

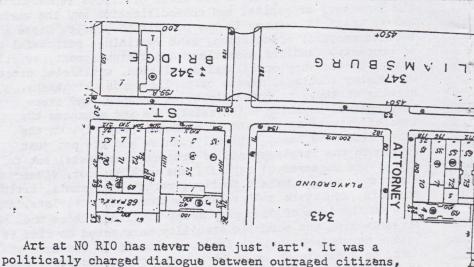
The history of ABC NO RIO has consistently been a representitive microcosm of the larger real estate war being fought across the country during this same period. The combatants consist, on one side, of forces representing the interests of capital and commodification and the various guises which it assumes in the pursuit of profit. These guises include property speculation, bank redlining, purposeful neglegt of property, landlord absentiesm and disinvestment, eviction, arson, unneccesary or illegal demolition, artificial creation of housing shortage, misuse of public funds, kickbacks, hireing of thugs to forceibly evict tenants, and overdevelopment, anything which reinforces and enhances the idea of private as opposed to communal property. On the other side have been, typically, those who are not just victim to the infringements of property interests, but to all of the excesses of capital, the working poor, ethnic minoritys, single parent familys, recent immigrants, artists, students, squatters and grassroots community activists, anyone to whom the idea of community means anything, those who, their lives lacking any economic stability have tried to find it in the psychogeographical landscape itself in the form of what, to a developer, must be a very strange notion - that of the 'nieghborhood' and all of its attending factors such as cooperation, ethnic or class identity, sharing of resources and information, fostering of creativity, fixing the old instead of building anew, and self reliance.

Of coarse, as diverse as the backgrounds of the individual artists were, and as many different, sometimes conflicting ideas as to what, if anything, can be conveyed through art, specifically activist oriented, content over form art, some things were clear. By 1979, artists looking for affordable live/work space had, along with the original working class residents, been pushed out of formerly affordable nieghborhoods. Real estate developers and greedy gallery owners whad seen to that. There was a growing sense that artists were being used by real estate interests as gentrification shock troops in city nieghborhoods which traditiomally had been poor and ethnic. It was clear to everyone that the notion of real estate as investment, as a commodity to be bought, traded or, in the case of many property owners owing back taxes - burnt down to collect the insurance money, rather than as a structural landscape within which a community is fostered, where real, flesh and blood individuals and familys pursued their real, flesh and blood dreams, that this notion was so endemic to the entire structure within which it operated as to be its salient, dehumanizing characteristic, contrary to any sustainable, dignity allowing construct of the social contract.

MOTNATE

1 52 85.: 1':

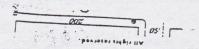
PE



S COMMUNITY SCHOOL S 20,1002

There was also a dissatisfaction with the current pre-eminance of abstract minimalist art. While ever larger segments of the population were becoming economically and politically disenfranchised; nieghborhoods were burning down; the social agenda of the 'Great Society', limited as it may have been, was reduced to political lip service and posturing; and rascism seemed to be an entrenched governmental policy; - many artists were still painting sterile, empty minimalist white cubes seemingly in the hopes of having them purchased and placed above the potted palms in some corporate lobby. Some had viewed the burgeoning alternative space scene as the antidote to this trend, but they only further deliniated the line between artist/ spectator/curator by their warehousing of artists and their emphasis on single issue shows.

and the event which led directly to its founding set the pace, the spirit, for all that would follow.

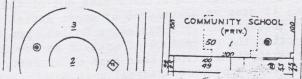


344

64

5

The Real Estate show was a collaborative installation that, in a way, was the next logical step in a series of public exhibitions that had been mounted by the member artists of Collab. Inc., a loose affiliation of multi-media artists who had banded together to pool resources and funding. Since governmental agencies granting funds to artists would do so only to incorporated entities -read 'galleries' - and tended to ignore the lone, unknown artist who may not be producing works with a specific commercial audience -again, read 'galleries'- in mind, several of these artists decided to band together, incorporate for the purpose of obtaining funds, and subvert the gallery process altogether and take their art directly to the streets, to the people for whom their usually subversive images and ideas were intended in the first place. Theirs was a participatory sensibility bent on erasing the barriers between the viewer and the process, so that the viewer became an equal participant in the artistic transaction.



It was only natural that the next step would be to illegaly occupy a space to highlight the soaring rents of Manhattan, while the city was warehousing so much of its housing stock in the form of abandoned properties which simply sat, and sat, becoming shooting galleries and firetraps, awaiting market 're-vitalization' or for a nod from housing agencies and developers to tear them down in order to make way for the monolithic filing cabinets for the city's poor in the form of monstrous housing projects. At the same time, the show was concieved as an insurrectionary act which would reach out d directly to those usually ignored by the mainstream art world. It was a gesture of solidarity with those who suffered most from the remote, racist profit hungry decision -making machine that had allowed these neighborhoods to deteriorate in the first place.

200

23 G

4 0

20 2

2.5

185

22 2

5

235

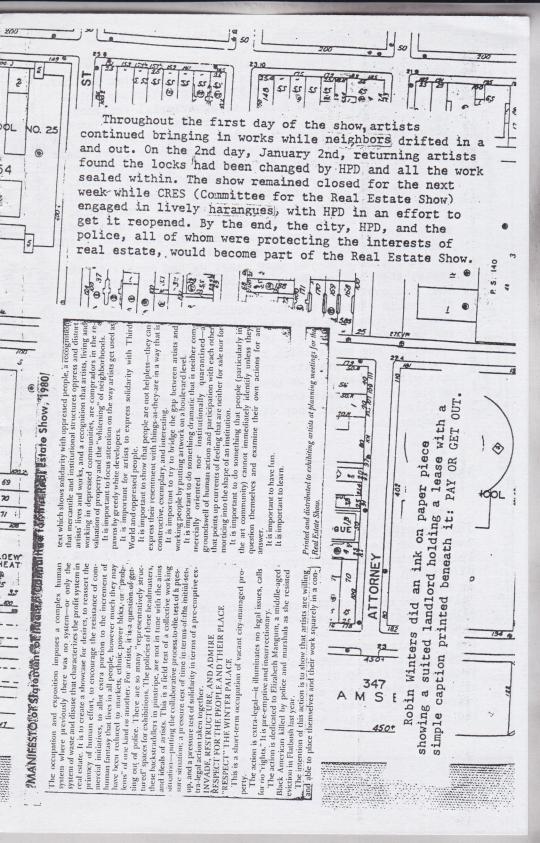
8

Their art could be characterized by the rejection of formal considerations of the gallery world in favor of assemblages of materials drawn from the subject matter itself, which created a gritty syntax about life under occupation. The use of abandoned buildings, parking lots, converted lofts, subway cars, bridges, scrap metal, cracked toilets, pigeons and roaches and spray paint, it all coalesced into an act of reclaimation of the objects which formed the psychological context of tenement life, it was a rebellion by those who felt themselves to be presented with only two choices: be commodified or discarded. It was the art of rhetoric with attitude which held a lot in common with the reclaiming of a perjorative epithet to denote self empowerment. As Leanard Abrams of the East Village Eye, who would later become involved with NO RIO has said of that time, "We were more interested in breaking out of the art world than boring into it."

Although many of the artists came out of the Collab. milleau, it drew an assortment of other artists as well and was not, stricktly speaking, a Collab. project. Highlighting the dependence of artists on funding and the contradictions within this type of mindset, even within a self proclaimed radical anti commercial group of artists, many of Collabs members declined to participate in the Real Estate Show due to the illegality of squatting a city owned building. They feared the attention of police as well as losing their funding.

80

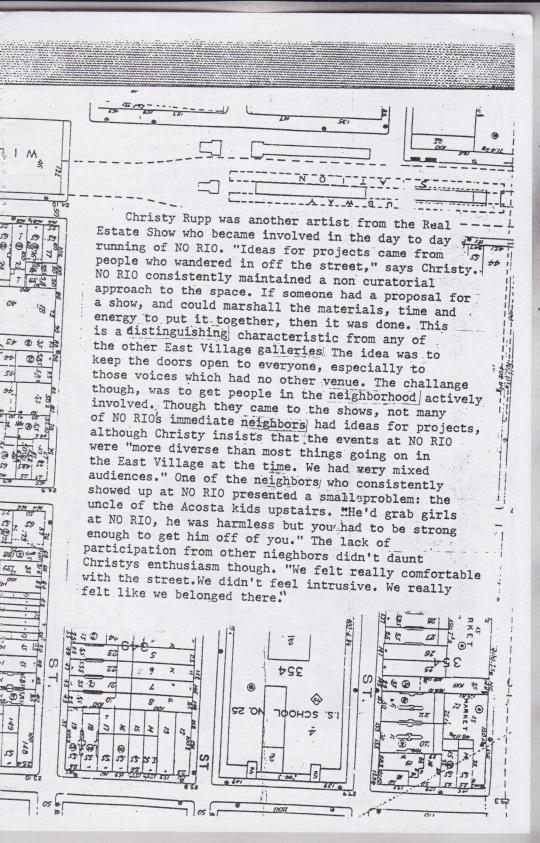
What they didn't realize at the time was that the building they chose for their boulevard pulpit was a cornerstone in a massive new development project which would encompass several blocks along Delancey St. The city offices of H.P.D. (Housing Preservation and Development, which later activists would redubb Housing Prevention and Destruction) became alarmed, possibly believing that the artists knew more than they actually did and that they represented an organized political force within the nieghborhood.

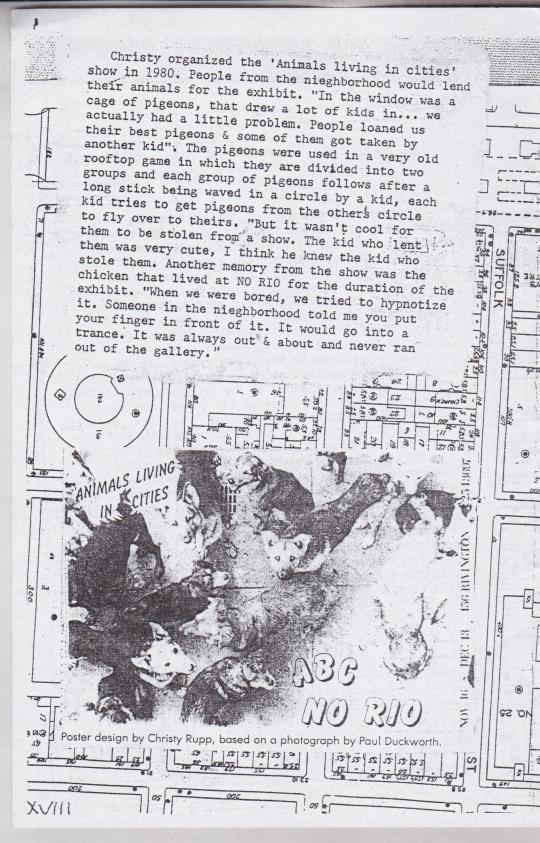


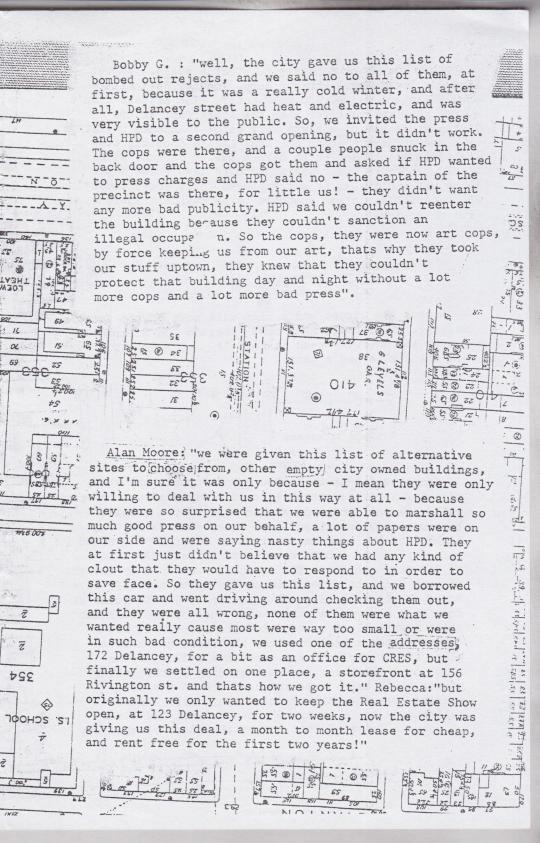
1 0 50 1 For the first week the talks seemed to be going nowhere, with HPD giving first one answer, then another. (An antecedent to future NO RIO - HPD relations which would be a decade and a half of adversarial acrimony.) On January 11th, all of the artwork was roughly jammed into cartons and taken to a city storage area. When the artists were finally given permission to retrieve their works a few days later, they found that some of it was irretrievably lost or damaged. Bobby Grerecalls that, "we came back and found our building padlocked and all our work locked inside, we called a press conference, a lot of media came and the city was really surprised, and so the city invited us to a meeting late that night -this was the first of several meetings, they were a little intimidated you know cause we had access to the press, they had wanted to be able to report back that they had everything under control, but, well, the show did remain closed, but they couldn't make us just go away, you know, so later we all had a couple drinks and went down to the HPD offices, and we wanted to videotape the whole thing but they said no way, so I said hey, (in private, to the others) if we concede this video, what are we gonna get back? So thats what

we did and they said theyd give us another space to

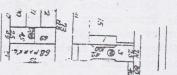
There didn't seem to really be any specific reason for the city's insistence on the removal from 123 Delancey, except for the issue of authority and of playing by the rules. Which CRES had clearly broke. Yet, what was the difference if the Real Estate Show went on at 123 Delancey or any other place? The 'other place' would be one 'given' to the artists rather than one taken, and to a hierarchically obsessed bureacracy this would seem to make all the difference, to them, it was even logical. One can only wonder at the irony, in light of later developments, that HPD was directly responsible for the founding of ABC NO RIO! Imagine, if they had just let the artists finish their show and pack up by January 22, 1980, years of legal fees, public demonstrations, headaches and bad press could have been avoided on the part of HPD!



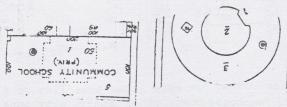




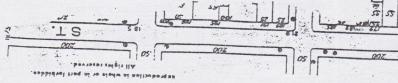
"There was never a desire to start a space. It just happened," remembers Christy Rupp, another Real Estate Show organizer and NO RIO co-founder. "The artists didn't expect the city to offer them the storefront at 156 Rivington, a lot of artists were using abandoned buildings, what was different about the Real Estate Show was that the artists intended it to have a public aspect. With NO RIO, suddenly there was a place to have shows where there was no hassle, it was supposed to be eco-friendly and accessible, it was supposed to be magical. There were no rules".



Across the street was a sign with most of the letters missing, what should have read 'Abogado Con Notario' - Lawyer and Notary - read instead AB C NO RIO - now their home had a name.



The basement at that time was an upholstery shop, with its seperate entrance leading downstairs, the brick walls one sees today on either side of the outside basement door were then large glass windows letting light into the basement. Very soon after NO RIO moved in upstairs the upholsterer moved out and HPD told NO RIO they could use that space as well. "They thought we were gonna be quiet down on Rivington street," says Bobby, "but, well, I guess we weren't, and to quiet us down they threw us another bone - use of the basement which eventually I moved into." The storefront had I formerly been a beauty salon, the front had a large glass window, no heat and pervasive ceiling leaks which over the years became legendary as the gallery pieces would have to be arranged around the water running from the ceiling which could fill a fifty gallon drum in 24 hours. The new tenants had plenty of work in front of them to get the place cleaned up.





"ANIMAL SHOW" by Susannah Sedgewick, 45 THE CO.

## East Village Eye, 1980

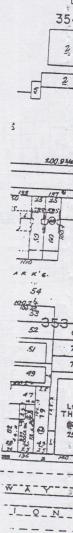
In an urban situation it may appear hard to learn things about animals because we feel so alienated from them. Other than our relatively domesticated dogs or cats, we have only the "phobic" city animals to consider. Nevertheless, these city animals which norant disposal of garbage. Rats are cyclical; when there is we prefer to ignore are all around us, were here before us and most likely will remain long after we are gone. Although we may cringe at the thought of a ratio of ten rats to one city dweller, their abundance is directly related to our proclivity for the ignothing for them to eat they stop breeding. As long as we provide them with refuse they will revel

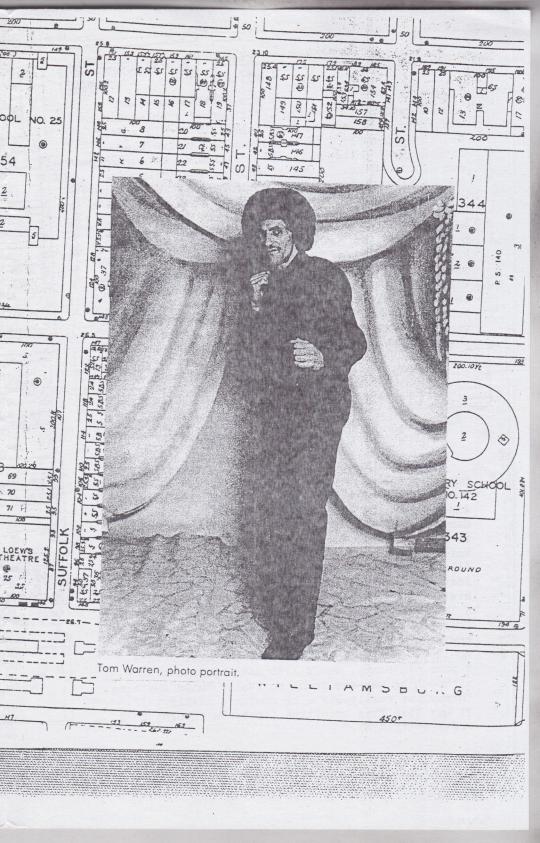
cousins, city pigeons are carriers of disease because they Our view of the pigeon is similar. Unlike their country scavenge for survival in city filth. Seagulls, scavengers as well, have also discovered the immediate joys of garbage dumps. According to a recent project by Peter Fend and Christy Rupp, seagulls flocking about the Jamaica Bay garbage dump have inthat the Federal Aviation Agency believes the airport should be terfered with so many airplanes taking off and landing at J.F.K. closed until the hazard is eliminated.

systematic depradation of nature. The group show at ABC No ting that there should arise a unified appeal by artists against the Nature was the original inspirer of art, and so now it is only fit-

Rio entitled "Animals Living in Cities" has brought together artists whose collective theme involves city animals, their role and their plight in urban society. The show was organized by Christy Rupp, founder of City Wildlife Projects, in an attempt to art of this nature can create a public awareness, so we rid promote understanding of our cities' ecosystems. Says Rupp: "Artist can do things visually that others do verbally, and I think ourselves of the concept of letting someone else do the job for us." The show reaffirms a feeling for the preservation of nature and the environment. It is a need for social change dramatically expressed in artistic forms.

Rupp, who studied animal behavior, started focussing on the problems of city animals about three years ago. Aside from recruiting the artists and their work, she also procured an interesting collection of urban animals. The gallery window was converted into a large cage wherein feathered birds attracted local passersby who wandered in with the hope of purchasing a the show included several plaster rats, pigeons and a papier pet. There were plump sassy squabs found in a park, several oigeons and a clucking motherly hen purchased in a city poultry farm. The show also included a house full of cockroaches conparently bleeding from sharp cans is the number one cause of tributed by the Museum of Natural History, a very genteel lookand an understandably frustrated cat. Rupp's contributions to ing rat, a mouse, a "New Wave" hamster (he had sunglasses), mache seagull whose talon was entangled in a beer can. Apdeath among city gulls.



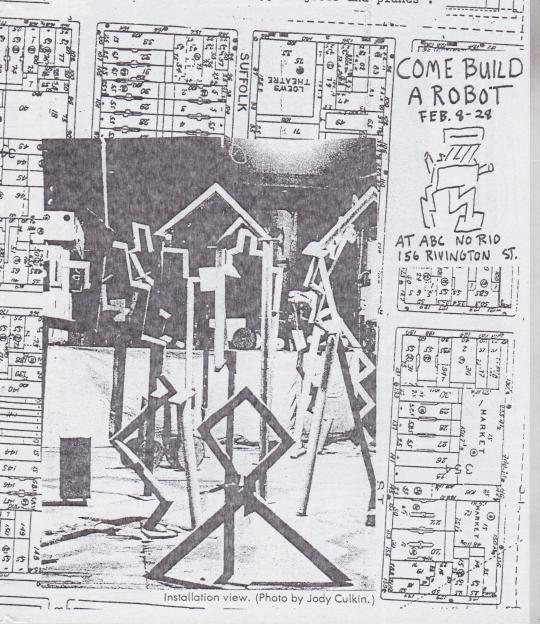


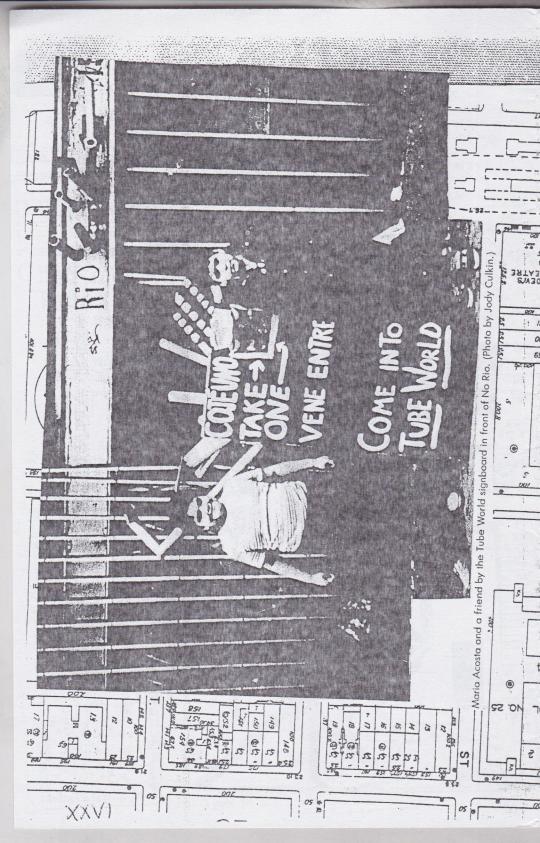
Artist Jody Culkin remembers putting together a show called 'Tube World'. "It seemed problematic that the community wasn't involved in NO RIO". Jody Culkin's plan for Tube World was to involve the nieghborhood children in the creation of an environment out of cardboard. "I was already making sculptures out of cardboard and glue," Jody recalls. Using gard 378 cardboard tubes as a medium stemmed from both Jody's use of cardboard and the availability of tubes to be found on the street. "Christy helped me go pick ap up the tubes. We had access to a vehicle & we picked them off the street. Crosby street had a lot." From there, Jody visited schools both in the nieghborhood & further away, presenting the idea for'Tube World' and giving flyers to the students there. At the schools further from the neighborhood, the teachers were somewhat skeptical, asking, "would you want your kids in that neighborhood?" One woman, who was working as an artist in public schools, brought different groups of students 30 each time she visited. "Not a lot of kids came off 20 the street. The neighborhood was a lot more dangerous. There weren't a lot of kids wandering around." Parents dropped their kids off at 'Tube World' because they considered NO RIO safe. "The

One woman, who was working as an artist in public schools, brought different groups of students each time she visited. "Not a lot of kids came off the street. The neighborhood was a lot more dangerous. There weren't a lot of kids wandering around." Parents dropped their kids off at 'Tube World' because they considered NO RIO safe. "The Acosta kids seemed to wander down at all hours," Jody recalls. "Maria and her two brothers came every day. A little boy who was Maria's buddy came a lot too." Maria's 9-year-old sister would give Jody Spanish lessons while Jody was doing gallery hours. "She'd write things down & think of what would be important to say". The youngest Acosta, 2 year old Manny, would also make his appearance, although he was too young to really build anything. "Manny was really big & he couldn't really talk. It was like this primitive force. We thought he'd break everything."

7-year-old Maria was the most actively involved with 'Tube World'. "She wasn't just my assistant, she was my partner," Jody remembers. "She'd come in and say, "okay, we have a lot to do today, the floor is dirty, I'm gonna sweep it up". "Kids would puthes together things that looked like toys." Raymond made an airplane out of a huge cardboard box. One of Maria's many creations was a cardboard camera with a picture sticking out of it, as if it were a polaroid. "There were a lot of missle-type objects and planes".







There were also weekly poetry and performance events. A flyer from that time announces readings by Kathy Acker, Bob Holman, Amiri Baraka, Richard Hell, Bimbo Rivas, Tuli Kupferberg, Jorges Brandon and Keith Haring among others. Occasionally the NO RIO Cardboard Air Band would perform, each member of the band 'playing' cardboard cut-outs of instruments, while miming songs played on a tape deck. Much of the formatting for events that occured during that time are still used today, such as the opening & closing party for visual art exhibitions, the open door exhibition policy and the weekend poetry & spoken word readings. By the end of NO RIO's 3rd year though, operations had expanded beyond the energies of Alan, Becky and Bobby. There were more operating expenses to be met, funding had begun to come in but the writing of grant proposals was a lengthy, daily task. Keeping the building in operating condition, fixing leaks and toilets, getting wood for the wood burning stove for heat in winter, accounting for the gallery's activities on paper to the city and to various funding agencies - seemed to swallow all of their time leaving little for anything else. "We all started to feel more like administers than artists", says Rebecca, "there just wasn't any time left to pursue our art."

34

11 11 27 12 23 33 35

A new era was begining in NO RIOs history. The next installment in this series will continue to explore the events and contradictions of ABC NO RIO.

PLAYGROUND 1

NEXT ISSUE: DECADENT PERFORMANCE ERA. OUT: AVG. 3 RD

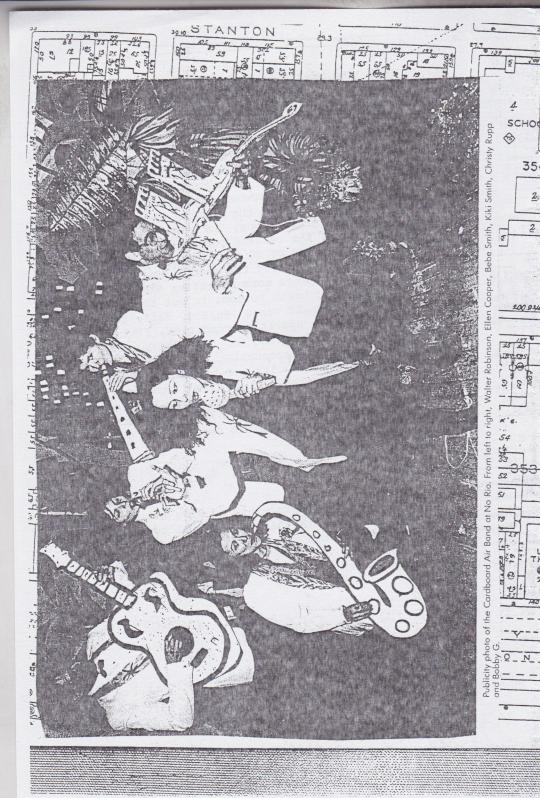
ERA. OVT: AVG. 3RD

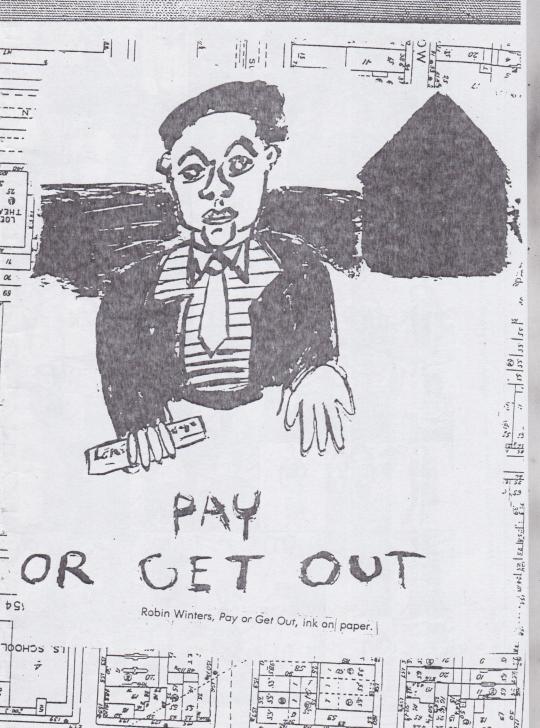
AMSBURG | | | 300 | 0 | VIKKI LAW

Okra P. Dingle

DICTATED BY COOKIE PUSS







Tom Warren, photo portraits. Includes photos of artists, neighborhood people, and children with their parents on Halloween.