

ARTISTS' BOOKS

Artists-Talk-on-Art, March 25

□ Moderator **Pat Steir** is an artist and member of Printed Matter, which publishes and distributes artists' books. Panelists **Leandro Katz**, **Eve Sonneman**, and **Robert Barry** are artists who make books. They reviewed what is being done in the field, and its potential value and relevance to society.

Steir began by commenting that the genre becomes increasingly attractive to artists as a vehicle for their ideas, allowing them both through form and context to cover areas that traditional painting and sculpture do not. She noted the difference between experiencing an artist's book in the privacy of one's own space and the public viewing of art in a gallery or museum.

Books are ideal companions: unobtrusive, easy to transport, trade, or dispose of, and do not demand much space. For the artist they can be relatively inexpensive to make, easily distributed, and affordable to the general public.

There is now an astonishing number of artists making books, Steir said. For an unknown artist, or one not living in a major urban area, it's a way to have one's work seen and a way, also, to curb the authority of galleries and museums in defining taste and shaping culture.

Leandro Katz has made some 14 books, printing at first with collectives, producing limited editions on small presses, then larger editions as new techniques became available. The artist can take over the milieu of books, a powerful medium for propagating ideas, Katz said, and should try to save the "idea" of a book from commercial trade. *Self-Hypnosis*, his most recent work, contains an image and numeral system with a continuing text interpreting it. The reader becomes actively involved in the construction of the book, thrust out of the role of passive consumer or spectator customary in "viewing art."

Eve Sonneman has just finished her first book, *Real Time*, a collection of her favorite photographs. The "passing of time, moment to moment," is conveyed through double-image photographs side by side. Sonneman chose the book format for its concision and availability. She supervised the making of the book and the reproduction of photographs she herself had developed.

Robert Barry, who saw "the book as book" rather than as a carrier of information, had at first been invited by a dealer to make a book, *Zero to 1*, with Vito Acconci. Now Barry's books usually have no title, no beginning, and no end, but on each page an isolated descriptive phrase, "adding up" to nothing, defying classical narrative structure.

Steir asked, "When does something become a book? Is 'sequentialness' in form necessary?" Katz replied that his books are not objects that reveal themselves, but reveal instead the didactic process of language. At this point the audience brought up the question of the economics of producing books, asking whether money considerations limit creativity. The speakers outlined ways of making books cheaply, saying that with off-set printing and xerography anyone could afford to make a book—cost determined by how elaborate a project becomes. Grants for making books are now available also.

Again the audience asked whether the artist's book will remain democratic, "devaluing the 'art object.'" Would not hand-signed, limited-edition works eventually go the same route as other precious art, increasing in price and in the hands of a few wealthy collectors?

The panelists said this would certainly happen with limited editions, but their own books are in unlimited editions. Steir's company will not accept any other kind.

Is it possible to make money from books? All said returns are slim—definitely not a money-making venture.

Katz said again that for him the form is a search for a language outside the general language of books. Able to reach all those persons not usually reached by art, the artist can gain some idea of potential audience and the general culture.

Do any national book chains take artists' books? Not many, Katz said, but he advocated keeping the distinction between artists' books and general trade books, with a special section for these technical and didactic investigations. ■

—**Medrie MacPhee**

[Write Printed Matter, 105 Hudson St., NYC 10013, to be put on their mailing list.]

Medrie MacPhee, a painter from Canada, studied at Nova Scotia College of Art and Cooper Union, works at Printed Matter.

The Downtown Art Scene:
A Quarter Century Ago

Artists-Talk-on-Art, April 29

□ Moderator: **Bruce Barton**. Panelists: **Nell Blaine** (Jane Street), **Louise Bourgeois** (Peridot), **Gretna Campbell** (Pyramid), **Angelo Ippolito and Lois Dodd** (Tanager), **Richard Stankiewicz** (Hansa), **Don David** (Camino), **Ed Clark** (Brata), **Pat Passlof** (March), **Bob Henry** (James), **Ruth Fortrel** (and Duback from the floor) (Area), **Bruno Palmer-Poroner** (Phoenix and Nonagon).

This was a panel! The largest, the most interminable! Despite its broader title, which led me to expect talk about the work, the issues, the "Club," artists' publications (Geist was in the audience), and, incidentally, artists' galleries, the panel limited itself to the last-mentioned, which was, for me, only one expression of this expansionist period.

The ATOA Committee deserves a tribute from all of us, and a grant from somewhere, for sponsoring this series. My only complaint is that there is no continuity, nor the flexibility which would allow such an unwieldy panel to be carried over the following week. The old "Club" had an advantage in a smaller, more coherent art world, in which one man (Phillip Pavia) could keep his ear to the ground and play it accordingly. Weekly mailings, which could be changed at the last minute, helped too.

As it turned out, each panelist was there as historian for the gallery with which he or she had been affiliated, and thus burdened with the kind of documentation (founding dates, founding members, rents and rulings, old addresses, dues, budgets, lists and constitutions) which more properly belong in archives.

Bruce Barton researched the subject conscientiously, one of the results being the increase of the originally announced panel of seven to the final dozen. Nell Blaine was represented on tape by an excellent interview with Bruce, too long to hear more than half-way through, but which stirred up flurries of memories. We panelists were just warming up when our exhausted audience deserted us. ■

—**Pat Passlof**

39th ANNUAL EXHIBITION,
East Hampton, NY

April 30 - June 2

□ Launching the new season at Guild Hall, East Hampton, 192 members filled two galleries in the annual Open Show, juried by Cynthia Navaretta, Betty Parsons, and Ray Prohaska.

Best-in-show went to Perle Fine, who will be awarded a one-person exhibition in 1978. First place for representational painting went to Doris Schwartz, and a "first" for watercolor to Susanne Yardley Mason. Among 20 Honorable Mentions were: Elsie Manville, Pat Ralph, Phyllis Mark, Margaret Lamb, Mary Tyson, Dorothy Vogel, Phyllis Hirschberg. ■

MORE DOPE ON THE COUNTERWEIGHT:

or, Another Story for Women

□ Much has been said on the Whitney Counterweight. What I have to add is one of those stories that likes to be told, and is not without significance. I had the questionable privilege of being one of seven jurors for some of the show (*some*, because only about 60% of the work chosen went through the jury process).

Four slides from each applicant were placed anonymously in carousels, and we voted by number. New to New York, I knew the work of very few people. A number of the jurors were not intimate with the art world either, so our choices were pretty detached—no friends, no lobbying. (Looking only at slides is, of course, another problem.) Toward the end of the jurying, the moderator announced that over 60% of the final

ists were women. One man blanched visibly. Another said, "Well, I had hoped it would be at least 50-50."

I had to leave town at this point. When I returned, this unique imbalance had been redressed. The final selection was 46% women.

I think without a cultural bias by male jurors the show would have been more than 60% female. Certainly it was evident during jurying that most of the strong work was by women. In the actual show, women, blacks, and third world people still dominated with many of the stronger pieces.

Despite its problems the Counterweight was a significant and much-needed event. But for me its greatest failure was that it played it safe, insisting on the status quo.

—**Betsy Damon**

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