

Charles Simonds doesn't really need an article, and he won't get one here. Most art requires or at least appears to require a written backdrop (a little contextualization for explication?). Simonds' art is homogeneously interdependent and doesn't suffer the sort of schizophrenia between artist/work, work/meaning, image/form that seems to beg verbal linkage. His art offers no verbal intimidation, so that each viewer's speculation is easily and openly excited.

In a way Simonds' art has no surface barriers. It is phantasy and myth — and the complexity of these is explicit in their face value. Phantasy art has incomparable reality impact enough so that the art becomes something "real," or has a greater reality level than most art seems to contain. It connects to, becomes a part of, interacts with and eventually influences real life, so that its "artness" is not a contentious point.

Simonds is free of anti-art polemic. He is an artist, but he is not involved in working in a non-esthetic context as an attack on the existing art/system. He has found an area where his energies are not destructive, or on the offensive against a contaminated situation. He has dropped the system, and wastes no energy confronting it. (The Taoist butcher never has to waste time sharpening his knife; he knows perfectly well how to cut without striking home.) This is not to say that Simonds does not have much to offer to the art world. After all, he has achieved the esteemed status

of not being called an artist in the real-world while consistently making art productions.

AS PUBLIC SCULPTURE

As public sculpture Simonds' work easily creates a meaning beyond its material parts. It refers to an older tradition of public sculpture than the recent crop of monumental abstract forms, a tradition

that provides images with public, or generalized meaning. The public meanings that Simonds' provides are also at least as primordial as cultural, elemental as sociological. Charles is making in a way reminiscent of "Making" in a tribal or religious sense. It is a simple, almost sacred concept. A general respect for creation is generated. In a way that used to be understood by communal

societies and the community architects of the past, where building had as its tenets the social and religious mores of the people.

Simonds, with his reverse scale for public ("monumental") art does not suffer the reliance on art support systems that keeps most large scale public art on the drawing boards. Working small, working frequently, a one-to-one relationship to his public.

The presence of Simonds' work does more than co-exist with the surrounding neighborhood. It interlocks, integrates with the place it occupies, sculpture and the environment, create a larger shared context because of their relative characters as "dwellings" as artifacts.

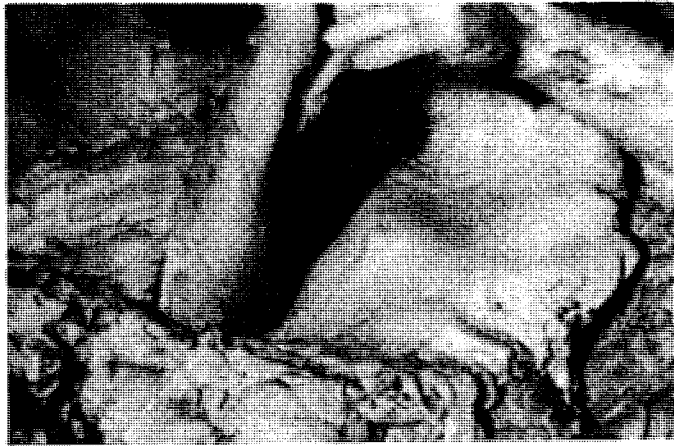
Simonds does not face any problems with vandalism. Vandalism removes his work to the realm of oral myth. The method of construction is obviously not meant for permanence, and the time scale of the little people does not require continuous standard time being. That the structures are "break" and continuously rise and fall only relates it more closely with its ghetto environment. Rather than being one object, any dwelling is part of a cult occurring in several places, times, and forms.

Simonds has to repeatedly appear to install the dwellings, working long hours on the streets, becoming part of the pattern of public life, as well as a part of the cult of the little people and their dwellings. By his personal presence and the accessibility of his work, he becomes intimate with the neighbors, a folk artist.

Vernacular
Myth

BIRTH

On a barren clay pit, no vegetation, no sign of life. The colors are garish oranges and browns, dried and caked mud in the sun. And then, with all the jerky majesty of a grade B movie gargantua, Simonds breaks free from the mound of clay which contained him. It is a fascinating self birth and creation, both because of the pseudo science fiction mode and its relevance to the ancient myths of man arising from the bowels of a mother earth.



"He... was the Spirit of the Earth, and I saw that he was very old, but more as men are old. I stared at him, for it seemed I knew him somehow; and as I stared, he slowly changed, for he was growing backwards into youth, and when he had become a boy, I knew that he was myself. . ."

From Black Elk Speaks

LANDSCAPING

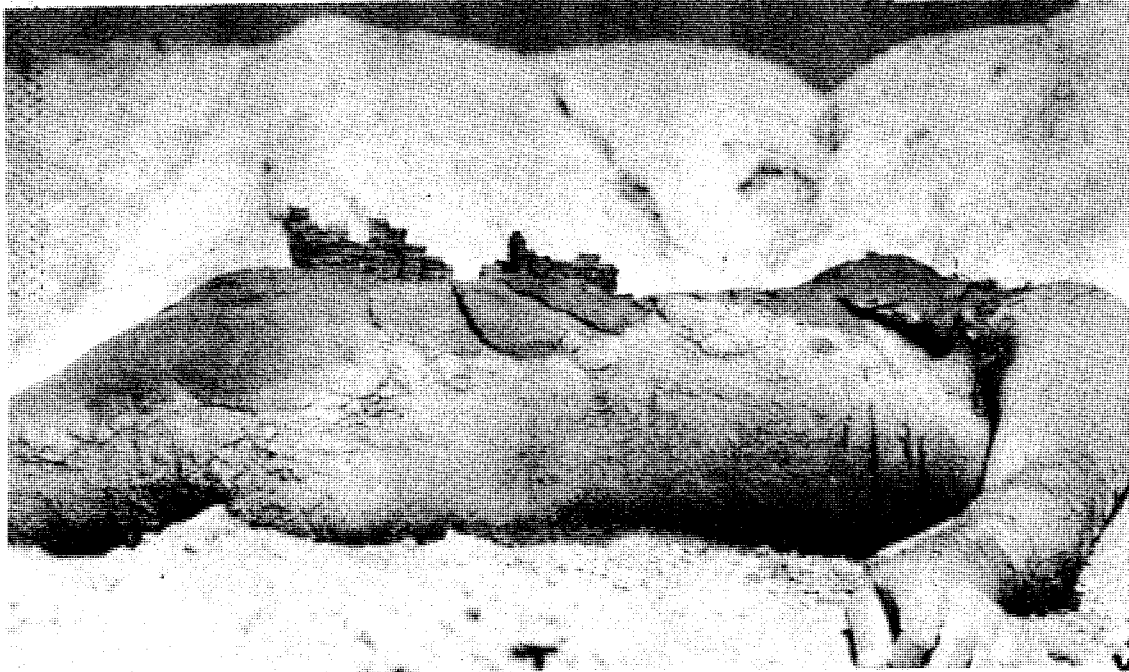
A mass of clay, wet and glistening, with Simonds in a dance of contact with it. The scene has the trappings of primordial ritual in which the newly created man-god both contours a landscape from his own dimension and form, and becomes further identified with the earth.

LANDSCAPE:

BODY:

DWELLING

Simonds appears lying covered with dark grey clay, sealed within totally to mark his separation from his earth source — to become a source in and of himself. Then the earth-figure covers his torso with a red clay, landscaping it in a new version of the hills from which he came. Over a period of hours, Simonds constructs a dwelling of small clay bricks, sticks and steps. Here the myth enlarges to include with the newly created god a new personal race of people. He is sandwiched between the earth of our world and the earth of his; creating out of himself as he was created from clay.

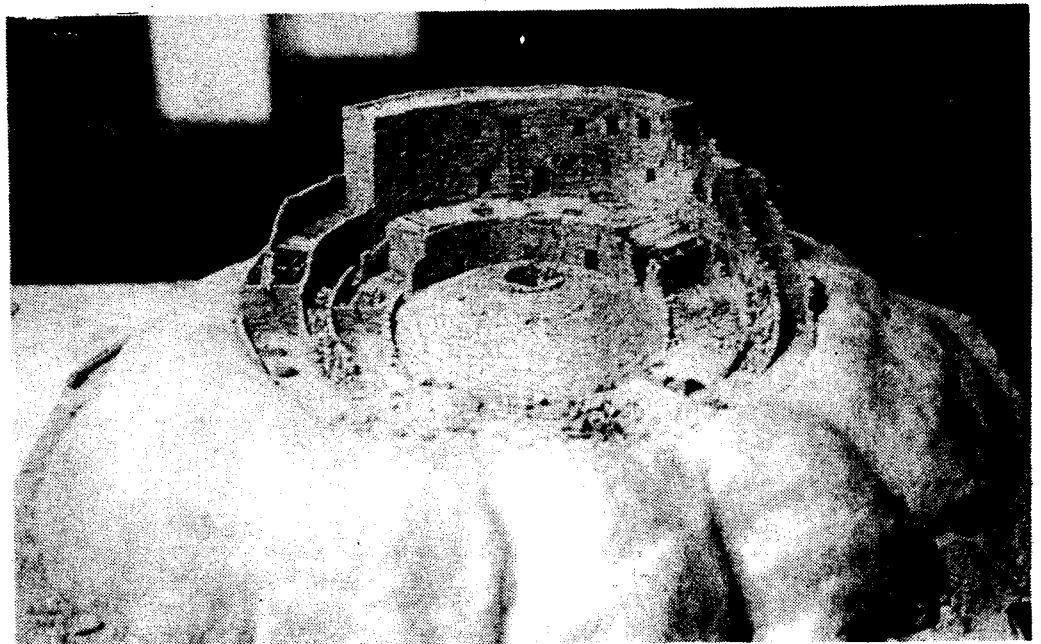


1. People going around in a flat circle: generation after generation, constantly remaking their present out of their past, always recovering the past, always rebuilding the present.

2. Those that live on a line: little people who travel along the landscape and leave the past behind. There is little in the way of spatial relationships from one point to another. An endless house, past untouched, like a museum.

3. Those that live on an upwards spiral: they use the past a building material for their ambitious monumentalizing

Gives shape to the unconsolidated views surrounding civilizations, and develops a type of negative architecture.



THE LITTLE PEOPLE

The easiest part of Simonds work to understand is his myth of the "little people," an entirely imaginary semi-nomadic group who travel invisibly about the lower east side, leaving behind a trail of dwelling places in varying states of completion or disrepair. Built of clay and sticks on niches in crumbling brick walls, high up on ledges, or in trenced and broken gutters, the buildings' survival is dictated by all factors of the surrounding situation — traffic, children, dogs, vandals, demolition companies, etc. Besides the fact that the work is essentially "public property" in a peculiarly intimate way, the installation of the work is a public event that communities accept with curiosity, enthusiasm, and a strange apparent respect and understanding of Simonds' efforts. He works when he

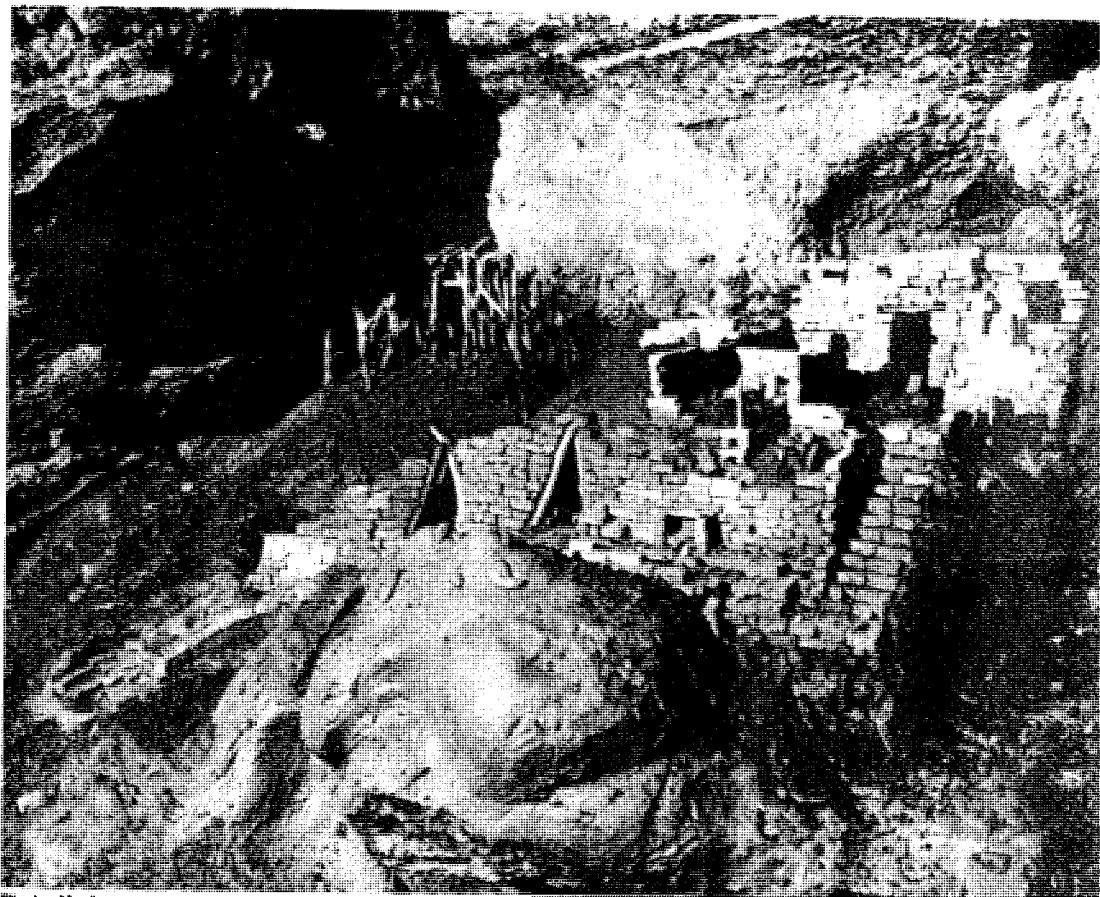


Photo: Yuri

feels like it (nearly all the time above freezing that is), and travels to his customary locale with his materials in a bag. Finding a likely spot he first contours the location with a foundation of clay and then builds buildings, walls, enclosures, etc. of tiny dried clay bricks, dipped in water and placed with dental

forceps. His architecture does not go beyond post and lintel construction, and seems reminiscent of Southwest Indian pueblos, but remains strangely contiguous with the structures around it.

Being at ease with their environment is more important to Simonds' work than

the formal, or artistic concern with which he attacks the space. The heart of his work lies in his being at home with creation (his particular means of creation) which leads to a generalized notion of Man (Simonds) the creator and created, out of the earth created and on the earth to create (to build).

OFFERINGS

The dwellings are populated with little people, or they would populate them if they could. But they couldn't live in the settlements after they were "discovered." The dwellings could never really provide shelter because they don't rely on nature. Nature is indifferent, hence it can provide protection. The city, the community, the society, are not indifferent and not permanent, so they recognize sacrifices only.

In spite of this Simonds

Charles clings on the **WHOLE WORLD** — earth, sky, etc. with his entire soul — and his dwellings are only a little corner of this. On the other hand, he would only be really happy if he could move into them. Millions of little dwellings are needed — more, more, more. Everywhere, in every environment. He sits in the houses. His best feeling would be wearing "house-cloaks," "city furcoats."

builds there again and again. he accepts, (wants to accept) the connotations of the identification with the surroundings; he gives anyway, regardless of the fact that the city devours the result of his personalized art. On the

other hand he does look for protection, little ones, fragile ones, even if for hours only. He is gaining somehow by losing.

The S.W. Indian dwellings are very real

because they fulfill their function very overtly and self-evidently. They work, they are efficient. These little dwellings are also very real, very existing somethings. This makes one believe that they probably also "work" and are sufficient. The dwellings *function* might lie precisely in the fact that they transform protection into defenselessness, and vice versa; they *suffer* the change of the surrounding (a sacrificial offering).