

new possibilities/1997



**problems
of
contemporary
art:
possibilities I**

abel. arp. bazioros. caffi. calvo. haieff

hayter. hulbeck. goodman. miró. motherwell

nienmeyer. pas. pollock. rosenberg. rathko

devid smith. virgil thomson. varèse. ben weber

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University Art Gallery

State University of New York at Stony Brook

POSSIBILITIES 1947 / 1997

*One functions in an attitude of expectancy.*¹

On the fiftieth anniversary of its publication, the magazine *possibilities* remains a relevant document. Conceived by the artist Robert Motherwell and the critic Harold Rosenberg as an "occasional review," it appeared only once, in late 1947, and is a testament to their shared belief in art as a manifestation of individual experience. Its four editors—Motherwell for art, Rosenberg for literature, the composer John Cage for music, and the architect Pierre Chareau for architecture—sembled an eclectic assortment of images and texts, ranging from an Edgar Allan Poe essay to poetry by the sculptor David Smith, fiction, criticism, and interviews with modern composers. There were also photographs of a parabolic-arched building by the Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer, statements by several contemporary artists, and reproductions of their work. The selection reflected no common philosophy or aesthetic program. Rather, as Rosenberg and Motherwell wrote in their introductory remarks, *possibilities* was devoted to work that embodied the artists' experience "without seeking to transcend it in academic, group or political formulas."² Thus the editors deliberately avoided any implication that the magazine was a *de facto* position paper for the nascent tendency, as William Seitz characterized it, which became known as Abstract Expressionism.

Nevertheless, as both Robert Hobbs and Ann Gibson have pointed out, *possibilities* did exemplify a certain outlook that, in Gibson's words, "paralleled some aspects of the developing aesthetic of Abstract Expressionist art."³ In Hobbs' view, the affinity was not so much with style or content as with attitude or practice; the magazine and the movement aimed "to catch the freshness of the unresolved."⁴ Both Gibson and Hobbs cite evidence of a period ethos in *possibilities*' non-programmatic structure and emphasis on idiosyncrasy, spontaneity, and the fantastic. As Hobbs has summarized it: "Mythology and magic are of great concern. The cult of individualism is still rampant. Personal vision and individual intuition still count."⁵ As a result, Gibson concluded, the editors "purposefully sacrificed the cohesiveness offered by a single philosophy, a single medium, or consistent organization in favor of the 'possibilities' lurking in the unexpected conjunction of dissimilar elements."⁶

The current exhibition celebrates the golden jubilee of *possibilities* by affirming the continuing validity of that approach.

The seven Long Island artists represented in *new possibilities* were chosen in the spirit of the magazine: they seem to me to share a kinship with those selected by Motherwell and Rosenberg. Cage's editorial contri-

bution—Q and A sessions among several composers—is less adaptable to the exhibition format, although its emphasis on the necessity of finding a musical language ideally suited to each composer's own subjective intentions is not without parallels in the visual art rhetoric. Chareau's architecture component, limited to three views of Niemeyer's 1946 reinforced concrete church, implicitly supports the magazine's devotion to non-ideological individuality by illustrating a practical application. To find an analogous recent example, however, one would have to look outside the geographical region to which *new possibilities* is confined.

What we have here, I believe, is a disparate group of visual artists with several things in common, primarily the deeply personal and highly intuitive character of their various approaches. That is not to say that they use no traditional techniques or deny aesthetic precedents. The search for possibilities by no means precludes such a creative progression. In fact that very continuity (not stylistic or philosophical, and certainly not theoretical—perhaps spiritual is the most appropriate term for it) establishes the intangible relationships between the *possibilities* artists and their contemporary counterparts.

In one case, the relationship is literal. Ibram Lassaw, two years older than Motherwell, would certainly have qualified for inclusion in a subsequent issue of *possibilities* for his innovative, spontaneously executed sculpture was (and still is) a prime example of the materialized "conversion of energy" that the magazine celebrated. As Smith defined it in one of his poems, sculpture is "the fight between the monster Tiamat personification of chaos darkness disorder evil and Marduk god of light," and Lassaw's work seeks to resolve that dichotomy. His vocabulary of spatial structure echoes the unseen forces, negative and positive alike, that bind all matter, from atoms to galaxies. Two generations separate him from Nick Micros, who mines deep veins of memory and emotion for the ore with which to forge physical links between form and feeling. He might well say, as Joan Miró did in *possibilities*, "I regard the past and I work with the future in mind." With a surreal sense of the absurd, Micros infuses recognizable elements with hidden meanings—veiled, buried, obscured, struggling to emerge from the accumulated weight of conventional human expectations.

Josh Dayton's ceramic reliefs are similarly ambiguous although less assertive, inhabiting a realm that seems to shift between contour and substance. The "principle and passion of organisms" to which Mark Rothko referred in his *possibilities* essay is embodied in Dayton's sensuous clay shards, alien yet strangely familiar, mounted like specimens against textured backgrounds that emphasize their biological overtones. This sense of discovery born of experience,

of forming that is really transforming, is also present in the paintings of Connie Fox and Sally Egbert. In Fox's case, the approach relates to William Baziot's statement: "Each beginning suggests something. Once I sense the suggestion, I begin to paint intuitively." Her references are jumbled into a kaleidoscopic maelstrom of accumulated information filtered through the artist's sensibility, turning impressions into expressions without violating the process' essential continuum. Egbert opts for a more direct encounter with the painting activity itself, allowing it to guide the evolution of imagery and producing what Jackson Pollock described as the "pure harmony, the easy give and take" of unpremeditated inspiration.

A more deliberate amalgamation of the artist's own history and a generalized level of perception is the hallmark of Edvard Lieber's multilayered collages, which incorporate painting, drawing, photography, and fragments of text written especially for each image. Under the rubric Plural Space, the series investigates a multiplicity of realities, from the concrete world of buildings and recognizable people—among them John Cage, Leonard Bernstein, and the artist himself—to the intangible sphere of fragmentary thoughts, fleeting sensations, and musical rhythms. As the composer Edgard Varèse observed in *possibilities*: "The nature of the physical world (time, space, matter) is no longer what it was for us in the past," and Lieber, who is also a composer, uses visual art to prove the truth of that claim. Carol Hunt establishes its validity beyond question with work that arises in an electronic matrix—a world where those forces are in constant interactive flux. The collective title of her series, Reflections in Time and Space, indicates her involvement with mirroring but also with musing, contemplation, and the suggestive potential of forms that evolve one from another. As both a stimulus and a means of realizing her objectives, the computer serves Hunt as Stanley William Hayter's automatic drawing techniques served him. In *possibilities* Hayter asserted that "the use of automatism in exploring the imagination (and in making the exploration available through its echo in other minds) is not a static experience," an apt description of Hunt's graphic animations.

Exactly half a century after Hayter, Varèse, Pollock, Baziot's, Rothko, Miró, and Smith gave the readers of *possibilities* tantalizing glimpses into the artists' private domain, the creative values they represent continue to have meaning. They are alive and flourishing in the work of the seven contemporary artists represented here, and in all artistic endeavor that celebrates individuality, affirms humanity, delights in experience, disdains conformity, and manifests "the extremist faith in sheer possibility."

Helen A. Harrison

NOTES

1. Robert Motherwell and Harold Rosenberg, editorial statement, *possibilities* 1 (Winter 1947/8), p.1
2. *Ibid.*
3. Ann Eden Gibson, "Possibilities: 'The Thing without Theory,'" *Issues in Abstract Expressionism: The Artist-run Periodicals* (Ann Arbor, MI: U.M.I. Research Press, 1987), p.33
4. Robert C. Hobbs, "Re-Review: Possibilities," *Art Criticism* VI:2 (1979), p.97
5. Hobbs, p. 98
6. Gibson, p. 36
7. Motherwell and Rosenberg, *ibid.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my gratitude to Helen A. Harrison, Director of the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center in East Hampton, for organizing this exhibition and for contributing her illuminating essay.

Special thanks are also extended to members of the Staller Center for the Arts staff: Pete Pantaleo and Pat Pickett, for installation assistance; Pauline Cullen, Denise Fierro, Mei Huang, and Stella del Rosario, Gallery Assistants; Elizabeth Garcia, Aleksandra Ikanowicz, Peter Kaufman, Mimi Ng, Young Park, and Xin Quinwu, Gallery Interns; Patrick Kelly, Production Manager, Liz Silver, Technical Director, and Neil Creedon, ATD, and the Technical Crew, Staller Center, for exhibition lighting; and Mary Balduf, Gallery Secretary.

Most of all, I wish to thank the artists for participating in this exhibition and for sharing their work with the Stony Brook community.

Rhonda Cooper
Director

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Artists are listed in alphabetical order. All dimensions are given in inches, height preceding width preceding depth. All works lent by the artist unless indicated otherwise.

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of New York at Stony Brook.

JOSH DAYTON

1. *Anthony's Jacket*, 1997
Ceramic on linen, 48 x 34"
2. *Balustrade to Mars*, 1997
Ceramic on paper and canvas, 45 x 32"
3. *Flusteration*, 1997
Ceramic on paper and canvas, 36 x 24"
4. *Night Mask*, 1997
Ceramic on paper and canvas, 36 x 24"
5. *The Bricklayer's Fog*, 1997
Ceramic on paper and canvas, 45 x 32"
6. *The Weird One*, 1997
Ceramic on paper and canvas, 44 x 30"
7. *Washable Queen*, 1997
Ceramic on paper and canvas, 43 x 27"

Courtesy Arlene Bujese Gallery, East Hampton



Night Mask

Photo credit: Noel Rowe

SALLY EGBERT

1. *Jackknife*, 1996
Oil on canvas, 60 x 72"
2. *Untitled painting*, 1996
Oil on canvas, 20 x 20"
3. *Untitled painting*, 1996
Oil on canvas, 20 x 20"
4. *Cloud*, 1997
Oil on canvas, 77 x 56"
5. *Smoke*, 1997
Oil on canvas, 77 x 56"
6. *River*, 1997
Oil on canvas, 60 x 60"
7. *Untitled painting*, 1997
Oil on canvas, 20 x 20"
8. *Untitled painting*, 1997
Oil on canvas, 20 x 20"



River



Night Kites

1. *Not the Man, Not the Tornado*, 1985
Acrylic on canvas, 100 x 160"
2. *Night Kites*, 1992
Acrylic on canvas, 90 x 72"
3. *Mondo*, 1993
Acrylic on canvas, 78 x 84"

CAROL HUNT



Variation 5

1. *Reflections in Time and Space*, 1996
Computer animation, 12 minutes
2. *Variation 5*, 1996
Iris print, 20 x 32"
3. *Variation 6*, 1996
Iris print, 12-1/2 x 20"
4. *Variation 10*, 1996
Iris print, 20 x 32"
5. *Variation 11*, 1996
Iris print, 20 x 32"
6. *Variation 56F60*, 1996
Iris print, 20 x 32"
7. *Variation 56F119*, 1996
Iris print, 12-1/2 x 20"
8. *Variation 56F130*, 1996
Iris print, 12-1/2 x 20"

Courtesy Arlene Bujese Gallery,
East Hampton

IBRAM LASSAW

1. *Counterpoint Castle*, 1957
Bronze, 38 x 26 x 19"
2. *Topography*, 1966
Ink on paper, 16-1/2 x 21-1/4"
3. *Dharmadhatu*, 1976
Bronze, 38 x 20 x 13-1/2"
4. *Metagalaxy*, 1979
Bronze, 31 x 29 x 22"
5. *Aglaia*, 1982
Bronze, 26-1/2 x 24 x 24"
6. *Trinacria III*, 1984
Bronze, 23-1/2 x 19-1/2 x 18"
7. *Untitled (#100)*, 1985
Gouache and ink on paper, 10-1/2 x 13"
8. *Yellow Field*, 1985
Gouache and ink on paper, 11 x 14"
9. *Untitled (#104)*, 1995
Gouache and ink on paper, 11 x 14"
10. *Untitled (#109)*, 1995
Gouache and ink on paper, 9 x 8"
11. *Untitled (#110)*, 1995
Gouache and ink on paper, 8 x 9-1/2"

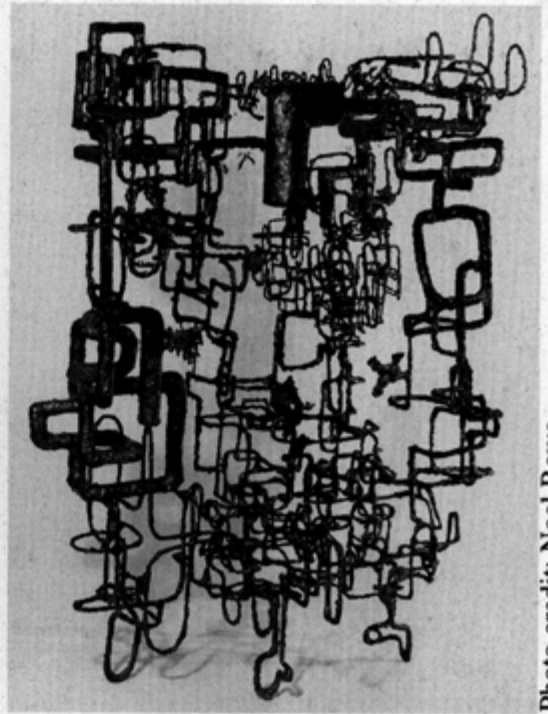


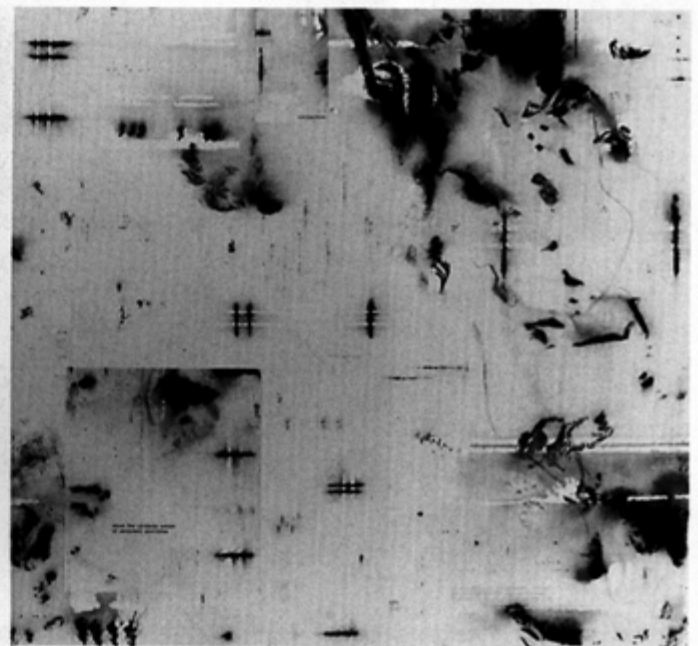
Photo credit: Noel Rowe

Counterpoint Castle

EDVARD LIEBER

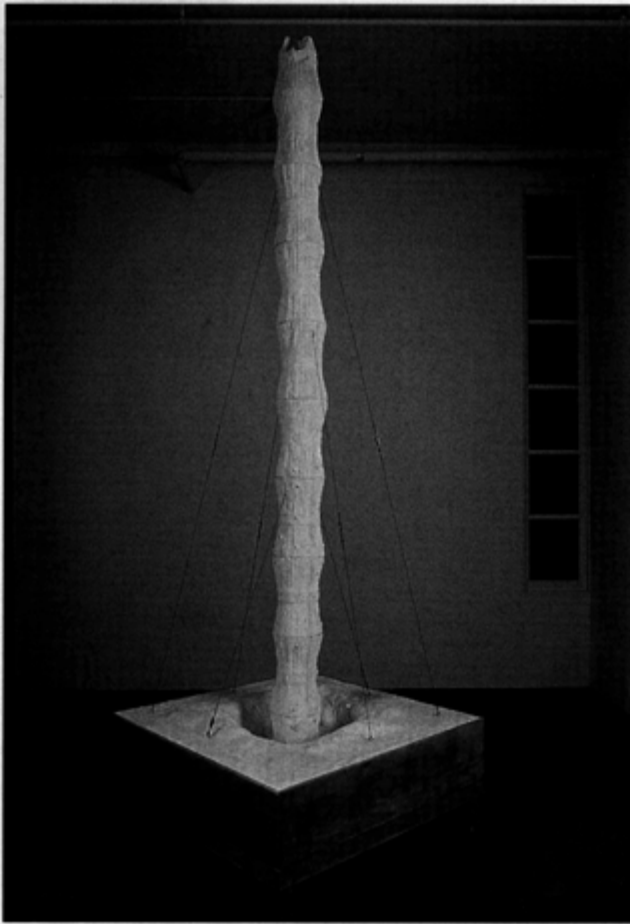
A series of seven diptychs, 1993-94:
Charcoal, ink, pencil, acrylic, sand,
volcanic ash, watercolor, silkscreen,
typewriting, pastel on paper, with
collaged photographs by the artist.

1. *Cleaving of Temporality*
7 x 34-3/8"
2. *Declension of Plane and Shadow*
22-1/4 x 29-1/2"
3. *Devexity of Syntax and Metaphor*
22-1/4 x 29-1/2"
4. *Mutability of Silence in Proximity*
14-1/8 x 19-7/8"
5. *Path to the Isolation of Transitivity*
22-1/4 x 29-1/2"
6. *Reach of Contiguity*
14-1/4 x 19"
7. *Temperature of Perception*
9-3/4 x 13-7/8"



Devexity of Syntax and Metaphor

(With photographs of John Cage playing chess, Edvard Lieber playing the piano, and three abstract photographs)



Sheaves

1. *Maquette for a Monument*, 1995
Steel, limestone, chiffon, and electric lights, 88 x 36 x 24"
2. *Untitled*, 1995
Glazed stoneware, 27 x 18 x 16"
3. *Chasuble*, 1996
Nylon, 113 x 64 x 9"
4. *Clearing*, 1996
Stoneware, plaster, fabric, wood, and casein paint, 54 x 29 x 26"
5. *Sheaves*, 1996-97
Plaster, wood, and wire, 158 x 50 x 50"

PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY

- 1975 FACULTY EXHIBITION
1976 MICHELE STUART
RECENT DRAWINGS
SALVATORE ROMANO
1977 MEL PEKARSKY
JUDITH BERNSTEIN
HERBERT BAYER
1978 LEON GOLUB
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 II, THE STUDIO FACULTY
1981 ALICE NEEL
55 MERCER: 10 SCULPTORS
JOHN LITTLE
IRA JOEL HABER
LEON POLK SMITH
1982 FOUR SCULPTORS
CECIL 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
1985 LEWIS HINE IN EUROPE: 1918-1919
FRANCESCO TORRES: PATHS OF GLORY
HOMAGE TO BOLOTOWSKY: 1935-1981
FREEDOM WITHIN: PAINTING BY JUAN SANCHEZ/
INSTALLATION BY ALFREDO JAAR
ABSTRACT PAINTINGS REDEFINED
1986 KLEEGER: METAL SCULPTURE
TOBY BUONAGURIO: SELECTED WORKS
YANG YAN-PING and ZENG SHAN-QING
EIGHT URBAN PAINTERS: CONTEMPORARY
ARTISTS OF THE EAST VILLAGE
TV: THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS
WOMEN ARTISTS OF THE SURREALIST MOVEMENT
- 1987 HANS BREDER: ARCHETYPAL DIAGRAMS
MICHAEL SINGER: RITUAL SERIES RETELLINGS
JUDITH DOLNICK/ROBERT NATKIN
MARGARET BOURKE-WHITE: THE HUMANITARIAN
VISION
MEL ALEXENBERG: COMPUTER ANGELS
STEINA AND WOODY VASULKA: THE WEST
1988 THE FACULTY SHOW '88
ROBERT WHITE: SELECTED WORKS 1947-1988
LEE KRASNER: PAINTINGS 1956-1984
EDGAR BUONAGURIO: PERMUTATION AND
EVOLUTION 1974-1988
JOAN SNYDER COLLECTS JOAN SNYDER
1989 ROBERT KUSHNER: SILENT OPERAS
HERMAN CHERRY: PAINTINGS 1984-1989
HAITIAN ART: THE GRAHAM COLLECTION
FIBER EXPLORATIONS: NEW WORK IN FIBER ART
1990 PRINTS BY PRINTMAKERS
KIT-YIN SNYDER: ENRICO IV
FANTASTIC VOYAGES
POETIC LICENSE
1991 FREDERIC AMAT and ROBERTO JUAREZ
ADOLPH GOTTLIEB: EPIC ART
THE MONOTYPES OF ADOLPH GOTTLIEB
THE FACULTY SHOW '91
NEW TRADITIONS: THIRTEEN HISPANIC
PHOTOGRAPHERS
1992 JULIUS TOBIAS
REUBEN KADISH
CITY VIEWS
GEORGE KORAS
1993 CONCEPTS WITH NEON
WARREN BRANDT: A RETROSPECTIVE
JOHN FERREN: IMAGES FROM NATURE
WOOD
1994 PAPER WORKS
ROBERT RICHENBURG: ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONIST
THE FACULTY SHOW '94
MAURA SHEEHAN: DORA: BIG GIRLS DON'T CRY
1995 EIGHTEEN SUFFOLK ARTISTS
PAT HAMMERMAN and BURT HASEN
ART AND TECHNOLOGY
PRIVATE ART/PUBLIC ART: PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE
COLLECTIONS OF CITIBANK AND JOHNSON &
JOHNSON
1996 JOHN HULTBERG, VINCENT PEPI, and
EDVINS STRAUTMANIS
ROGER ARRANDALE WILLIAMS: THE AMERICAN
TERRAIN
KEITH SONNIER: ORIENTAL-OCCIDENTAL
TEXT AND IDENTITY: 12 WOMEN/12 ARTISTS
1997 TERENCE NETTER: VISIONS AND REVISIONS
FACULTY SHOW 1997