

# ALTERNATIVE SPACE

## ALTERNATIVE SPACES — PART ONE

BERNICE MURPHY

*'to date, art's freedom lies, almost exclusively, in its ability to freely examine itself. This precise and closed activity is underpinned by a more general and open-ended desire to be free. Between the generality of the one and the precision of the other lies the deadline which separates art from life.'*

*This tacit desideratum lies at the heart of the unwritten contract which artists make with their art.*

*Writing, rewriting, examining and re-examining the nature of this contract might be seen as a metaphor for much recent art — a working out of the difference between 'I make art' and 'art makes me'. From shaping the canvas to closing the gap on the art/life division, moving from the canvas as arena to the world at large, artists place themselves and their art within the terms of an art contract.'* (Noel Sheridan (1976), then Director, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide.)

*"Place the artist, not the art" is the most important of the precepts I have made for myself while trying to bring the curatorial role into phase with the changing character of art being produced.'*

(Alanna Heiss (1978), President, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, at The Clocktower and PS1, New York.)

Alanna Heiss and Noel Sheridan were once neighbours in adjacent lofts in a New York building in the 1960's. Alanna Heiss had recently come to New York, having grown up in the wide expanses of South Dakota, a blonde *ingenue*, utterly fresh to the art world and, as she readily volunteers in retrospect, 'with hayseeds coming out of both ears'. Noel Sheridan was a recent artist arrival from Dublin. He had come over from Ireland in a theatrical revue (which flopped), was entranced by New York's energy and immediately decided to stay. Neither was then involved in sponsorship of other people's art or showed any indication of the parallel roles they would later pursue, in different parts of the world and in relative ignorance of each other.

Alanna Heiss's name is now intimately associated with the so-called 'alternative artspaces' which developed in the 1970's in the United States — as co-director (now President) of the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, famous for its exhibitions and artists' projects sponsored at The Clocktower

(1973ff) and P.S.1. (1976ff) in New York. Noel Sheridan's name (along with Kiffy Rubbo's in Melbourne) is similarly associated with the development of alternative spaces in Australia — he was Secretary/Director of the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide, from 1974 until 1981, when he left to return to Ireland to become head of the National Art School in Dublin.

One of the most important factors affecting contemporary art in the 1970's was the emergence of a vast array of 'alternative art spaces': in Europe, in North America (called 'parallel galleries' in Canada), and in Australia. Widely differing in particular circumstance, but almost universally characterised by their being artist-run, these spaces challenged the life of art museums and public galleries not only in the vast quantity of new work they showed but also in their facilitation of new forms of art being produced. By the end of the decade, the growth of alternative spaces had stimulated two large conferences of their directors. One was international in invitation, held in conjunction with the **Arte Fiera** in Bologna in 1977 (attendance by John Buckley, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Kiffy Rubbo, Ewing & Paton Gallery, Melbourne, and Noel Sheridan, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, was funded by the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council). The other, a first and invaluable comprehensive conference of all North American directors of such spaces, was held at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art in April 1978 (attended by the present author on a private visit to the United States).<sup>1</sup> However, by the end of this (rather generously funded) decade, such spaces had been forced to reappraise their achievements and adjust their objectives and operations in a climate of drastically reduced government support for the arts. All must sharply reassess their situation if they are to survive far into the 1980's.

But to take a broader perspective first: the buoyancy and heady self-emphasis of the alternative spaces of the 1970's has obscured some of their wider connections and origins. Many earlier instances of artists taking immediate charge of their own work and carrying its energy and statement right out into the public arena, by-passing museums and the other official institutions of art, have been somewhat forgotten.

Following Courbet's famous private showing of 40 of his pictures at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1855, Monet and his artist colleagues organised the first joint public manifestation of the Impressionists in 1874, in an independent exhibition at Nadar's photography studio in Paris. Following the Impressionists, the Fauves, the Futurists, Constructivist and Dadaists all initiated their own

work into the public sphere and circumvented contemporary institutions which showed and validated art.

Marinetti's launching of the first manifesto of "**Le Futurisme**" (not simply ideology but also an artwork) on the front page of **Le Figaro** in 1909 represented a radical capture of social space long before artists of the 1970's created the so-called 'new arts-spaces' of magazines, periodicals, billboards and street forums. And even stretching conceptually beyond the avant-gardism of the Futurist and Dadaist manifestations, designed to shock an elite, the Constructivists' painted trains and travel shows reached out into the community, transforming and often dissolving the formal mediation between artists and society. The Bauhaus, too, sought a more collective, collaborative art and design, spreading into all areas of daily life, subverting the media divisions and hierarchies which '*marginalized*' the creative contribution of artists and designers to society. The 1970's saw a reactivation and re-statement of many of these old concerns in new ways and new forms.

Australia has its own independent roots of direct artist action to recall, if precedents are to be adduced from the past. The most famous local exhibition of the entire nineteenth century — the **9 x 5 Impressions** show — was in fact artist-organised, by Roberts, Streeton and co. in Melbourne in 1889. This was at a time when 'the few galleries available for exhibitions were expensive and it had become common practice for artists to hold exhibitions in their studios'.<sup>2</sup>

There was even an arrangement of simultaneous exhibitions on one occasion by a number of Melbourne artists in the 1880's<sup>3</sup>, anticipating such developments in various quarters in the 1970's: the 'South of Market' artists' open studio exhibitions arranged in San Francisco in the late seventies, and the similar Creative Space project in Sydney in conjunction with the Festival of Sydney in January 1981.

On another front in the 1880's, Tom Roberts had led the formation of the briefly independent Australian Artists' Association (1886-1888) during a visit to Sydney from Melbourne. This was an organisation exclusively of 'professional artists' motivated largely by the wish to have artists wrest determination of their work away from more 'official' mediating bodies, and an organisation spurred significantly by Julian Ashton's vigorous advocacy of support and recognition for the work of Australian artists, as against continual deference to work from abroad. Interestingly, these two features have resurfaced in fresh guise, almost a century later in Sydney, in the formation of the Artworkers Union, arising out of debates around issues of the third Biennale of Sydney in 1979.

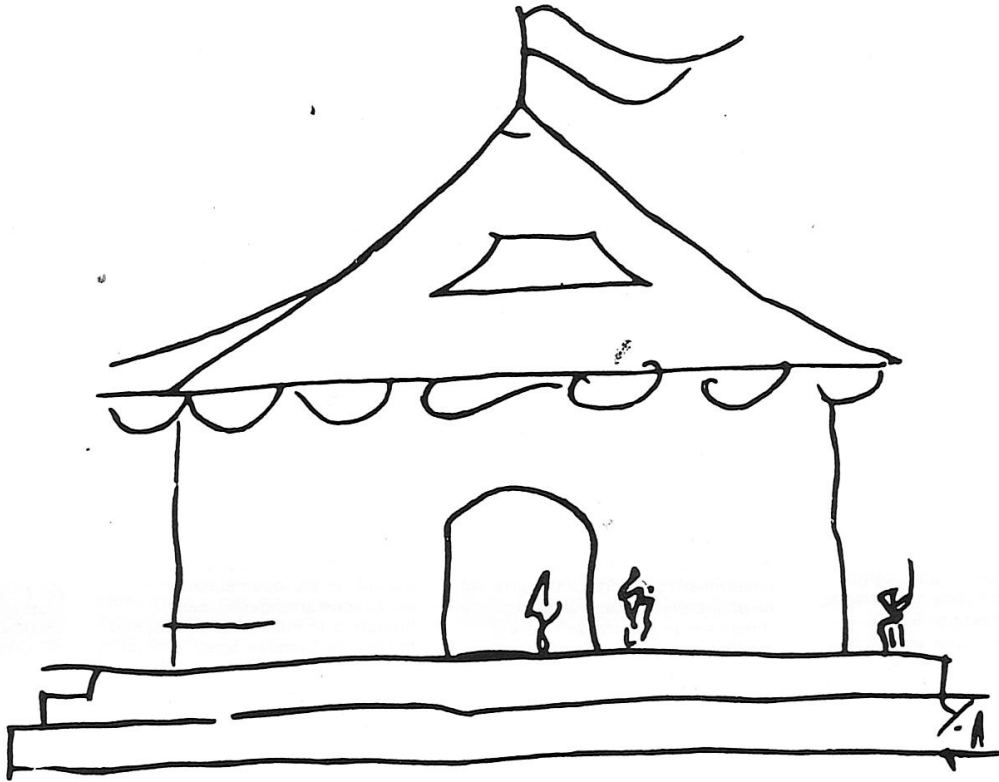
The immediate roots of the American alternative spaces of the 1970's may be found in the artists' co-operatives (for example in Chicago and Boston, dating from the 1950's) and in the neighbourhood programs and common development organisations established by artists in the late 1960's. The Institute for Art and Urban Resources (founded 1971 in New York) was in fact modelled after the successful English SPACE organisation, dedicated to finding work spaces for artists in London in the late 1960's. St. Katherine's dock, in particular, a huge deserted warehouse building in London used by artists in the late 1960's, had provided an important model of the viability of old disused buildings as ideal low-cost artists' working and living spaces. Artists in many cities around the world in the 1970's were thus to play an important part in inner-city urban renewal — often, as we still see today, with the ironic consequences of their losing their own economic base as revitalised areas prosper, rents rise and the boutiques, restaurants and developers move in.

In Australia the various state branches of the Contemporary Art Society (dating back to the parent body founded in Melbourne in 1938) have played a varying but often forceful role in sponsoring artist-run organisation of exhibitions, critical debate and publications. The Victorian and South Australian bodies had been most vigorous in the 1940's. In Sydney, the Contemporary Art Society of New South Wales became a strong generative force in the facilitation and dissemination of new art from 1960 onwards, stimulated especially by the energies of Elwyn Lynn, editor of a regular **C.A.S. Broadsheet** in the 1960's and eventually the Society's President. The C.A.S. continued its existence in the 1970's in Sydney, but in a contracted form and without any permanent address. Meanwhile new, more focused, artist-run spaces were emerging.

Inhobdress, started by artists Mike Parr and Peter Kennedy on the 2nd floor of a former factory space in Woolloomooloo late in 1970, represented the new, smaller and more focused type of art space that was to contour experimental work in the seventies.

Inhobdress embraced all of the most significant characteristics of the seventies 'alternative spaces': it was powered by radical social and political analysis; it arose from young artists' perceived need to take charge of their own situation in order to pursue and show their own and others' work; it was dedicated to experimental and often site-specific forms of work which then had no chance or notion of being shown in conventional public spaces or art museums; it was run cheaply in an old inner-urban area on a co-operative, shared-cost, shared-responsibility basis; it became a focus not only for showing new work but also for the redevelopment of art theory; it was concerned with exchange of work and ideas between

Art Network  
#6, winter 1982



Projet de tente conçu par Courbet pour son Exposition de 1855

artists in different parts of the world; it eventually attracted limited federal government funding; and it lasted only as long as it could serve its original impetus. Faced with the scale-up or fold-up cross-roads in 1972, Parr and Kennedy decided they did not want to take on further unsalaried administrative burdens and wrapped up Inhibodress in August 1972, after almost two full and important years of operation. Inhibodress, having been one of the first of this new type of exhibition space to be founded anywhere in the world in the 1970's, was also one of the first to reassess the temporality of its position and close.

Across the Pacific, in the United States and Canada, many similar alternative visual arts organisations began to be opened up by artists and associated 'inexperienced people, flexing around', spaces born of a sense of occasion and sharpened perceptions about nurturing new art in new situations, spaces no longer indexed to the exhibition functions of art galleries and museums but identified and supported wholly by processes of peer-group validation. Alanna Heiss recalled this time later: 'In the late 1960's and 1970's a lot of new art was being made which was important and contained a power which couldn't be stopped. There was a feeling of tension and risk and marvel and wonderment...'<sup>5</sup>

It is notable that the largest proliferation of alternative art spaces in the 1970's occurred in North America rather than in Europe. Certain countries in Europe had a better established tradition of support for contemporary art through existing structures and institutions, notably in Germany.

Not only did Germany have remarkable museums, as well as

**Kunsthalle** and **Kunstverein** spaces (the latter more artist-influenced) for the showing of modern and contemporary art, but it had also established new institutions like the enormous **Documenta** exhibitions at Kassel, which began in 1955. Neither the United States nor Canada had a comparable forum for a focused, critical and comparative evaluation of the evolving state of the visual arts.

Moreover much of the pioneering critical support for experimental American work in the 1960's came through German cities like Dusseldorf, Frankfurt and Cologne, well ahead of support in the United States: the Fluxus group, and Paik, Moorman and Cage are just a few examples. Even such a well anthologised 'west-coast Pop' artist as Edward Kienholz is today more sympathetically understood, shown and collected in Germany (where he lives in Berlin) than he is in New York. And the pattern continues: it could be argued that young American artists like Jonathan Borofsky and Julian Schnabel have been established in the last two or three years more by the weight and extent of European critical attention than that in the United States.

By the end of the 1960's, despite the vast financial extent, in quantitative terms, of American public and private patronage of the arts, there existed a decisive critical gap. The great 'treasures' from past centuries were avidly collected and housed. The work of Alfred Stieglitz and his circle, and the impact of the 1913 Armory Show — leading to the establishment of the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1929 — had educated a new, and equally eager public, devoted to the 'story' of modernist European art. And the 'heroic emergence' of American art (abstract expressionism

to Pop) was now validated and keenly collected. However new forms of art were emerging which challenged the existing artist-dealer-critic-museum cycle altogether, and sought entirely different means of support, contexts of exposure and artist-audience relationships.

The alternative spaces supported the growth of many kinds of art that was not compatible with — even fundamentally oppositional to — the life of art museums and commercial galleries. Much new work challenged the homogenising white cube that had come to represent the ideal modernist exhibition space. The development of video, documentation, performance, site-specific installations, inter-media projects, community work, sociological and political art represented the growth of new forms of art powered by a changing, more politicised consciousness which had grown out of the 1960's.

The spontaneous appearance in the 1970's of so many artist-controlled organisations in such far-flung parts of the world reflected the erosion of the idea of 'internationalism' that had occurred in art in the 1960's. Charged by the aspirations of ever increasing numbers of unexhibited young artists produced by the juggernaut of tertiary art education (particularly in Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia), direct action at a local level was a spontaneous counter-thrust to the pursuit of 'international' art in a few clogged centres of artistic energy, dominated by New York.

Many of the alternative spaces have thereby nourished a move towards revitalised regionalism in the arts. This is especially pertinent in places, even whole countries, which find almost their entire cultural life

traditionally moulded by a 'regionalist' position in relation to monolithic centres and repositories of 'international' culture elsewhere. Such changing conditions and sharpened critical analysis have been especially significant and generative for the development of Australian art and culture in the 1970's.

At a quite profound level, the new art spaces altered the sense of mediation between artist and audience that generally occurs in the showing of work. They represented a changed notion of responsibility on the part of artists for the development and presentation of their own and others' work.

How that sense of responsibility was taken up and developed simultaneously in different parts of the world (in continents on either side of the Pacific) will be dealt with in Part 2 of this account, in the next issue. □

#### Footnotes:

1. This conference, entitled **The New Artsspace**, was held in Los Angeles over four days 26-29 April, organised by the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (Director: Bob Smith). A pre-Conference publication, under the above title, brought together several essays and a directory of basic information about alternative spaces in the United States.
2. Alan McCulloch, **The Golden Age of Australian Painting: Impressionism and the Heidelberg School**, Melbourne, Lansdown, 1969, p.42.
3. Ibid.
4. Quote from panel session, **The New Artsspace**, Los Angeles, 1978.
5. Alanna Heiss, *ibid.*, 'History and Objectives' session, 26 April, 1978.

# THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART CENTRAL STREET GALLERY

PAUL MCGILLICK

There has been a gallery space at No. 1 Central Street in the heart of down-town Sydney since 1966. At one time, in 1975/76, the Institute of Contemporary Art was utilising all three floors of the building. At present, only the ground floor is being used.

Central Street Gallery operated for five years until it closed in 1971 as a result of one of its then directors, Chandler Coventry, wanting to establish his own gallery elsewhere. The closure, however, was only temporary and in subsequent years the gallery has taken on the character of a Phoenix rising from the ashes.

The regular changes in gallery policy have mirrored the increasing fragmentation of the visual arts which commenced in the early 70's. These changes in policy — which is really only another way of saying changes in the way the space has been utilised — were always conscious responses by those currently associated with the gallery to the changing needs and emphases of the "art world". More often, it would be more accurate to speak of *initiatives* rather than responses for I think it is true to say that Central Street (as it is invariably known) has consistently led the way in signalling new directions in art in Australia.

This flexibility makes Central Street and its history a kind of barometer of changes in the visual arts in Australia since early 1966. Unlike any other non-institutional gallery in Australia, Central Street has not only exhibited current work, but maintained a didactic activity to support these exhibitions. By this I mean that new work was always, where possible, accompanied by some explication of its premises and sources. This was done by exhibitions, such as the early Matisse *papier decoupees* (1966), Josef Albers (both *Homage to the Square* and *The Interaction of Colour*), and a number of other imported exhibitions from Britain and the U.S. It was done also by catalogues, publications and seminars. No other gallery in Australia has documented its own history as comprehensively as Central Street — to be completed by a forthcoming history of the gallery.

The mercurial character of the gallery, however, has also ensured that Central Street has frequently been the focus of distortions and half-truths — sometimes propagated by people and institutions who perceive Central Street as being in some way a rival to their own ambitions, sometimes propagated by those individuals who have attempted to exploit the gallery for

their own purposes and failed, sometimes propagated by the ill-informed and sometimes propagated by those with an ideological barrow to push (viz. Central was "reactionary" or "derivative" or "elitist").

This is not the place to launch into a lengthy defence of Central Street against its detractors. However, one recent example warrants a retort and will serve to cast some light on what I have just said.

Gary Catalano recently published a book entitled *The Years of Hope* (O.U.P., 1981) which purports to be a study of Australian art and criticism during the period 1959 to 1968. Either as a result of unworthy motives or as the result of poor scholarship, Mr. Catalano has, in effect, published a "revised" version of Australian art in that period — "revised" because it omits a large number of artists who were important (and many of whom remain important) and because it seems to go out of its way to distort the truth about some other artists and galleries.

Mr. Catalano, of course, worked for Watters Gallery for some time and, sure enough, it is Watters which gets the five star rating for everything from originality to integrity. At the same time, he rakes over the ashes of what he imagines to have been a rivalry between Central Street and Watters. No such rivalry existed then or since.

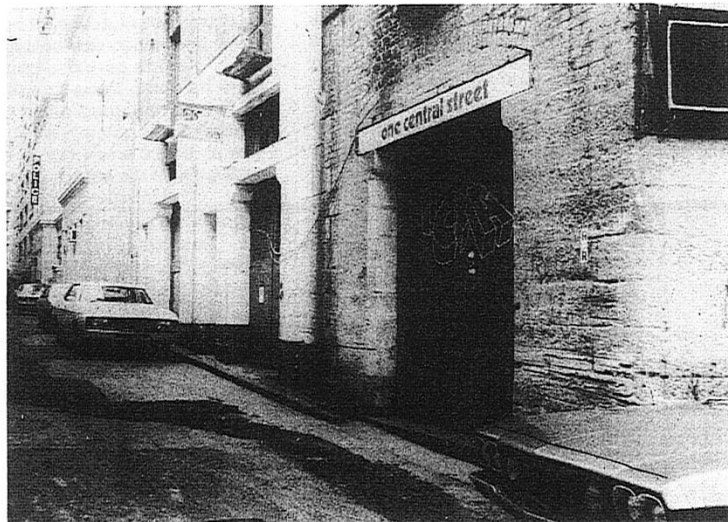
Catalano seems particularly intent on an attempt to discredit Central Street. He goes to extraordinary lengths. For example, Dick Watkins is named as one of Australia's best painters. But only Watkins' first show at Watters is mentioned. In fact, Watkins showed mainly at Central Street and established his reputation there. Similarly, Alan Oldfield's first exhibition at Watters is noted, but with no mention of the several shows at Central Street which subsequently established Oldfield.

Mr. Catalano asserts that Central Street only got the reputation it did because it was run by advertising people who knew how to market a product. This highly inaccurate assertion was (by default) supported by no less a person than Bernard Smith when he reviewed the book (in *Island*, No.8, Nov. 1981). The facts are these: John White and Harald Noritis (both painters and both commercial artists) ran their business out of the building. When they acquired new premises, they retained the lease on Central Street and made it available for use as a gallery.

The main moving force behind the gallery's establishment was Tony McGillick who had just returned from England as part of a wave of expatriates who returned in 1965/66. The gallery was intended to show the work of these expatriates and argue for the principles which informed their art. McGillick had spent most of his five years abroad working full-time as a painter. He returned to take up a job with an advertising agency. Like many artists in Australia (Syd Ball, Brett Whiteley and Michael Johnson for example), McGillick's initial art training came by way of an "apprenticeship" with an advertising agency. In the fifties, this was often the only way for a young person of

evidenced by "Known Systems, Anonymous Gestures" (1970) — probably the first conceptual/systems show in Australia — and the CAS-sponsored, "The Situation Now", which was accompanied by an extensive catalogue edited by Terry Smith. Anyway, since 1972, Central Street has always been non-commercial. This is not to say that it hasn't acted as agent for an artist (usually when a sale has resulted from a piece being exhibited in the gallery), only that it has not looked to sell art, nor has it promoted art because of its potential commercial viability.

From 1974 to March 1978, Central Street (under the new name, Institute



limited means to get through art school.

The first manager of Central Street was Royston Harpur, a painter and a former gallery director of the ICA in London. He had no connection with advertising. None of the other artists who exhibited in those establishment years had anything to do with advertising. Moreover, it should be pointed out that Central Street, in its initial years, was run as a cooperative by all the artists involved. Artists who showed during this time were Michael Johnson, Dick Watkins, Rollin Schlicht, Wendy Paramor, Joe Szabo, Gunter Christmann and Alan Oldfield.

If, as Mr. Catalano asserts, Central Street was so successful, why did it consistently lose money? Central Street has always been subsidised by private money: most of that money (to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars over a fifteen year period) has come from the gallery's principal benefactors, John White and Harald Noritis; for a short period it was Chandler Coventry who put a lot of money into the venture. Today Central Street is still supported by White and Noritis. It has never enjoyed either the sympathy or the financial support of the Visual Arts Board. Perhaps it was the futility of pretending to be commercial with an art which was largely uncommercial that prompted a change in policy after the brief period of closure in the early 70's. In fact, policy had been changing even before this as

of Contemporary Art) operated full-time with myself as executive director. Its programme included exhibitions and installations, plays, concerts, dance programmes, poetry readings, seminars and workshops. The ICA published a quarterly magazine and prepared a number of documentation packages of work originally presented in the gallery.

From overseas, the exhibitions included the Merce Cunningham show (prints by Johns, Rauschenberg, Nauman, Cage and others; films, videos, posters and memorabilia), John Danvers, John Baldessari, the St Martins Sculpture Photographic Survey and artists from British Columbia in Canada. The first Women's Art Movement shows were held at the ICA, together with solo shows by Elizabeth Gower, Ken Unsworth, Peter Kennedy and a group show by past residents of the Power Studio in Paris. John Cage attended a concert in his honour and seminars were led by Lucy Lippard and Clement Greenberg. Jacqui Carroll and Nanette Hassell were among the many dancers who performed at the gallery, while concerts featured Bill Fontana, Warren Burt, David Ahern, Jon Rose and Colin Offord.

Today the ICA functions on a part-time basis, without staff and with myself as coordinator of exhibitions. In 1981 Richard Dunn organised a series of four exhibitions including an installation by himself, together with installations by John Lethbridge, Rose Anne McCreevy

and Kevin Sheehan. Presentations are restricted to static exhibitions/installations as the combination of new fire regulations and problems of supervision make performance difficult to accommodate. Most of the presentations result from approaches to the gallery by individual artists wanting to use the space. These presentations are supervised by the artist at times which vary from show to show. No rent is charged unless work is sold as a result of exhibiting in the space. In this event, a small rental is negotiated as a contribution to the gallery's maintenance costs. Sales, however, are rare, as most of the work exhibited is of a non-saleable nature.

What, then, is the gallery's policy?

This is hard to pin down, as a primary objective is to remain flexible. At the moment, the gallery is seen as a kind of *anti-gallery*, operating in a manner almost entirely opposed to the conventional gallery. The gallery does not advertise, except by direct mailing to selected people. The gallery is non-commercial. It does not run a stable of artists (although there are a small number of artists who appear to prefer to show in this space). It is principally interested in showing work which, either because of its non-commercial or innovative character, is not likely to be presented elsewhere. To some extent the gallery continues a policy (important in the 1974-78 period) of being a launch pad for new artists — although the main emphasis is now on good work, rather than the trendy or new work for its own sake.

In particular, the gallery seems to be veering towards becoming a highly "private" space — an operation with low visibility. In this way it runs counter to modish preoccupations with "marketing". It is difficult to find out what is on at Central Street. It is difficult to get into: one has to stoop through a small doorway and ascend a steep flight of stairs, borrow a key to the gallery from an obliging secretary upstairs and then let oneself in and out of the gallery space. More and more, it is becoming necessary to make special arrangements with the artist to get to see his work.

The reason for this growing anti-social attitude is, I think, twofold. Firstly, to put it rhetorically, why should art be of easy access? Central Street has always been a serious gallery (though rarely earnest). At Central Street the art has always come first — before the ambitions of individuals and before the vulgarity of socialising. On the occasions when it has started to take on the character of a drinking trough, a boudoir or a drop-in centre, the doors have been closed and the operation re-assessed.

If art is that important, then make the effort to ring up, make an appointment and venture into one of the nastier parts of Sydney to see it. Do so in privacy, and do so as a kind of communion. Good art is difficult. Central Street goes against the current philosophy which informs the

activities of so many galleries that art must be easy. Good art is tough. There is precious little of it around in Sydney at the moment and Central Street is prepared to keep the doors closed until good work becomes available.

The second reason for going underground is a feeling that the visual arts have been over-exposed. More than ever art has become a commodity. The dialectic of the 60's and 70's has been betrayed by artists who once denounced the prostitution of others but who now peddle their own brands of merchandise. The sins of each generation are perpetuated by the next. Central Street rejects the notion of art as commodity — or, at the very least, the artist should be honest with himself. After all no one's arguing with the artist's right to eat and have a roof over his head. As Brecht remarked: "*Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral.*"<sup>1</sup> We should, however, reject art as subject for the social column, art as the vehicle only of ambition and reject the notion of artist-as-serf. Most of all: let's ditch the notion of artist as Ego.

The current policy at Central Street could almost be termed a closed-door policy — both literally and figuratively. This policy, like all the previous policies, stems from a simple belief: that making art is a worthwhile activity and that any art

made with integrity is entitled to be appreciated and evaluated in the most favourable circumstances.

By this I don't mean that art should be accepted uncritically. On the contrary, what we most lack in this country is a mature critical attitude — one which goes beyond the playground level of taking all criticism to be a form of vindictiveness. Central Street believes that, at the moment, the best thing the visual arts can do is to retreat behind closed doors for a while and re-assess. Quality *does* matter. Standards *do* matter. If they didn't, we would all be faced with the existentialist's final option.

Central Street has closed its doors. But it is still showing art. And closed doors do not mean a closed shop. Artists are invited to contact the gallery with proposals for using the space. A written proposal is preferred. It should be remembered that the ICA has very limited funds, most of which are reserved for maintaining the space. Artists are, therefore, expected to fund their own exhibitions. Enquiries should be directed to Paul McGillick (Executive Director) Institute of Contemporary Art, 1 Central Street, Sydney 2000. NSW.

#### Footnote

1. First comes food, then morality.

that I had begun to show with Gallery A; the need for another gallery, therefore, being a fairly low priority.

Nevertheless I was interested in the possibility of an alternative existing system, while at the same time recognizing that Gallery A may not satisfy future, particular, exhibition requirements. This was enough for me to maintain whatever degree of interest I had in the project.

A space on the second floor of a building in Woolloomooloo was secured for a rent of \$30.00 per week. The space, measuring approximately 60' x 30', was formerly the premises of a blouse factory, the company being called Hibodress Blouses. 'In' was added to 'Hibodress', for no particular reason other than the member's mutual decision to have a name for the gallery which was non-specific. So the gallery became Inhibodress, a non-sense word, reminiscent of Dada.

A press release written by Barbara Hall, and dated 22.10.70 was forwarded to the local media and art critics;

### INHIBODRESS, A NEW SYDNEY GALLERY

A new art gallery opens in Sydney on November 7 — a gallery with a few radical differences.

- (1) it is being initiated, financed and maintained solely by artists.
- (2) it is a non profit proposition in contrast to all private Sydney galleries.
- (3) it is being founded without any interest in identity, or in representing any school of art.
- (4) it will be a low-rent venue for frequent theatre, music and poetry experiments.

How...At present the founding group comprises eleven artists, but additions are possible within limits. Each contributes a weekly sum for rental and upkeep, and each is responsible for all aspects of his exhibition — promotion, management etc.

Why...Some of the artists have broken with regular galleries and consider *Inhibodress* a complete substitute.

For some it will provide an opportunity for experimental projects not easily assimilable in the regular gallery set-up.

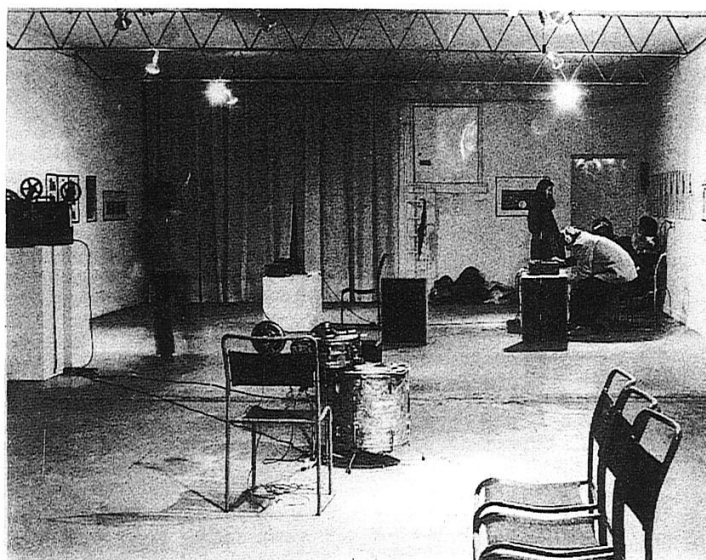
For others it will provide a first showing for artists who have not been able to break into the regular galleries.

Who...The original idea rests with Mike Parr, a poet, painter and conceptualist, but the 'power rests with the masses' and all decisions are settled by majority vote.

The subscribing artists are: John Armstrong,<sup>2</sup> Bill Brown, Terry English, Neils Elmoos, James Elwing, Michael Gifford, Tim Johnson, Peter Kennedy, Orest Keywan, Mike Parr and Rolla Primrose.

The press release created dissension amongst some of the members. It was the first disagreement within the group to be voiced *out-front*. It was probably also the last disagreement to be so openly voiced. The cause of the disagreement was due to member's sensitivity to the

## INHIBODRESS JUST FOR THE RECORD PETER KENNEDY



Interior view of Inhibodress.

The exhibition is *Idea Demonstrations* mounted jointly by Peter Kennedy and Mike Parr (May 1972)

I believe it would have been some time in August/September, 1970, that Mike Parr convened a meeting to discuss the possibility of establishing an artists' co-operative gallery.

I attended the first meeting, and a subsequent meeting, with a degree of scepticism mixed with disinterest. What was being proposed was not so much an alternative to the existing gallery-dealer system, but a means by which a number of artists, who were not represented by a gallery, might have the opportunity to show their work. My scepticism rested in my knowledge of the ease with which an artists' co-operative could fail, and my disinterest with the fact

statement, "For others, it will provide a first showing for artists who have not been able to break into regular galleries".

A circular was sent to all members calling for a meeting on Saturday, October 31, 1970, to discuss, amongst other things, a policy towards publicity. The circular enumerated the points, concerning publicity, to be discussed.

- (1) ...should the gallery make a policy of getting as much publicity as possible?
- (2) ...should the onus rest on individuals for organising the publicity for their own shows?
- (3) ...can individual members, at their own discretion, organize publicity for the gallery as a whole?

The circular was jointly signed by Mike Parr and myself. This was the first occasion on which I became actually involved with Inhibodress administration!

A consensus was arrived at. As there were eleven members there were eleven different reasons for membership. Barbara Hall was to continue as Inhibodress publicist.

The first show, a group show of nine artists, received only salutary mention by Sydney critics. With several 'post-object' artists as members of the co-operative the expectations (already apparent) of two critics, Donald Brook, and Terry Smith were not fulfilled.

The final event for the year was an AZ Music concert organized by David Ahern, who had just joined the group. The concert was dismissed by Sydney's music critics, but was favourably reviewed by Donald Brook.

It was not until the new year, 1971, that the direction for which Inhibodress became known began to develop. Following in rapid succession the exhibitions defined a 'position'. There was Mike Parr's 'Word Situations No.1', my exhibition 'But the Fierce Blackman', Tim Johnson's 'Installation as Conceptual Scheme', an exhibition organized by Tim Johnson called 'Activities' which included the work of local artists (Neil Evans, Terry English, Tim Johnson, myself, Mike Parr, Alec Tzannes, Optronic Kinetic and artists overseas collected by Tim Johnson whilst travelling in England and Europe at the latter part of 1970 and the beginning of 1971, Mel Bochner, Victor Burgin, Ian Breakwell, John Hilliard, Barry Flanagan, Lygia Clark, Helio Oiticica, David Medalla and Lawrence Weiner were some of the artists). The next exhibition, which I organized, was four artists associated with Melbourne's Pinacotheca gallery. The artists were: Simon Close, Roger Cutforth, Dale Hickett and Robert Rooney.

These five exhibitions ranged from mid-February to mid-June, 1971. Referring to the art reviews of the time it appears that there were only three other shows from that time, mid-June to the end of 1971, which received the kind of critical attention necessary to support Inhibodress' position as the 'radical' or 'experimental' gallery of the Sydney art scene. Those shows were; Mike Parr's 'Word Situations No.2, Terry English's 'Processes, Activities and Participation in Time' and a

presentation of video tapes by Mike Parr and myself, although the latter attracted attention more for their innovative rather than their aesthetic qualities. To my knowledge it was the first video-tape show in this country and it was with being 'first' which Inhibodress was beginning to become rather self-consciously associated with.

Although, as it seemed to me, Inhibodress represented something of a cause to both Donald Brook and Terry Smith, enthusiastic responses to the above shows were not their prerogative alone. Bruce Adams, James Gleeson, Noel Hutchison, Sandra McGrath, David Rankin and Daniel Thomas were usually sympathetic if not always enthusiastic. The only opposition derived from Elwyn Lynn. Laurie Thomas wrote about it on several occasions.

Introductions to reviews during this period were positively laudatory; 'This gallery is the exciting place this week', 'Without doubt, a visit to Inhibodress — which has now assumed the avant-garde mantle dropped by Central Street — is an exciting and stimulating experience', 'By far the most challenging and thought provoking of this week's exhibitions...'

'Inhibodress Information', a collection of loose sheets, 'edited' by Tim Johnson, Mike Parr and myself, grew out of this excitement. Three issues reached subscribers before it folded; it never really seemed to get off the ground.

'Conceptual' or 'post-object' art, had by this time become substantially associated with Inhibodress. As Mike Parr and I had assumed the major part of the administration of Inhibodress, if not all of it; our names, too, were strongly associated with the gallery by this time.

The emergent *raison d'être* had brought with it an image. Many of the artists originally associated with the gallery had, by this time, their own one-man shows, or at least were about to. Their financial commitment to Inhibodress in the form of rent contributions was fulfilled with the completion of their show. Members gradually left at the point of achieving this objective, not wishing to share an unwanted image, or being generally disillusioned with the way things had gone.

As members left at a faster rate than they could be replaced it was not difficult to see that Inhibodress was living on borrowed time. By the end of 1971 there was only one artist Tim Gibb, other than Mike Parr and myself, remaining with the gallery. Financial support for the gallery was an increasing problem.

To some extent we had already recognized the problem prior to the making of the video tapes around the middle of 1971. We made an unsuccessful application to the Australian Council for the Arts at about that time. The application was referred to the Australian Film Institute where it languished. Our desperation was reflected in the press release for the video tape show 'In view of the buck-passing among government agencies when it comes to supporting art, avant-garde art in particular — Parr and Kennedy believe the future of arts patronage

lies with responsible private enterprise. They are grateful to Akai (Australia) for the loan of the video screening equipment. Without this help the screenings would have been financially impossible'.

The intention was explicitly political, to get people in institutions of one kind or another to start thinking about such things.

In the February 1971, issue of Studio International there appeared an article on 'five typical young artists in Sydney' by Donald Brook.<sup>3</sup> The five artists were John Armstrong, Tim Johnson, Ian Milliss, Mike Parr and myself.

Instructions for a sound piece of mine, reprinted in the article, attracted the attention of the editor of a London magazine, 'Pages'. In April I was asked to submit some pieces for inclusion in the next issue. The magazine was concerned with work which occurred at the intersection of avant-garde art and music. It had a European as well as an English readership. As a result of this contact my name found its way on to several of the art mailing lists circulating in Europe in 1971.

In May, 1971, I received an invitation to participate in an exhibition organized by a German artist Hans-Werner Kalkmann. Tim Johnson and Mike Parr also took part in this exhibition.

The possibility of realizing the potential for Inhibodress to act as an Australian reference or focal point to the international avant-garde mainstream now seemed attainable through these contacts, although my awareness had already been stimulated a month previously in discussions I had with a visiting Canadian artist, Duane Lunden. He had been directly involved in the activities of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in their efforts to overcome their relative isolation from all that was going on.

To be able to make art in Sydney while at the same time participating in the mainstream was, to me at that time, a very important step to take. Insofar as this could be the case the intention was different to Tim Johnson's 'Activities' exhibition in that shows of overseas artists could be mounted without having to leave Sydney.

I became very involved in contacting sympathetic artists and other people in the international art world whose work was known to me, telling them of Inhibodress. The following extract, a letter addressed to New York art critic and writer, Lucy Lippard, dated April 13, 1971, serves as an example: 'Implicit in our intentions is a need to show overseas artists. Inhibodress intends to reconcile the local avant-garde with the most progressive international art. To implement this policy Inhibodress wishes to organise an exchange of information and work with any North American, European and British artists who might be interested in exhibiting "non-bulk" art. There was a highly efficient network. Sometime later I received a letter from American artist John Goodyear, 'Lucy Lippard suggested I write to you about my "Earth Curve" shows. I've written to the Australian Arts Council but nothing much came of it...' Work of other artists began to arrive on the doorstep almost daily. So too did

invitations to participate in exhibitions, particularly in Europe.

1972 arrived. Without artists contributing to the rent it was conceivable that the gallery could close before the exhibitions which were planned for 1972 could be mounted. We applied once again to the Australian Council for the Arts. This time we were successful. Inhibodress (Peter Kennedy and Mike Parr) received \$1500.00, a proportion of which went towards the rent.

The first show of the 'Trans-Art' series was 'Trans-Art 2, 'Australian Curve' and 'Standing Right, Sydney' by John Goodyear. This show replaced an abortive attempt to mount 'Trans-Art 1, Idea Demonstration' a two-man show by Mike Parr and myself. However, the difficulties were overcome and that show opened on May 23, 1972. The term 'Trans-Art' was explained in the press release. 'Trans-Art 1' comprises works by Parr and Kennedy which have been made with video-tapes, 16mm film, sound tapes, photographs, slides, and a sound installation using drums. Trans-Art is a term coined by Mike Parr and Terry Kennedy to describe diverse forms of new art which have one factor in common — they are highly transportable and therefore readily, and internationally accessible to a wide audience. This exhibition functions much like a library or information centre, and the works operate as demonstrations of ideas. The artists will be on hand to play works as they are requested.'

The last two shows were 'Trans-Art 3, Communications' and 'Trans-Art 4, Catchword Potash Mine'.

'Communications' was an exhibition of work of sixty-five artists with whom I'd been in contact. Eleanor Antin, Alice Aycock, Oyvind Fahlstrom, The Guerrilla Art Action Group, Dan Graham and Adrian Piper would, perhaps, be some of the more familiar names amongst those who took part. However, from my point of view, recognizing the imminent demise of Inhibodress, the exhibition was primarily political, to get institutions, as public educators, to assume some responsibility towards this 'new art'. This was clearly stated in the press release. " 'Communications' exists as a statement as to the change in the nature of art and how aspects of this art conform to the concept of a 'global village'. More importantly, perhaps, 'Communications' may indicate the possibilities open to an application of resources far greater than those available for this exhibition."

'Catchword Potash Mine' was an exhibition organized by German artist Hans-Werner Kalkmann and made available to Inhibodress. The exhibition was the work of nine artists whose contribution to an ecology theme made use of xerox for the presentation of concepts.

To those accustomed to receiving Inhibodress notifications the reverse side of the exhibition mailer may possibly have been of more interest. 'This will be Inhibodress' last exhibition...we would like to take this opportunity to thank all those friends and colleagues who have supported Inhibodress over the last two years.' The gallery closed about one week

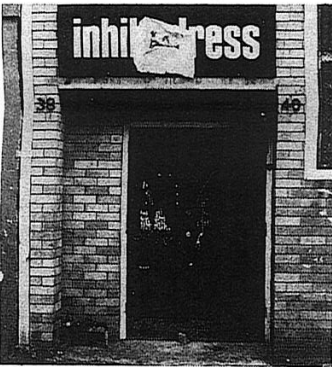
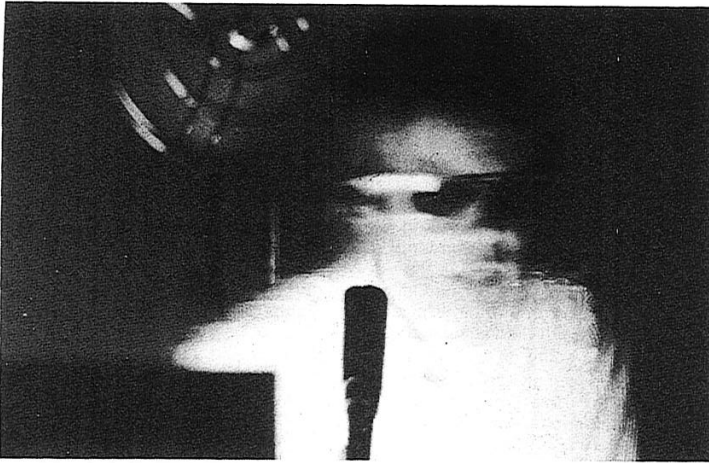


Photo Kennedy

**Inhibodress:** Rear 85 Forbes St, Woolloomooloo N.S.W. November 1972. The sign is obscured by a poster for an exhibition by Bert Flugelman.

before the scheduled date of August 20, 1972. The Sydney County Council had cut off the power.

For me it was a tremendous relief. Inhibodress had become a millstone. The nature of the commitment, reinforced by the critics, was decidedly oppressive. The objectives were beginning to go out of focus partly due to the sheer physical impossibility of maintaining the energy sufficient to achieve those same objectives. It was not possible to live a life which involved a nine-to-five job, alternate nights minding exhibitions at the gallery as well as the week-ends, organizing exhibitions, corresponding with

**But The Fierce Blackman** Peter Kennedy March 1971. Sound installation using specially prepared tape loop, amplification, speakers, taxi cab radio calls, television, electric fan and performance.

artists, and at the same time, finding the time to make one's own art. Ending Inhibodress allowed another beginning.

Although what occurred at Inhibodress had a certain coherence I don't believe that coherence should militate against recognition of those other, similar, experimental events which evolved at the same time. □

#### Footnotes

1. For an opposing point of view, allowing a different perspective on Inhibodress see Ian Milliss, 'Obituary Inhibodress Gallery, 1970-1972', C.A.S. Broadsheet, Sept. 1972.
2. Although his name appears in the press release John Armstrong was never associated with Inhibodress. He attended the first meeting of the co-operative but never returned. Bill Brown participated in the inaugural exhibition but withdrew soon after.
3. Some of the aspirations held by Donald Brook for Inhibodress' future are elucidated by him in this article. See **Studio International**, February, 1971, pp. 76-80.

gallery as a record of the individuals and groups of artists who used the space. This archival aspect of artists' spaces is important as it provides the raw material for future public research and analysis; rather than resting in the private vaults of the art entrepreneur.

The supportive role played by artists' spaces in fostering emergent art activity is essential in a decade where "making the arts pay" is apparently a major concern of funding authorities. Most of the artwork that passes through these spaces is non-commercial. Often the very nature of the work defies annexation by the traditional gallery structure due to its 'time-based' nature. The necessity of continued support for artists' spaces is not simply because they will provide future fodder for art museums but because they project, often in a tentative way, the directions in which art and society will continue in the future. They are 'litmus tests' of creative possibility.

In the face of increasing, and often spurious, cuts to the visual arts and the cultural implications' it is up to artists' spaces to fulfill a bridging function for art students, either selected or rejected, from art institutions and to act as a focus for art action in the community. After a number of years within the often cloistered precincts of art schools, students are faced with the bleak prospects of maintaining links with their fellow students, getting the opportunity to exhibit their work; or simply continuing art practice and 'keeping in touch' with continuing art activity. One of the positive side-effects of these educational cut-backs is that students are being forced to use facilities outside art schools. This is where artists' spaces will play an increasingly important function through the provision of resource material on contemporary art and contacts with art facilities, giving students a far more pragmatic view of art activity under late twentieth century capitalism. Praxis is becoming a channel for innovative student work in West Australia.

Resident artists ensure the greater impact of contemporary art, for rather than the stultified show-place, the artists' space can present the public with art action. Over the past twelve months the Artist in Residence programme at Praxis has enabled artists to visit and work directly in the space, acquainting others with the process of artwork and enabling interchange of skills and theory. As well as working at the gallery, talks at local art institutions and public lectures have enabled a broader dissemination of current art practice. The communicative role of artists' spaces, through this exchange and publishing of art information is of prime importance, especially in West Australia with its isolation from Eastern bloc art activity. Through monthly newsletters and work published by visiting artists the multifarious activities of Praxis can be distributed to a wider audience. Also included in the mail-outs is information on work by other local artists, the most significant being the Media Space publications which chart the dialogues and thoughts projected by this group of artists.

The paucity of art theory in the West is a major concern of Praxis and Media Space. West Australia, until very recently, was the only state in Australia without an official art theory course. It is now a minor subject at the University of West Australia, orientated towards the Renaissance! Through lectures and workshops supported by Praxis there have been established theoretical considerations which can only expand critical practice.

Through the fore-sight of Noel Sheridan, the founding director of the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide, off-set printing facilities have been set up which can authenticate the art action and theory practiced by this non-commercial gallery in Adelaide. Much of the theory for 'alternative spaces' has been evolved through the Experimental Art Foundation which has as its guiding principles:

1. Our apprehension of the world is active not passive; and art displays an emergent apprehension.
2. Art is only incidentally and not essentially aesthetic. Art is concerned with every kind of value and not particularly with beauty.
3. Art interrogates the status quo; it is essentially and not incidentally radical.
4. Art is experimental action; it models possible forms of life and makes them available to public criticism.

Donald Brook, who has recognised that "there is too much laxity in the studios and too much rigidity in the laboratories", provides insightful theoretical consideration for alternative spaces through his epistemological and transinstitutional theories on art.<sup>2</sup> However it is my contention that art theory has been concerned with an internalised and often self-referential language, and this 'preaching to the converted' has limited much art activity to a primarily institutional context. What is required is an alternative: the development of methodologies that are appropriate to what a wider audience perceives as being meaningful. Much of the hostility directed towards current art is really a misunderstanding due to this internalised language of appraisal and description. It does little good culturally to keep developing and accumulating, and not at the same time develop a programme of direct action where all of this accumulated art information can be externalized — and therefore effect a change in cultural consciousness.

It should be the primary concern of artists' spaces, such as Praxis, to orientate themselves towards the dissemination of art information so that it can be more readily understood and assimilated within an historical framework. It is up to artists working through these art centres to project these models, metaphors and images of ART that can be considered as part of an ongoing and strengthening input to an evolving independent Australian culture. □

#### Footnotes:

1. Peter Kennedy, **Art Network** 5 P.70-71
2. 'Social Role of Art' by Donald Brook, EAF. & 'What Art Is' **Art Network** 5 P.6-8.

## PRAXIS

### LINDSAY PARKHILL

I have decided not just to write a synopsis of art activity for the past twelve months since Praxis has re-emerged as a Federally-funded artists' space; but rather provide some insight into the ideas and directions of such "alternative spaces". What follows is rather a dry exposition that neglects the vibrancy of such art centres which are in a continual state of flux, moulding themselves to the needs of artists contributing to their varied art activities. These places are not neutral but project the ideology of the artists who use the space and the individuals who comprise the decision-making body that resolves the direction and general theory of

the organization.

Unlike art museums wherein lie the stable and conservative records and artifacts of art activity, artists' spaces reflect the dynamism of the creative climate providing models for the theoretical concerns of the day. They assume the role of *test-tubes* where theory is manifest in praxis and made available for public consideration. Some of this artwork will be subsumed and absorbed into the mainstream of art theory, if it hasn't been already. The remainder goes the way of many tentative explorations in the creative realm, retained in the memory of those who contributed the artwork, or preserved in the archives of the