

FROM SPACE NEEDLE TO SPACE SHUTTLE on the road with jah

SEATTLE

It was exciting to hear my name on the airport intercom in Seattle, for I had failed to describe myself adequately to my hostess, Laura Millin. We met, felt a keen energy between us, and drove to Seattle with its skyline etched in steel gray, inviting me to dip into an exciting, growing, progressive city with new buildings interspersed with the old, one better than the other.

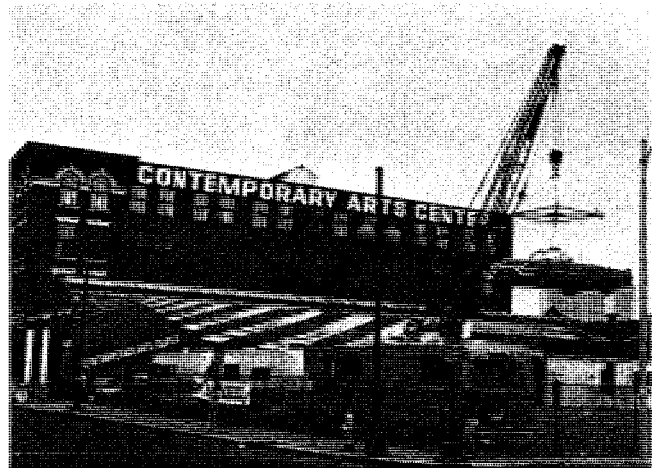
Arriving at Laura's apartment on Sunday afternoon (28 March), I saw a Lloyd Hamrol sculpture in an open space on the corner, another one of those wonderful commissioned public works that Seattle is so famous for. A dinner party awaited me with artist-friends and new-found friends arriving, among them the infamous Carl Chew, who not only creates amazing fictitious city planners such as Ralph Doid and color-Xerox postage stamps, but excellent wine, with Xeroxed labels that are funnier than you can imagine! The wine was excellent, the food made by artists superb, and the company stimulating. It was a good beginning.

PORTLAND

The warmth and friendliness in the Northwest was instantly experienced, even when I called an information operator about a phone number, or a clerk to find out how to get to the airport. I awoke at an ungodly 4:15 a.m. and walked through the streets of downtown Seattle (about 12 blocks) to get to the "hustle bus" station to get me to the airport on time, for I was going to Portland to see an artists' book show. The streets of Seattle were beautiful in the dark morning light, and I recognized buildings that had been in the conversation the night before—new buildings as well as the glorious Olympia Hotel which was being renovated. Arriving in a very short time in Portland, I was greeted by Darryl Clegg, director of the Northwest Artists Workshop. We drove to "America's most honest city" as a fellow-traveler at the airport called it.

The exhibition at the NAW was spectacular, one of the finest I have ever seen. Co-curated by Tim Guest and Carl Loeffler of La Mamelle, with input from private collectors and local artists, the exhibition was even more stunning thanks to Clegg's efforts in reconstructing the Rodchenko Workers' Reading Club plan from Constructivist days. The space was an inviting, book-filled, light-diffused area with plenty of seating, lots of glass-topped library tables, slanting reading tables (according to Rodchenko) and a few low exhibit tables. The theme was black, white, and red—the metal chairs had been painted shining black, there was an outstanding Suprematist-style bench and a floating glass panel which had been designed with red and black tape (ala Lissitzky) by Jerry Mayer.

What I saw was the best solution to showing artists' books that I had ever seen. The books were treated as art objects, but immediately accessible to readers. Some were protected but visible to anyone who walked by. There was time to look at each object, and a place to contemplate them. It was a great privilege to experience this show, which celebrated



the fifth anniversary of the Northwest Artists' Workshop. The show's installation was the product of genius; the books were the products of artists. Sadly, it was a very short visit, and Portland deserves more.

Arriving back in Seattle by noon, I learned to my shock that President Reagan had been shot, as I bought some postcards that simulated umbrellas in a stationery store. I took one of the free buses in Seattle to and/or, one of the finest alternative spaces in the country, and ran into the video room asking them to change the show to see CBS and Dan Rather covering the attempted assassination. We were glued to the set for about 20 minutes, and then back to the and/or library and Claudia Clement, who showed me the rich collection of periodicals, books and documents dealing with the arts. There are comfortable chairs and an inviting hospitable atmosphere. We shared information about mail art, artists' books, and new periodicals—including gossip about the art world.

Around the corner is Comet Tavern which is a hang-out for artists and poets, and of course besides the billiard tables and the loud music, the TV was on with the doctors showing illustrations of how the bullet entered, etc. Meanwhile, a couple who were playing pool shouted out, "It's sitcom, without the humor!" and the bartender, an older woman, seemed stony-faced, yet good at her job!

The next morning with brunch at Triangle Studio for Cee Brown and me (Brown being the curator in charge of the Performance Archive at MOMA and now working for Holly Solomon Editions, who was in town to install a print show) I got to meet lots of artists in this fabulous space shared by many artists, including Nori Sato and Carl Chew. The food was abundant, the talk all about Peter Frank's appearance on the *Sunday* show on CBS the previous morning, as well as many other events in Seattle. A tour of everyone's studio space showed the variety of a cooperative large space. All these artists are looking for now is someone to administer their business affairs, including the phone. And this space is right in the middle of Seattle downtown near Pioneer Square.

Chew took me in tow and we walked to the City Offices where his work on Ralph Doid, City Planner, purchased by the city, was on display in the lobby of this building. Chew, a scientist turned mythmaker-artist, is a genius with the color Xerox machine and an artist who uses humor more than anyone else I know. He is a sit-down comic, a wit with vitality and ingenuity, an imaginative genius. He gifted me with the notebook he used to create the Bumbershoot poster four years ago for the Seattle Bumbershoot Festival, which was sent to me for the Umbrella Show.

Then on to A.R.C., one of the finest artists' bookshops that sells books, periodicals, postcards, with an added attraction of a gallery space. This is a clean white space near Silver Image Gallery, Rosco Louis Gallery where performances and alternative media are nurtured. Then on a drive we saw the first commissioned work of art in a public space according to the 1% for Art Program by the Seattle Arts Commission. This first project was the Viewland/Hoffman Substation where Andrew Keating, Buster Simpson and Ellen Markovitz collaborated to create signage, paintings, painted tanks, and in collaboration with the landscape architect, with cherry trees planted so that their blossoms were the same shade as the pink elements of the substation. A vital element of the Substation is a permanent exhibition of 27 whirl-i-gigs, created by Emil and Veva Gehrke. The whirl-i-gigs are made from found and recycled materials, such as bicycle wheels, yellow hardhats, coffee cans and dust-pans. The couple from Grand Coulee, Washington have over 300 different whirl-i-gigs in their back yard!

I became convinced that Seattle is doing something right, making art in public places an essential in the man-made landscape, thanks to the continued 1% for Art Program, with artists even serving on the Arts Commission.

That night, supper at the Belltown Cafe where Ben Marks, art collector and connoisseur served up a mean dinner in a most inviting atmosphere, where artists come together for food and good talk. Then I gave a lecture on artists' books and artists' periodicals at and/or.

VICTORIA

Flying over the snow-covered Olympia Mountains was a spectacular experience and then over green, lush islands to Victoria, where customs were a breeze.

I stayed with Carole Sabiston, artist and friend of Anna Banana, and her husband, Jim Munro, bookseller. They live in a marvelous 1894 house. The house has a great warm feeling, thanks to Carole's great color sense and ability to fill the house with works of art (her own and others) as well as many collections, such as a key collection, textiles, and wall hangings. The reason for my coming to British Columbia was to attend the Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, but I got a peek at this beautiful town of Victoria on this sunny, warm day before getting to the Empress Hotel for the meetings. The village atmosphere of Victoria is charming, and it is hard to believe that there is an artists' space in this resort town, but the Canadian Government helps Open Space, where Bill Burns was having an exhibition of an installation called Homage to Kandinsky. What a beautiful space it is, in an area where Victoria has restored and renovated old buildings

for artists' studios, boutiques, and shopping areas. And of course, Victoria is famous for Rogers, home of chocolate creams in the grand old English style. It would be death to us all to have a Rogers so close!

The Provincial Museum in Victoria is one of the outstanding museums I have ever visited. The dioramas, environments and educational exhibitions are of the highest order, well conceived and brilliantly executed. So if you are ever in Victoria, do not miss the Provincial Museum—it is not provincial at all, but universal.

Anna Banana came over from Vancouver and we spent April First together, even attending an erotic art show organized by J.C., an alternative artist in the community, whose space is in the heart of Chinatown. Also met Bill Boyce of Arts Ontario and Glenn Lewis of Western Front. Russell Kezire, editor of *Vanguard*, was also at the Conference, so it was a big treat for me.

Went on a garden and house tour before going to Vancouver with Glenn Lewis. During the tour, we saw Scottish broom which is all over Victoria, giving it this bright golden hue, amidst the glorious gardens which were all in bloom. The ferry, run by the government, takes one hour and 25 minutes, including the bus ride to the ferry, the bus driving onto the ferry. With a good cup of coffee, one can read, work, converse, and arrive safe and sound in Vancouver via the bus getting off the ferry and getting you to the bus station. It was pouring rain in Vancouver when I arrived, but that was the last rain I was to see. Vancouver decided to put on its brilliant glory for me!

VANCOUVER

After Dim Sun in Chinatown, we explored the Victoria Art Gallery, where three of us raided the postcard collection and as a result, I bought \$12 worth of postcards with umbrellas on them in about 12 minutes. We also visited a fine group, a cooperative called Women in Focus, which first started as a videotape and film production group in 1974, but has since acquired a large exhibition space and launches monthly shows.

One of the highlights of my stay in Vancouver was a visit to the Museum of Man on the University of British Columbia campus. The building, designed by Arthur Erickson, is brilliant, and the museum that Anna Banana and I saw was inspiring, not only for its permanent installations and special exhibitions, but for its fantastic museum in drawers, an imaginative device to store the artifacts that come from all over the world in pull-out drawers in an area that is not closed to the public, but available for the delectation of patrons such as Anna and myself. Name it, the Museum of Man is not America's attic like the Smithsonian, but Canada's public warehouse.

That night, we had a sensational community dinner in Western Front, where I was staying. Western Front is one of the longest-standing artists' spaces in Canada and is a very large, spacious building which houses public spaces and private rooms for artists in residence as well as visiting firemen like me. There, I gave a lecture as well.

The next day, we visited Arthur Erickson's already famous Courthouse in Robson Square. Both Anna and I never saw

any sign forbidding cameras, and I continued shooting this remarkable glass building, until a sheriff took me by the arm and accompanied down to the Sheriff's Office, where I thought I was slated for imprisonment. Instead, and you realize I was a foreigner in Canada, a smiling gentleman called the Sheriff proceeded to tell me that he was sorry that there were no signs on the door we entered, and that taking pictures in the courthouse while court is in session is against the law. But he was charming, made me feel comfortable, and even told me some problems with the building that are built-in to the plan. Would it have been so easy in the States?

After a birthday party for Elizabeth Chitty, resident video artist at the Western Front, Glenn Lewis and I proceeded to the airport, since I was flying to Birmingham and he to New Orleans. Flying to my destination meant several stops, so everytime I got off the plane, I found myself at the postcard rack and found even more umbrella postcards. At any rate, by the time I arrived in Birmingham, it was early morning and already quite warm, so I had to take off the coat, etc. I was whisked to the Birmingham Museum of Art by my hostess, Jimmie Walker, performance and video artist, where I was soon interviewed by a newspaper reporter, prepared my carousels, saw a 22-slide projector presentation in honor of Mexican art, and then whisked to the Country Club for lunch with several artists. After a shower and a little rest in this beautiful New York-style loft of Sarah Armstrong, sculptor, I was whisked back to the museum for a potluck supper, a quick look at the collection, including an early Nevelson, a beautiful 1977 suite of Rauschenberg which I had never seen, and fine contemporary paintings and sculpture, after which I gave a lecture on mail art. Southern hospitality is the best, and I was immediately taken in by the warmth and friendliness of everyone.

Birmingham is probably the only city that is proud of its grotesque, Vulcan, the representative of steel, which is the leading industry of Birmingham. In addition, Birmingham has two Statues of Liberty, not one, since their insurance company is called Liberty National.

MISSISSIPPI

The next morning very early we drove through Mississippi, Sarah and I, a state which I had not seen for a long time. Mississippi seemed to be endless, neat forests and hills, but never did I see people or structures. The dogwood was in bloom, there were beautiful pines, and it was clear.

NEW ORLEANS

You could tell when you arrived in Louisiana, even without seeing the signs. The landscape was different, there were populated areas, and New Orleans, beautiful New Orleans, was hot and sticky. I arrived to attend the artists' space conference, Beyond Survival, at the Contemporary Art Center, a familiar site. First thing, a t-shirt, buttons, and the program. After the opening of the exhibition of artists' spaces which were participating in the conference, we all went out to eat—some of us to Felix for oysters and then a long wait, but was it worth it, to K. Paul's for a truly great meal of Louisiana traditional cooking. But everyone seemed to have the same idea—Jim Melchert, Bob McGovern

from Seattle, and so we waited in a Tennessee Williams' kind of sultry evening to enjoy the culinary delights of K. Paul's. It's on Chartres Street (pronounced charters) and it is something not to miss!

The next four days were full of meetings, caucuses, political intrigue and the initiatives to establish a national organization of some sort for artists' spaces. Meanwhile, there was a party in Armstrong Park for participants, where the Green Worm, a Voodoo ceremony and other delights were part of the entertainment, courtesy of the CAC. Other activities included more oysters, more coffee and beignets at the Cafe du Monde, a visit to the Maple Leaf Club for cajun music, and the Mississippi River by night.

Friday evening, when meetings had ended and we were ready to go to a reception, we walked out of the Center and noticed a strange floating orange vintage Cadillac, suspended in space in the Center's parking lot. It was part of a traveling exhibition, called *Art in America*. The floating car is part of Bob Tannen's mobile home installation entitled, "Louisiana Space Shuttle." His launching was scheduled to coincide with NASA's launch. His took off as planned on time; however, NASA was two days late.

Besides a party given by the man who owns a large chain of drugstores and has been a patron of the CAC since its outset at his headquarters building nearby, we also had a bus tour to attend a number of gallery openings. By chance, the tour guide was a book maker, Page Flamm, whose books I had photographed the last time I was in New Orleans. It truly is a small world!

During the last day of meetings, Buster Holmes, the famous restaurateur who feeds jazz greats with red beans and rice, catered the last lunch during the series of meetings. After a committee was elected to assess the possibilities of a national organization, Sarah and I proceeded to explore Royal Street and came upon Jazz in the streets with the French Market Jazz Band putting on a glorious gig for us and a large crowd—that's the New Orleans I love.

A big party at Dawn Dedeaux's house offered us a marvelous meal of barbecued shrimp. The next morning the Space Shuttle successfully was launched, and cable television really came into its own for me. I was drawn to the TV set because I was staying in a home where I could flip the dial and just about get anything—from stock reports to arts programming, from the Space Shuttle from the Atlanta news channel, to old movies—serendipity by remote control! After a visit to Longue Vue Gardens, I looked at TV again before taking off for the airport.

Epilogue: Both in the Los Angeles airport where I waited for my plane and again on my return flight in the New Orleans airport, pro-nuke forces seemed to be passing around the propaganda, wearing sandwich boards, and promoting nuclear power. It seemed like a bad dream.

The other bad dream seemed to reflect the black cloud I have over me (like the character in Lil Abner comic strip), because everytime I am in a plane, someone important gets shot. From Seattle to Portland, Reagan was shot; from L.A. to San Francisco, recently, the Pope was shot. The question is, should I fly again?

—jah