oil painting. I've been able to engage at levels of sensitivity through this printmaking counterpart which cuts across the four path of painting ... and sometimes lodge there."

In England where the American Kitać developed a reputation alongside native artists Eduardo Paolozzi, Peter Blake, Joe Tilson and Allen Jones, printmaking was revived through the skill and enthusiasm of Christopher Prater. Inexpansional attitudes, unheard of ten years ago, are now a legitimate part of that medium. In Kitać's case, images appear in his prints before they will enter his painting. His repertoire derives from political manifestos, violence and injustice, esoteric texts on history and science, past art and literature. Philosophy, central European culture and the history of anarchy in particular are a treasure-trove for his inquisitive mind.

As of the early 1960s Kitać made prints in which he collaged found and 'insulted' texts and photographs, pulled from obscure sources. Like Brecht he is not interested in aesthetic effect or compositional briluance. Nor can his prints be construed as information structures or metaphors of reality. Fixed by the associational value of things, Kitać jumps from one presentation technique to another, gives the viewer many a clue as to what to look for and underscores all logical relationships. Lawrence Alloway writes of Kitać that he has a deep sense of the endless permutations of word and image, of source and modification, observing a pictorial code of diagrammatic statements and elliptic condensations of events that are set down as a scatter of diverse, ideographic centers.

Some noted by R. B. Kitać on his screenprints: Pogany is a print I like very much. Pogany is of course that Mlle of Brancusi fame. The Brancusi installation in Paris floored me last year and I made this female print. The drawings I made in my own way after photos of the Mlle Pogany heads in a Brancusi book.

WHAT IS A COMPARISON? Is a line from I. A. Rich- ard's—the literary critic... I read two to great advantage from time to time and find its ideas quite available to my occasions.

Most and VERNISAGE COCKTAILS are mates and you might hang them next to one another. They seem complete enough not to have to say anything about them just now... except that I had kept the photos involved for 10 or 15 years before using them up in a matter of weeks, 90 and set KILLER COMMUNE,... in what is reputed to have been said to Stephen Spender by one of the communist politicians at the time of the Spanish war—it may not be true but it says much about an activistic art. This print was intended as a memorial to the young Scholle who organized the (Christian?) White Rose movement in Germany and were beheaded just before the war ended.

Berkeley, California 1967
The Big Book is not a product, but a process, and the person using the Book must accept himself as part of the process. Discarding enough reserve to bend over and enter the Book—flexing, flowing, discarding stances. The Big Book cannot be known without being entered, and it cannot be entered without being modified—so that getting to know it alters it, even as it alters us, and there can be no one interpretation. So down on hands and knees then, and through the cover, on through a hole burned in a vinyl page, and down onto belly to crawl through a tunnel in a wall of artificial grass and water, a realm of pleasingly overt artifice. After wriggling through the tunnel, one enters the apartment, an illusory reality, a world without artifice, the unpretentious Manhattan living-loft of the 1960s and 1970s. This underworld, such as an escapist usually enters, presents the processes of life nonchalantly, without passion, and involves one immediately. Everything seems useful here: easy communications out of the book by a working telephone, while the eggs are frying on the hot-plate, or perhaps a glass of wine while we peruse the library under the window. One scoops for a moment here, leaves the pages of the book to retreat and view the gallery of goals on page four. These goals, originally screen printed on newspaper by Alison Knowles, have been transformed by many artists and hang here, lighted with black light and tungsten, rising above the grass tunnel and forming pages three and four. Back to the apartment, we may swing out the baby chair and rest a moment before continuing through the pages by climbing out the window and up a short ladder. When the apartment was felt to be sufficient, it ceased to be an underworld and became a means toward elevation. Descending the ladder with a jump, one passes easily through the final opening, which is a silk screen mounted to the eighth foot page with crossbar and ship hatches. Others who need the Big Book who take this journey through metaphors will be on a different quest and will arrive at different goals, but necessarily when they are in the Big Book they will be as mobile, kinetic, dual, visual, energetic, and beautiful as it is.

William S. Wilson
(Written for Decollage/6)
Allison Knowles
The Big Book

"Phalanx 3," a 1965 exhibition in Herman Hall of the Illinois Institute of Technology, contained works of surprising vigor and originality by a group of young Chicago painters who, the following year, were to be launched as the Hairy Who. Don Baum, the sympathetic director of the Hyde Park Art Center, sponsored their venture and a Chicago critic and radio commentator became a crypto part of their name. Two Hairy Who comic books, reminiscent of Joe Brainard's "Go" Comics, were issued to accompany the 1966 and 1967 Hairy Who exhibitions. Art Green, Gladys Nilsson, James Nutt, Suellen Rocca and Karl Wirsum in these exhibitions presented full-scale versions, skillful elaborations or wild transfigurations of the cartoon images filling the Hairy Who comic books.

Franz Schulze sees Hairy Who as a new outcropping of the dark, myth-haunted imagery preeminent among the painters of the 1960s—generally reflected in the pervasive post-war love of surrealism and dada among both artists and collectors in Chicago. While there may be parallels, the differences are no less evident. If abstract art can be said to have an esthetic and surrealism and dada an anti-esthetic objective, then the Hairy Who shares with pop art a lack of concern with esthetics. The group imagery relates to Peter Saul and Robert Hudson who both had considerable exposure in Chicago. Hairy Who could perhaps be considered as a pictorial counterpart of "funk art," the simultaneous West Coast development in sculpture.

James Nutt adopts with great delight—and pushes ad absurdum—the cartoonist's short-cuts to expressiveness and plasticity. He uses color in the most unabashed fashion, blooming over the weirdo effects and sideshow flavor his subjects afford him, he amplifies the initial imagery with misspellings, cut-outs from cheap novelty house mailers, personal hygiene ads, anatomical monstrosities and physical flaws in every shade and color. Yet, there is more nostalgia and railiness in these works than erotic and scatological interest. Nutt loves malapropisms, has a cool sense of humor and a low-brow interest in the big-city subculture of tattoo parlors, flop-houses, wrestling arenas and cut-rate stores.

With a delight in excess and exaggeration Nutt re-interprets the unconscious and unrepentant iconography of an adolescent and semi-literate society.

James Nutt works on the reverse side of plexiglass and uses collage overlays to enhance the physical and pictorial dimensions of his freely shaped paintings. In spite of the hard-hitting impression they make at first, these paintings are private, inner-directed and more concerned with intensity of feeling than with clarity of communication. Nutt demonstrates with wit and defiance how Chicago's surrealist hang-up can be given a comic slant, played up in his fashion and tied in with visual and literary ideas that have currency the world over.

Simonetti's canvases "read" like a network of signs, abbreviated and diagrammatic images. While the structure is said on overall design or program, the individual elements comprising the structure are opaque and ambiguous. Any attempt at translating the minute signs in this pietrofico fabric is doomed from the start. They originate in, but no longer relate to, the ideology of a technological and consumer's world and they are extremely dense with respect to linguistic, philosophical and literary references. To the extent that Simonetti's secretive imagery is decodable, we find references to the idea worlds of Marcel Duchamp, James Joyce, Lewis Carroll and Launcelot Storr.

Simonetti's paintings operate on several levels. This complexity springs from the artist's conviction that perception and interpretation no longer rely on the rules of traditional logic and monocular vision. Non-Aristotelian with a vengeance, Simonetti insists that we consider the world not as a universe, but as a multiverse of hypothesis, ideas, and dialectically inter-related situations.

The artist makes his point through the lucidity of intellectual discourse rather than the rapture of emotion. Therefore, our first impression of his paintings is one of coldness, detachment and calculation: they reveal elaborate schemas and a "strategy" borrowed from chess, that is, rigorous of all games. Unique to Simonetti and setting him apart from John Cage or Allan Kuprow, is a lack of interest in creating a new or intermediary game. He makes it clear that he wants to operate within the genre of painting, and the rules of that genre, because to him it is not yet exhausted.

His paintings are like "stills" of a mind in constant operation. Moving about on an indeterminate white surface, an idea may run from association to association, digging its path through the maze of literary-poetic and pictorial semiotics. The artist's memory is mined in these works like in an open pit where layer after layer is bared, allowing us to read the history of the site by concentrating on the vertical rather than the horizontal. Simonetti's imagery, in the main deriving from illustrators in dictionaries, mechanical drawings and gameboard pieces, alludes to subject matter in an emblematic way.

The composition of these elements is based on the artist's permutations of intellectual choices and game situations. Simonetti creates a legible discontinuity that repudiates narrative conventions while suggesting another, time and space oriented possibility: the theatre. The painting-score equation is an interesting potential but it will take more than the artist's general assurance that "any of my pieces can be performed any time, anyplace and by anyone" to convey pictorial opacity into theatrical clarity.

Wolf Vostell's Happenings career was launched in the mid 1950s when he tore posters off walls in Paris and Düsseldorf and proposed the result (de-coll/age—the artist's spelling) as an art form similar to collage that was arriving at by reverse methods. Other artists—Raymond Hains, Mimmo Rotella and Jacques de la Villeglé—were engaged in the laboration of posters and Vostell's de-coll/age were a product of the same time and climate. Passing beyond the "New Realists", Vostell turned from product to process: out of a preoccupation with torn posters for the sake of raw and unexpected imagery grew the de-coll/age presented as event. Vostell's ambition to create an art that would transcend the boundaries of time and space and no longer be tied to traditional materials and concepts became a fact in the "De-coll/age Happening." In French "décollage" has the double meaning of "unsticking" and the take-off of an airplane. In his "Dé-coll/age Happenings," Vostell plays heavily on the second meaning. The idea of a take-off from posters to events is an attractive one. Vostell asserts that life and people are art, that Happenings and events are frames of reference for experience of the present, a do-it-yourself reality. Jet-age transportation and the electronic communications media, violence, brutality and annihilation prompt and are evoked by Vostell's Happenings. The artist takes an anti-war and anti-discrimination stand and holds us spellbound by the self-dissolving, self-destroying and self-exhausting factors in human experience. The Happening notations in this exhibition are to be read as scores or, more precisely, as the aggregate of pre-Happening instructions and post-Happening reflections. All preliminary ideas about and workplans for a particular Happening are written down in combination with renderings and pictures of the places mapped out for action. As scores they do not lend themselves to repetition or repeated interpretations. Instead, Vostell calls them "erasures" and "idea fields" that can be activated by the viewer's imagination.
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Also contains excerpts of introductions and reviews by Max Bense, Siegfried Fried, Alain Jouffroy, Jill Johnston, Grace Glueck, Paul Karalus, Bernhard Schütz, Heinz Chiff, Claus Bremer, Helmut R. Rümel, and Günter Rümel.
Checklist of the Exhibition

Shusaku Arakawa
1. Separate Continuums, No. 2 (At the Corner of Central Park) 1965-67 Ink and acrylic on canvas 72½ x 108 1/4" All loans Sidney Janis Gallery, New York


3. A Self-Portrait 1967 Oil, fluorescent magic marker and pencil on canvas 93 x 62½" All loans Dehn Gallery, New York

Gianfranco Baruchello
4. Persuasione contro Necessita 1965 Mixed media on photo paper 54 x 65

5. La costituzione del No! 1965 Mixed media on photo paper 54 x 65

6. Fire orini maggiori del Vecchio Amore 1966 Mixed media on layered plexiglass 20 x 29 x 3 1/4" All loans Cordier & Ekstrom, Inc., New York

Mary Bauermeister
10. I’m a Pacifist, but War Pictures are too Beautiful 1964-66 Mixed media 45 x 96" All loans Richard Feigen Gallery, Chicago

11. Writing 1966 Mixed media 33½ x 33½" All loans Richard Feigen Gallery, Chicago

12. V.P. Very Important Picture 1966-67 Mixed media 64 x 94" All loans Richard Feigen Gallery, Chicago

George Brecht
17. King of Cups 1964 Mixed media 7½ x 5 x 2" All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

18. Three of Coins 1965 Mixed media 5 x 3½ x 2½" All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

19. Two of Clubs 1966 Mixed media 10 x 15 x 2½" All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

20. Three of Swords 1966 Mixed media 10 x 15 x 2½" All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

21. Knight of Clubs 1966 Mixed media 10 x 15 x 2½" All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

22. Veil of Cups 1966 Mixed media 10 x 15 x 2½" All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

23. Six of Swords 1966 Mixed media 10 x 15 x 2½" All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

24. One of Clubs 1966 Mixed media 10 x 15 x 2½" All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

25. Six of Clubs 1966 Mixed media 10 x 15 x 2½" All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

26. Knight of Clubs 1966 Mixed media 15½ x 15½ x 2½" All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

27. Derive 1965 Mixed media Tempera on board, vinyl and metal 78 x 78 All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

28. Sitting . . . Blocks 1965-66 Mixed media 12 x 12 All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

29. Edie in the Desert . . . Dominó 1965 Mixed media 21 x 40 All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

30. Life-Curve No. 2 (Snowfield) Oswald 1967 Mixed media Tempera on photo paper on board, 33 x 138 All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

Ray Johnson
31. Stile 1966 Collage-painting 29½ x 12½ All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

32. Comb Knife 1966 Collage-painting 20 x 20 All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

33. Dice 1966 Collage-painting 22 x 16 All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

34. The Snake has a Heart 1966 Collage-painting 13½ x 27 All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

35. Ice 1966 Collage-painting 30 x 30 All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

36. Massage Ball 1967 Collage-painting 14½ x 16½ All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

37. Wanda Gag 1967 Collage-painting 13½ x 16½ All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

38. Weirus Unrattig 1967 Collage-painting 14 x 20 All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

39. His Art Looks Old 1967 Collage-painting 15 x 20 All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

40. Jan 1967 Collage-painting 14½ x 20 All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

Alton Kaprow
41. Words 1967 Mixed media environment 8 x 9 x 9' and 8 x 6 x 6' All loans Richard Feigen Gallery, Chicago, with exception of Nos. 31 and 32 Collection W. M. Bollenbach, Jr., St. Paul, Minnesota

Oyvind Fahlström
27. Derive 1965 Mixed media Tempera on board, vinyl and metal 78 x 78 All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

42. What is a Comparison? 1964 Silkscreen print 30 x 20 All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

43. World Ruin Through Black Magic 1965 Silkscreen print 54 x 38½ All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

44. Heart 1966 Silkscreen print 29½ x 20 All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

45. Madman 1967 Silkscreen print 40 x 27½ All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

46. Get a Grip Comrade—We Need a Byron in the Movement 1966 Silkscreen print 22 x 21½ All loans Franklin Kingsberg, Los Angeles

47. Vermissage Cocktail 1966 Silkscreen print 41 x 27½ All loans Marlborough Graphics, New York
Alison Knowles
48. The Big Book 1956-67 Mixed media 5 x 8" lent by the artist
49. The Big Book incorporates the "Goat Gallery," an array of works of art by Robert Watts, Emmett Williams, Robert Filliou, Wolf Vostell, Tatsuo Saito, Carolee Schneemann, Al Hansen, Philip Corner, Cyrellie Forman, George Brecht, Claes Oldenburg, Hansjörg Mayer, Ray Johnson, Ethel Ross, Billy Apple, Way Wilson and Dick Higgins. Alison Knowles executed silkscreened images of a mountain seal and an exercising man which she printed on sheets of newspaper and sent to a number of her friends to be transformed and returned. James Nunn

Gianni-Emilio Simonetti
50. Apres la Swartz-set "Inter-nazionale" 1959 Mixed media on canvas 36 x 36" 51. Classificazioni diotomiche dei sessi in base agli elementi secondari dell'abbigliamento 1965 Mixed media on canvas 36 x 36" 52. Les frits du champ de mon père ("Mini-verse of the Young Shandy") 1955 Mixed media on canvas 40 x 60" 53. Lips-Vegno Temax 1967 Mixed media on canvas 50 x 50" 54. Turner in money-mod a ll'Hotel Delestreazione ("ANalysye du vir-age") 1967 Wash with a wet sponge 40 x 40" 55. We o how il pe e hi ("ANalysye du vir-age") 1967 Wash with a wet sponge 40 x 40" 56. LUV ("ANalysye du vir-age") 1967 Wash with a wet sponge 40 x 40" 57. L'eau de Giotta diventa usqueadbaugham ("ANalysye du vir-age") 1967 Wash with a wet sponge 40 x 40"

All loans Galería Bonino, Ltd., New York, courtesy Galeria Schwartz, Milan

Wolf Vostell

All loans Collection Dick Higgins, New York
Photograph Credits

Bacel, Milan: cat. 63
Geoffrey Clements, New York: cat. 9, 28, 40
Fischbach Gallery, New York: cat. 21
Peter A. Juley & Sons, New York: cat. 23
Marlborough-New York Gallery, London: cat. 45
Robert R. McEown, New York: cat. 41
Peter Moore, New York: cat. 12
Walter Russell, New York: cat. 3

5000 copies of Pictures to be read / Poetry to be seen, have been printed by W.J. Wrenn
Printing Corp., for the Museum of Contemporary Art on the occasion of the opening exhibition,
October 24—December 3, 1967.
Designed by Sherman Mutchnick.
Typography by Berthel and Cooper.
Set in Helvetica Regular and Medium, 8/9 point.
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Printed in U.S.A.