PROJECTS FOR PCA PHILADELPHIA COLLEGE OF ART PROJECTS FOR PCA

ANNE HEALY PATRICK IRELAND ROBERT IRWIN CHARLES SIMONDS

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FOUR PROJECTS

Occasions—theater, rituals and festivals—carry with them non-permanent visual baggage: costumes, ceremonial objects, and banners. Historically, works created in an art context have been permanent residents in our museums and homes. In recent project work (art of a temporary nature designed for specific spaces), works are built for an "occasion"—an exhibition—and the museum or gallery undertakes to destroy the work when its scheduled time has lapsed. Project artists are more concerned with engaging in a short-term dialogue with a specific space or situation than in making permanent works of art.

Other art has also "dematerialized" the art object—earthworks, conceptual art, and performance pieces. Art has been set outdoors for the elements to destroy (Marcel Duchamp's *Unhappy Ready-Made*, 1919), constructed so that it might destroy itself (Tinguely's *Homage to New York*, 1960); it has been made disposable (Les Levine, 1964) or "Inmaterial" (Yves Klein, 1951). Prescient works conceived for specific spaces were Duchamp's *1,200 Coal Bags Suspended from the Ceiling over a Stove*, (1938), and *String at the Surrealist Exhibition*, (1942), Schwitter's *Merzbau*, (1923-1936), and Dine, Kaprow and Oldenburg's environments of the 1960's. Environment artists brought found objects into galleries to cancel the sense of an "exalted" exhibition space with the ingenuity of the *bricoleur*. In much project work raw materials (cloth, wood, steel) may be used to alter the space, but the artist accepts its confines. Such work tends not to dominate or distort its environment, but to readjust our perceptions of it, inviting the viewer to define his relationship to an experience that is often as elusive as it is instructive.

For the artist, project work presents unique problems. Acquaintance must be made with non-art materials and skills to solve the complexities of construction - suspension, lighting, etc. A solution must be found within a finite time-span and budget. In the studio, an object can be reworked endlessly or abandoned

at will. Projects, however, have a built-in anxiety quotient. The outcome is not certain until completion. And what does one do with a project that does not meet the expectations of the artist or curator? Since risk is a part of the process, project work should acknowledge the artists' license to fail.

As in earthworks, site selection is one of the most important decisions the project artist makes. Non-gallery spaces are often suitable contexts. In *Projects for PCA* "arranged marriages" were consummated between the artists and specific spaces: Charles Simonds chose two sites in the city near the school, Anne Healy did a piece for the school's facade, and Robert Irwin and Patrick Ireland agreed to work in the gallery.

Amidst its neighbors, a bouillabaisse of gas stations, parking lots, automobile salesrooms, bars and small stores, the neo-classic facade of PCA, designed by John Haviland in 1824, seems a bewildered traveler. It faces Broad Street, the city's major artery, planned by William Penn. In its context the building looks like papier-maché pretending to be granite. It was a suitable backdrop for Anne Healy's "stage-curtains".

To enter the building one ascends a flight of wide steps, and passes between four massive granite columns into a narrow porch. The most direct access is through the three central openings. *Transparent Detour* was composed of three 23' high panels of white nylon net, suspended in the spaces between the columns. They extended the entire height of the columns, thus attempting to repattern entry through the little-used openings on either end of the porch. The idea of hindered physical access was accentuated by a thin yellow "X" painted across each panel, inspired by similar markings on windows of buildings under construction. Each panel had a three inch border of opaque white nylon tape, stitched yellow.

A school building often becomes "invisible" for those who use it. Repatterning entry heightened awareness of the narrow confines of the porch and the overwhelming height of the columns. People entering and leaving the school were subliminally cued to pass either through the open lateral spaces or to slide carefully through the narrow space between panel and column. The steps of the school serve as a compressed campus; they are lunch bench, work surface and meeting place for flirtation or discussion. Students had previously dispersed themselves into scattered random groups. With entry redirected, seating arrangements were reoriented to the ends of the steps, leaving a surprising void in the middle.

From the lobby, the dingy atmosphere of the street was seen through a glamorizing veil. From the street, the heavy, neutral-toned facade was not disturbed or challenged. Subtle windows of nylon net, a new material for Healy, gently altered and softened the building. An interesting dialogue ensued between the granite columns and the irregular rippling of the transparent fabric.

Patrick Ireland and Robert Irwin installed their projects in the gallery. Irwin accepts invitations to work anywhere, if he can devise an appropriate project. (He has done 23 installations in the last 9 months.) After spending a day in the gallery, measuring and testing walls and floors, he proposed building a scrim wall on the side of the gallery facing the entrance. When he returned for a second visit, Ireland was present. Their friendship is based on mutual respect and a shared interest in visual perception. Ireland did research in visual perception at Cambridge University; Irwin conducted formal investigations in that field for the Los Angeles County Museum's "Art and Technology Program." They discussed their intentions and agreed they could do projects that would not intrude upon each other.

In his work, Robert Irwin has progressively removed tradi-

ANNE HEALY *TRANSPARENT DETOUR* 23′ X 5′2″ NYLON NET

tional art historical guidelines. His canvases of the 1960's eliminated what he considered to be arbitrary limits—edge, frame, format. Surface marks had as little content or expression as possible—lines or dots. The plastic discs extinguished these minimal marks, as well as the right angled framing edge. Since 1970 he has abandoned object and studio, and worked directly with gallery spaces. The empty gallery is the arena in which he prompts the viewer to perceive fractional differences and alterations.

The gallery at PCA is an attenuated rectangle (20′ by 86′) that also functions as a passageway to a faculty lounge, classrooms and restrooms. The two long walls contain several small offsets, remnants of dormitory rooms. (Originally the building was a school for the deaf and dumb.) Windows and a fireplace have been covered. On one long wall a partition 20′ wide projects out 8′ to conceal the entry into the restrooms. This projection leaves two side bays. The floor of the gallery is grey marbleized asbestos tile; the ceiling and a 2′ recessed flat "entablature" are painted dark brown. The gallery walls are white. There is the usual track lighting system.

The projecting restroom wall was always an arbitrary divisive factor imposing itself on installation plans for each exhibition. Irwin exploited this liability. He extended the line of the projecting wall with a scrim wall that ran the entire length of the gallery.

The construction of the wall required simple carpentry skills—sawing, hammering, glueing, spraying; ordinary materials—wood strips ordered from a local lumber yard, glue, nails, white contact paper; and the extraordinary nylon scrim, a semi-transparent fabric he first saw filtering the light that poured through the glass roof at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. The grey floor was given a skin of white contact paper and several coats of white paint. The scrim was stapled to a frame, consisting of wood strips on floor and ceiling and the side walls of each bay. There is a two foot space between the top of the projecting partition wall and the ceiling. This brown "space" was echoed by spraying a two foot band of brown along the top of the scrim walls. The track lighting fixtures were turned at a slight angle away from the scrim walls.

Irwin's inquiries in visual perception for the "Art and Technology Program," done with Edward Worst, an experimental psychologist, investigated anechoic chambers (rooms insulated against outside sound) and Ganz fields ("a visual field in which there are no objects you can take hold of with your eye. It's entirely homogeneous in color, white in our case. Its unique feature is that it appears to be light filled. That is, light appears to have substance in the Ganz field".)[1] Under both conditions auditory or visual senses are totally deprived. After this experience one will hear or see differently. In an art context, when everything is removed from the gallery space, one "sees" that space differently. The psychology of these differences in perception are the form and content of Irwin's work.

When the installation was completed the "empty" gallery was laden with visual information. Walls and ceilings turned out not to be plumb. The brush strokes of the maintenance men, and the layers of paint where panels of homosote abut were subtly "focused". Slight architectural complexities (outlets, recesses, coving) became "found" means of enrichment.

The scrim completely transformed the gallery space, ordering the irregularly shaped room. Scrim walls engaged in an uncanny dialogue with the solid wall, which often appeared transparent. The sprayed brown band of paint interacted with the open space above the top of the partition wall. Moving through the space presented a dialectic between opaque/transparent, finite/infinite, visible/invisible. Corners appeared and disappeared, solidity was transformed into ephemerality, substance into light. The only constant reality was these systems of illusion. The two qualities of the scrim wall—its opacity and

PATRICK IRELAND *UNTITLED* ON A WALL 12' X 80'
ROBERT IRWIN *UNTITLED* 12' X 80' SCRIM AND LIGHT

transparency—could not be seen simultaneously. From any position one's field of vision couldn't encompass the totality. One had to back off to see the scale of the piece; one had to stand close to see the wall disappear.

If the title of Malevich's seminal composition was "White on White," Irwin's title might have been white on white on white—a complete spectrum of whites; floor, real wall, scrim wall, coving, switch plates, shadows in wall recesses. Although Irwin directs his efforts towards eliminating content, retinal associations were discernable; snow, clouds, or the desert where Irwin has been working secretly. This pure yet sensual work was unmeasurable, unknowable, unphotographable and unforgettable.

Patrick Ireland installed his project opposite Irwin's. Three spans were chosen on the entrance wall of the gallery: the former fireplace projection in the bay to the right of the entrance and two spans of 26′ and 12′ to the left. Lengths of wood, ordered from the lumber yard, were painted white. One side was painted in primary colors. All the strips were 2″ wide and ¾″ thick. The strips were suspended from the ceiling an inch from the gallery wall with nearly invisible nylon cord. Barely perceptible halos of reflected color were cast on the wall.

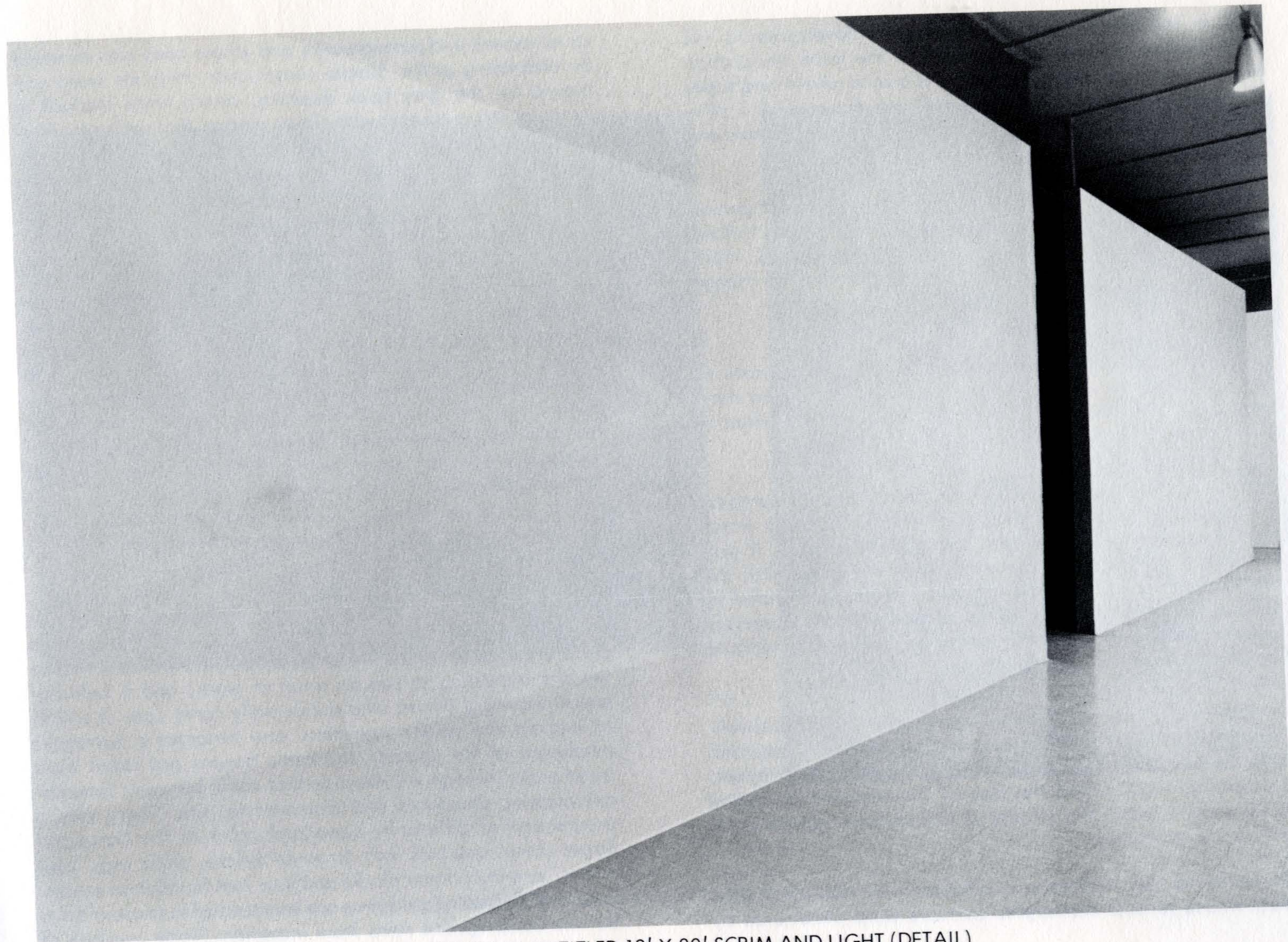
On the slightly projecting wall in the right bay, an eight foot vertical strip was suspended, the side facing the wall divided (reading from the top) into equal blue, yellow and red zones. Three seven foot vertical strips were suspended at seven foot intervals on the twenty-six foot wall in the center, each turning a red, yellow or blue side to the wall. A seven foot horizontal red/yellow/blue strip was hung on the twelve foot wall at the end of the gallery. Each wall span was treated differently, but since the materials and method of suspension were similar, the works relayed themselves down the length of the room, hovering between three separate works and a single ensemble.

Matisse said, "If upon a white canvas I jot down some sensations of blue, of green, of red—every new brushstroke diminishes the importance of the proceeding ones."[2] Ireland's "sensations" (bands of color) on the "white canvas" (the wall) are like preliminary notations; a "first step" exerted enough energy to significantly mark the gallery.

Each strip cast reflected color on the wall, controlled by adjusting the distance of the strip from the wall and the angle of the lighting fixtures. When viewed frontally, the wall, full of the uncertainties and imperfections of "ground" was set in motion, moving in front of, and then behind the strip of wood, while the wood obtained a position as ambiguous as a cubist plane. From the side, the far edge of each strip appeared continuous with the wall, while the near side opened up a reflected pillar of color and shadow. The reflected zones of color met on the wall with a stealthy diffusion reminiscent of some of Rothko's paintings. The source of color remained hidden and elusive.

Ireland's use of color to question location and demand its redefinition recalls his use of color in the series of rope drawings he has been doing since 1973, which the present project interrupts. For Ireland, primary colors are the chromatic equivalent of a fundamental unit of geometry, such as a square or triangle. They are as much signs as sensations, and measure "three modalities of vision." In this work the color is the stable and constant component—what is ambiguous is the wood surface and wall. That the color in this project is intended as a stable point of reference is perhaps conveyed by Ireland's comment that "Primary colors are words." To see these pieces as dealing solely with sensation is to misinterpret them.

Language, sign systems and color codes are preoccupations that run through Ireland's work since 1967. Even more fundamental to his work was the idea of reflection, as exemplified by the vertical and horizontal wall-pieces of the sixties, which these works recall. Despite the fact that in the sixties he par-



ROBERT IRWIN *UNTITLED* 12' X 80' SCRIM AND LIGHT (DETAIL)

took in the clarification of post-minimal developments, his work always remains elusive. Between the frank declaration of means and the amplified effects, is a zone where one tunes down one's senses and is gently offered the role of a privileged eavesdropper. The works transcend minimal means and evoke contemplation.

The dialogue between Irwin's and Ireland's wall was congenial. Its main theme was temporality, spatialized in the Ireland pieces by the sequence of the strips along the wall, more nebulous in the Irwin wall where exact moments of change could not be perceived.

Charles Simonds constructs dwellings for a migratory race of Little People. Each new dwelling represents an era in their history. Two eras elapsed during the two days he worked in Philadelphia.

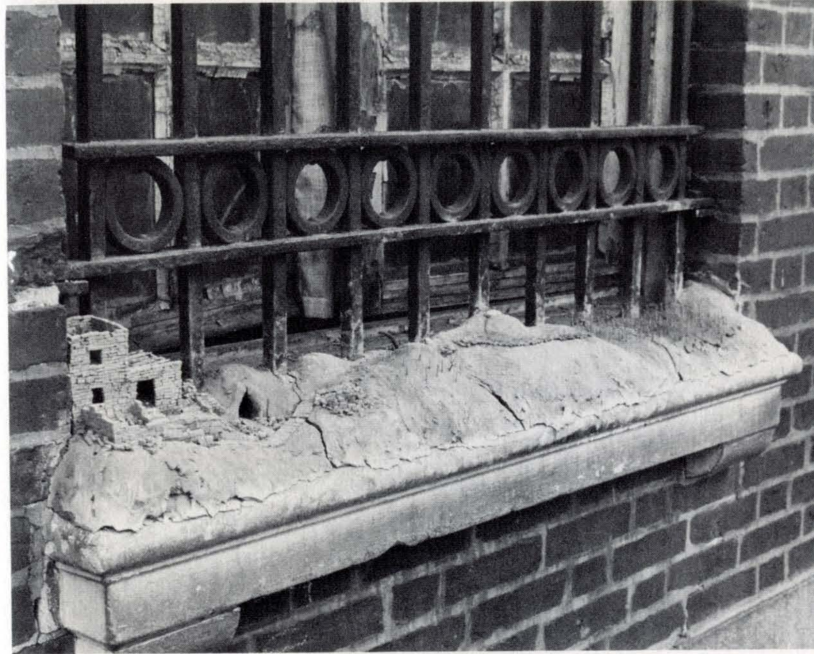
For his first dwelling, Simonds chose a small brick building on the corner of Broad and Lombard Streets. Built upon a waist-high window-ledge, at a public and school bus stop, it predicted a short life span. The bricks are unfired, so that the first rainfall would begin the entropic process, accelerated by the curious or destructive hands of pedestrians. Observers would witness a cycle from inception on their way to work to completion at the end of the day.

Philadelphia offered a congenial environment for brick dwellings. Simonds might have been constructing the characteristic 17th century Philadelphia brick row house. The architect, Latrobe, in 1800, called the clay of Philadelphia "excellent brick earth." Today, the streets of Philadelphia remain lined with brick structures.

An earth-red clay landscape was formed first—an earth goddess whose sensual biomorphic contours were penetrated by ritual tunnels and passageways, and whose body was caressed by undulating paths. Simple construction methods were employed for the grey brick dwelling; bricks were stacked in irregular string courses with slip as mortar. Flat roofs of willow sticks were supported by beams of the same material. Larger brick lintels supported doors and windows. A brick path led to ritual areas; kivas, hills claimed by territorial stakes, mounds, and tunnels containing spherical artifacts.

His second dwelling was built into the disintegrating walls of an abandoned warehouse—which Simonds described as a "fractured structure." The dwelling was set into a corner defined by a projecting iron beam, a cinder block wall, and a projecting stone foundation. A path led around the rusted metal beam to steps formed when the surface brick had fallen away—"natural" ascents for the Little People. At the summit of the hill, the clay-earth was shaped into a vulva-like motif recalling Duchamp's *Etant Donne*. The newly created land configurations of wet clay are especially sensual environments for the Little People, who ". . . eschewing all temporal activity, reenacted original creation in a dizzying celebration of sexual possibility."[3]

Discussions with pedestrians about his work, the Little People, and their civilization are part of Simonds' process. This takes place between Simonds, the art audience (those who arrive at the site expecting to see an artist at work) and a heterogenous assembly (those who accidentally come upon it.) With or without the artist's narration, one becomes a surrogate inhabitant of the spaces. Children's fingers and adult eyes tread paths through a landscape that shifts between Simonds' microcosmic structures and macrocosmic site. There was a progression of differently sized rectangles in the Carpenter Street piece; one-half inch Simonds' bricks, eight inch "real bricks," one inch cinder blocks and four foot foundation stones. Echoes of archeological forms are constructed in present time, but the buildings are ruins from inception. These overlays of



CHARLES SIMONDS *DWELLING* LOMBARD STREET BRICKS ½" LONG

past, present and future are as arbitrary as film-time, concentric as Robert Smithson's concept of time, and as fictional as the armature of time in a Borges short story. "One of the schools of Tlön goes so far as to negate time: it reasons that the present is indefinite, that the future has no reality other than as a present hope, that the past has no reality other than as a present memory. Another school declares that *all time* has already transpired . . ."[4]

Impermanency is a condition of project work, but these pieces had a sense of ephemerality and elusiveness even during their existence. What was the source of color in Ireland's work? Where were the wood strips located in relation to the wall? How was it possible to see through a wall from one location in the gallery and not to see through Irwin's scrim from another? A facade glimpsed through Healy's veil was disconcerting, but no more so that Simonds' villages without inhabitants, located in the midst of an overpopulated modern city. For all these works, the camera remains an impotent instrument of reproduction, raising the question, central to project work, of how such art may survive in an historical context.

Janet Kardon

1. Maurice Tuchman, *A Report on the Art and Technology Program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, Los Angeles, California, 1971, p. 136-137.
2. Henri Matisse, *Notes of a Painter*, 1908.
3. Charles Simonds, *Three Peoples*, Sananedizione, Genova, Italy, 1976, p. 15.
4. Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*, New Directions, 1964, New York, p. 10.

~~Subject~~

~~Object~~

Project

A SYMPOSIUM

April 22, 1976

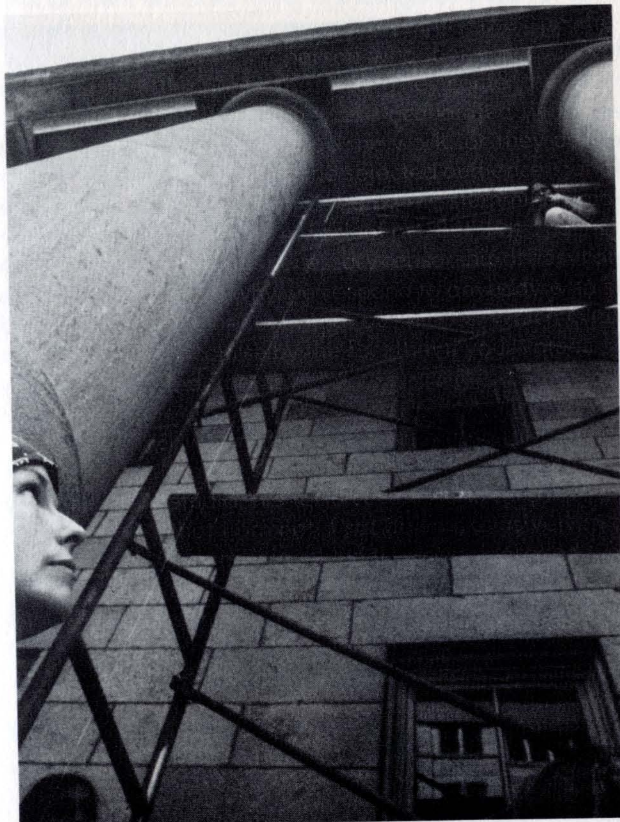
Philadelphia College of Art

Marcia Tucker The unique aspect of this exhibition is that the projects were designed for the specific spaces they occupy. This kind of show is perhaps not one we would have seen ten years ago. I'll start by asking the artists if at one time they did make objects and if they still do?

Charles Simonds I did make objects and continue to make them. They are similar to what I do in the street. Moving out into the street wasn't based on any great ideological premise. It occurred to me to ask "What would it be like to do a landscape that was part of the real landscape?" So I went out into the street. What I've done since then has changed everything in my life and in my work. Those changes came from working in the street and the reception I found there. In the beginning, I worked mostly in SoHo. At that time, it was a mixture of workers and artists. I was excited by the spontaneous reactions I received. I slowly developed the notion of choosing one particular area and a group of people I could work with over a long period. Since then I've been working in one neighborhood on the Lower East Side. Through working in the street I became involved in community projects. I serve on committees for various housing projects. My work led me into areas I certainly wouldn't have found by sitting in my studio. Also, a lot of my work has to do with the relationship I've established and developed with my audience. I would never have enjoyed that by working in a gallery or through some institutionalized framework.

Marcia Tucker Robert Irwin?

Robert Irwin I began as a painter and in time came to cut my teeth on Abstract Expressionism, I came to really admire those people, . . . at one point I finally came to have a real question of my own making. Out of that question I did a series of line paintings in which the mark was radically reduced in value to become one with the ground. The question that followed, can I paint a painting in which there is no mark at all, in any pictorial sense? This question was followed by a series of paintings done on a



ANNE HEALY ON STEPS IN FRONT OF PCA FACADE

ROBERT IRWIN AND PATRICK IRELAND IN THE GALLERY

Anne Healy I feel you lose control as soon as you enter a gallery or museum situation. If I have to work indoors, I try to do pieces I will have to install. Then I have more control over what I want to put up and what I want to express. Obviously, I'm not going to get the natural elements I have outdoors, so the work changes drastically. In a way, they become more personal in content and the images become more mystical. It's just a totally different context for working.

Marcia Tucker Anne, you said you try to install your own pieces so that you can have control over them. That seems to be the heart of this matter. Museums and galleries have always felt it was their prerogative to control the artist. Now the artist comes along and does work the museums and galleries cannot control.

Charles Simonds The irony of this is shown by a little dwelling I once did in the street. The Whitney wanted it as part of their Annual. So it appeared in the Whitney Museum as the *Whitney Dwelling*. The people in the street had never heard that it was the *Whitney Dwelling*.

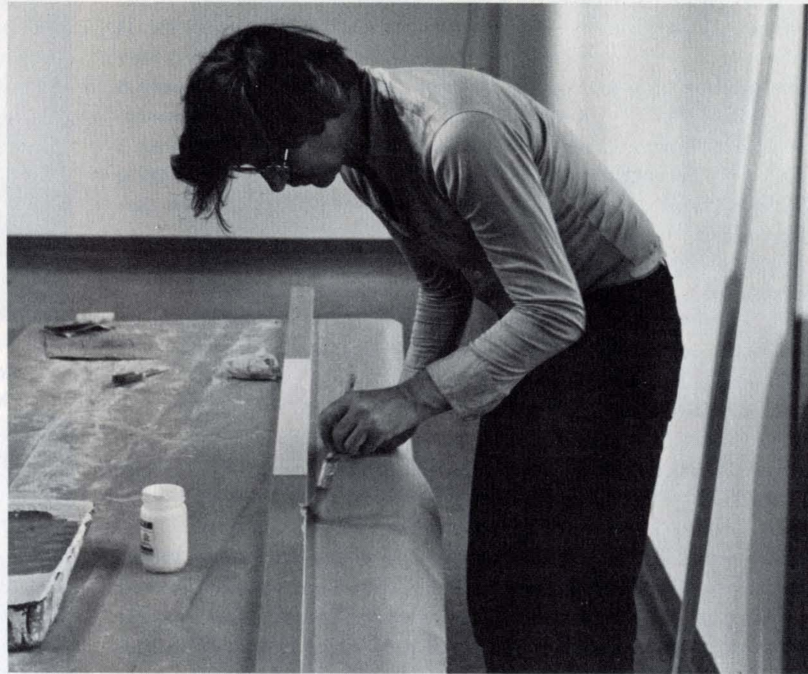
Marcia Tucker Well, a museum has a right to say that a piece is part of the museum structure, if there's some financial or physical aid, which brings us into an economic question. If you're able to do your pieces when and where you will, then you are in a sense free. What if you have to build? That's a question for Bob.

Robert Irwin I really feel that the intention, which is the ground on which you make your principal decisions, is most critical. If you are involved with social concerns, which is certainly worthwhile, or if you make the decision that your goal is an historical or social one, it is simply defining it in terms of how it has defined itself . . . That what it is you break your principal decisions over is essentially the definition of your act . . . For that reason, as my own inquiry became more and more obscure I decided to give it no responsibilities whatsoever, other than my own edification. So I have a whole series of things I've been doing in the desert since 1970, which no one has seen. I'm not going to take bus tours to them and I'm not going to make maps or plans. I've decided not to take photographs or even describe them to anyone. In any translation, something very essential is lost. I'm not doing them for that reason anyway. Eventually to some degree, it's going to change how I conduct myself in my other areas or activities. When I do something in a museum or gallery situation, I feel I have taken on the role of an interactor. Since it's a cultural institution, it's a cultural activity. To pretend that it's anything other than that, is somehow not to pay attention. The degree of control that I want in a situation is essentially absolute. I'm not interested in whether the museum has an opinion on how the situation is to be concluded. I don't think there's anyone who knows as much about what I do as myself and there's nobody who's more conscientious about it than I am. So when I participate in the museum situation, I only do it as a response. I never go or ask or solicit; I simply wait until somebody asks me. I assume that *when* they ask me, they're interested, and if they're interested, then they're going to get what they're interested in. And if they're not that interested, we simply don't do it. To counterbalance that, I do things like I'm doing right now which are wholly cultural.

Marcia Tucker How does that feed into the economics? You all make environments you can't sell. How do you support yourselves?

Patrick Ireland Selling project work raises interesting social questions. Once an economic transaction occurs the work is involved in a social situation and there it's subject to the vagaries of that society. One has to accept this or make things that are very difficult for people to want. If a collector wants something that of its nature is worthless commercially, he is past an almost moral test, the criterion of financial value. When project work is purchased a complicated social contract emerges. The pur-

CHARLES SIMONDS WORKING ON LOMBARD STREET



PATRICK IRELAND IN THE GALLERY

chaser makes a more or less radical commitment. Most collectors are oriented towards property, which they usually have enough of.

Charles Simonds There's an aspect of this that isn't that simple. Certainly there's a telling irony in the fact that a collector is willing to pay for something that has no value which, on a certain level, is only to say that he's getting a bargain. It's only a coefficient of the value he then foresees accruing from eventually reselling it. That's one of the premises of collecting. I don't think you can assume that because he wants something that has no value means that he's past the moral test in a certain way. If he can't sell it—

Patrick Ireland If he can't sell it.

Charles Simonds Ah, if he can't sell it.

Patrick Ireland He can't sell it.

Charles Simonds How do you describe something that cannot be sold?

Patrick Ireland If it's an installation for a specific place. When the collector moves, he can't take it with him. So it has a limited life, tied to place. If he has trouble with that, I ask, how long do you expect to live? This business of art lasting a long time is a puzzling idea.

Robert Irwin It's not really very puzzling. High prices are never paid for art. They're paid for history. We operate from a collective consciousness. Without this historical record, we lost a great deal of information on how our ideas build and are compounded out of themselves. There are those who go so far as to say "that history makes consciousness" . . . which *is* puzzling.

Patrick Ireland History, or the possibility of future profit?

Robert Irwin Well, that is true too. I'd like to raise the ante on the question a little bit. When the artist talks about the economics of a situation, there's a more complex, less visible thing involved—the economics of identity. No one can live or exist, or work in a total vacuum. Everyone has some necessity to be visible in the world, to be respected, to have some sense of effect, to be loved a little bit. To some degree, any decision is affected by that need. The simple economics of making a living in this culture are not really all that complicated.

Marcia Tucker Anne, you had something you wanted to say?

Anne Healy I never made anything that I really considered would be sold. I'm always amazed when someone asks me what the price is, because it's such a difficult thing to determine. Most collectors do, I think, approach the whole thing as an investment, and with the objective of reselling it. They want to know how long it's going to last, especially with the kind of materials I use. That question is not valid to me at all. It's a matter of priority. When I have to do a piece, I do it. That's all.

Patrick Ireland I think this business of history is not inconsistent with producing very perishable things. Traces and remains and memories of what is done can be entered precariously into those historical stakes, if one wishes. Charles' work does that. He spends a lot of time in a situation that would terrify me. Who knows what way history turns? Artists spend too much time thinking about it. It's a way of confusing yourself completely. Al Held says, "History is the devil and all artists are Faust." I have some confidence in a kind of memory, a trace that has nothing to do with organized memory, which is what museums are. Although those traces are also part of great art work in a museum, they are rarely picked up. If you stand and watch a museum audience look, most of the comments are like the blind men at the elephant. If that is communal memory, one doesn't want it. There are alternatives.

ROBERT IRWIN STAPLING SCRIM TO FLOOR ASSISTED BY PCA STUDENTS KELLY BRIAN, MARY DINABERG, STEVE GROSSMAN

PCA STUDENT KELLY BRIAN PAINTING FLOOR BEHIND IRWIN WALL

ROBERT IRWIN STAPLING SCRIM TO CEILING ASSISTED BY PCA STUDENT MARY DINABERG

Robert Irwin I'm not speaking for the others, but it seems to me that inherent in each one of the works in the show is the question of permanency. What is their relationship to a traditional art which was very concerned with history, with permanence? I give you an option to make something very good that's going to last for eons of time and will carry your identity, transcend your own death. Held against this, the fact that all of our philosophies and religions are preoccupied with the idea of transcending our own death and that our arts were committed to it for a very long time, is I think a significant idea. Then you come to a period in history, such as we are in now, in which you can make something that will only last for thirty seconds, but it will be absolutely magnificent. It's your choice. If you should opt for the latter and deal with the idea of impermanence, you place very complex questions into the dialogue in terms of what do we mean by history, and what is not in a sense available to history, given the present methodology. That's one of the really interesting questions raised by some of the activities here.

Patrick Ireland May I tell a little story? Jack Butler Yeats, the poet's brother, wrote plays his brother didn't like. I thought they were very good. One of them, *In Sand*, touches what we're talking about. An old man is dying, and he gives a kid the responsibility of writing something on sand each anniversary of his death—a phrase like "James MacDonald, we have the good thought of you still." When the kid grows up and is about to die he passes the job onto someone else. So every year the phrase would appear in sand. After generations, it ended up somewhere on the shore of Brazil. Something impermanent and fragile had an illogical persistence. Yeats may have meant it to be a salutary lesson to imperial history. I think things of that scale can survive longer and mean more, but how and in what way is the question.

Robert Irwin The question of permanence or impermanence is not a question of morality, it's a question of structure. And a very critical one. The historian is essentially someone who comes to measure the consistencies in the world, particularly those proved in performance . . . It's an objective method and preoccupation that further structures its data with its precidents and form . . . now if the data should be more complex or deeply experiential, that is to say eccentric to the system itself, because the system is a preoccupation and a physical form, terrestrially conceived it will simply obscure or exclude that which is not in kind . . . now if at a particular point in time the art of that culture should become obscure, recognized by its general public estrangement . . . it could most reasonably be viewed as a developing anti-thesis . . . This art, would bring into dialogue those questions left out of present practice, these should not be looked at as moral questions, morality is too often an in-house term, but rather to how and in what manner this art raises alternatives to the manner in which the culture has come to organize its thoughts, values and views, of itself.

Charles Simonds Right. A major quality in art as we see it now is that it thrives on an overdeterminacy in terms of what it is, and also on a sort of ecstasy about its own revolution, of wanting to outrage itself in one form or another—which I don't altogether consider a healthy form of methodology. I mean it's both convoluted and at the same time doesn't allow for those true extremities that need to be absorbed into the culture. Do you follow what I'm saying?

Robert Irwin Yes.

Charles Simonds Do you agree? In terms of your attitudes about the form that we exist in now, how would you characterize what is going on? I think art is eminently historical.

Robert Irwin Everything is eminently historical. It is in a sense a process of how one develops the idea of intelligence. Intelligence is really a game of information. But information is eccentric, it's a game of contextual information. But pure data,

PASSERSBY VIEWING CHARLES SIMONDS *DWELLING* ON CARPENTER STREET.

CHARLES SIMONDS WORKING ON LOMBARD STREET

that is consciousness, is inherently eccentric, not always intellectual in character, it's not always literate or even semiotic in character. There is an essential kind of knowing which comes on a purely phenomenological basis.

For example, look at any current city planning problem and you will find a critical lack of any humanist kind of input. Why is that? You've talked to the planner/architect, many certainly have good intentions and are aware of the problem. Often he is simply usurped by the economics of the situation, but that is not the real explanation of the loss . . . the critical part lies in the hidden orthodoxies of the system as a whole, the concept, *to plan* . . . which can only come to deal with that information that will translate itself through a series of qualified abstractions . . .

And if it won't fit, articulate itself in script, graphics or economics, it simply does not appear in the process of planning, and in the facts of the city. So it's all edited out, not by intention, but by the character of the logic itself . . . That an art develops which becomes preoccupied with those things this culture has left out, seems to me a realistic idea.

Charles Simonds Charles Fort is the equivalent, I think.

Robert Irwin Yes.

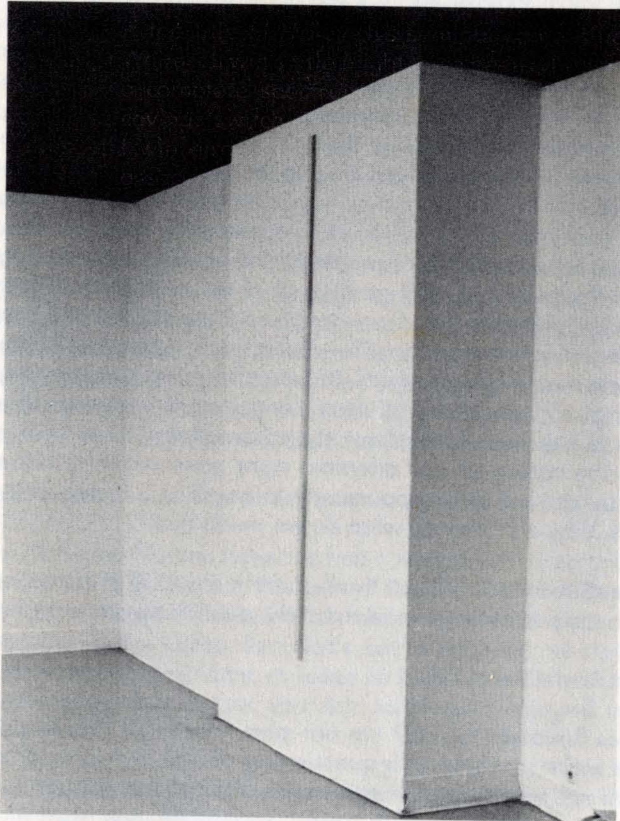
Patrick Ireland Who was that?

Charles Simonds He's just someone who collected random phenomenological data in little shoe boxes, I think, in the beginning. He eventually published them. All the phenomena that appeared on the last page of newspapers, etc.—it rained frogs in Mobile, and the sea turned yellow, and so on. He collected all this information that had no real system by which it could be quantified and just left it at that.

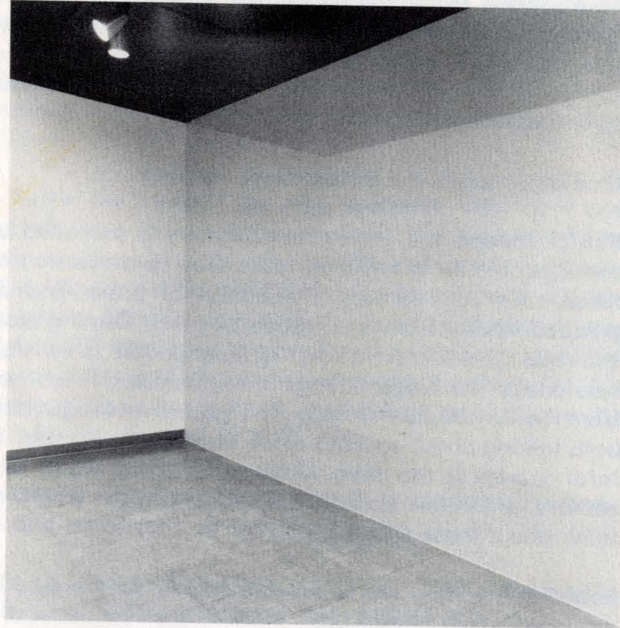
Marcia Tucker I wonder if this is part of a question I wanted to ask. How do you see your work as participating or not participating in the specific cultural, social, political situation we find ourselves in now?

Charles Simonds I think we first have to identify what kind of methodology we exist under before we can ask how we deal with that structure. Bob, I look to you only because you seem to have a very articulate way of expressing some of those qualities. I haven't thought about it in the terms you are presenting, which interest me tremendously. I think of art as a structural methodology, overdetermined in a special way. I find that art is eminently predictable, especially when you talk of museums, for instance. The structure of those institutions predisposes artists to think what art is. Nearly all the art I see is determined by the structure, the space into which it is projected, in terms of an imagination that says it will exist in this particular space and this particular social and economic context. In that sense, there is a necessity for artists to find some sort of historical justification—where their work comes from and where it's going. An over-determined kind of structure, that for all its hoopla of being avant-garde or revolutionary or exciting, is basically quite predictable. I don't think it does include the kind of information you find, for instance, on the Lower East Side. There's a guy there who once a month gets all the people in the building together and they write a play. The characters are his people living in the building and each scene takes place in so and so's kitchen, living room, bedroom and so on. So, they basically recapitulate their own social framework into a fantasy for themselves. There's no audience involved. There are many, many things like that going on—creative activities—that don't ever surface in the formal, overstructured framework. I think they contain some of that information, maybe in a much more articulate form than an historical framework, certainly in terms of content, which I think might be more to the point.

Patrick Ireland I don't want to say the fatal word "vernacular."



PATRICK IRELAND *UNTITLED* WOOD LIQUITEX ON A WALL 12' X 80'(DETAIL)



ROBERT IRWIN *UNTITLED* 12' X 80' SCRIM,LIGHT (DETAIL)

But I think its lessons are really there. It's produced by people who are outside history, who have forgotten the past and don't know the future and aren't too interested in either. Its lessons are applicable across the whole panorama of culture. Coming from another place, the things that American culture formally ignores are very visible to me. Las Vegas is a whole vernacular value system, like it or not. I dislike the formal American conception of history, Americans' idea of what composes their communal memory . . .

Charles Simonds The Bicentennial, for instance.

Patrick Ireland Yes. Historical continuity is cancelled by what these people do in fulfilling tasks they construe in a disorganized, unstructured way. Perception of order and disorder proceed wholly from an attitude of mind. Coming along, you can reap a harvest from what to most people is invisible. That was one of the hidden things in minimalism. It learned more from the vernacular than pop. The kind of investigations you're both talking about couldn't exist, perhaps, in Europe. The cultural overlay is too deep. Maybe that's why we're all in this country, or in New York. It provides a context where one can think about these things best.

Robert Irwin Well, that's not necessarily so. I would have to argue with that a little bit.

Patrick Ireland I know you're from Los Angeles.

Robert Irwin Yes, that's true, I have this idea that so called minimalizing—less in terms of performance and permanence—is not really so much a final statement, but rather the adoption of a posture of inquiry. When a culture like ours defines the word esthetics, and develops a philosophy of esthetics, from that point on that culture is no longer really involved in esthetics. It's the same as developing a theology, which is the logical explanation of faith. When a culture finds a necessity for theology, it is no longer a faith-oriented culture. What it's saying is that finally it makes its principal decisions about what it thinks and feels—based on a process of logic. But if that culture develops what we have developed—an incredible number of technological extensions—it's not done without some loss. So when an aspect of that culture, such as its art, begins to develop a minimal aspect, and appears to lack the values or the meanings of the rest of the culture, I don't think that that can be simply viewed as either accidental or incidental. You must at least consider the possibility that it is involved with the development of an antithesis. But having arrived at that doubt, it's very difficult to ask a question about an alternative when you live in the center of the milieu. How do we ask a question about what we are completely committed to? It is reasonable to think that in the beginning you go through a slow withdrawal from those commitments, which cannot be seen by anyone still holding the commitments as anything but a loss of value or irrationality or a meaningless activity. But at some point, you may then arrive at the periphery of that commitment—you can then begin to ask questions about the alternatives. I see that as being the nature of our dilemma right now, which is not so much a dilemma as an opportunity to question our own orthodoxies. Why art? Exactly what do we mean by it?

Charles Simonds But do you think of art in any kind of dialectical relationship to reality—in terms of the public's awareness of it?

Robert Irwin Yes.

Charles Simonds You do? I'm not sure I feel that. Certainly I agree we're involved in a questioning of our own orthodoxy, but I'm not sure that ever enters into the culture at large.

Robert Irwin I don't think it does in any direct causal sense.

Charles Simonds Not only in any direct sense. I mean, for instance, Patrick's talking about the way the public stands in

front of the great work of art and their reactions fail to play at that time. Implicit in what he was saying, is that people are missing out on the true dialectical nature of that work. So, whether the information is ultimately transmitted—

Robert Irwin You mean, their cognizance fails to communicate its meaning objectively, the process I'm talking about has taken two hundred years and we're only at the point of asking questions.

Charles Simonds Oh, I think we've been asking the question for sixty years—

Robert Irwin Well, o.k. for sixty years, but we have no system of cultural measure acute enough to pick up the character of subjective effect, in short spans, essentially in that respect we are still only measuring behavior as a distant clue to what is happening and to what degree. Few young people, for example, could define for you what is meant by existential thought, yet much of their actions now seem to have an existential edge.

Audience How does that affect an artist who has a retrospective?

Marcia Tucker No one here has had a retrospective, so this is a theoretical question for this group. Do you feel that the very fact of having a retrospective and defining oneself is therefore negative in the sense that, let's say a religion, by defining itself, loses its vital force, or loses its faith? Is it an act of self-examination that means you are no longer engaged in the thing itself?

Anne Healy Well, I think most retrospectives are postmortems. I find them very deadening. I don't think I would want to have one. It does put a cap on what you've been about, and I can't help but feel it is a somewhat negative thing.

Patrick Ireland That question was raised for a lot of us with the Ad Reinhardt retrospective at the Jewish Museum. Here was a man whose ideology was totally against the retrospective. Then he had one. It was a very curious retrospective. Wall after wall after wall of those dark pictures, with fractional differences between the works. Time as development was shown to be artificial. He had it both ways without compromise. He had a double answer. He arranged matters very well, I think. He chose the context in which he would deliver his work to history, which cannot be escaped. The time was right, because he died shortly after.

Marcia Tucker But couldn't you also speculate that there are other possibilities than a retrospective? The opportunity to look back on a body of work in a neutral environment might be beneficial. Wouldn't it be good for a change to share say ten or twenty-five years of work with the public and also in one sense, yourself? The onus that's placed on the retrospective might be the fault of the curators and public, not the artist. It's not a danger the artist created, and it can be bypassed by altering how you think of it. No?

Patrick Ireland I think every artist tends to spatialise his body of work and perceive it all simultaneously.

Robert Irwin In considering a question like this you have to decide to what extent you want to live in or have any interaction with a community. No one lives outside of the community, no one is without some need to act or interact in some way. When you assume to do that you will need to use the existing agreements, even if it is to raise a contradiction. For example, I'm using words now, which is the existing currency of this situation. Even though words are antithetical to my deed as an artist. But you use certain forms at certain times because situations call for them, agreements are held, it's a continuous questioning of, what is it you want to know and do, want to accomplish. Retrospectives are a heavy handed method, adherent to . . . an historical view.

Marcia Tucker Any more questions?

Audience I just want to know how Charles chose his site on Lombard Street.

Charles Simonds I walked around. It was chosen quickly. It was late in the afternoon and I had to choose a place. Actually, it's atypical in the sense that it was chosen somewhat to meet the need of being somewhere near the school so that people from the school could see it and also my need for it to be somewhere where people who didn't go to the school could see it. It's situated somewhere in between those two needs. This place is basically a bus stop, where people come and wait. Generally in the Lower East Side, people will go home and tell their family what I'm doing and come back. Since I've worked there for a long time, I'm always bumping into somebody who's seen me before, seen the dwellings before and is able to act as an intermediary to what I'm doing when other people come along. I recount some of the history of these imaginary people, the dwellers, so that this kind of situation is a very particular kind of a view that you're getting to what I do.

Marcia Tucker Could you say where the pieces are located?

Charles Simonds One is on Lombard and Broad Street on the northeast corner. There's another on Carpenter Street just off Broad Street. You do down Broad Street until you get to the McDonald's, then go right, it's right there in the middle of the large warehouse type building. The nice thing about this spot is that yesterday people saw me beginning, obviously came back this morning to see how it turned out, before it might be destroyed. It's a very exposed kind of spot, on the Lower East Side, where I work; more of society develops around it, more of a sense of community that protects and destroys it at the same time.

Marcia Tucker I'd like to expand the question to ask Anne, the other person who did a piece for an exterior site, how she chose her site and why?

Anne Healy I came up in January, walked around the school and hung around the neighborhood. I saw the spot and I liked its very "squishy" space. It's got massive columns that are only twenty-three feet high. I wanted to work with the way people approach a very formal space, which the facade is. The door is placed in the center. Even though there are a series of choices that you can make, almost invariably the natural choice is to walk up the center of the steps. I decided that I wanted to have people think a little bit about approaching this building, so I filled in the center spaces and made them walk around to the edges and hopefully made them start to think about the space ten feet behind it. When you get there, the columns are very overwhelming, but I didn't want to block them off totally, I wanted you to be able to see the exterior street and conversely as you were coming up, to almost think that you can get through. Logically, you shouldn't be able to. But for technical reasons, there are spaces there you can go through. During installation I couldn't get the panels exactly into the center. I find it funny that people are now entering the formal space by squeezing through the barriers I put up. That's an unexpected part of the piece I really like. It started out to be one thing and being one kind of space, but I did want you to feel you were squeezing into a very strange space behind those columns and you're actually doing it, so it worked out o.k.

Audience How long are you going to leave your pieces up?

Charles Simonds I never take them down, they are eventually destroyed—either by the weather or by somebody who wants to play God. If someone wants to take it for themselves alone, they destroy it, physically. So as long as the piece belongs to everyone, they exist; as soon as they're possessed by one person, they're destroyed.

Audience to Robert Irwin The way you precipitate a situation means that a lot of the experience depends upon the viewer and his own awareness. Your work carries with it a very strong sexual veiling, a very desirable kind of space. If I try to think about the qualities of that experience, they're all things I categorize as personal—an artist's hand, a sensibility, has made something come to be in a certain way. Do you feel there is a sensibility traveling through the different situations you deal with? But at the same time do you think the experience should be composed of what the viewer brings to it? I mean, is your experience similar to mine?

Robert Irwin Well, in one sense, no. It's hard to explain it. My real interest in people and the thing I love best about them, and which you get to see the least, is their complexity. Given a situation in which people can'exercise their own individuality, their own nature, or their own potential being, they're very complex. Say I've just come from Moscow, Idaho and arrived in Grand Forks, North Dakota. The people in Grand Forks, North Dakota said, "How was it in Moscow?" I said, "Well, it was fine." They say, "What are the people like there?", and I thought to myself, I've been there three days, how do I know what the people are like there really, people present themselves to you in a particular way. If you saw them the following day they'd present themselves entirely differently. The woman I live with now is continuously surprising me. She just did a play she was directing. I was absolutely astounded by it, she's so unbelievably talented. I had no idea she was that good . . . I really must cease to speculate on how other people respond. I'm pleased when they do. On the other hand—now answering the other side of the question about the museum as a context—I did a piece at the Modern one time which the Modern didn't want, they let me use the space as long as I came in the middle of the night and bribed the electricians and the painters not to be there. I did this situation and then they didn't announce it. I didn't put my name on it, and people come to a museum as a highly focused audience. Right next door were the Brancusis, which are definitely art, as far as I can tell. They would sort of peek in my room and they had to ask themselves, "Is that really intended, and if so, is it finished?" They might have finally got to the question of whether or not it was art and they might have even possibly wondered who did it. If the artist has assumed the responsibility of distinguishing what is art by some kind of subjective process, rather than in relationship to some kind of external logic . . . you asked about the role of the viewer, if that idea has any validity, then you're talking about this responsibility being placed on the individual viewer, now participant. While the artist may appear isolated, acting individually, he is at the same time acting as the collective, cultural "I," what he can assume for himself, the individual "I," must translate to be real, at least in part, for the collective whole. Each viewer must now decide, with his or her subjective powers to reason, whether or not any of this has any actuality for them.

Audience Could you say that there is only one culture in the United States, and how would you define it?

Robert Irwin I didn't really say there is only one culture. Culture is the sum total of the history of civilization. It breaks down into more specific situations, infinitely to individuals. I didn't say anything when Patrick talked about coming from another place. While Ireland is another place, it's not that other. There are differences, but we have more in common.

Patrick Ireland Will you come over with me, Bob?

Robert Irwin Are you kidding? I'd love to, is that a real invitation?

Patrick Ireland Yes, it is. You've got a lot of witnesses. Listening to Charles and Bob a few moments ago, something came to mind. Project work goes up, comes down, and is a memory. There's a compression of time that gives a kind of image of historical process. Reacting to a particular situation or thing or project involves perceptual revisions on the audience's part.

Some of their assumptions become transparent to them. At least there's the possibility of that. That leaves them as open as they'll ever be to moving towards the brief formation of what, for want of something better, I'll call a temporary myth. There are situations where there is the opportunity for certain axioms to be at least temporarily disproved from experience. Then there is a connection between the perceptual and the mythic. Any period has its overriding dialetic, whether it's form/content or whatever. I'm beginning to think the dialetic of this period may be perception and mythology. Both are antagonistic to history and so have delusions about it. Project work translates perception into memory, and so may give us myths without content. Memory is very strong. It's difficult and dangerous to put the two together—perception and myth—but I think there are many routes to it that will be fairly well travelled as we get used to the idea. People come to these means from different ends.

Anne Healy It's a moment when what you do has a response almost on a one to one basis from whoever is looking at it. As that moment carries through, it's a memory. Then it doesn't matter whether the object's there for one minute or three thousand years. The moment in time—that's the important thing.

Marcia Tucker I think, right now, the next step is to look at the exhibition and to capture that moment in time for yourselves.

I would like to thank the participants in this symposium for reviewing their comments. J.K.

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