

# DETROIT FOCUS QUARTERLY

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Photo: Steve Rost



## Double Vision of Detroit Transplants

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*Gary Mayer is a former Detroit artist living in New York City. When Mayer is not painting, he is employed as a truck driver for Utrecht Linens, and vice-versa.*

### East Village Art

**He said:** Once you get over the haircuts and haircolorings, what you have is mostly awful art, but also there exists a small shred of humanity. This is the only place where anyone can start a gallery and anyone can get a show. Some artists get into as many as five shows

a week. I've counted! Could prolific Picasso produce enough work for five shows a week? The East Village is rock 'n' roll. Needless to say if you're the hermetic type the whole East Village scene wears on you. The important thing about the EV is that it is young and hasn't become a system as yet. The possibility for real art to appear does exist.

**She said:** You can't deny the energy and dynamism of what has essentially been a 36-month phenomenon. Three years ago there was Patti Astor's Fun Gallery, Nature Morte, Civilian Warfare, and ABC NO RIO on the LOISADA (the Lower East Side). Gracie Mansion was still selling out of a rented limousine at that time. Today there are over 30 galleries, 10 of which take out ads in the Gallery Guide. People do the East Village like they do SoHo or 57th Street. The atmosphere might not always be the most professional but, in many ways

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# **"... The Role of the Critic."**

by Vincent Carducci

If we are trying to affect positive changes . . .

I would like to suggest less of the indulgent

verbiage and more constructive criticism.

I realize that I may be deluding myself by

thinking such is the role of the critic.

Mike Zimmerman

Letter to the Editor

*Detroit Focus Quarterly*

April, 1982

Because critical dialogue in Detroit has been meagre, it is not surprising that misapprehensions have arisen about art criticism and the role of the critic. There are some commonly held ideas regarding the critical function that must be examined in order to arrive at a more properly conceived model of critical inquiry.

The first misconception is that of constructive criticism. The phrase, "constructive criticism," implies that the critic's role is to review an artist's work and respond to it so that, in essence, the critic "instructs" the artist on how to amend his/her esthetic position. This is both naive and self-centered, for although the critic is concerned with quality, that is, what is desirable, appropriate and/or significant, his/her dialogue is not with the artist so much as with those who receive the work. As Donald B. Kuspit states

criticism in part is a preliminary attempt to socialize the work of art, showing it to be viable to the extent it serves the community of human interests, however these interests may be interpreted.<sup>1</sup>

This does not mean that the critic's role is merely to decode the work for the viewer. For to expose the intentions of the artist and to assert, subsequently, that a work of art conforms to those intentions is not to establish its value. The critic seeks to posit his/her subject, be it a single work, an *oeuvre*, or a tendency, into the cultural matrix.

Additionally, the critic's role is not promotion. The promotion of artists is a function of galleries as part of the commodity system. Marketing strategies operate without regard to critical issues. The critic values the work of art as a cultural signifier, not a consumable. In fact, true criticism is art's first line of defense against commercialism.

The critic functions as the quintessential or, to use Suzanne Langer's term, "virtual" audience. Critical observation is "formalized," that is, phenomenologically bracketed. Through "receiving ideology,"<sup>2</sup> the critical eye illustrates ways of seeing and methods of interpretation. By situating the work within a constellation of ideas which illuminates a larger cultural orientation, the critic's role, as virtual audience, is as important to the work of art as its creator's.<sup>3</sup>

Art criticism seeks to discover and interpret world-historical currents through the analysis of cultural artifacts (artworks). The autochthonous critic's role, then, is to decentralize critical discourse by exposing and examining art tendencies from a regional vantage point. This posture is global in that it functions in light of and, more pointedly, in spite of centralized artworld power clusters. It is also topical, for, to quote Donald Judd:

The time is over when a knowledge of the shows in New York was definitive.<sup>4</sup>

1. Donald B. Kuspit, "Art, Criticism, and Ideology," *Art in America*, Summer, 1981, p. 93.

2. For a discussion of receiving ideology, see Kuspit, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-97+. Also my article, "Critical Stances: Reflections on Art Writing," *Detroit Focus Quarterly*, September, 1984, p. 2.

3. Marcel Duchamp maintained this position. See Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors: Five Masters of the Avant-garde*, The Viking Press (New York, 1965) p. 9. Also, see Kuspit discussing H. R. Jauss, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

4. Donald Judd, "Issues and Commentary," *Art in America*, October, 1984, p. 10.

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## **In Focus**

We was sittin' around the old waterin' hole last week, talkin' about great sportin' events that we'd seen and as usual, tryin' to top Bubba, when I remembered way back to the summer of '84. What a season! That was the year the collectors put two consecutive world championship titles on the line against a dynamic artists team. The whole first half of the season had to be rescheduled . . . something about there being rain for forty days and nights. However, all the animals survived and on September 16, 1984, a clear, crisp day, these two teams met in an earnest dispute over the title and the diamond.

Bubba said he put his money on the collectors with powerhouses like: Charles McGee, Mark Morris, John Murphy, Michael Bank, and Leslie Cohen. As it turned out, Michael Bank did win the most valuable player award.

Myself, I had taken the artists with: David Barr, Lois Teicher, Stanley Rosenthal, Jack Parker, and Bob Caskey, but as any manager knows, games aren't won on the score card, but on the field. I still can feel a chill as I remember Jon Catenacci's bat connect with still another hit which would win him the silver bat award. It seemed like only yesterday, or even a month or two ago, that the excited sound of an usually restrained announcer, Senator Jack Faxon, was heard as he screamed of a play at the plate, the long throw, the block, the catch, the tag . . . OUT! Everyone was on their feet screaming.

Even Bubba and Ralph agreed that Debbie McLellen deserved one of Dennis Guastella's trophies, the golden glove for that play. Ralph even went on to say, she could teach Lance Parrish a few things.

I asked Ralph to draw another brew, and Bubba reminded me, with no minimal amount of satisfaction, of the outcome of the game . . . 11-7 Collectors! So, I lost some dough; it ain't the first time. But, from what I heard, Detroit Focus (Baseball Club) made

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these young dealers seem to have more integrity than the dealers with a high capital investment. Robert Pincus-Witten with a collector on his arm is not an uncommon sight. The best galleries in the EV? Deborah Sharpe, Garett/Kohn, P. P. O. W., and Patricia Hearn. The art? Mostly decorative and unaccomplished. I'm touched at the eagerness to exhibit work the minute it's finished. From time to time there are a few really shining moments among the decorative and trivial.

#### The East Village in General

**He said:** I like to eat there.

**She said:** The whole thing reminds me of Haight-Ashbury soon to become Rodeo Drive. When I moved to New York I rejected the EV as a place to live, now I wish I could afford the \$1250 rent for a newly renovated apartment so that I could walk to work and alleviate the subway stress.

#### SoHo

**He said:** Terminally cute.

**She said:** SoHo for me is basically The New Museum. Lucky for me I can do all the SoHo galleries at lunch. I try to avoid SoHo on Sundays and Fanelli's on Saturday evenings. Working for The New Museum puts me in a vulnerable position, especially since I live with an artist. I'm continually asked why the Museum is showing this or that artist, or why we did a particular exhibition. I usually answer, "I'm not in curatorial." The Museum is still the most responsive institution I know to visual artists. Marcia Tucker, the Director, and the curators are always running around the country looking under rocks for work not well represented either in idea or in body. We receive thousands of slides of regional work, though very few from the Detroit area. On my end, which is marketing and development, I work hard at integrating the Museum's concern for our artist constituency into my programs. Some time ago I realized that artists' attendance at our receptions seemed to be falling off. I also noticed that this occurred about the time we stopped serving beer at our openings. (Other museums serve wine.) It doesn't take a genius to realize that artists are beer drinkers. Now we're serving beer again, thanks to a wonderful product donation from Stroh's. No, I can't help you with your slides, but can I buy you a beer at our next opening?

#### Real Estate

**He said:** I had 1000 square feet of space in Detroit for \$100 per month. Now I have a great deal in New York at \$400 per month for 800 square feet.

**She said:** Real Estate is the primary topic of conversation among strangers in New York. It beats money, sex, movies, restaurants. Real estate is a perfectly legitimate way to start a conversation or pick up a date. An "ain't-it-awful" horror story about fixture fees, landlords, rent strikes, or lawsuits sparks immediate commiseration. The city runs on the real estate dollar. The real estate dollar is what will ultimately cause 60,000 people to pour into Zabar's market on a Saturday morning when Lincoln West is built on the upper West Side. By the time LOISADA, Harlem, and the upper West Side are gentrified, the pale, homogeneous tone to the city will send its residents shrieking to Astoria and Brighton Beach for a little color.

#### Subways

**He said:** Where else do you regularly see war veterans amputated at the waist rolling along on platforms? And where else can you look up and down a car without seeing the same nationality repeated twice? Where else can you experience the thrills and chills of the "Blue Streak" for only 90 cents?

**She said:** "Life as a mole." I'm convinced that the subways are the major cause for the anxiety level in NYC. The psychological discrepancy occurs when one's personal space is violated while trying to appear as though nothing is wrong by staring at a small patch of space on the wall. More than once I found myself staring at a graffiti-

scrawled expletive as though it were the only view in sight.

Occasionally I'm struck by the hot-house effect of the trains. The Puerto Rican girls bloom early and the train cars are filled with tight-jeaned, lacquered-nailed, teenaged exotics of thirteen and fourteen. To date, I've been in one shoot-out, numerous track fires, and have been "shot-up" to the Bronx when my Local turned Express while I was reading.

#### Hype in Art

**He said:** Very scary stuff. Why are there so many rich and famous young artists? When you're young you are malleable and energetic enough to whip out the work at a very fast rate. How is this? Assistants! Everyone got an assistant along with the rolodex and phone machine. Sounds like business to me. I've been told that there are now classes taught in art school on this stuff.

**She said:** Hey, I'm majoring in marketing the arts. The museum as product, the artist as product, the art as product. It sounds crass but in many ways the whole approach is very clean and certainly very quantifiable. Not only that, but marketing the arts allows me to keep my curatorial integrity to myself. My biggest complaint are exhibitions curated so as to edit in works of art to validate a curatorial theme. These exhibitions fall into the category of: first, you pick the title and then you illustrate the title.

#### Work Ethic

**He said:** I don't think about it much, I only work.

**She said:** It's a definite advantage being from the Midwest. Employers are aware that outside of New York, people work harder. It's a myth about how hard everyone works in NYC. On the surface it appears as though everyone works much harder and longer, but in fact the freneticism results from constant breakdowns, screw-ups, delayed traffic, and analyst appointments. As the French say, "Il ne marche pas!"

#### Cheap Thrills

**He said:** Big pretzels with mustard, the pocket El Greco book at the Strand bookstore, the Staten Island Ferry, Coney Island in the fall, the galleries.

**She said:** Watching the rowboats in Central Park, watching fights break out and relationships break up. Riding in the head car of the express train and looking out the front window. Life as a fast mole! The Cloisters.

#### And Now for the Positive

**He said:** Most memorable memories in NYC? The DeKooning show, the Manet show, the Balthus show, the Met, the etchings of the late Picasso exhibitions, *Fool for Love* at Circle Rep Theater. Delivering an art order to an old friend of Rothko's who was totally unaware that he painted just like Rothko. Finally, waiting in line for Shakespeare in the Park and watching: a marriage break up; a girl with no underwear making sure everyone knew she was unencumbered (her date was a blind guy); a five-minute presentation of *War and Peace*; and a softball game, all at the same time.

**She said:** Most memorable positives about NYC? Looking up Fifth Avenue from Washington Square at twilight in October. The Cloisters. Lunch with the painter at a Russian restaurant in Brighton Beach. The adversity of it all. After New York, any other U.S. city will seem easy to live in. Something for everyone in the field of art — Have you heard of the Museum for the Dog? Sponsored by the AKC, no less. It's a fine, professional small museum devoted to canine-related art, objects, and ephemera. Something for everyone, period! (Except for Mexican food, there is no good Mexican food in New York!)

#### Worst Experience to Date

**He said:** They roll off of me.

**She said:** A well-dressed Marvin Hagler look-alike trying to punch me out on 23rd Street. I ducked, ran into the street while he called me a transvestite fag. I jumped to the immediate conclusion that I should start dressing better.



## The Uniroyal: A Montage

by Joel Silvers

Soon the cliff-like facade of the old Uniroyal factory will no longer loom over East Jefferson at the foot of the Belle Isle Bridge. Memories and ghosts will be nearly all that remain of this gigantic factory whose peculiar personality defined the site it occupied and dominated the surrounding area of the city. Yet, the old Uniroyal factory, as an unacknowledged urban landmark, will also leave its imprint upon the unconscious and enter the shared language of this region. As the structure is about to be obliterated from the public visual domain, it acquires mysterious new dimensions beyond our everyday perceptions. We begin to recognize its multiple functions — as a visual reference point, as a thread in a continuous urban fabric, as a trace of a certain period in our city's development, as a sculptural form — for the first time. By borrowing a nonlinear method from film editing, the montage, perhaps a penetrating "portrait" may be rendered and alternative ways of perceiving the city will be revealed.

This montage "portrait" is built from the thoughts of: **Cay Bahnmiller**, an artist who lives in the neighborhood of the Uniroyal; **Charles Blessing**, the director of Detroit's City Planning Commission from 1953 to 1977; **Lowell Boileau**, a painter whose work has interpreted Detroit's industrial landmarks; **Jim Duffy**, a photographer of Detroit's old buildings; **Ed Levine**, a realist painter; **Charles Merz**, a member of the architectural firm which designed Chene Park; **Dennis Teichman**, a poet who has worked at jobs for firms near the Uniroyal; and **Bill Worden**, Staff Director of the Historic Designation Board of the City of Detroit.

When I think of Uniroyal, I immediately think of the complex or the

magnificent whole, just as I think about seeing the city whole. The idea of the cosmos, the whole of a place, the whole of a Russian earth-built basement out in Springfield, Kansas, or something like that. Whatever it is, see it *whole*. And to do less is to betray the subject. That's the way I would approach the Uniroyal! — *Blessing*

One effect (of the demolition) that is noted is that for so many people it has no effect. They are negligent of understanding their environment, because it's been so far removed that they don't pay attention to it. — *Bahnmiller*

I guess I would comment too that I'm not sure there isn't beauty in that plant. If you equate beauty and delicacy, of course not. But there's a good deal of strength of design, a good deal of power in the design, and THAT has a beauty and an image all its own . . . The buildings generate an impression of power, strength. If you don't want to call them beautiful, you might want to call them handsome. If indeed buildings have gender, they're clearly masculine . . . my basic image is of that powerful presence on the street, the suggestion of activities involving strength and industrial might going on behind those cliff-like facades . . . if you go to the art museum and you look at the Rivera mural, you'll find paintings of husky men working hard, and that's the kind of image that the Uniroyal buildings have. They're hard-working buildings, and as Rivera the Marxist would say, there's honor in honest labor. And I'm not sure you *have* to be a Marxist to believe that. I'm not sure that the Puritan Work Ethic doesn't say the same thing, although it may use a different language to express it. — *Worden*

So, I see what the building was built to do, and then I see it as it is now. But what to me seems real important is what's gone on between. It's been ignored just because it wasn't in use. Well, I think there's another way of looking at how the city is constructed. There's the kind of headline stuff like Millender Center which tells me nothing about the building. And then there's all of the other dormant structures that have an ongoing life even though they aren't being attended to . . . So what about Uniroyal in *that* sense? Now they're gonna demolish it, and that's the final stage, but meanwhile, what about *right now*, and before, and a year ago? The building had its identification still. I saw it as an active, vital area. And not just because people fished around it and cars drove past it, but I always imagined the sort of secret life of the building and objects — as what they are other than our normal way of comprehending them . . . Finally, the real persona of the building has taken over, and there's something else outside of what man constructed and put the final stamp on. It's almost like it got out of control and took on its own life. — *Bahnmler*

Constantly, as you move about the city, you see these cranes and busy people . . . It's like termites . . . And I see these buildings coming down from the Fisher (Freeway), these old hotels with all their gutted windows. The gutted window is starting to become a motif in this city. These ruins housed people and lives that passed on. Now, I'm not saying I got to hold onto every building. It's not a nostalgic thing at all . . . The preparatory procedure and the process of how it got there should be paid more attention. It's important. It's like a drone, a constant drone in the city. It's a chipping away . . . You come to a point where you understand that assertions made about the environment are done via the process of negation. That's how I see it in painting. It isn't A plus B necessarily at all. — *Bahnmler*

The reason I do that (concentrate on images of ruined industrial structures) is to express the feeling of transition, rather than to express a feeling of nostalgia. In other words, to express a feeling that this has changed, that this is the way things are, that this is like a moment or a frame frozen out of time. It's the idea of transition that is going on rather than any memorializing of the pieces. Certainly a piece I did of the destruction of Dodge Main was like that. It was the dying light of a day on a dying factory, and it's gone, but that's a state of transition. — *Boileau*

That whole area is the rugged end of Detroit. It's the rugged end of the human psyche as it regards its work . . . You look at the Uniroyal plant with its vent stacks sticking up along the whole wall for how many years now? And they're still there. They're *rigid*! They're *locked* in place. They've gone through tornados and all kinds of changes, and they're still intact. That goes for a lot of the buildings down in that area. They were built ruggedly for one purpose — to feed industry. There were no frills. They were tough, hard buildings, with tough, hard people who worked in them. — *Teichman*

There was a kind of elegance to its massiveness, because it was a *big* building. There were portions of it that looked like an elegant chair; it would slope down toward the water like the legs of a chair. And I thought it made it nicely with the bridge. Maybe in a sense, from some angles, it even looked better than the bridge. It anchored the bridge, made the bridge seem stable, and made the bridge a better looking structure because of its presence. But I never felt that way about it from Jefferson. From Jefferson, it was blotto, just another ugly building . . . of which Detroit has always had more than its share. But I liked it very much from waterside . . . I'm always amazed when anything as large and as functional as that structure can give a semblance of grace and find itself compatible with a bridge and a river. That's amazing! — *Levine*

I like interior aspects of it. I like the inside of the complex much bet-

ter than the outside . . . I do know those great empty spaces with light filtering down, fighting through corridors and buildings and bridges to finally get a view of Belle Isle . . . The space and the light and all those qualities are permanently engraved in my mind. If that plant is ripped down and it's gone, it won't be for me. It was that strong an impression. It's indelibly burned in, and I know I will have dreams about it some day . . . I know those spaces, and it's the strongest image of Piranesi-like space I have ever seen . . . Just its existence has already modified my thinking in a way. — *Merz*

Everything in Detroit is functional. There is very little attention paid to beauty. The only kind of color we have here is either the absence of color or the outrageous. We have what I call the prematurely grey city, which is Detroit. It's really a young city which is ghastly in terms of color. Nobody uses color . . . There is more color and more interest and more beauty in any one of a hundred motels in Santa Monica, California than there is in any on the new buildings in Detroit. I've done a lot of landscape painting, or cityscape painting, here in this city, and I avoided most of the large buildings that the city is known for because they offered very little in terms of color opportunities for me. The color of decay, the vividness of decay, the vividness of shadow, the half-burned building, the pattern of shadows, the blues and greens and scarlets and purples that come out of urban decay, which is largely contingent on fire in most of the areas that I worked in, interest me a lot more than the buildings. There was a kind of purposeful color, the color of commerce, such as the loud, gaudy sign, but it seems that architecture and color are almost incompatible in this part of the world. — *Levine*

But I have this real fondness in this city for that sort of cement color. It's a neutral color, but it allows other colors to work off of it. — *Bahnmler*

And so they (factories in Detroit such as the Uniroyal) all have this dual nature to them, and I think that's what I feel and what I try certainly to express. I try to paint them in times when the light hits them and lights up their windows to turn them into jewels for a moment, so as to be a point of contemplation beyond all the hours of work that have been lost in there and all the anguish and all the paychecks and all the happy times in the parking lot drinking on payday . . . The predominant color scheme, which I would call black-grey-yellow, is grim, but it's rather beautiful in its own subtle way. I find that, especially when they're enhanced by bright sunlight, the colors are generally very matte. They soak in the light and they create stark contrast without having a lot of reflective glare. You can see the individual parts very well, whereas if you had a glossy surface, there would be a tendency towards confusion. The west end of the plant, which is a giant bank of windows sooted black over the ages, with giant vent pipes crawling up the side of them, catch the dying light of the sun, and particularly on a very orangey type sunset, they are beautifully illuminated. It's an absolute spectacle to see that bank of blackened windows tinged with this very brilliant orange or whatever color's in the sky. The color becomes a black-bright orange-yellow from that direction. — *Boileau*

And the buildings are these massive, massive inverted bells where they hit the slabs. (The columns are where they hit the slabs.) It's almost as if it was a solid cube that somebody sculpted into a series of buildings. You could think of a thousand Michaelangelos sitting on the top of a big granite cube and just starting to carve down the trenches in between and leaving certain bridges . . . It's that kind of monolithic feel. — *Merz*

I think artists are totally involved with space, and when you get a thing as enormous as Uniroyal, it probably is extremely fascinating to artists and imaginative people, because of its great mass. — *Duffy*

Now, if they take everything out of this neighborhood that is patterned . . . I wonder if they know what they're doing, because aerially, it's a real thrill . . . And when I look across the whole neighborhood, and I see all of these little squares, it's exciting. I see Uniroyal as a continuation of the whole neighborhood I don't even think you can talk about Uniroyal without talking about the neighborhood, because it's the boundary. It's a limit. I think you should be talking about how limits function in a constructive sense and that you have to have these boundaries . . . It's like a marker. It's like a bookend . . . I think that building has to be understood in connection with the entire neighborhood. And then from that, you start to think, you've got to think, about the city and everything that works up against the building. That's what defines that space ultimately, not just the concrete . . . You understand Detroit in relation to Windsor too. That's what makes Detroit. It's just as if you start studying the river line of Detroit, and you start paying attention to the cylindrical shapes. You don't stop at the end of Detroit. You go up to Port Huron, and you've got more. And you start seeing the city in *that* context. — *BahnMiller*

Those kind of vistas, when you get a *glimpse* of something interesting as you go by, are very important in a city, and we lose a lot of them as we lose the built environment in the city. As we get more and more vacant land, what we're beginning to do is to *see too far*. That's psychologically not very desirable in a city. Maybe you want a boulevard with a grand vista for miles, but at other times, you want to peek into a courtyard and have your vision stopped by something that's interesting. We have that same phenomenon going on downtown where it becomes possible from Kennedy Square to see a building that's six blocks away, or something like that, because there's so much vacant land. The loss of short term, closed vistas is a shame in a cityscape, and the Uniroyal plant did provide some very interesting ones as you traveled by it on Jefferson. — *Worden*

I learned from that building, as a constant, like a chalkboard for me. I could work out spatial sorts of questions, equations, off of that site. It was an area that I could kind of think back and forth about . . . components of space . . . like a work-space . . . I study the city constantly. I think out my ideas — about space, of the construction of the city . . . I suppose like field work. It's also a field in the sense of like a gravitational field, forces that are interdependent. — *BahnMiller*

Somehow, you're walking along, or driving, to Belle Isle and thinking of Olmsted and that great history . . . All of a sudden the whole facade opens up, or lights up, you see this hologram inside of the plant, and it's like walking into a rainbow. Were you ever in a rainbow? . . . Suddenly, the Uniroyal becomes a grandiloquent vision of Detroit's own peculiar romantic industrial history, a history of industry. It would be the grandeur of the industrial, which has gone astray in so many ways. This city needs to come back and to see the beauty of industry — as in Gary or the steel mills and blast furnaces of Pittsburgh that you see in the middle of the night . . . Endless things have happened. In a very real sense, architecture in the world has tended to become, and I think that's good, the architecture of glass, or transparency, of beauty from the outside . . . This tradition of glass somehow might be the secret of handling of a massive reinforced concrete structure of the scale and the magnitude and variety of spaces of Uniroyal. Why not explore the Uniroyal from the point of view of the combination of ancient industrial buildings with modern techniques, perhaps with emphasis on glass and maybe on rubber in this case, and see what could come out of an inherent set of qualities once you begin to look at a particular building. — *Blessing*

This article consists of excerpts from a multi-media work in progress on Detroit's changing landscape.



Duane Hanson, *Self-Portrait, lifesize, cast vinyl polychromed in oil, 1976.*

## Interview: Duane Hanson

Duane Hanson's illusionistic sculptures, painstakingly handcrafted of polychromed plastics, are objective life-size depictions of working class types in American life. He works out of his garage in Davie, Florida. This interview was conducted during an October visit to Cranbrook Academy of Art, where he earned an M.F.A. in 1951.

**Wesner:** *Why don't we start by talking a little bit about your sculptural relationship to the figure, perhaps as opposed to the classical sculptural approach.*

**Hanson:** That's a good question. Sculptural considerations come first and the first inspiration of course is in the form and the challenge of dealing with the form. But in my case, the form is not an ideal. The classic view of beauty or aesthetic is not involved. People have said to me, 'So-and-so only makes beautiful sculptures and you make the ugly ones.' And I've said, 'No, it's how you look at it, the point of view. I think mine is just as beautiful.'

I don't choose young, beautiful women, or a man that's in his prime; when the flesh sags a bit, that to me is an ideal aesthetic beauty. My feeling is that it comes very close to the truth, to the reality of life. We're not dealing in an ideal world but the real world. There is also a mood and communication of not only a beauty but some kind of feeling for American culture. I feel that as an American that which is most vital and energetic is often a comment on our times.

**Wesner:** *Could you talk about the images and characters that you select and why you select them?*

**Hanson:** It makes it possible for you to use young people, older people, working people, people in their prime or people that come up against great odds and show that life is not all a bed of roses. We struggle for what we get and therefore in the compositions they show a bit of fatigue. They have a struggle, a confrontation with life. They are the world as it exists and not as one would have it exist.

There is criticism about why art should be focused on the world as it can be and not as it is. Well, different people want to do that but for me some of the most beautiful music is the tragic music. Music like the opera *Der Rosenkavalier*. The way she sings that, the words. She is so aware of the passage of time and it's beautiful and a tragedy and sad, but there's a moment of the truth, of coming to terms with herself. She's getting old. She hears the clock ticking and she wants to stop it. That sort of thing can carry over in a work of art and is very, very devastating.

**Wesner:** *With that in mind, do the models you select understand the heroic, existential role they play as American heroes? Do they feel ennobled?*

**Hanson:** Oh yes, I think so. Some of them do and some of them aren't that aware of the fact that the world is falling apart or whatever. But the mood and projection of the moment of truth goes beyond a single person, a single portraiture, a casting of a look-alike. In a larger sense, we're all in the same boat. We all get tired and all have to deal with the problems of the world; of the world falling apart, inflation, politics and the wars that we can't do anything about. So that falls into a wider view of the world and society.

**Wesner:** *Do you see the trompe l'oeil effect in your work as a primary issue?*

**Hanson:** I view it as a secondary concern. I don't like sculptures on pedestals and in my case, it's sort of art and life intertwining, moving this way and that, not to fool people and to unsettle them or make them feel uncomfortable, although occasionally that is all right, but to deal with reality! I believe in going all the way. Why stop halfway? I was always very intrigued with George Segal's work, but to me he didn't go far enough. I can understand it if you want to work that way, but then it should go on. There is the problem of carrying on and I've been fortunate that my choice of subject matter is so wide. There is a whole world out there and little by little, adding, adding, adding, and seeing — that's the fun part, seeing what you can add. That's not the total interest for me, but rather it is a challenge, like climbing the next mountain to see what's in back and saying, 'Well you did this, now let's see if you can do this and this.'

You know, I used to go into museums to look at Renaissance art and think, 'Look at that hand and that eye — so real!' I love Hans Holbein. I lived in Germany for a while, in Berlin, and went to all of the museums there. They have the paintings of those old merchants with the scales and the carnations and all that detail. There is a portrait there where you can see each of the hairs of the beard, with maybe one white hair, and I'd go up to it and flip out.

**Wesner:** *So it would be fair to say that you really have an affinity with the realism of trompe l'oeil.*

**Hanson:** Yes. But it isn't the detail. It's the overall integration of that one hair and how it all works together as a relationship.

**Wesner:** *As a sculptor you relate to that?*

**Hanson:** Yes. And the hair, and the eyes, and the clothing, and then the posture — it all has a considered importance.

**Wesner:** *Your work brings the audience immediately into it; it is very accessible. Entrance and accessibility is an issue for a lot of artists, in terms of how esoteric, how distant their own vision, thinking and expression can be and what their responsibility is to the audience.*

**Hanson:** Well, I don't think you can program that into your work. I think it just happens. Some work is going to be more popular, more interesting. I think you have to just do what you want to do and some work is not going to get the recognition of others. The figure, of

course, is close to everyone. When you get into abstract works you have to have a trained eye. You have to work harder.

**Wesner:** *Do you usually start with a general idea of what type of character you like to work with?*

**Hanson:** Yes. I mull it over in my mind for sometimes years, sometimes months. I always have several ideas in my mind of what I would like to do and then I keep looking around. It's sort of like having a play and you look around for a cast to play different characters. I look for certain body types, for figures, some physical types that will have something. Usually I have a lot of volunteers but they're usually the wrong types.

Right now I'm considering doing a figure for the Orlando Airport. I want to do a camper. I got my neighbor to model. We had a photo session the other day and he came over. He camps out a lot and so he's got all of these bags and a fishing pole, and he came over and threw them all on the floor. I wanted him sort of reclining on the floor on one of those bags, waiting for a plane. I really like the relaxed imagery, shabby, with all of the stuff piled around him. It serves as a barrier so people won't go up and touch him all of the time. It gives it an impact not only of the figure but of his clutter and junk. I'm always impressed when I go into airports and see people dragging their stuff around, bags everywhere. It's very intriguing. We become human pack horses. It's fascinating to then begin taking the pictures — instant polaroids — this way and that way of the figure in position.

**Wesner:** *So the intermediate step would be photographic. You don't do drawings or small models?*

**Hanson:** No, because there is too much detail. It's time consuming and I can't have somebody doing that. I'm going to take some time off and just do some drawings.

**Wesner:** *Could you just elaborate a little bit on your ideas about sculpture, and perhaps discuss a few people that have meant something to you?*

**Hanson:** Well, I admire Gauguin a great deal because, although at times his work can get a little too emotional, there is a solidness and solidity of form in a way you can see that works. Well, so that's been done, and you, as a figurative artist, have to go on. You have to on working, and go beyond that, and so my work becomes very, very detailed, which is something I never thought I could do or would be interested in doing.

Modeling and the challenge of form, expressing oneself to that and beyond that; this speaks to the fact that many artists cut out sheets of metal and make columns of steel using I-beams or a similar type of thing and it still all relates. All sculpture relates. I have a friend that says it's all the same thing. I thought to myself, 'How can she say that? I'm working as a realist, this one's an expressionist, this is minimal, and here I'm doing this. But we all deal with the same thing. Take the way we deal with color. You blend it or it's a sharp edge, but regardless there's color to deal with. Or there's a form — a box, a minimal shape, and so the surface has to be very smooth to work. The placement and composition of these boxy forms — how far apart should they come? The question's the same for figurative work; how far apart should those legs be? Or what color should that shirt be in relationship to the flesh in order to let the flesh come out? In abstract painting you have color; what looks best next to that color to make the most expressive statement? What shape should this be and how big should it be? Where should it be? I go over and over it, only in my case, it's a little more complicated since I've got hair, eyes, nose, clothing and so on.

I appreciate a Frank Stella where just what you see is what it is. There it is and that's what it is, and that's all right too. All art can't be the same. But for me, it takes a little more feeling for the difficult times you have, and expressing them this way is the best way I know how to do it.

Joseph Wesner is a sculptor who teaches at the Center for Creative Studies



Mark Schwing, *Nightmare*



Marilyn Schechter

## Mark Schwing: Recent Works

Sixth Street Gallery Sept 22-Oct 20/84  
Royal Oak

An artist's first one-person show is often accompanied by feelings of ambivalence. Anticipation of greater recognition is frequently modified by fear that, standing alone, one's work may fail to measure up. Anxious to display quality, the artist may decide that quantity is necessary to establish professional stature. At this point it becomes the gallery director's responsibility to step in and, while affirming confidence in the artist, examine each work with an eye towards its intrinsic value and its place within the context of the exhibit as a whole. Ideally, an art exhibit — like the individual works it contains — should have a discernible point of view. Anything more or less can be a disservice to artist, gallery and viewer.

Mark Schwing's exhibit at the Sixth Street Gallery, which included large (4' x 8') acrylic paintings on canvas, smaller gouaches on paper, and color lithographs, tended to point up the value of "less is more" or the hazards of ignoring this truism. In the confusion of stimuli presented, Schwing's strongest works, examples of his distinctive

organization of space, color and symbols, were weakened and diluted in impact. Paintings as large, as active and as colorful as these require space around them to breathe.

At his best, as in *Barbeque* (Boy with Red Hair), Schwing abstracts a typical backyard scene to produce a painting of strong design, interlocking color relationships, lush paint handling and pointed social commentary. Schwing's personal iconography seems to derive from the trappings of today's suburban society: bowling pins, swizzle sticks, Saturday morning cartoons. While one appreciates Schwing's integrity in presenting these symbols as his own, their very association in the viewer's mind with the slick superficial images seen in television animation and advertising occasionally works against one's taking these paintings very seriously.

Schwing's color lithographs are perhaps the most consistently successful of all the work exhibited. The subtlety of color and the sophisticated handling of texture combine with the smaller scale to leave the viewer satisfied that each work offers more than meets the eye.

Mark Schwing appears to be an energetic, talented and prolific artist with a developing social conscience. Michigan art has been

advanced by *Recent Works* at the Sixth Street Gallery, even if some of them seemed to be crying out for air.

Patricia Dorsey is a multi-media artist.

## Marilyn Schechter

Ann Arbor Art Association  
Sept 28-Oct 23/84 Ann Arbor

Marilyn Schechter is a sculptor, carving figures, modeling shapes, creating three-dimensional representations. She is also a visual poet, comprehending the world metaphorically. Copper strips symbolize energy; triangular shapes portray three generations of women; irregular, jagged, circular forms denote vegetation — sometimes these vegetation forms flank ominously positioned tenuous figures, sometimes they appear as female breasts, suggesting fertility and nourishment.

Schechter admits to seeing significance in what she creates long before she can identify what she actually sees. Through communication with others and private consideration — whether emotional or cerebral — she comes to grips with her work's expressive virtue.

She is an artist of intuition. Her work



reflects human feeling, the cyclical rhythms in nature, and the power of forms, especially those which deviate from symmetry. Her installation piece reflects her penchant for images which convey grace without balance. The tilted figure rests capriciously on the floor, surrounded by spirited vegetation forms which hang on, yet away from the wall, allowing shadows to form under the lights.

Schechter is a mystical seer. She focuses not on the rightness of line and mass, but on the magical forces that inspire her. She focuses not on the utilitarian and the literal, but on the innate and the figurative. On display for the first time are the artist's drawings, revealing a freedom of expression often associated with Surrealists. Human heads become triangles; pink, a female color, dominates the frame and overcomes the strength of the black ink lines; and strange, ambiguous shapes remain cliff-hangers.

Ultimately, Schechter is a sculptor. She creates forms which to the pedestrian eye resemble chairs, but which to the artist are the human body, representing an extension of the human form. *Figure 1*, composed of wood, rice paper, ink and stone, suggests a self-portrait: the sculpture with its flat, black painted stones glued upon the surface of the painted rice paper becomes a metaphor for the artist, who talks lovingly of walking the beaches of Lake Michigan and picking up stones. Her work slides from the natural to the man-made world, from natural pebbles to imitation pearls and fake diamonds, from wood bases to painted and lacquered forms that belie the natural surface of the wood, from the human body to headless structural

forms. Schechter's works attest to man's need to relate to the natural world through representation.

**Judith Weiner** is an instructor in the humanities department at Lawrence Institute of Technology.

## Salt Fired Clay

Pewabic Pottery Sept 21-Oct 15/84  
Detroit

In an about-face from previous years, this year Pewabic's gallery has really come through with remarkable exhibitions: John and Suzanne Stephenson's twenty-year retrospective showed their range and command of clay, while *New Vistas in Clay* captured the progressive energy and directions happening with young clay artists today. Shows like these are hard acts to follow; *Salt Fired Clay*, featuring works by Robert Diebboll, Tom Greenland, and Robert Winokur, is their equal.

*Salt Fired Clay* was the last in a series of exhibitions centered on a particular firing process. During the firing, salt (usually rock salt) is introduced into the kiln atmosphere at temperatures around 2350°F. The salt instantly vaporizes and collects onto the clay surface to form a pebbled, glass-like surface.

In the United States salt fired clay is rooted primarily in early nineteenth century mountain jug wares produced in the Kentucky and Carolina areas. Diebboll's works are directly influenced by this mountain ware tradition. His forms are simple, cylindrical covered jars with slip-drawn animals and scenes on the surface wall. The direct, naive

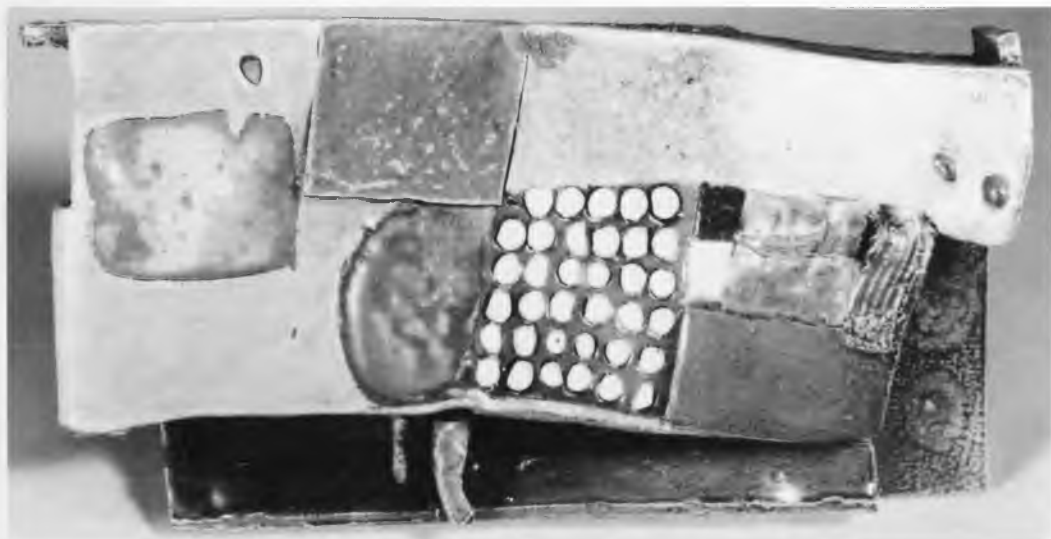
quality of these works allows the viewer to focus on the artist's loose and easy slip drawing. Diebboll's works all have subtle flashing patterns which enhance the forms greatly.

Greenland's works — bowls, cups, teapots, and baskets — are also traditional and functional. All are finely executed, yet I found myself strongly attracted to only a few pieces which were soaked in salt water and fired in a conventional stoneware kiln. This alteration of the traditional salt process gave Greenland's porcelain surfaces brilliant orange hues with subtle flashing. In contrast to the rigid forms and glazing, this gave the pots a little spontaneous life.

Winokur has long been a heavyweight in clay circles. He has made salt "his thing." A few pieces included in this show consist of stacked cylinders of contrasting diameters with slip work bleeding through their incised borders. These forms still are exciting to see, yet in his new direction he has lost all the energy. Everything is lacking: the intriguing form isn't there, nor is the color or the askewed stacking of the forms. All that remains in the small wall constructions is work done in clay out of habit.

This show suffered from one serious point right at its inception. At present within ceramics, salt firing just isn't "cookin'." Few people use the technique, due to its high cost, pollution, and color limitations. There is simply so much going on today in new techniques, why pick salt out of a dark corner? The show was good, but looked pale in light of what's going on elsewhere in ceramics today.

**Tom Phardel** is an Ann Arbor ceramicist.



Robert Winokur, *Sturtevant Ranch; Aerial View*

Wesley Merritt, *Bear*Nanette Carter at *g. r. n'namdi gallery*

## Wesley Merritt

Mt. Pleasant

Wesley Merritt has a dream.

Two miles northeast of Shepard and eight miles west of Mt. Pleasant on South Wise Road, Wesley Merritt and his wife live in a trailer surrounded by his small collection of wood carvings. The carvings are folk in character, primitive in look, and kitsch in subject. With them Wesley wants to build an outdoor sculpture park, "a place where children can come and see what the West was like. We're losing that and there's no place for children to go around here."

With no formal art education Wesley had an interest in painting, but he gave it up twenty-five years ago after making his first wood carving. Wood carving was what he wanted to do. The size of his sculptures ranges from four- to five-inch painted birds on sticks to five-foot tall wooden Indians and totem poles and a six-foot pole with climbing bear cubs. The sculpture is sometimes stained, but more often painted with an eye for the bright and the decorative.

The carvings are not without humor and even a bit of menace. On a chuck wagon at the center of the park is a cartoon-like hare, hanging from its feet on a nail, an oversized wooden rifle leaning against it. The cubs climbing a pole look quaint enough, but the red paint splattered on the pole below them stops the impulse to emit an "aww" or a "how cute."

As a definition of kitsch Milan Kundera states in his novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (Harper & Row, 1984), "Kitsch is a German word born in the middle of the sentimental nineteenth century, and from German it entered all Western languages. Repeated

use, however, has obliterated its original metaphysical meaning: Kitsch is the absolute denial of shit, in both the literal and the figurative senses of the word; kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence."

Wesley's sculpture is more folk and primitive than kitsch. It is much too primitive for such purveyors of kitsch as Walt Disney or Hanna-Barbera. There is too much blood, the expressions are often too unsettling, the features are not symmetrical and homogenized. The pieces are too individual and expressive to be kitsch, even though the subject matter — the Wild West — is certainly a kitsch approved one.

Wesley Merritt is concerned that the West isn't just lost, but is being forgotten. He wants to build an outdoor wood sculpture park where kids can see his vision.

The success of Wesley's park is not underwritten, nor is it pre-ordained. Whether it will happen or not depends on his ambition and energy alone. His support system consists of himself, not an uncommon situation for the artist today. He is trying to hang on to his carvings, but the temptation to sell them is there. On occasion he has felt forced to sell larger works to help tide things over.

The sculpture park is far from completion, as envisioned, although people are welcome to walk through and see the pieces that are there. But even if you don't see the work until the park opens, don't worry. You may run across Wesley Merritt driving his homemade camper in a parade in the area. With a carved hillbilly on top of the cab, a wooden bear cub bolted to the hood, and multi-colored birds here and there, the camper is invited to quite a few local

parades. And, oh yes, there is a big black carved spider in there, too.

John Dempsey is a painter who lives in Midland.

## Nanette Carter

*g. r. n'namdi gallery Oct 19-Nov 24/84*  
Detroit

Nanette Carter's show of collages at the *g. r. n'namdi gallery* is the occasion of a double premiere — her first Detroit area showing and the *g. r. n'namdi gallery's* inaugural exhibition.

Carter's collages are clear and uncluttered pieces, carefully composed of few basic elements. Neon squiggles and curves, dark slashes and somber shapes are either used to shape and contain smooth dappled surfaces, or are superimposed onto these surfaces. Her careful resolutions of design and compositional issues give her pieces a calm intensity. Concern with balance and symmetry, particularly evident in pieces of three and four segments, emphasizes the formal aspect of her approach; a formality that is at once countered and heightened by the unexpected waves and curves of color. A few works have a tentative, self-conscious feel to them, but in general the pieces — especially the single woodcut exhibited — are confident, fully developed statements. Texture is one of Carter's concerns. Delicate scoring and shallow cutouts are subtle elements of several pieces, and in her woodcut this fascination with texture becomes a compelling compositional element. One hopes that she will continue to explore and develop this aspect of her approach in future works.

Carter, a young New York based artist, who has shown for several years in New

York City as well as in Buffalo and Chicago, was brought to George N'nambi's attention by collageist Romare Bearden.

N'nambi himself is pleased to introduce not only Nanette Carter but his new gallery to the Detroit art community. Located on the second floor of the grandly proportioned David Whitney Building, the gallery space is scaled to accommodate single-artist shows especially well. N'nambi, a partner in the former Jazzonia gallery, is particularly appreciative of this feature of his gallery, having been faced with the challenging necessity of mounting a series of group shows to fill Jazzonia's space. He is also enthusiastic about using the 4-story sky-lighted lobby of the David Whitney building to exhibit one or more of Chicago sculptor Matt Corbin's larger works when he shows at g.r. n'nambi next February.

Barbara Siwula is an interested observer of the Detroit area art scene.

## James Kirchner, Alvaro Jurado, Michel Comtois

Willis Gallery Oct/84  
Detroit

This show consisted of paintings by James Kirchner, constructions by Alvaro Jurado, and paintings and ceramics by Michel Comtois. The exhibition was refreshing because it was one group show in which the artists didn't have an obvious relation-

ship with one another; forced theme shows can be tiresome. The work presented was strong when viewed as part of each respective group, but upon closer inspection a lot of the works didn't have enough substance to hold up individually.


James Kirchner's paintings of interiors and landscape are rendered in a uniformly dark tonality. Several of his pictures operate well on different levels, having both an interesting viewpoint and a richness of surface. With paintings this dark, obvious comparisons can be drawn: Ad Reinhardt's crosses, Whistler's nocturnes, or the strange moody light in Vermeer or De la Tour. But the majority of the works Kirchner showed failed because they just didn't go far enough. In these pictures the darkness becomes a gimmick, masking the subjects and whatever subtlety that might be there. Getting closer does no good; as the surfaces are approached the details disappear into a flat blue-blackness. Kirchner basically has a good idea and is a competent painter. He should emphasize the *film noir* aspect of his work, but not so much that it obliterates the content.

Alvaro Jurado showed constructions of totally found objects arranged in various configurations. On the surface they seem to be direct descendants of the Cass Corridor. In reality they are closer to Joseph Cornell and Judy Pfaff. These pieces look good, but how can you go wrong when using components

that already have a basic appeal? These sculptures work in the same way that a well designed room works. I was looking for something more; some evidence of the individuality of the artist, outside of a flair for arranging. This was found in a piece called *Aardvark*, a somewhat phallic wall piece that transcended its component parts to become a satisfying statement. Jurado's best works are those that are smaller in scale and that exhibit a playfulness and ingenuousness of spirit.

Michel Comtois showed both paintings and ceramics. At this point in his career the ceramics are definitely much stronger. His paintings are grandchildren of Pollock, but without the grandeur. They may have stories to tell, but they are difficult to decipher. In a group, the larger canvases are imposing presences; individually, they become mere attempts to catalog the natural fluidity of enamel paint. In one painting, though, this controlled chaos reaches an equilibrium that makes it work. In *Nothing Is Ever Black and White* Comtois seems to have found a key. It is smaller than the rest, more modest. He also has a series of very small pictures that combine the painted surface with small sculptural elements; these have an intimacy that allows the viewer easier access. Mr. Comtois' forte seems to be in the smaller scale. Larger doesn't necessarily mean better.

Gilda Snowden, a painter, lives and works in Detroit.



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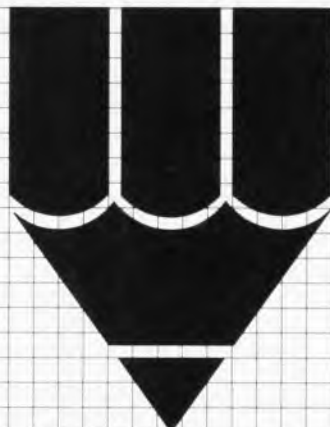
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\$5,500.00 or more from the game and sales of Mark Schwing designed T-shirts and that's good!

Bubba said he's puttin' his money on the collectors next year and rubbed in the fact that they've never lost. That's when we got started up again. "Tweeners, Texas Leaguers, Seein' Eye Singles, it was just luck," I said, "and what's more, next year, I'm puttin' my dough on a real winner, Detroit Focus." And the argument has been going on ever since.

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### Jackie Feigenson

On September 20, 1984, Jacqueline Feigenson died. Life changed for me and it was my personal loss I thought of first.

It wasn't until several days later as I passed a tiny, two car funeral procession heading in the opposite direction and thought of Jackie's funeral again, crowded with people who loved and admired her, that I realized that Jackie affected the lives of many people, not only close friends, but countless others. I felt certain that people who had never even met Jackie would feel the loss. People who knew her well will be different without her here, and everyone who knows a person who knew Jackie will feel the difference too. It's an effect analogous to removing the cornerstone from a building; the entire building topples, not just the adjacent stones.

It is a great feeling to have known someone special like Jackie, who could effect change and direct a course through history. Jackie is part of the reason why people are able to under-

stand and appreciate tough, intelligent Detroit art. She created the Feigenson Gallery out of a need to make a place as great as the work she wanted to show. She did. Jackie wanted people to understand the importance of art by Detroit artists. She knew it was necessary for artists to have a place to show their work, and she cared about helping artists see their way through all the baloney that has nothing to do with making art but everything to do with making a living and building a future. Jackie also introduced emerging artists outside Detroit to Detroiters. Every show had a point.

Now the question is, what will happen to the Feigenson Gallery? The final decision about the gallery's future has not yet been made. In the meantime, the gallery will remain open. Jackie left us the future as her legacy.

Mary Preston

### Peter Halsey

A person's mark on the world is sometimes the impressions he leaves with those people whose lives he touches. Peter Halsey's tragic passing struck a cord in all of us who knew him through Detroit Focus. Peter was an eager participant when the second floor gallery was in its infancy, and generously contributed his time and his work. When the Detroit Focus Quarterly was founded, Peter was there with solid input and I feel that without his hard work the Quarterly would have never gotten off the ground. He brought his business acumen to the advertising sales, and through his diligence the magazine quickly attained the financial stability necessary for its survival. But what touched me most about this man was his persevering spirit even at times when personal difficulties threatened to engulf him. He always had a smile, an enthusiastic air, and was respectful to all who knew him. He was a very good man and will be sorely missed.

Peter J. Manshot

**Detroit Focus**  
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