

07

EXHIBITION

557,087

LOCATION

Seattle Art
Museum
Pavilion and
surrounding area

DATE

5 September–
5 October 1969

scale public exhibition to focus on conceptualist art after the population of its host city of Seattle recorded in 1960 evoked a democratic notion of art as something to be shared. When the exhibition traveled across the Canadian border to Toronto in a slightly different form, its title was the approximate population of Seattle as recorded by the Contemporary Art Council of the Seattle Art Museum. The 1962 World's Fair Pavilion and extended to a 50-mile radius, it was not only one painter and works ranging from Bill Bollinger's "The Art of Art" that Bert Barry knew but was not thinking of on 15 June 1969 at the time of the challenge to its populist intentions. As critic Peter Schjerve produced "a bump in the phenomenology of art."

A stack of ninety-five 4 x 6-inch index cards arranged randomly, each with an essay and sixty-four cards contributed by the artists. The instructions for creating their pieces, or descriptions of their work by others. The genre of instruction work was an important part of the work of Fluxus artists and flowering internationally in the late 1960s. It could be little money for shipping and for artist travel, Lippard thought that she could make on site with the help of volunteers. The work was made of works that could be displayed inexpensively, art-by-art, a commercial art system that highlighted the precious object. The work was an anti-elitist cultural politics, fitting well with her egalitarian

instruction works is indeterminacy, allowing works to be made in a way that critical details were sometimes unspecified, as when Carl Holman's piece should be made from finished lumber and not raw. And exigencies of circumstance often prompted loose interpretations of instructions because Lippard and her co-workers had a small budget and in a short time. The open nature of art-by-art character, thus shared creative responsibility beyond the boundaries of artistic roles.

It was a central feature of the time. Lippard began as an art curator, and in 1966 she curated the important Post-Modernist Abstraction. But she viewed her curatorial work as a part of her own practice. Artists of her generation engaged in critical writing as part of their work. When Plagens reviewed "557,087," he suggested that Lippard was using her artists as her material, a charge that would be marshaled against her. In retrospect she thought the remark appropriate to her role as a dealer could be as artistically innovative as an artist. In the activities of conceptual art impresario Seth Siegelaub, the work "557,087" and "955,000." Siegelaub shipped to the artists a large selection of artists' books as well as his own. The artists themselves functioned as exhibitions (Lippard's stack of books in this way). After curating two more numbers shows—"c.7,500" in 1971 and "c.7,500" at seven sites in 1973–74—Lippard's archive of the period, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of Art, 1969–1972* (1973). She considered this book to be her most

"557,087" was the first large-scale public exhibition to focus on conceptualist art practices. By naming her show after the population of its host city of Seattle recorded in the census of 1960, Lucy R. Lippard evoked a democratic notion of art as something to be shared by a broad public. When the exhibition traveled across the Canadian border to Vancouver, where it took a slightly different form, its title was the approximate population of that city: "955,000." Sponsored by the Contemporary Art Council of the Seattle Art Museum, it was centered in the 1962 World's Fair Pavilion and extended to a 50-mile radius around the city. But with only one painter and works ranging from Bill Bollinger's floating log to everything Robert Barry knew but was not thinking of on 15 June 1969 at 1:36 p.m., its esoteric nature was a challenge to its populist intentions. As critic Peter Plagens wrote, the exhibition produced "a bump in the phenomenology of art."

The catalog was a stack of ninety-five 4 x 6-inch index cards arranged randomly, including twenty for Lippard's essay and sixty-four cards contributed by the artists. Many of the artists' cards gave instructions for creating their pieces, or descriptions of things that could be realized by others. The genre of instruction work was an important conceptualist form, developed by Fluxus artists and flowering internationally in the late 1960s. Knowing that there would be little money for shipping and for artist travel, Lippard solicited proposals for works that she could make on site with the help of volunteers. Because the process yielded works that could be displayed inexpensively, art-by-instruction sat outside a commercial art system that highlighted the precious object. This resonated with Lippard's anti-elitist cultural politics, fitting well with her egalitarian aspirations for "557,087."

A central feature of instruction works is indeterminacy, allowing works to be realized in different ways. Critical details were sometimes unspecified, as when Carl Andre neglected to state that his piece should be made from finished lumber and Lippard used rough logs instead. And exigencies of circumstance often prompted loose interpretations or departure from instructions because Lippard and her co-workers constructed many works with little budget and in a short time. The open nature of art-by-instruction, and its collaborative character, thus shared creative responsibility beyond the artist and furthered the blurring of artistic roles.

This mixing of roles was a central feature of the time. Lippard began as an art critic living in a community of artists, and in 1966 she curated the important Post-Minimalist exhibition "Eccentric Abstraction." But she viewed her curatorial work as a variety of criticism, just as the artists of her generation engaged in critical writing as part of their artistic practice. When Plagens reviewed "557,087," he suggested that Lippard operated as an artist using other artists as her material, a charge that would be marshaled regularly against future curators. In retrospect she thought the remark appropriate to her work at this time when, say, a dealer could be as artistically innovative as an artist.

Such was the case with the activities of conceptual art impresario Seth Siegelaub, who assisted Lippard with both "557,087" and "955,000." Siegelaub shipped to the World's Fair Pavilion bookshop a large selection of artists' books as well as his own publications—catalogs that themselves functioned as exhibitions (Lippard's stack of index cards can also be seen in this way). After curating two more numbers shows—"2,972,453" in Buenos Aires in 1971 and "c.7,500" at seven sites in 1973–74—Lippard published a comprehensive archive of the period, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (1973). She considered this book to be her most successful curatorial project.

ROBERT MORRIS born 1931 lives New York City

Stand 10' from the wall. Holding the weapon at waist level, fire both barrels of a 12 gauge shotgun at the wall. Use heavy shot in the shells. Leave it - i.e., whatever falls on the floor, etc.

Photograph the above, make an 8" x 10" blowup in black and white. When the show travels to the next city, mount this photo on the wall at waist level and repeat the firing of the shotgun as described above. Photograph this (the wall, what remains of the photo) and enlarge to a 12" x 14" black and white.

If this piece were repeated in other locations, the photograph would be shot at, re-photographed and the size increased each time.

DEDICATED TO LAWRENCE WEINER WHO FIRED THE SHOT HEARD ROUND THE WORLD.

vito Acconci; 102 Christopher St., NYC; b. Jan. 24, 1940

untitled; 28"x34"; materials: calendar, postcards; date: exhibition dates

A postcard sent, for the duration of the exhibition, at the same time each day, from the same mailbox in New York City, to the exhibition site; the postcard, when received placed on a calendar, on the date-rectangle of the day it is received.

1. Performing; forming; transforming. 2. Day by day; from day to day; the other day. 3. End of an action; an action without an end. 4. "Place" (specific locality; an indeterminate region or expanse). 5. "Post" (to mail; to station in a given place). 6. "Point" (a particular place; a particular narrowly limited step, stage, or degree in the condition or development of something; a run — as a cross-country run — made straight from one place to another; to cause to be turned in a particular direction or toward a particular thing). 7. "Points of view" (view of the sender; view of the sender).

RE: SEATTLE SHOW, SEPTEMBER 1969/

TERRITORIAL RESERVE #4 (1968)

FOR THE DURATION OF AN EXHIBITION A BOUNDARIED, UNMARKED, PRE-ALLOCATED SPACE OF 46,656 CUBIC INCHES IS TO REMAIN UNOCCUPIED.

MEL BOCHNER

B.D. 23 AUG '40

R.: NEW YORK CITY



ROBERT SMITHSON B. NY 1938
400 SQUARE SNAPSHOTS OF
SEATTLE HORIZONS—SHOULD
BE EMPTY, PLAIN, VACANT,
SURE, COMMON, ORDINARY
BLANK DULL LEVEL
BEACHES, UNOCCUPIED
UNINHABITED, DESERTED
FIELDS SCANTY LOTS
HOUSELESS TYPICAL
AVERAGE VOID ROADS
SHADY REMOTE LAKES
DISTANT TIMELESS SITES
—USE KODAK INSTAMATIC
804

N.Y.C. 1969

8 rows of 50
ganged on wall

PROTOTYPE SNAPSHOT ACTUAL SIZE

R. Barthelme, B. October 10, 1946, New York, N.Y.
Instead of making any art I bought this television set.

The RUBENS - ABS07W
Space Command® 600 Remote Control
Compact Giant-screen 23" Diag. Table Color TV. Vinyl clad
metal cabinet in grained Kashmir Walnut color. Zenith Titan 80
Handicrafted Chassis with exclusive Zenith Solid-State
Chromatic Brain Color Demodulator. New Zenith Color
Commander Control. Advanced Super Gold Video Guard Tuning
System. Sunshiner® Color TV Picture Tube. Zenith AFC—
Automatic Fine-tuning Control. VHF and UHF Spillover Panel.
Zenith Automatic VHF Touch Tuning Bars. 5" x 3" Twin-Cone
Speaker. Cabinet size: 21 1/4" H, 28 1/2" W, 15 1/2" D.



William Bollinger
born: 1939
lives in New York

Large log (to be selected in Seattle), floating
in a lake or bay.

(card by lrl not wb)

SEATTLE

a) SOL LEWITT

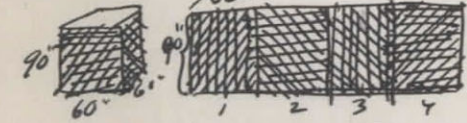
b) 9/9/28

c) NYC

d) Title: 3D unit with drawing on sides

Size: 60" x 60" x 90"

material: wood and masonite painted flat white

e) 

Plan for direction
of lines.

Bruce McLean
Born Glasgow 1944
Lives in London

Seattle Lakescape piece. June 23,
1969.

(3 landscapes of Lake Washington
by other artists, to be selected
in Seattle)

Below, photo of earlier floataway piece Easter 1967



←← Robert Morris's catalog card for "557,087," with instructions for creating *Shotgun Piece*.

← Vito Acconci's catalog card, with instructions for creating an untitled mail-art piece.

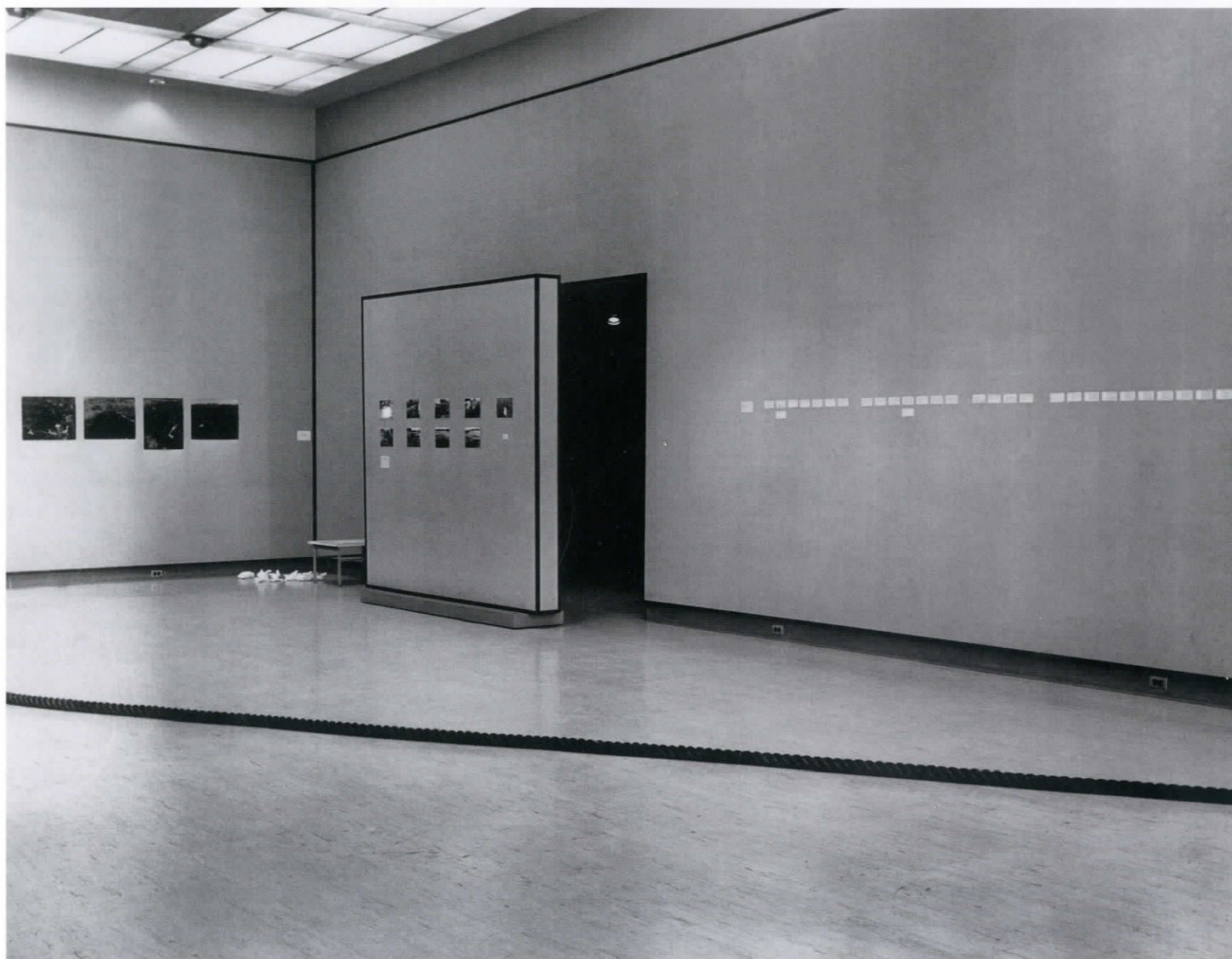
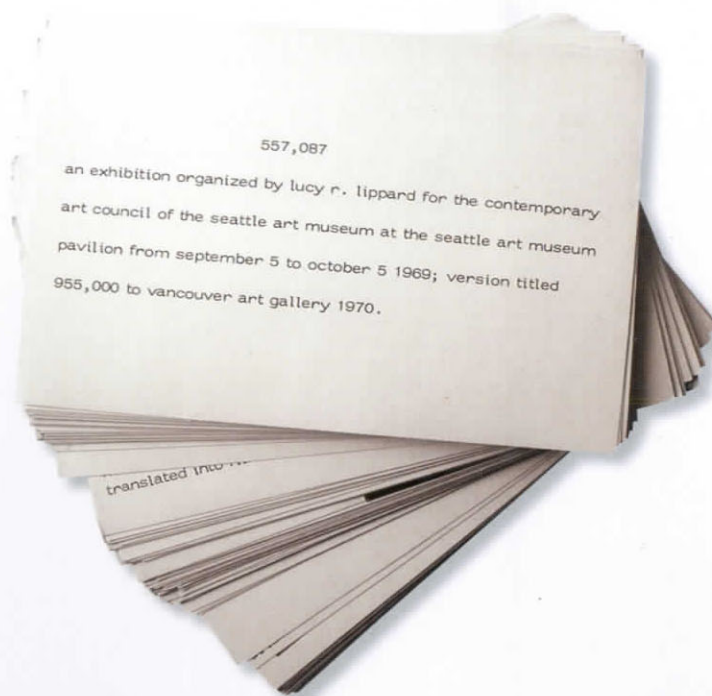
↙↘ Catalog card for Robert Smithson, with hand-written instructions for creating *400 Seattle Horizons*.

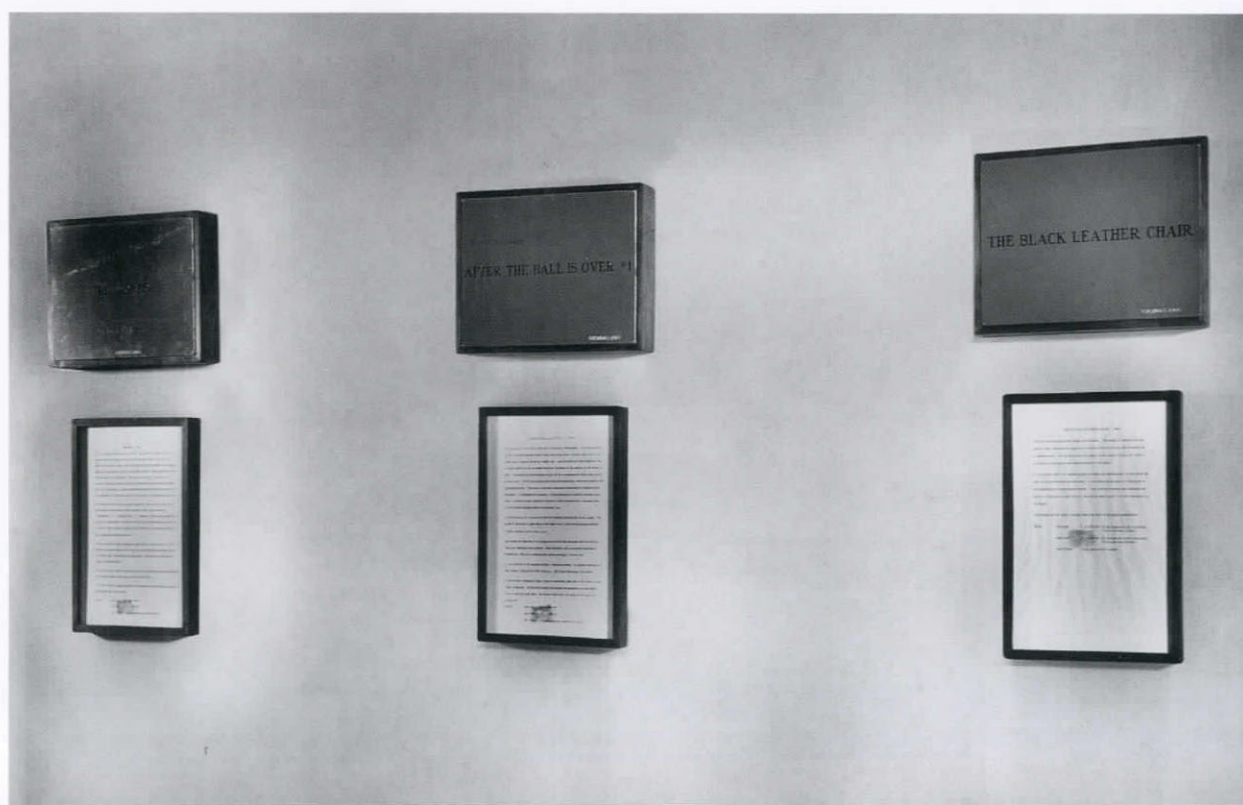
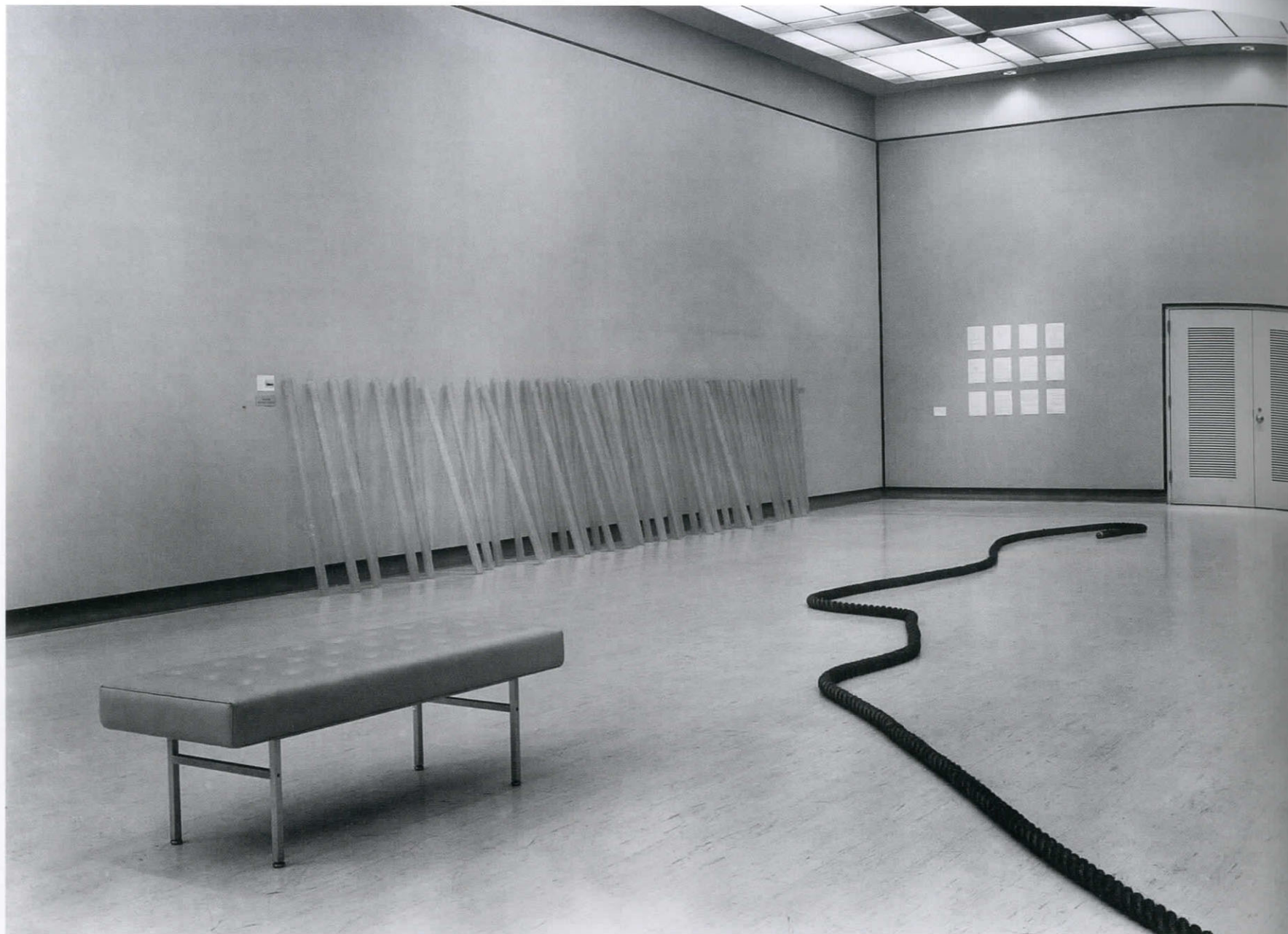
↙ Mel Bochner's handwritten catalog card, with instructions for creating *Territorial Reserve #4*.

↙↘↘ Catalog cards Rick Barthelme, Bill Bollinger, Sol LeWitt, and Bruce McLean.

→ Exhibition catalog for "557,087", consisting of a stack of loose index cards.

↓ Main room at the Seattle Art Museum Pavilion, showing Barry Flanagan's *Two Space Rope Sculpture* (on the floor), Dennis Oppenheim's *Infected Zone* (left); Liliana Porter's work for the New York Graphic Workshop, *To Be Wrinkled and Thrown Away* (on the table); N.E. Thing Co.'s *VSI Formula #5* (on the freestanding wall in front of the entrance to the film screening room); and cards from the catalog (on the wall to the right).



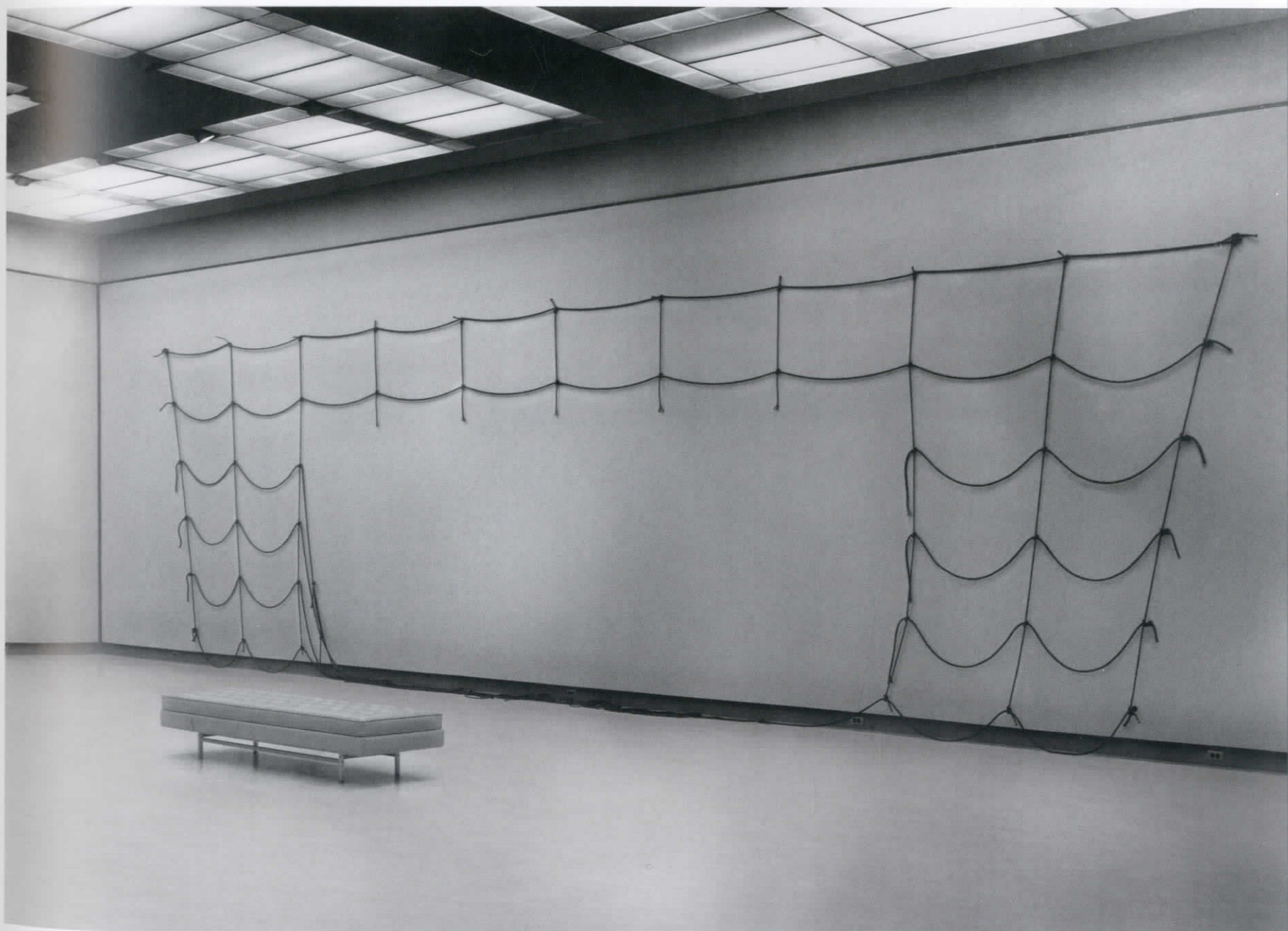


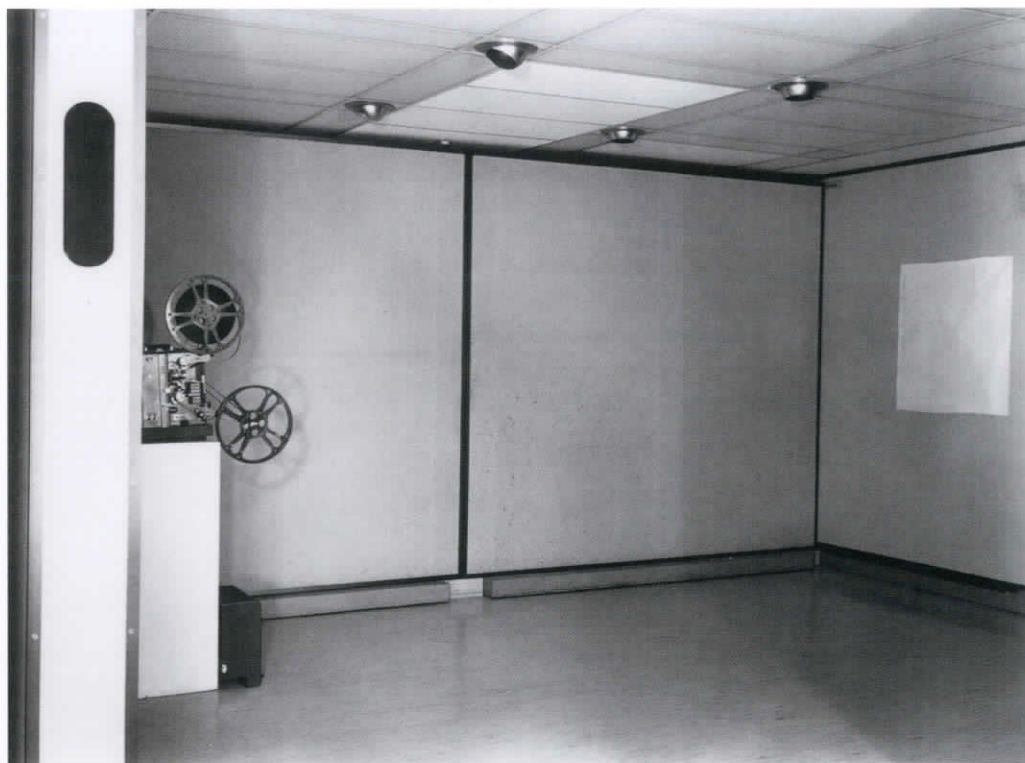
← Leaning against the wall is Eva Hesse's 1968 *Accretion*, which consists of fifty tubes made from fiberglass and polyester resin. On the floor is Barry Flanagan's *Two Space Rope Sculpture*. On the far wall is mounted Jonathan Borofsky's *Quiz Questions*.

↙ Three brass plaques and framed texts by Ed Kienholz, from his *Concept Tableaux* series. The text for *The World* includes the statement, "I plan to sign the world as the most awesome 'found object' I have ever come across." The text for *After the Ball is Over #2* begins, "This tableau is to be built in the town of Fairfield, Washington. It will be an existing two or three bedroom frame house with a living room, kitchen, back

porch, etc." The text for *The Black Chair* is more political and reads, "This is a tableau about the Negro in America." Buyers could purchase a proposal and Kienholz would later realize it as a drawing or full-sized tableau.

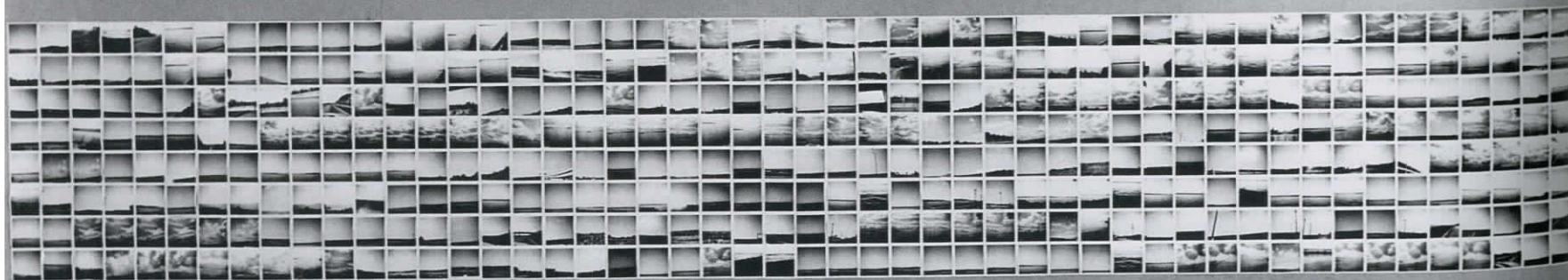
↓ Robert Rohm's *Untitled*, a grid made of manila rope, which was cut to instructions given by the artist. The work was also shown in the exhibition "Anti-Illusion: Procedures-Materials" at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 19 May-6 July 1969.

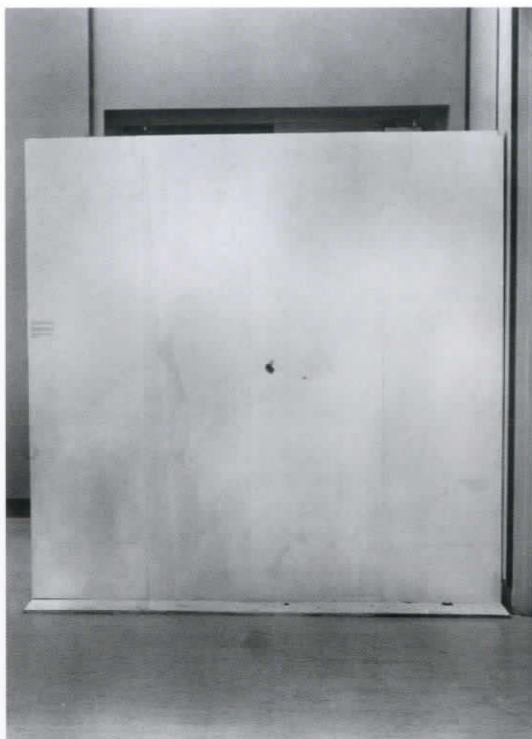
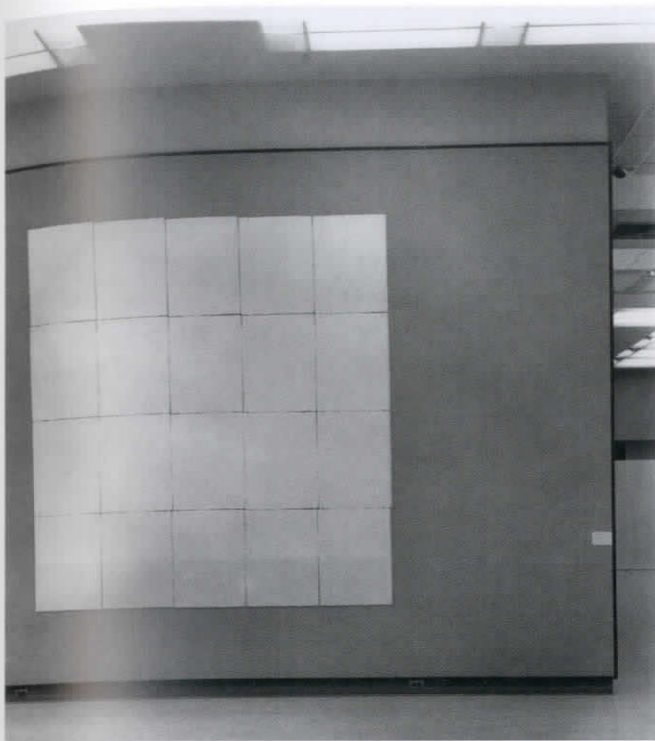




← The film projector room, with one of Richard Artschwager's *blps* (left; *blps* were also exhibited in the "When Attitudes Become Form" exhibition that same year; see pp. 95 and 96). The films shown were selected by Hollis Frampton, and included works by Ernie Gehr, Robert Huot, Ken Jacobs, George Landow, Claes Oldenburg, Richard Serra, Paul Sharits, Michael Snow, and Joyce Wieland. Also screened was Gerry Schum's Land art programme, with works by Marinus Boezem, Jan Dibbets, Barry Flanagan, Michael Heizer, Richard Long, Walter De Maria, Dennis Oppenheim, and Robert Smithson.

↓ Robert Smithson's *400 Seattle Horizons* (destroyed). In the 1971 essay "Art Through the Camera's Eye," Smithson recalled "Once I had somebody take 400 snapshots of horizons in Seattle, the recording of such stigmatic vistas and unreachable limits resulted in a collection of banished bits of space. Taking such photos puts the human eye in exile and brings on a cosmic punishment."





←← Robert Rohm's *Classico*, which was made of twenty sheets of paper painted with white acrylic.

← Robert Morris' *Shotgun Piece* was the result of the instruction given on the artists catalog card (see p. 112): "Standing 10' from the wall, holding the weapon at waist level, fire both barrels of a 12 gauge shot gun at the wall [...]. Photograph the above, make an 8" x 10" blowup in black and white [...]"

↓ N.E. Thing Co.'s mirror work, *VSI Formula #5*, the location and positioning of which was determined by an algebraic formula.



INTRODUCTION

Lucy R. Lippard
557,087 (exh. cat.)

Benevolent societies seem persistently engaged in bringing things together that are apart, and taking things apart that are together, thus fostering the perceptual mobility of art which is destructive of genuine concentration.—Edgar Wind

Art has never succeeded in changing or integrating with society. Recently artists (Cage, Kaprow, Rauschenberg, Oldenburg, Rainer) have moved to encompass the world (or be encompassed by it) on a more fundamental level. Experience and awareness are, after all, shared by everyone. Art intended as pure experience doesn't exist until someone experiences it, defying ownership, reproduction, sameness. Intangible art could break down the artificial imposition of "culture" and provide a broader audience for a tangible, object art. When automation frees millions of hours for leisure, art should gain rather than diminish in importance, for while art is not just play, it is the counterpoint to work. The time may come when art is everyone's daily occupation, though there is no reason to think this activity will be called art.

The experiences and motivations of a visual artist still differ from those of a poet, though as the media continue to mesh and the performing arts provide an increasingly relevant bridge between concrete art and concrete poetry, transitional figures continue to emerge (see the work of poets Acconci, Graham, and Perreault or artists Nauman, Wilson, and Barthelme in this exhibition).

At the moment the performance media offer extensions rather than alternatives to visual artists, since they are generally interested in the sensation of a kind of stopped or scrambled, unlinear time, not open to the performing arts, which exist in real time. Some of this comes in from literature like that of the very visually oriented Robbe-Grillet, but music and dance have also moved increasingly nearer to the plastic arts in their fascination with silence and near stasis, or very slow, extended, and

repetitive movement. Visual art retains no "purity of medium," but an autonomy of viewpoint remains, and is best translated into film.

Capitalist progress [...] not only reduces the environment of freedom, the "open space" of the human existence, but also the "longing," the need for such an environment.
—Herbert Marcuse

The engaged position is to run along the earth [...] My ideal piece of sculpture is a road.
—Carl Andre

The major sculptural innovation of the 60's is the horizontal viewpoint opened to a traditionally vertical art form, a fact that initially distinguishes sculpture from most architecture and, except for the linear, perspective depth implied, from painting. Vertical alignment is anthropomorphic, immediate, but static; the horizontal incorporates time distance, and is experienced and measured, kinaesthetically. This is a logical result of the jet age. Floor sculpture is seen from an aerial viewpoint. Man sees everything differently once he has flown.

Why did the chicken cross the road? To get to the other side.

The course of development: Sculpture as form, Sculpture as structure, Sculpture as place.
—Carl Andre

Sense of place varies: Baxter claims ready-made natural or artificial places. Andre's places are localized by his "found" or indigent materials and by his use of sculptural energy. Lever (1966) ran through a doorway; the line of hay bales at Windham (1968) began in the woods and moved into an open field. Smithson localizes place, though in a manner that incorporates (shrinks) long distance between site and nonsite, landscape and its test-tube counterpart (rock samples). Huebler's place is generalized when he imposes a geometrical or serial plan on large areas, times, distances, demanding no physical proof of their characteristics, but marking duration or extension by document. Richard

Long's ten-mile walking tour sculpture (1967) was both local and general; despite the distance, a very regional sense was retained by the choice of area in which to walk.

Start a rumor.—Steve Kaltenbach

Live in your head.—Keith Sonnier

Art is only memory anyway.—Michael Heizer

Ian Wilson, whose medium is "oral communication," preserves his apparently ephemeral art by "making it mnemonic [...]" transcending particular times and particular places." How many people have seen Angkor Wat or the Isenheim Altarpiece more than once? Temporary art exists for less time but is no less accessible by photographic record. A "memorable art" is accessible to anyone who wants it enough to store it away. When computers provide artificial memories, our "private collections" will be unlimited, and the mind will be freer to pursue its own expanding awareness. Idea or conceptual art, like that of Darboven, Atkinson, Baldwin, Borofsky, Kawara or Kosuth, and physically extant but imperceptible art like Barry's, share basic conditions with all previous art. What is radically new is its context, the exhibition and dissemination possibilities (c.f. Seth Siegel's March and Summer shows, 1969, which took place all over the world—simultaneously or however the artists chose to govern their time).

Photography is a product of the non-relational aesthetic that pervades the 60's, and its ramifications for all the arts are innumerable. Still photography is notoriously unselective; though it can be made to falsify or overdramatize its subject, once a viewpoint is chosen extraneous detail cannot be omitted, nor reality re-arranged. It can bring art to the level of everything else (Ruscha's books) or ricochet off reality (Baxter) or prove that the work of art exists specifically (Ruppertsberg, Morris) or generally (Smithson, Huebler). Bruce Nauman extracts the punning potential of photography, as he dealt with puns in his seminal piled, random rubber sculpture (he, Hesse, and Viner were the first abstract artists to work significantly with soft

materials), then in his elaborately titled "representational" pieces, in photographs ("...our arrangement") and now in holograms. His films and tapes play deadpan, act on timely fiction (fact taken on faith): "The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths." "Do you believe that?" "I don't know. I think we should leave that open."

Chance brings us closer to Nature in her manner of operation.—John Cage

The more technologically sophisticated we become, the more we are able to plug into extant natural systems. Ecology, the relationship between an organism and its environment, interests some artists as a framework for control and change, others as a means of exploring the ratio of order and lack of order in nature. Haacke's *Live Airborne Systems* (1968) documents the movements of gulls taking bread from the sea. He has also worked with frost, condensation, evaporation, snow, mist, grass, representing the laboratory aspect of the more physically assertive earth sculpture. Hesse, Serra, and Saret, in varying degrees of dematerialization, explore the effects of natural forces and controlled randomness on materials, while Ruscha's inclusiveness ("All the Buildings on the Sunset Strip") applies a similar idea to the artificial environment; Artschwager's "blps" and Buren's posters accent urban ecology.

A word is worth 1,000th of a picture.
—Iain Baxter

The visual artist uses words to convey information about sensorial or potentially perceptible phenomena; his current preoccupation with linguistics, semantics, and social structures as exposed by anthropology is not surprising. The fact that it is, indeed, structural patterns that are the basis of these fields brings them into visual range.

People deny that words have any thing to do with pictures. I don't accept that. They do. Art is a source of information [...] the work concerns itself with things whose interrelationship is beyond perceptual experience.

Because the work is beyond perceptual experience, awareness of the work depends on a system of documentation [...] photographs, maps, drawings and descriptive language.
—Douglas Huebler

All art originates in the human mind, in our reaction to the world rather than in the visible world in itself.—Ernst Gombrich

If the insistent physical presence of the primary structures is a time-stopping device that resists the modern world's flux by creating new, frontal, static monuments to the present, most of the work here deals with energy, animation, non-sequential and relatively irrational lines of time and material. It can, however, be speculatively concrete, even when it is invisible. Despite deceptively scientific or pragmatic presentations, the artists generally accept and are involved with the unknown on a different level than scientists. Artists do not analyze circumstances with progress in mind so much as expose them, making themselves and their audience aware of things previously disregarded, information already in the environment which can be harnessed into aesthetic experience. And what can't be?

The structures within which man functions should not be fortresses which exclude the external world, but interacting systems through which his life is made possible. Living and working space will then become organizational entities that will change as humans and the natural environment evolve.
—The Pulsa Group

The conviction that geometry is the most neutral vehicle for either physical or conceptual art ideas has been more directly transferred from minimal art into the new forms than is immediately obvious. Morris's felt is cut in rectangular sections before it assumes its own shapes; Smithson, Huebler, Baxter, Arnatt, Louw, and others impose geometric overlays on space. If Morris is trying to expose the fallibility of order by refusing "to continue aestheticizing form by dealing with it as a prescribed end," a "systems aesthetic" continues the traditional artistic

task of discovering underlying order in the world. Though the order found is far from traditionally constructed: "The special function of modern didactic art has been to show that art does not reside in material entities, but in relations between people and between people and the components of their environments" (Jack Burnham). Thus social comment (Oppenheim's extermination piece, Baldessari's ghetto boundaries) is possible, as well as a "regional art" made by foreigners through remote control (Ferrer's memorial to a Seattle engineer; McLean's Lake Washington piece).

The most important question is Why? all the answers belong to What? and every real interest pertains to How?—Frederick Castle

When the artist determines the materials and allows the materials to determine the final shape or shape possibilities, he is dealing with a set of factors producing difficulties new to contemporary art. The Surrealists, and Pollock, had in mind an often unarticulated image context within a broad Freudian or Jungian framework, even when this content was not immediately recognizable. The new "materialist," experience-oriented art has a recognizable content only in that it summons up a how-to-do-it picture of its execution in the viewer's mind. The lead was spattered against the wall with such and such a gesture; the rubber was poured and allowed to run off the edge of the mold this way; the sand was dumped that way and has spread according to succeeding events in its space. Ryman, the only painter involved, states unequivocally by his negation of the object quality of painting, that the path of what brush in what paint to produce what kind of surface is what matters.

Deliberately low-keyed art often resembles ruins, like neolithic rather than classical monuments, amalgams of past and future, remains of something "more," vestiges of some unknown venture. The ghost of content continues to hover over the most obdurately abstract art. The more open, or ambiguous, the experience offered, the more the viewer is forced to depend upon his own perceptions.

I cannot experience your experience. You cannot experience my experience. We are both invisible men. All men are invisible to one another. Experience is man's invisibility to man [...] Since your and their experience is invisible to me as mine is to you and them, I seek to make evident to the others, through their experience of my behavior, what I infer of your experience, through my experience of your behavior. This is the crux of social phenomenology.—R. D. Laing

Pop Art questioned the subject matter and materials of art. Earthworks, outdoor projects, documentary, and some "Antiform" sculpture question the experience of art; they suggest that like the tree falling in the forest, art can be anything perceived as art by anyone at that time. An artist can make his own or his environment's presence felt by dropping a point, a line, an accent, a word into the world, embracing all or parts of any area or period at any place or time. Concurrently, the area's or period's importance can be neutralized until the art becomes more abstract than ever, even when it is virtually inseparable from life. The implication is that what we now consider art will eventually be unrecognizable. On the other hand, the boundaries of seeing, like the perceptible aspects of nature or outer space, seem to extend as infinitely as man's experience and experiments can take them.

Art teaches people how to see.—Ad Reinhardt

Freedom is a negative, it's freedom from something.—Ad Reinhardt

The world is full of objects, more or less interesting, I do not wish to add any more. I prefer, simply, to state the existence of things in terms of time and—or place.—Douglas Huebler

Andre's use of his materials as "the cut in space" has been extended by Weiner's "removals" and Heizer's "negative objects" (trenches, holes). Freeing the world from an inundation of "precious objects" is only a by-product, but it has also freed younger artists from restrictions imposed by traditional definitions of the plastic arts. Kosuth, who

began with Reinhardtian negative photostats of these definitions, wants "to remove the experience from the work of art [...] Non-artists often insist on something along with the art because they are not excited by the idea of art. They need that physical excitation along with the art to keep them interested. But the artist has that same obsessed interest in art that the physicist has in physics and the philosopher in philosophy."

557,087: APT TITLE,
UNPREDICTABLE ART

Don Duncan
Seattle Times, 1969

Logic is logic, is all I can say. And 557,087 is the very logical title chosen for a contemporary art show opening here Friday and continuing through the month.

For one thing, 557,087 was the 1960 Seattle census. For another, it has a nicer ring than 2,918, which is the distance in miles between Seattle and New York, where most of the show originated.

The latter string of digits received serious consideration from the sponsoring Contemporary Art Council. But it finally agreed that it tended to reduce Seattle to "an outpost of New York."

Personally I think 34.1, our average rainfall, would have been very logical. But nobody asked me.

Anyways, 557,087 it is. And the show will take place in the Seattle Art Museum's Seattle Center Pavilion and way points. You will need a road map to find those way points.

Although the show may not be wild by New York and San Francisco standards, many here will throw up their hands and ask, "What is the art world coming to?"

It is coming to dirt trenches, shotgun blasts, logs floating in ponds, and giant billboards covered with masking tape, among other things.

Morrie Alhadeff, President of the Contemporary Art Council, is better known for his work on behalf of improving the breed of racehorses in this state. He may wish he had stuck with the more predictable nags

when 557,087 invades the town with "the bluest skies."

Mrs. Ann Gerber, widow of the much-loved Sidney, is one of the show's hardest workers.

"How terrible if we should be ignored," Mrs. Gerber said. "I'd like to get a lot of hippies to attend. We can always count on the staid, middle-class, middle-aged people."

Mrs. Gerber handed me a stack of little white cards on which directions for assembling the show were printed. The cards represent the show's "catalog." They were assembled by Miss Lucy Lippard, a New York art-magazine critic who is gaining a considerable reputation for promoting art as a vehicle for social commentary and philosophical insights.

Sort of, a painting is a painting is a painting. But a dirt trench, well, it's cool and it's a good hiding place for tin cans and trap rodents.

Not all the artists whose work will be displayed will make it to Seattle, since they will receive no pay. But quite a number are coming on the promise of free lodgings and grub. One young lady has specified a high-protein diet, "and I expect to bicycle if there is no public transportation."

You can readily see that Seattle's big-league status hasn't made much impact on New Yorkers.

For that reason, Mrs. Gerber sent about two dozen road maps to artists, to give them an idea of Seattle's geography.

557,087

Peter Plagens

Artforum, November 1969

"557,087," the show that Lucy Lippard has organized for the Seattle Art Museum, will be recalled generically as the first sizable (i.e. public institution) exhibition of "concept art," but it is in fact an amalgam of non-chromatic work running a gamut from late, funky Minimal to a point at which art is replaced, literally, by literature. The show is a bellwether, consolidated enough to necessitate sifting high-grade bullshit Canal

Street art-thinking from genuinely dangerous, substantial material. "557,087" (which was, incidentally, the population of Seattle in 1960; the title changes when the exhibition reaches Vancouver) deals with the idea of ideas as art (roughly quoting Joseph Kosuth, one of the more ideational and difficult artists). Unfortunately, the context of exhibition bestows an unmerited exoticism on several ideas, which, as with most of the lesser work, rely on the quality of theater; biology or electronics or typing presented as art, unlike art presented as biology or electronics or typing, inherits the benefit of the doubt ("What does it mean?"), since art has no measurable practicality—a bad piece stands there just as long as a good one. Ideas have a tougher time considered as ideas than as art:

"In any field, some ideas are important and some are trivial. The importance of an idea is measured by 1.) the number of things to which the idea applies—its applicability; 2.) how often the idea is used in discussion and explanation—its relative frequency; 3.) to what extent other ideas flow from it or can be derived from it—its fruitfulness; 4.) to what extent the idea benefits human beings—its practical advantages; and similar factors."

The author (Edmund C. Berkeley, *A Guide to Mathematics for the Intelligent Non-Mathematician*) tenders the theory of evolution (natural selection) as a "profoundly important" biological idea, while the color classification of bears, although more widely known, is trivial. While "557,087" has its colored bears, there are quite a few good, hard, sticky ideas (concepts?) around. (The catalog is a set of label cards, one per artist, in most instances completed by the artist. The cards are randomly ordered and, in constant reshuffling, constitute a technique for apperceiving the show.)

Bullshit, most of which is found in the catalog cards, seems a product of ideological fervor and occurs, mainly, in two forms: statements so extended and ersatz-profound as to cancel significance, and specious assertions. Some of the former: "the boundaries of seeing, like the perceptible aspects of nature or outer space, seem to extend as infinitely

as man's experience and experiments can take them"; "I'm sure there are a lot of things we don't yet know about which exist in the space around us, and, though we don't see or feel them, we somehow know they are out there"; "Metaphors for the degree to which an individual exists in the world, the degree to which he asserts himself, asserts his environment." Some of the latter:

"Non artists often insist on something along with the art because they are not excited by the ideas of art. They need that physical excitation along with the art to keep them interested. But, the artist has that same obsessed interest in art that the physicist has in physics, and the philosopher in philosophy." (One of the con jobs of newer art-thinking is the straw-man scientist who does everything right that the old, garret-style artist did wrong); "Because the work is beyond perceptual experience [...]" (Darby Bannard has pointed out the forced hyper-positive use of "beyond" where "short of" might well apply); "Artschwager's *blps* and Buren's posters accent urban ecology."

But there are first-rate idea pieces: 1.) Robert Morris's wall, a process piece. The wall suffers a shotgun blast, the blasted wall is photographed, and the photograph is mounted over the buckshot crater. The process is repeated at each succeeding location of the exhibition, each consecutive photograph a couple of inches larger than the last; 2.) Joseph Kosuth's series of cards, part of a larger work entitled *Art as Idea as Idea*; 3.) Robert Huot's room painted Pratt & Lambert #5017 alkyd flat blue; 4.) William Bollinger's log floating in Seattle Bay; and 5.) Dennis Oppenheim's *Infected Zone*, another process piece: an area of land undergoes bombardments of gasoline, rat poison, grass poison, etc. I did not see Huot's room (to be done when the show reaches Vancouver) or Bollinger's log, or, except through "photo-documentation"—a standard mannerism of Concept art—Oppenheim's *Zone*; nevertheless, the ideas are appealing, and with this I find myself harmoniously level with the exhibition. In these invisible pieces, we are head-on against quality and intent: in place of physical fact, there is a

description and perhaps a few clues as to intent. No one, it seems, is quite sure of the staying power of non-corporeality; "557,087" requires a hell of a lot of reading (revolution floats on a sea of words). But, to "see" these pieces as figures of radicalism against a ground of "art" is, once more, to make a necessity of "art"; thus, non-present pieces are in the mind, where they are free to be dealt with as ideas. Morris's wall is significant as an idea (ad infinitum as a physical process) and, concretely, as a static-moving time piece (the form, complete in Seattle, projects itself ahead and behind through the photograph). In Kosuth's piece, the slender physicality of the cards is reluctant, but the philosophy is honest; Kosuth risks the embarrassment of trying to find answers in his typed outline, rather than merely, hiply, "posing question." The quality of Kosuth's thinking is evident when compared to Robert Barry's gratuity: "All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking—1:36 p.m; 15 June 1969 New York." Huot's room and Bollinger's log have in common a physical, but conceptually extended connection to "art" which gives rise to multiple possibilities—comments on painting and sculpture, explorations of materials, participation-environmental-time pieces, etc.—while retaining a grittiness in the work (or idea of the work) itself. Oppenheim's *Infected Zone* is, among the others, an old master: a slick, mature, finished product (color photographs, technical specifications, "official" signature).

The relationship of art to objecthood, perhaps the true problem of "557,087," is solved in a literary way, by literature. The concepts in Concept art are either so large, general, profound, abstract, permanent, or so small, personal, complex, trivial, particular, ephemeral as to mock any rationale for an art object. Into the vacuum abandoned by the art object comes "concept," made manifest by literature (specifications, photo-documentation, formulae, and, infrequently, ordinary narrative prose). At its best the art exceeds literature-as-medium, and in pieces by Morris, Sonnier, Ryman, Eva Hesse (*Accretion*, an object consisting of fifty fiberglass tubes leaning in a row

against the wall), Ed Ruscha (the book *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* mounted as a single horizontal strip so that the south side of Sunset Boulevard is upside down), Robert Smithson's 400 drugstore-size snapshots of "Seattle horizons," Mel Bochner's *Territorial Reserve #4* (which at least anticipated the need for boundaries), and Fred Sandback's untitled rectangle of elastic cord, the presence is felt rather than read about. When the particular properties of literature dominate, the results become curiousest and curiousest. One of Edward Kienholz's *Tableaus* entitled *After the Ball* contains the following first-novel prose: "In the kitchen, sitting at a table, under an unshaded light bulb is the father, tired, rigid, menacing. He has been teased into letting his daughter go to the dance (this is her first real date). He doesn't know why, but right now he hates the young man." Dan Graham's work, a melange of writing, tape, and assorted evidence, contains such heavy Sociology 1A nuggets as astrology considered as a social science, magazines as socioeconomic statements, and the possibility of no-point-of-view writing.

And there are indifferent idea pieces (not bad, really, but ailing from predictability): 1.) Ian Wilson's medium of "oral communications" (art-talk, talk-as-art); 2.) Robert Rohm's 40 by 20-foot [12 x 6-meter] rope grid in which certain cuts have been made, a whole section falling limply to the base (the effect is palpably visual, the "documentation" is precious window dressing); 3.) Bob Kinmont's *Eight Natural Handstands* (photos) which occupies that gap between Deborah Hay and Andy Warhol and debilitated by (in comparison to) Bruce Nauman's films; and 4.) John Baldessari's and George Nicolaidis's silver ghetto stickers reading "— Boundary — A section of a city, especially a thickly populated area inhabited by minority groups often as a result of social or economic restrictions," which were placed on the perimeter of San Diego's black ghetto (fine conscience-tweaking entertainment for culture vultures and, they'll never know).

Some examples of pretty bad idea pieces were 1.) Bruce McLean's three landscapes of Lake Washington by other artists, selected

(one bad traditional, two bad "early" moderns) in Seattle; 2.) Richard Artschwager's *blp*, a shape similar to his *100 Locations* piece in the Whitney Annual, but here adjusted for "concept" purposes: "When you see a 'blp' you recognize it as an image of the true blp which is in your mind"; 3.) Rick Barthelme's television set (not present) which "instead of making any art, I bought"; 4.) On Kawara's notebooks, *I Met* and *I Went in* (medium) "people and cities"; and 5.) Adrian Piper's display of two notebooks and a map documenting travel from Point A (New York) to Point B (Seattle), including, helpfully, textbook definitions of point and line.

There is a totality of style to the show, a style so pervasive as to invite the conclusion that Lucy Lippard is in fact the artist and that her medium is other artists, a foreseeable extension of the current practice of a museum's hiring a critic to "do" a show and the critic then asking artists to "do" pieces for the show. The most salient aspect of "557,087" is precisely the lengths to which it refuses to go. For instance, it is explained that parts of the show are not confined by the limits of the museum, Seattle, or, indeed the dates of the exhibition, a hedging that asks why the show was not merely declared without benefit of a World's Fair Pavilion embellished in the traditional manner, with the untraditional objects and ideas of "557,087." Also, it is noticeable that, in a general kind of art in which there are few, if any, material prerequisites, we have a glut of glossy photographs, notebooks, and typewritten copy and, by contrast, very few technical or, more broadly, non-literary statements. Finally, most of the intensely literary work, like Donald Burgoyne's loose-leaf, a medical and psychological history, pertains to the hypnotic demarcation between the specific (personal) and the abstract (conceptual). Burgoyne's concern for the nature of his own navel, his own head, becomes, successively, relentlessly ordinary, banal, impersonal, abstract, and conceptual.

In its parts, "557,087" emerges from manifold sources, of varying degrees of relevance ("relevance" depends on belief in "issues" in current art, as opposed to

endless refinement; "557,087" is about issues). In Allen Ruppersberg's *Hay at the Ambassador*, a table covered with, among other things, greenish hay, the allusions to Duchamp's *Fountain* and Man Ray's *Le Cadeau* are obvious, as is the art-historical specter (Abstract Expressionism to Pop to Minimal to Earthworks to Concept art) hovering over most of the exhibition. The single most pertinent source is, I think, an almost Puritan, moralistic concern with the threatening, nagging, perverse presence of "art" and, a subsource, anti-technology. One notebook admits the questions, "Are works of art PHYSICAL objects? Are works of art physical OBJECTS?" Poignant, not strident, the idea pieces in "557,087" ricochet around, figures begging for grounds. The choice of non-technology, a *modus operandi*, validates in the exhibition (or that part of it concerned with asking) since new media (opposed to non-media) avoids the business of redefining art; new media asks only mechanical questions; non-media asks almost all the other questions. Miss Lippard's exhibition is, if not what it might be (concept), at least a compilation of emphatically non-decorative, a-technical art, and art-thinking. And, if the quality and force are uneven, if the concept of concept art is unlikely to retain much cohesion before most of the artists are further dispersed, the show effects a bump in the phenomenology of art.

Biennials and Beyond— Exhibitions That Made Art History

1962–2002

Conceived and edited by
Phaidon Editors and Bruce Altshuler
Introductory essay and chapter introductions
by Bruce Altshuler



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Bruce Altshuler is director of the
Program in Museum Studies, Graduate
School of Arts and Sciences, New
York University. From 1992 to 1998 he
was director of the Isamu Noguchi
Garden Museum, Long Island City,
New York. Altshuler is the author of
*Salon to Biennial—Exhibitions that
Made Art History: 1863–1959* (Phaidon
Press 2008), which was awarded the
Bannister Fletcher Award for best new
book on art or architecture. He is also
the author of *The Avant-Garde in
Exhibition: New Art in the 20th
Century* and of *Isamu Noguchi*, and
the editor of *Collecting the New:
Museums and Contemporary Art*.

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Many sources were consulted for this
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made to represent the information
as accurately as possible. Spellings
of artists' names and other proper
names have been Anglicized. In the
documentary texts sections,
misspellings of artists' names have
been corrected, while other textual
variations have been retained in
order to keep the flavor of the
original. Explanatory notes appear
in square brackets within the text. In
cases where the contents of a traveling
exhibition changed after the primary
venue, the artist list and number of
art works reflect those of the primary
venue.

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