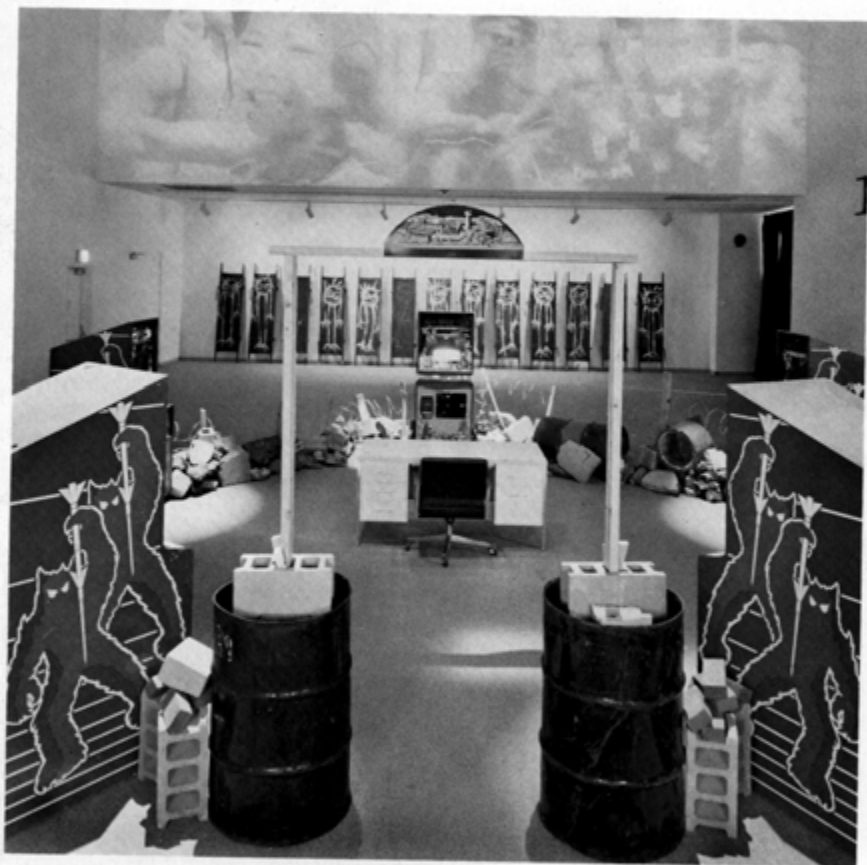


FRANCESC TORRES

PATHS OF GLORY



March 12 — April 19, 1985

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to guest curator Donald Kuspit, Professor, Art Department, State University of New York at Stony Brook, who developed this exhibition and contributed the catalogue essay.

I would also like to thank everyone who was involved in the installation of this exhibition, especially Gary Floyd, Technical Director of the Fine Arts Center, the Fine Arts Center Technical Staff, and the Art Gallery Staff.

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Most of all, I wish to thank Francesc Torres for sharing his work with the Stony Brook community.

Rhonda Cooper
Director

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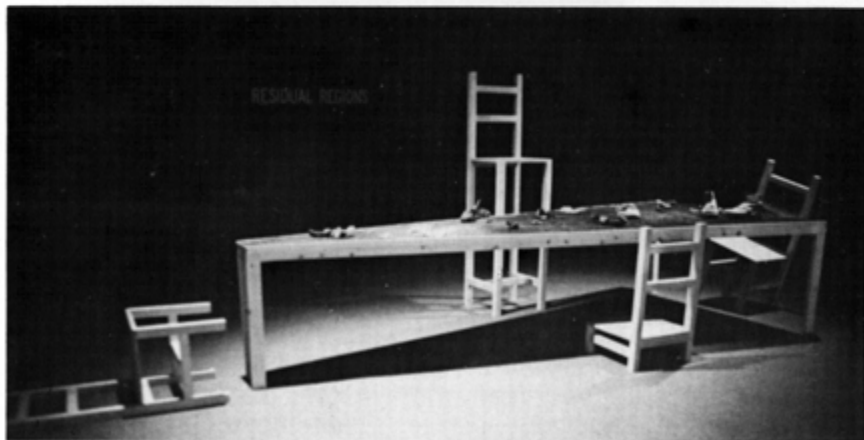
Cover: *PATHS OF GLORY*, 1985

Twenty painted army stretchers, three hand-colored slide projections, four arcade video games (operational), one arcade video game shell with a single channel videotape, an electrically operated drum stick, wood, barbed wire, and junk.

FRANCESC TORRES

by Donald Kuspit

John Hanhardt has emphasized, justly, the depth of Francesc Torres' scepticism of totalitarian institutions. Torres' angry criticism — recall Aristotle's remark that anger is the most intelligent of the emotions — of unfree, absolute social systems seems to bespeak a glorious, rebellious aspect of his Catalonian heritage. I agree with Hanhardt, but I see this scepticism and confrontational "realism" — in intention not style, although realistic details infiltrate the generally ironic "expressionism" ("action are") of his style — as the beginning not end of Torres' art, its scalpel not the guts of what it discloses. Social protest is the seductive surface of what has become Torres' increasingly deep, probing, often clamorous investigation of human aggression, viewed ahistorically as well as historically, interpreted in terms of "dumb" nature as well as social reality, that is, understood as inevitable rather than a matter of politically purposive choice. Insistently, Torres tells us that we have no choice — that just when we think we have mastered aggression, or are using it strategically, in a discreet, limited, intelligent way, and thus have it under control, subject to social will, we are most irrationally obsessed with it, at one with it; it has mastered us completely, controls us to the very roots of our being, or rather makes itself manifest as the very source of our being, its most inward nature. It is just when we think we are manipulating — superior to — aggression, that we are most its puppet. Torres' message is thus not only socially revolutionary, but a pessimistic and tragic if far from passive recogni-



RESIDUAL REGIONS, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY 1978
A table and four chairs, dry dirt, objects from the Spanish Civil War, photographs, two Super 8 film loop projections, fabric, and a three-channel videotape.

tion of the durability of aggression in the human constitution. He demonstrates how ingrained it is, and how seminal it has been in art. Freud has written that "the limitation of aggression is the first and perhaps hardest sacrifice which society demands from each individual." Torres shows us that there may have been an individual sacrifice of aggression, but it has hardly been renounced socially. It can never be transcended, not even by the saints, who still remain aggressive "animals"; their otherworldliness is an act of aggression against this world, as well as an aggressive act by their own aggressive nature against itself.

The motorcycle of *Accident* (1977), the armored vehicles of *Field of Action* (1982), as well as the automobiles in many of the drawings of that same year, are all psychodynamically modeled on as well as throwbacks to the cave painting images of animals that appear in the *Repetition of the Novelty* (1977). They are all the animal forms of aggression, the lower form it takes to make itself manifest in the "higher" social world. This is made directly clear in *This Is an Installation that Has as a Title . . .* (1979), where a cave painting bull is "repainted" — modernized — in neon and "analyzed" as a fighting machine, a kind of tank full of explosive vector forces. Perhaps the clearest identification between the primitive aggressive animal within man and the "sophisticated" technological expressions of and inventions serving aggression, is the video monitor image of the snake installed in the battering ram featured in *The Head of the Dragon* (1981). Slithering snake and rigid battering ram are one and the same, the battering ram being the social expression of the personal snake. (The brilliance of this installation is that video is used to represent the realm of the unconscious, in which the archetypal snake image appears.) The timelessness — the biological predestination — of aggression is shown in the various machines, natural and invented, with which man has been obsessed, as the embodiment, even apotheosis, of his aggression. Indeed, what makes Torres' obsession with the manifestations and biological origins of aggression so pointed and contemporary is his very direct reliance, in his installations, on technology as the major manifestation and symbol of aggression, and as such a major clue to understanding it. He ties the machine, a conscious human construction, to its unconscious, biological origins — its unwitting use as an instrument for symbolizing and satisfying an unconscious need (and to symbolize an invisible yet strongly felt force of nature is already to satisfy it) — showing that it is far from being the enlightened and enlightening device we imagine it to be. Far from being a means of transcending our aggressive animal nature, it is at once its most sophisticated expression and an eloquent means of obscuring it. It "modernizes" aggression, really more in looks than in method, for it makes clear the methodical, reflexive — "automatic" — character of aggression. The machine locks us all the more perversely into our nature by making us think we are superior to it — for isn't the machine a rational invention? — by causing us to drop our guard against our own destructive tendencies, that is, the deep inhumanity that is part of our humanity. Yet there is no more social invention that reflects our insist-



STEEL BALLS, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 1983

A 16mm loop film projection (high contrast negative of historical material, hand colored with additional hand animation), a videotape (two monitors, single channel), 15 pinball machines, cut-out airplane shapes and sound track.

ent destructiveness; this holds true even for machines which are not for fighting; their generally indifferent, automatic operation is already a sign of our brutality.

Commenting on *Repetition of the Novelty*, Torres has written that he intends to explore "the interaction of biological and cultural imperatives when acting upon and shaping artifact — making behavior (understood as a way of apprehending and manipulating reality)." This is in direct rebellion against the rather "large segment of the cultural establishment in the U.S.A. and Europe which likes to think of art as a clinically pure intellectual exercise, magically divorced from the rather inelegant ways in which social, cultural, ideological and political relations develop." (Comment on *Field of Action*.) Torres rebels against the view of "art as something having little or nothing to do with human behavior," both by attempting to see "things globally with its inherent, unavoidable confusion" — in part generated by his deliberately using maximum amount of different media and archetypes, "archaic" and "modern," that is, being global in his choice of methods — and by reliance on an evolutionary physiological theory of human behavior. Following Paul McLean's triune brain model, Torres remarks, commenting on *The Head of the Dragon* (1981), that "the brain is somewhat like an archaeological site with the outer layer being composed of the most recent brain structure. The most primitive layer is called the reptilian complex . . . The behavioral patterns regulated by this part of our brain are . . . territoriality, aggression, leader selection, hunting, etc." Here we have the heart of Torres' installations: each is an archaeological site showing artifacts from both the most advanced and primitive layers of the cultural brain, each artifact being representative of a certain native attitude and innate mode of behavior. The effect is global because of the simultaneity of parts, and the psychodynamic equival-

ents established between them. A kind of psychosocial equivalence is established which, perhaps unexpectedly, reflects Symbolist ideas. Seeming opposites are shown to be substantially — that is, psychobiologically — the same in import, enhancing the global effect by generating a sense of universal comprehensibility. "Comprehension," literally and conceptually, is central to Torres' intention. It is what gives his work its ambitious yet simultaneously precise look.

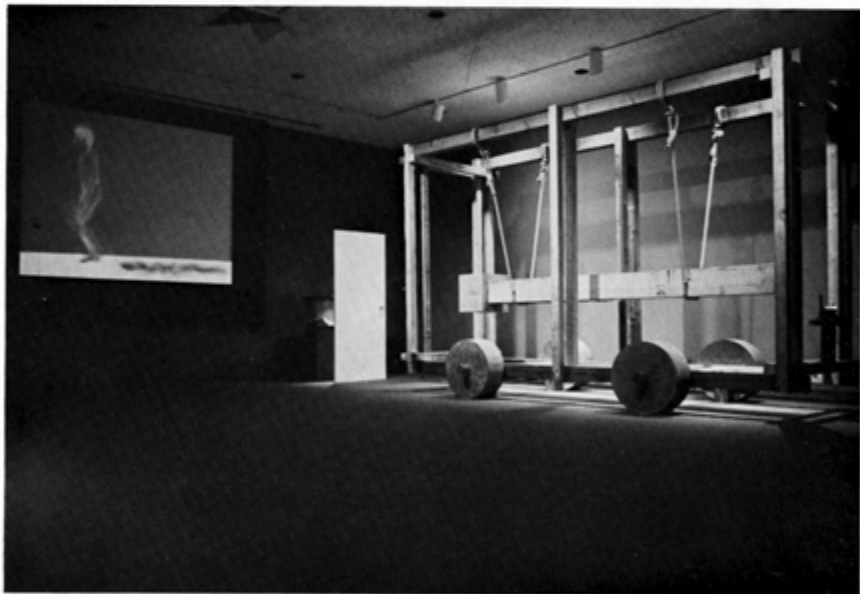
Thus, in *Field of Action*, action painting is equated with the camouflage on armored vehicles, suggesting that the aggressive component of action painting is not without behavioral and ideological foundations, or at least correlation. Jackson Pollock's credibility — Torres reproduces his *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30* (1950) as a cultural artifact — is as dependent on the Namuth photograph of him aggressively painting as on the supposed energy of the paintings themselves. Torres makes the American (ideological) and biocultural dimensions of Pollock's paintings explicit. Similarly, in *Residual Regions* (1978), artifacts from Neolithic Spain and the Spanish Civil War are united to make clear the continuing primitive aggressivity of Spain, an aggressivity which has created the ruins or relics that litter the installation site. Spain's famous picturesqueness is shown to be a landscape of destruction. Again, in *The Assyrian Paradigm* (1980), ostensibly showing "the power of the chance factor in life and historical processes," a pictureque cosmic landscape of destruction is created. The house of cards is an appropriate symbol for the decline of civilizations — victims of the aggressive impulse that built them in the first place — that is Torres' leitmotif. The follies of American civilization are particularly emphasized in the drawings of obsolete automobiles, deadends of a kind of cultural as well as stylistic evolution: the Cadillacs of *Hegelian Car or Official Vehicle for the Statesman Who Wants to Go Where the Real Action Is* and *Atomic Fallout Shelter (Mobile Version and/or Hermetic Caddy)*, and the Edsel of *No Go Also Known as to Run or Not to Run* (all of 1982). The decrepit appearance of the automobiles, and their association with American militarism — including the threat of nuclear holocaust — makes the



THE HEAD OF THE DRAGON, detail

point decisively. The *Improvised Armored Car or Prototype for a Cod-piece, also Known as Sexual Withdrawal* (1982), makes the primitive point of it with extraordinary economy of means, although all of Torres' works, installations or drawings, are more tightly organized and materially concentrated than might appear at first glance. This is not unrelated to the essential yet technically sophisticated primitivism of his art.

Torres is one of the major political artists of our time. What makes his art more than simple social commentary is its psychobiological and psychohistorical depth of meaning, which expands it into a theory of civilization. Torres' art is not only practically ingenious, with its mix of media, but a demonstration of the way an art can be conceptually significant without losing its sensuality, a sensuality so intense it drives to the verge of chaos. Torres shows this drive to be inherent to human and social behavior in general. Torres' art is a sophisticated manipulation of the primitive tendency to chaos that is at the root of so much existence — the self-deception that says we are advancing toward civilization when we are simply becoming more elegantly barbaric. Torres shows us that every progress towards rational civilization and technological facilitation of life turns out to have its dark side, to be a sinister regress to the inescapably primitive within us — an instrument of our aggressive death wish.



THE HEAD OF THE DRAGON, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY 1981

A full scale replica of a battering ram, a videotape (eight monitors, single channel), a closed circuit T.V. set-up, a 16mm film loop projection (hand colored plus animation), a puzzle, drawings, a miniature steam engine (working), a live boa constrictor, and a soundtrack.



TOUGH LIMO, Anderson Gallery, Richmond, VA 1983

Full scale mock-up of a military tank, five live iguanas inside visible from the outside, 50 chairs, a videotape shown on a monitor and simultaneously beamed on the wall, and a house of playing cards.



FRANCESC TORRES

Born in Barcelona, Spain in 1948.

Worked and lived in Paris, France, 1967 through 1969; Chicago, Illinois 1972 through 1973.

Has lived in New York City since 1974.

ONE PERSON SHOWS:

1973

Two Hundred Steps, Evanston Arts Center, Evanston, Illinois.

Two Exercises, Illinois Center, Chicago, Illinois.

Elemental Considerations, Francis Parker School, Chicago, Illinois.

1974

Redor Gallery, Madrid, Spain.

Behaving, Vehicule Art Inc., Montreal, Canada.

1975

Almost Like Sleeping, Artists Space, New York, New York.

Personal Intersections, 112 Greene Street Gallery, New York, New York.

Installation Piece, Espai de la Caixa d'Estalvis, Barcelona, Spain.

1976

Synchronic Attempts, 112 Greene Street Gallery, New York, New York.

Installation Piece, Gallery St: Petri, Lund, Sweden.

Installation Piece, Galleria Akumulatory 2, Poznan, Poland.

I.A.C., Friedrichsfehn, West Germany.

Kleine Gallery, Oldenburg, West Germany.

Everybody's House is Burning, Galeria "G", Barcelona, Spain.

1977

Behavioral Works, Channel C, Manhattan Cable Television, New York, New York.

Repetition of the Novelty, P.S. 1, Long Island City, New York.

C.E.A.C., Toronto, Canada.

Accident, 112 Greene Street Gallery, New York, New York.

Scenography of Work, in an abandoned textile factory, sponsored by Galeria Tres, Sabadell, Spain.

1978

Profane History, Tot Art, Spanish Television, Spain.

Three Books, Franklin Furnace, New York, New York.

Residual Regions, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York.

1979

Look, Look, Look At It, Department of Art, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Barcelona, Spain.

This Is An Installation That Has As A Title . . ., Fundacio Joan Miro,
Barcelona, Spain.
John Doesn't Know What Paul Does, The Everson Museum, Syracuse,
New York.

1980

Rock-Solid-Thin-Air, The Planetarium at The Hudson River Museum,
Yonkers, New York.
Seen Elsewhere, Watson Gallery, Wheaton College, Norton, Massachusetts.
Paradigm City Time, Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown,
Massachusetts.
Residual Regions, The Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (L.A.I.C.A.),
Los Angeles, California.
Running Speech, Elise Meyer Gallery, New York, New York.

1981

The Head of the Dragon, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York,
New York.

1982

Drawings, Elise Meyer Gallery, New York, New York.
Field of Action, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University,
Ithaca, New York.
Airstrip, Hartford Art School, University of Hartford, Hartford, Connecticut.

1983

Steel Balls, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado.
Tough Limo, Anderson Gallery, Virginia Commonwealth University,
Richmond, Virginia.
Masters of Contemporary Drawing: Francesc Torres, Anderson Gallery,
Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia.

1984

Tough Limo, Washington Project for the Arts (W.P.A.), Washington, D.C.
Warriors Have Funny Heads, Damon Brandt Gallery, New York, New York.
Electronic Billboard at Times Square, New York, New York.

1985

Tough Limo, Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
The Dictatorship of Swiftiness, Stadtische Galerie Im Lenbachhaus,
Munich, West Germany.
Paths of Glory, State University of New York at Stony Brook, Stony Brook,
New York.

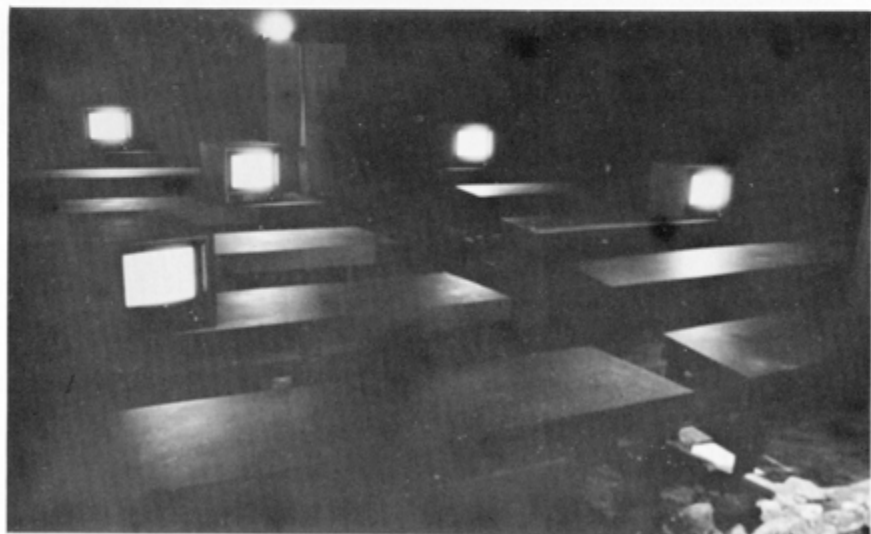
INSTITUTIONAL & PUBLIC COLLECTIONS:

The New York Public Library, Video Collection, Donnell Library, New York, NY; Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY; William College Museum of Art, Williamstown, MA; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sao Paulo, Brazil; Museum of Modern Art, Book Collection, New York, NY; Joan Miro Foundation, Book Collection, Barcelona, Spain; The Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Fine Arts School, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain; The Alternative Museum, New York, NY; The Herbert F. Johnson Museum, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY; Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA; Stadtische Galerie Im Lenbachhaus, Munich, West Germany; Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, PA; and Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, ME.



KLAUSEWITZ'S CLASSROOM and/or YALTA BEGINS AT SCHOOL, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1984

Installation View.



KLAUSEWITZ'S CLASSROOM and/or YALTA BEGINS AT SCHOOL

Detail of the video set-up, five monitors "sitting" on the classroom benches; single channel tape, six minutes long repeating itself constantly.



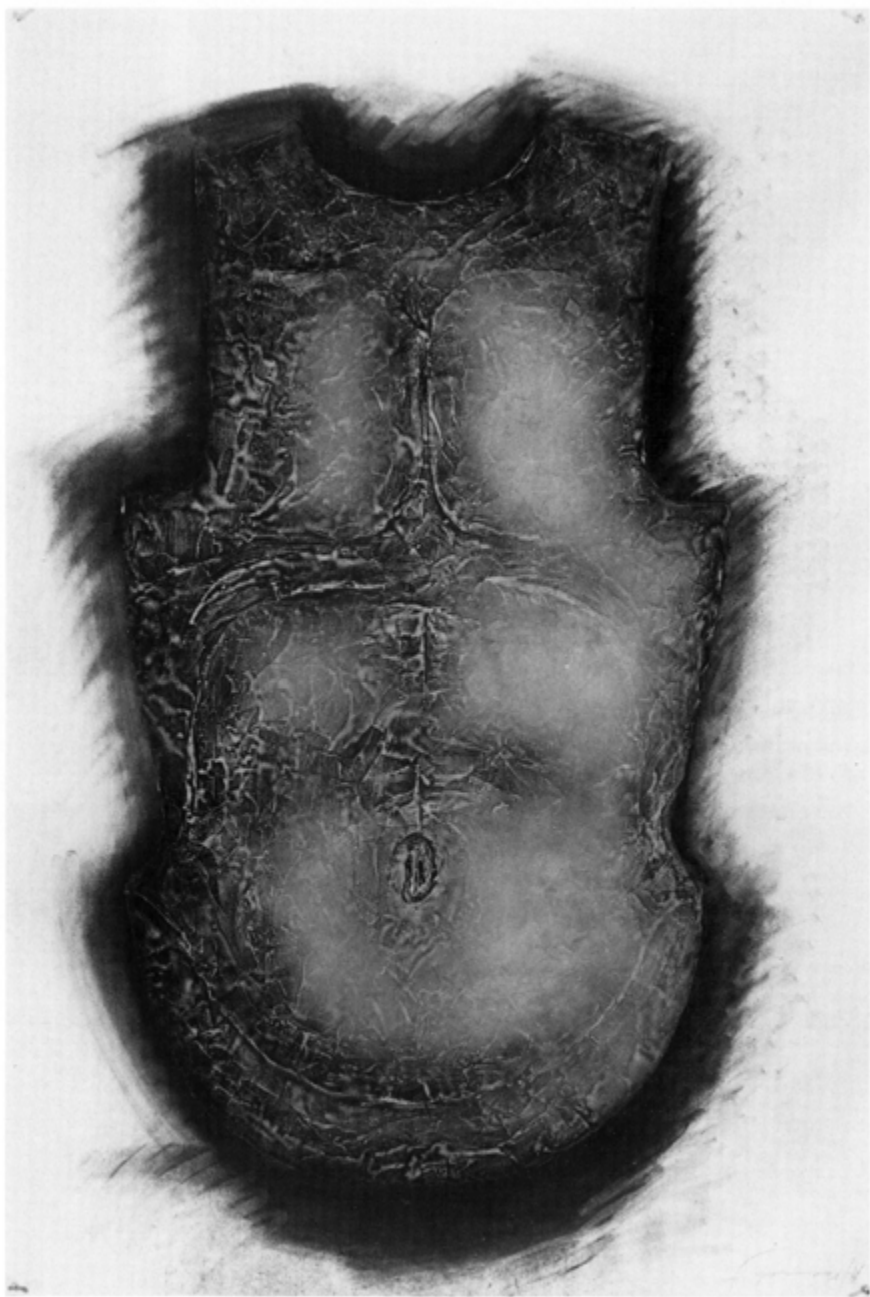
KLAUSEWITZ'S CLASSROOM and/or YALTA BEGINS AT SCHOOL

Detail of live boa constrictor and microphone on desk, video images reflected on the glass of the cage.



KLAUSEWITZ'S CLASSROOM and/or YALTA BEGINS AT SCHOOL

Detail of the portraits of Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin propped up in the rubble (some of the stones are painted in different national colors).



*ROMAN BREASTPLATE WITH VULNERABLE AREAS LIGHTLY INDICATED,
1984*

Sculptmetal, spray paint, charcoal, and brass flag on paper, 60 x 40".

PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS AT THE ART GALLERY

- 1975** FACULTY EXHIBITION
- 1976** MICHELLE STUART
RECENT DRAWINGS (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS EXHIBITION)
SALVATORE ROMANO
- 1977** MEL PEKARSKY
JUDITH BERNSTEIN
HERBERT BAYER (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS EXHIBITION)
- 1978** LEON GOLUB
WOMEN ARTISTS FROM NEW YORK
JANET FISH
ROSEMARY MAYER
THE SISTER CHAPEL
- 1979** SHIRLEY GORELICK
ALAN SONFIST
HOWARDENA PINDELL
ROY LICHTENSTEIN
- 1980** BENNY ANDREWS
ALEX KATZ
EIGHT FROM NEW YORK
ARTISTS FROM QUEENS
OTTO PIENE
STONY BROOK 11, THE STUDIO FACULTY
- 1981** ALICE NEEL
55 MERCER: 10 SCULPTORS
JOHN LITTLE
IRA JOEL HABER
LEON POLK SMITH
- 1982** FOUR SCULPTORS
CECILE ABISH
JACK YOUNGERMAN
ALAN SHIELDS
THE STONY BROOK ALUMNI INVITATIONAL
ANN MCCOY
- 1983** THE WAR SHOW
CERAMIC DIRECTIONS: A CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW
CINDY SHERMAN
THE FACULTY SHOW
- 1984** BERNARD APTEKAR: ART AND POLITICS
ERIC STALLER: LIGHT YEARS
NORMAN BLUHM: SEVEN FROM THE SEVENTIES
EDWARD COUNTEY 1921-1984
CARL ANDRE: SCULPTURE
LEWIS HINE IN EUROPE: 1918-1919

Director RHONDA COOPER

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK

THE FINE ARTS CENTER



art gallery

THE FINE ARTS CENTER ART GALLERY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK