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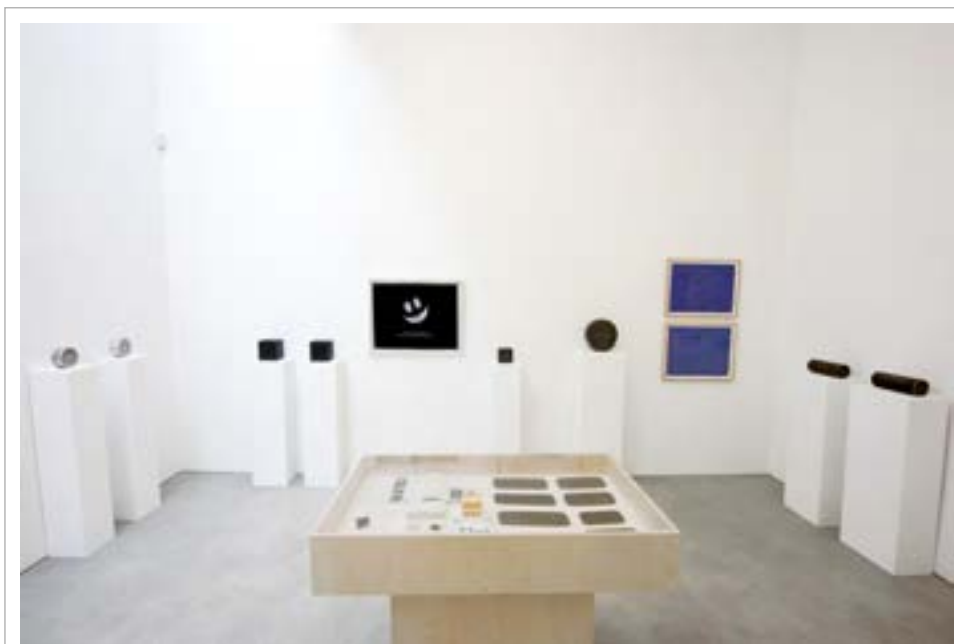
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ARTISTS — NEWS



JOURNEY THROUGH THE PAST: STEPHEN KALTENBACH, A FORGOTTEN CONCEPTUAL MASTER, MAKES A COMEBACK IN NEW YORK

BY *John Chiaverina* POSTED 05/16/16 1:30 PM



Installation View, Stephen Kaltenbach at Marlborough Chelsea
 MARLBOROUGH CHELSEA

In the late '60s, the artist Stephen Kaltenbach spent three manic, productive years in New York City before decamping to California, where he still lives and operates as a “regional artist” of sorts. In his three New York years, Kaltenbach produced a diverse body of work that traced the contours of the city’s emerging Conceptual and Post-Minimalist art movements, all carried out with an enigmatic prankster spirit that has continued to govern his practice. Until June 18, Marlborough Chelsea’s small Viewing Room sub-gallery is exhibiting a mini-retrospective from the artist, focusing primarily on the work he made during his concentrated time in the city. The day before the show’s opening, Kaltenbach gave me a tour of the exhibition alongside the space’s director, the artist and actor Leo

Fitzpatrick.

“I had a number of issues when I came to New York that I wanted to investigate, one them was Minimalism, and I had been doing simple objects pretty much like Donald Judd and felt that I could go a lot further than that,” Kaltenbach told me. A text written by the artist called *A Short Article on Expression 1969–2016* could be seen as a centerpiece of the exhibition. The writing contains a series of abstract proclamations and questions, things like “the manipulation of perception is a valid goal of art expression” and “is it important for an artist to be able to distinguish between manipulation of perception as a means for art expression from its manipulation as a result?”

A sprightly 76, Kaltenbach has short hair and a gray beard. He wore a light-blue hoodie with a shirt under it that was an even lighter shade of blue. He took me through a thorny, conceptual body of work that at times yielded more questions than answers. At one point he told me that he had converted to Christianity from Buddhism, telling me it was “one of the most counterintuitive things that can happen to a person. I was a Zen Buddhist because I didn’t have to deal with the God reality at all, that’s not what they do. So, I’m in the position of saying things that people don’t believe and I think it’s a logical extension of my work.” I asked him if he expected people to take him at face value. “Some do, some don’t. It’s all interesting to me,” he said. “I’m not your boss, you are.”

The exhibition weaves through a variety of materials and approaches, many of which were pioneering for the era (Kaltenbach was included in the renowned 1968 show “Nine” at Leo Castelli alongside artists including Richard Serra and Bruce Nauman. He also staged a solo show at the Whitney in 1969). There’s some early stencil graffiti and a series of starkly conceptual ads taken out in *Artforum* that include statements like “Perpetuate a Hoax.” There is the blueprint for a “wall painting” whose trace was so subtle that although it was shown at the San Francisco Art Institute for over two decades, art was frequently hung over it. There is a number of bronze text works that are only fully completed when inserted into nature. There are Minimalist time capsules intended to be sawed open, though few actually get that treatment. “I think it would be quite a bit of fun, yeah,” Kaltenbach responded when I asked if he would want collectors to do so. “I’ve been very interested in losing track of art,” he said. “It started with having things stolen, and I was thinking that those people were my first collectors. I had a work stolen before I sold anything.” Kaltenbach told me he hoped his art could be found in junk shops.

Viewing Room director Fitzpatrick discovered Kaltenbach through secondhand sources of a different nature. “I find a lot of my shows more through reading than through anything else,” he said. “I’m constantly reading and doing research and a lot of what I was reading, Steven’s name kept popping up. And so I slowly started doing research and looking into it, but it was this kind of Pandora’s box or Russian doll or whatever you want to call it, where there were these layers and layers and layers, and for me that’s intriguing.”

Over the years, Kaltenbach has had several art alter egos, many of which were represented at his Viewing Room show. One was Es Que, who made bad paintings initially intended for a Lord and Taylor department store. Kaltenbach donned a suit and fake mustache to become the sculptor Clyde Dillon, who initially traded in gaudy bronze abstractions. Then there’s Kaltenbach the author (his book *The End* is on display here in a glass case alongside, among other things, the artist’s own blood) and Kaltenbach the regional artist, known in Sacramento for accessible works like *Portrait of My Father*, which displays a painterly command that deviates wildly from his more conceptual pieces.

Looking at the show—its contents run far beyond what can simply be contained in this article—within a larger context, Fitzpatrick told me he is interested in “this idea of overnight success as opposed to a slow burn, especially in this day of the Internet and people are Instagram famous and then they’re gallery famous and then they’re rich and then they’re forgotten. I think with the Internet an artist’s career turns over so much faster nowadays, just because there’s more information out there, there’s more art out there.”

With the exhibition, Fitzpatrick wanted to “show people that it’s OK to take your time. People have to do this the rest of their lives; they signed up for a lifelong commitment to be an artist, so why rush to get all the success.”

“He understood that I decided on the long game,” Kaltenbach interjected.

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BAM/PFA Adds to Its Renowned Collection with the Acquisition of the Steven Leiber Conceptual Art Collection and Library

[BERKELEY](#), California [📅 December 18, 2014](#)

[🏷️ American art \(/tag/American_art\)](#) [🏷️ contemporary art \(/tag/contemporary_art\)](#)

The University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA (<http://cts.vresp.com/c/?FITZCO/8cc34b5d09/d58a14ee21/32781bc71f>)) has acquired the Steven Leiber collection of Conceptual art and ephemera as well as Leiber's library of Conceptual art reference and artists' books. Steven Leiber, who was a world-renowned dealer, scholar, and collector with a special interest in Conceptual art, died in 2012.

In recognition of Leiber's impact on the history of art and on the museum's own collection, BAM/PFA will name the area of its new building that will house these works "The Steven Leiber Conceptual Art Study Center." BAM/PFA's new building (<http://cts.vresp.com/c/?FITZCO/8cc34b5d09/d58a14ee21/e496781ad6>), designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, is currently under construction in downtown Berkeley and is slated to open in early 2016. With this new acquisition, BAM/PFA is poised to become one of the world's leading centers for the study of Conceptual art.

The newly acquired Steven Leiber collection includes approximately 300 rare and significant works by American and European Conceptual artists from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and over 700 books, catalog, and reference materials. Among the artists represented are Bas Jan Ader, Michael Asher, John Baldessari, Alighiero Boetti, Marcel Broodthaers, Stanley Brouwn, Daniel Buren, James Lee Byars, Hanne Darboven, Walter De Maria, Gilbert & George, Douglas Huebler, Stephen Kaltenbach, Allan Kaprow, Joseph



(/images/pr/Dec18_bas.jpg)

The BAM/PFA collection now features works from the Steven Leiber collection by Bas Jan Ader (shown), John Baldessari, Hanne Darboven, Walter De Maria, Joseph Kosuth, Lee Lozano, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Ed Ruscha, and Many Others

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(ArtfixDaily.com (<http://www.artfixdaily.com/>)) Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long, Lee Lozano, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Ed Ruscha, and Lawrence Weiner. The collection is also noteworthy for including complete sets of several seminal Conceptual art publications such as the Mönchengladbach Museum box catalogs, *Art-Rite*, *Avalanche*, and the *Art & Project* bulletins.

Leiber's passion for Conceptual art was established well before the genre became widely appreciated for its important place in the history of global contemporary art. The acquisition of his personal collection was made possible through a bequest from Phoebe Apperson Hearst, by exchange, a partial gift of the Steven Leiber Trust, and gifts from Andy and Deborah Rappaport, Robin Wright, Frances Bowes, Alexandra Bowes, and proceeds from the Marcia Simon Weisman Foundation Fund and the Friends and Trustees Acquisitions Endowment Fund.

Since the 1990s—and thanks, in part, to the assistance of Steven Leiber himself—BAM/PFA has developed one of the most important collections of Conceptual art and related materials. The institution's holdings include the archives of the Museum of Conceptual Art, The Ant Farm collective, and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, as well as significant Fluxus and mail art collections. BAM/PFA recently received a major grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to digitize and catalog a significant portion of its Conceptual art materials to make them more accessible to online researchers around the world.

"This collection is an embodiment of the most radical, thoughtful, and innovative art being made anywhere in the world from the 1960s to the 1980s," says former gallerist, arts publisher, and current BAM/PFA Trustee Jack Wendler. "As an active participant in the Conceptual art movement, I can say that there couldn't be a better home for this collection than BAM/PFA. It will be an inspiration to students and our other audiences for years to come."

"Steven enjoyed educating young people about Conceptual art as much as he loved the art itself," recalls BAM/PFA Director Lawrence Rinder. "As a scholar and teacher, he would have been thrilled to have his collection come to UC Berkeley where new generations can learn from, and add their own creativity to, this critically important genre of art."

Leiber's contributions to the history of contemporary art included consulting on numerous exhibitions, collections, and publications, as well as organizing the groundbreaking exhibition and book *Extra Art: A Survey of Artists' Ephemera, 1960–1999*, which opened in 2001 at the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco, before traveling to the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. He was also active as an adjunct professor at the California College of the Arts.

Leiber's wife, Leigh Markopoulos, expressed the Trust's delight at this acquisition, saying, "We cannot think of a more fitting home for Steven's Conceptual collection, nor a better way to celebrate his activities as a promoter, collector, and educator. It's wonderful to think that his legacy and connection to the Bay Area will be honored at BAM/PFA for years to come."

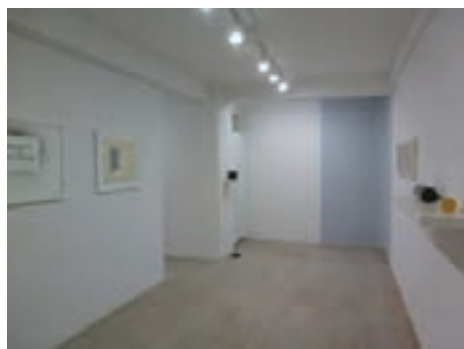
About BAM/PFA

Founded in 1963, the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA) is UC Berkeley's primary visual arts venue and among the largest university art museums in terms of size and audience in the United States. Internationally recognized for its art and film programming, BAM/PFA is a platform for cultural experiences that transform individuals, engage communities, and advance the local, national, and global discourse on art and ideas. BAM/PFA's mission is "to inspire the imagination and ignite critical dialogue through art and film."

ARTslant Chicago

'rak'rüm (noun);
the back room of an art
gallery
where artists and art lovers
hang

Stephen Kaltenbach



Stephen Kaltenbach,
*Installation view of Stephen Kaltenbach:
Drawings, Time Capsules and Room Alterations,*
2013

© Bert Green Fine Art, Chicago

Stephen Kaltenbach (born 1940) lives and works in California. A pioneering conceptual artist in the 1960s Kaltenbach participated in such landmark exhibitions as Harald Szeemann's *When Attitudes Become Form*, Kynaston McShine's *Information* and Lucy Lippard's *955,000*. He left New York and the art world in 1970 to become a professor and regionalist artist in California, while continuing to make conceptual work in secret. In recent years Kaltenbach has returned to the international art world amidst growing interest in his work and unique project of withdrawal.

His hallmark works include ads taken out anonymously in *Artforum* instructing readers to "Tell a lie," "Start a rumor," "Teach Art," "Build a reputation" and "Become a legend"; his ongoing series of Time Capsules—welded metal containers bearing inscriptions such as "OPEN BEFORE DEACCESSION"—and cast bronze plaques meant to be embedded in sidewalks emblazoned with statements like "ART WORKS."

Recently Kaltenbach was included in the traveling exhibition *State of Mind: New California Art* circa 1970 and solo exhibitions at Bert Green Fine Art, Chicago; *Specific Object*, New York; and *Another Year in LA*, Los Angeles. His work is included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis and the Staatliche Museen, Berlin.



Conceptual Art Legend Stephen Kaltenbach in Conversation

Chicago: In September of 2013 I sat down with the legendary Stephen Kaltenbach on the occasion of his exhibition at Bert Green Fine Art in Chicago to talk about his role in the history of conceptual art, his drastic 25-year recess from the art world, and his ideas about the nature of art. Kaltenbach's work ranges from discrete objects, anonymous magazine ads, and mysterious time

capsules to figurative sculpture, regionalist art, and shaping life narratives through various personae.



Stephen Kaltenbach, *Art Works (Sidewalk Plaque)*, 1968/2010 (Dates are based when each one is cast always with 1968 as the first date), Bronze,

Edition 37/100, 5 x 8 x 1/2"; Courtesy of the artist and Bert Green Fine Art, Chicago

*Erik Wenzel: You've participated in a lot of historically significant exhibitions. The one in particular that sticks out to me is **When Attitudes Become Form**(1969) with Harald Szeemann, a show that's become quite legendary. I wonder what it was like to be involved. What was your experience as someone who participated first hand? Did you have a feeling that it was major at the time?*

Stephen Kaltenbach: This was really the first show that I really remember. I wasn't that impressed, mostly because I didn't realize how important it was to me then that I be included in it. I didn't ask them if I could go over. I didn't ask them at all about how it went or whether they followed my instructions.

[In 2013] there was a re-hang in Venice [*When Attitudes Become Form* Bern/1969-Venice/2013 Fondazione Prada]. They had letters that I wrote to Harald and he wrote back. So there's some correspondence that gives a little view into that time. What I was like then.

EW: I was staying with a friend of mine in Switzerland who has a quite extensive library, including a copy of the catalogue. It's constructed as a binder much like a file or financial report; it's a conceptual work in itself. Each artist has an entry, something they did especially for the catalogue. Yours is "A Short Article on Art Expression." The piece consists of statements and questions about art. What I was attracted to about the piece was the way you are mapping out how art works. Do you still believe those axioms? Has anything changed?

SK: Do you have a specific one?

EW: "There are three factors which determine the nature of any perception. The object perceived, the environment in which the perception takes place and the person experiencing the perception."

SK: That was intended to be a mini manifesto. I was thinking about condensing my ideas until there was just the bones of the thought. After this I did the micro manifestos, which were the ads in *Artforum*, which were just two or three words. This was with the same idea in mind that I could possibly communicate something more clearly with fewer words.



Artist's Canvas to be arranged by Collector (Modern Draperies), 1967, Artist's canvas, 3 x 12 ft; Courtesy of the artist

EW: *Is this a process that continues: to continually define and redefine your position?*

SK: No, but I do write about art a lot of the time. I write about my own work. People ask me for different written things.

They just finished this show in London, it was a one-day show that was based on what I call my Modern Draperies, which is manipulated fabric [*Modern Draperies*, South London Gallery, September 14, 2013]. They used a piece of artist canvas that duplicated one of the ones I did. [These are pieces of fabric that are laid out on the floor forming waves and curves, variably bunched up and spread out. They are not meant to be interacted with by the viewer, but they are meant to change.]

When I was in the garage show of Leo Castelli's downtown space [*9 at Leo Castelli*, December 4–28, 1968] I assigned him to rearrange the piece every day. And he didn't. But he arranged it once. And he did a beautiful thing with it.

EW: *Maybe that was part of it. He thought, "Oh I've made it so nice..."*

SK: "...Maybe I can't get it better than that." I was happy with what he did. Very happy, actually. I was glad he kept it the way it was.

EW: *How do you feel about pieces that get recreated or remade? There are pieces, for example in the show at Bert Green Fine Art [2013] where there was a long period of time before they were realized.*

SK: If I'm asked to do a specific piece I'm happy to do it. I used to do all the labor when I was a student. Now I don't do any of the labor if possible and so it's easy to give instructions. I think some of these pieces have sort of slipped backwards into Modern Art. They're not really

contemporary art any more. So I think it's fitting they be seen.

Unless somebody owns them—and finally the Los Angeles County Museum of Art owns one—they're not made in any permanent way. So if there's an opportunity to show one again, I like to see it again and I try it on a different scale.

EW: I think that's an interesting, practical approach. It seems like often critics or historians take the approach that if it's remade it's something different. A recreation. Or that changes it forever.

SK: Or, "Don't I have new ideas?"

EW: It can get into philosophical territory. What is its status if it's completely recreated out of new material?

SK: Well this all changes once they're owned by a museum or collector. If the *Raised Floor*—which is the piece LACMA owns—if someone wanted to build that piece for a show in Europe some place or wherever, they would simply contact the museum because they own it and they have the directions on how to build it. They have the drawing. So I wouldn't repeat that piece again.



Stephen Kaltenbach, *Shadow Wall, I*, 1970-present, Graphite on paper; Courtesy of the artist and Bert Green Fine Art, Chicago

EW: So as it moves through time it gets fixed in different ways?

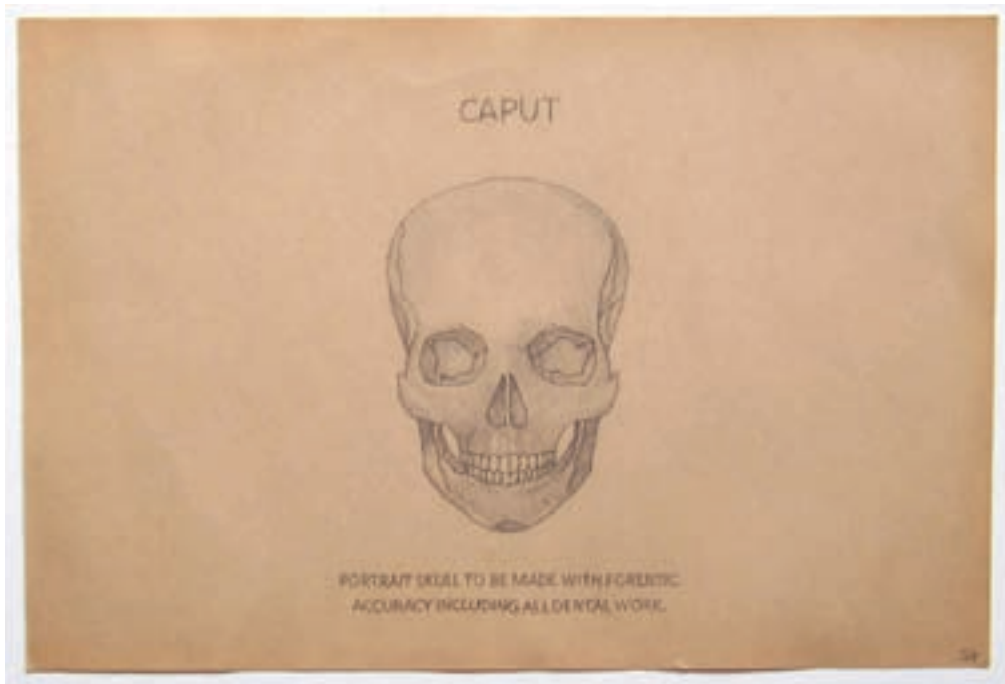
SK: Really the only way, in my mind, it gets fixed is if somebody owns it. As long as I own it, I feel very happy to do whatever I want to with it. Which so far hasn't been too much.

EW: The topic of works that get planned out and realized or not reminds me of a quote from Francis Alijs: "The best ideas tend to become stories without the need to become products."

When you started with the proposal drawings was it out of practicality? Were you thinking, "I can't do this right now but I want to somehow manifest the idea"?

SK: That's exactly how it started. But very quickly I began to do drawings that were either impossible or seemed impossible to me at the time. And suddenly they took on this different character that I really liked which was kind of an extravagant conceptual perimeter. It opened up all kinds of things.

In the last couple decades I've done this project Drawings for Nuclear Bombs. The world would retarget all their nuclear missiles to explode in the sky, far enough from the Earth where it wouldn't hurt. I made a font out of nuclear explosions; it's quite a nice looking font. One piece, *Blasted Luna Seas* (2004), was targeting the moon with two ovals during the first quarter so it looked like a happy face. So not only would those not happen, it would be a very bad idea if they did.



Stephen Kaltenbach, *Caput*, 1970 - Present, Graphite on Paper; Courtesy of the artist and Bert Green Fine Art, Chicago

EW: Looking at the drawing with the skull (*Caput*, 1970–present) or the tilted wall (*Shadow Wall, I*, 1970–present) it's clear it's not just a practical drawing, it becomes a quite nicely rendered visual object.

SK: Yeah, I like to take time with them. It's fun.

EW: So back to **When Attitudes Become Form**—there was a very strong local reaction. But you said you never actually travelled to Bern? You just sent the work.

SK: Right. And then I got a catalogue.

EW: Did any of the responses to the show reach you or have an effect on you?

SK: No, I was already on to the next thing. I didn't have time. That was a period of four and a half years where I didn't really have enough time to do the things I really wanted to do. And reducing them to concept drawings was a good way to handle it because I didn't have time or money.

EW: This leads to your move, or withdrawal. Was that heavy schedule something that contributed to you deciding to leave New York?

SK: Only in the sense that I wanted to truncate my career at a certain point and move it out of New York and out of the public eye. I had two reasons for that. One: I felt that the work I had done would become clearer if I wasn't constantly producing new stuff. And the second reason was that I had intended these works to all operate as a manifesto. So it really helped to not be there personally. I could then just observe how people responded to it at times. I felt I had a very positive response.

Although there was a whole body of work I did called "Causal Art" where I was attempting to actually influence other artists and what they did either by something I did or something I said. And that was very unpopular. I also realized it was unquantifiable. There's no way to tell. I was first clued into it when I was at a painter friend's studio and he was working on just evolving his style a little bit, his technical approach. He was a very technical artist. And so we were kicking around ideas about that. I had a lot of good ideas about how he could do things and he already had thought of them all.

I was also doing these art actions I call "Life Dramas." I decided to become the persona of another artist. The first one I thought of was a tragedy. It was a painter who was skillful to some extent but had no idea what fine art could be. And so he was making decorative things. It was intended to be shown with the art gallery that was part of the furniture gallery in Lord & Taylor in New York. So I met with the director of the gallery and she said, "Sure bring in your paintings."

EW: *You met with the director in the persona of this artist not as Stephen Kaltenbach?*

SK: Right. Although, I was equivocal about it at that time. I felt that if I got the show and I was able to get a bunch of my artist friends from SoHo and the School of Visual Arts, and my students to come, I'd probably just go ahead and use my name and not take on the persona of a bad painter.

[The director ultimately declined to show the work]

The second piece I did was a sculptor who I gave the name Clyde Dillon [read ArtSlant's 2010 interview with Dillon [here](#)]. I bought a costume for him to wear, a suit and hat and a fake mustache. He also didn't really understand the potential of Modern Art, but he had a pretty good sensibility about form and so on. I was sort of designing it to fit what I felt I was, but I wasn't really expressing. He did these pieces that were weak because they depended a lot on lustrous finishes, things like that. He did a series of small abstract bronzes that were shown on marble or quartz. He spent some time looking for a gallery but he couldn't get a career going. He continued when I moved to California. I felt like he wasn't exposed in New York so I could do that. He finally began to show after the turn of the century in Los Angeles.

EW: *The turn of 2000?*

SK: Yeah. His stuff in my mind got better and better [laughs]. I mentioned that to my son and he said, "You mean it's getting more and more like yours, Dad. You can just put your name on them now, there's no difference."

I am now in the process of making these pieces I refer to as "Dumb Objects" and I'm ripping off Clyde Dillon completely. It's just shameless.



The only available photograph of Clyde Dillon

EW: How does he feel about that? Does he know?

SK: He doesn't care. He's glad to have somebody else give him some substance.

The last piece I decided to do which I decided is what really made leaving New York OK with me... I decided to stop my career but continue doing conceptual work. But not show it. Do it in private. I did have a conceptual show when I first got to California, but it was work I'd done in New York that was already known about. Then I stopped showing.

After that what I wanted to do was create a regional artist and so I went back to school basically by designing my classes to pressure me to do figurative sculpture and portrait painting.

EW: That's in your role as a teacher of art?

SK: That's in my role as Stephen Kaltenbach, Regional Artist, Professor. I had shows in local museums, in galleries and so on. And so I did actually develop quite a regional reputation that was pretty much ignored by the avant-garde.

EW: It's like the article I found online that opened with something like, "Regional artist Stephen Kaltenbach discovered by cosmopolitan art world."

SK: That's funny. I also thought that after I'd done the best that I could with my regional art for 25 years that I would just move back into conceptual.

EW: But during that time you were also doing conceptual work, just not for the public.

SK: Yeah, so I had tons of work. But nobody was interested. In fact there is still a great deal of imbalance between the interest shown in my work now and the interest shown to my work that I had done back then. I believe that's a temporary thing to some degree. I'm not saying that they're wrong. I think that it's pretty common for creatives. I think mostly of physicists and mathematicians who do a big part of their work when they're young, usually in their twenties. You could say that about Duchamp. He just poured out a glut of work and then backed out. I knew about Duchamp and I was aware of the fact that what I was doing related closely to what he had done.

EW: And so for you, this process of withdrawing from the art world was always a part of your

work?

SK: Part of my work, yeah. It was a “Life Drama.” [Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer](#) has written about me. When she was interviewing me for [the article in Artforum](#) she really wanted me to say that I’d dropped out of the art world as a political act and I really didn’t at all. It was totally not. I think finally when we were done with the interview she was left with the impression that it was a little bit that. It was all the English she was putting on everything I said because she really wanted it to be that. And that was partly because my dear friend Lee Lozano was such a political person. A tremendous artist but also a very political person who did some of the most goofy things—amazing. [Kaltenbach and Lozano also made collaborative artworks]



Stephen Kaltenbach, *Time to Cast Away Stones*, 1998, 9x7x68 ft, Concrete composite, Sacramento Convention Center, Sacramento, California.

EW: So for you was it entirely an artistic gesture or were there also personal reasons like ambivalence toward the art world in New York?

SK: Not at all. There were personal things though. I was offered a job that I could support myself with so I didn’t have to be selling art. I was kicking around the Life Drama pieces and I wanted to do a big one. I got an offer to work at the University of California at Sacramento and I realized I could live on my income and I could do anything I wanted. I felt suddenly free to just move into that and do a long-term project where I would gradually build a reputation and also hone my ability to do certain things.

I really wasn’t interested in an intrinsic sense, but I was very interested in seeing what would happen to my work if I became good at these things. I became fairly good at figure sculpture when I was at my best. When I wasn’t I was only average and that includes some pretty bad examples. But I did do some nice pieces.

EW: Do you compartmentalize these different practices and then they are all under a larger body of life’s work?

SK: In my public attitude, they’re definitely compartmentalized. In my private life as an artist there’s 100 percent feedback going between them. I’ve had conceptual ideas that came from Clyde Dillon and came from ¿Es qué? which is my painter persona. I gave him a name. SK is my initials, but it’s also, “What’s that?” in Spanish. And because it’s a question I get to have an upside down

question mark on the front my name and one right side up in back, which really appeals to me.



Stephen Kaltenbach, *Humilis*, 1970 - Present, Burnished Steel, unknown contents; Courtesy of the artist and Bert Green Fine Art

EW: It's all real art. But is some of the art more real? For example are the Time Capsules maybe the real Stephen Kaltenbach work and then the figurative sculptures are the Stephen Kaltenbach, Regionalist Artist?

SK: Right, I understand what you're saying. Some of the regional art was more interesting to me because it had the added cache of being under the radar. It was part of a big project that I knew would eventually become known because I knew that art writers love that stuff. I knew that it wouldn't just disappear. I felt that I could work on it and not have anybody know about it until later. It was really a postponed revelation. As I said, I decided to come back after 25 years.

EW: So, how does one "Become a legend" as you instructed?

SK: Well, part of being legendary is having there be some question about what's true. What you've done and when you did it. After obscuring the time that I did things for a while, I've recently gone into the opposite phase. I always try to think of what the opposite would be of what I was doing. You know the word "exegetical?" It's when you build a picture out of a number of clues. It's based on scholarship, but it's not based on information. I've decided to do work I refer to as "densification" which is work that fits in between the changes that happened in my work if I'd been moving slower.

EW: So you're returning and filling in?

SK: Yeah, filling in the gaps. I'm being open about it, but I think it'll confuse things nicely.

EW: What I think is really interesting about your approach is that usually with these kinds of practices, like Lehrer-Graiwewer was hoping, it would be a political gesture. Or there's a story, like you had a negative experience and turned your back on the art world and the statement is, "I don't want this commercialism." There's eccentricity involved, but you're very straightforward and

down to earth: "No, I just wanted to do this." I find that also very interesting because artists are often taught, "You can do anything in art" but really it's anything you want as long as it becomes an object in some sense and you get known for it in a certain way.

SK: Yeah, I mean that's the conventional wisdom, and really I have to admit to believing that it would be a hitch in my career. And I was right about that. The other people I was working with in New York in SoHo at the time own three houses: one in Amsterdam, one in London, and one in Iowa. Their income is a lot higher than mine. But I did feel that it was likely when things worked their way out and I was no longer part of the picture, that what I had done would be beneficial and interesting to people. I really thought it would be. We'll see how right I was about that.

EW: *Was it scary for you to do that? Were you worried, "What if this is a big mistake?"*

SK: No. You know, for one thing, when I saw my work after meeting Bruce Nauman, my work went from just a single developing direction and just spread out in a lot of directions that didn't look like they were really done by the same artist. But I could see the underpinnings. It was easy once you really looked at everything to see how the same person could have done that as that and so on. I began to notice artists who I like who did the same thing their whole life—like Morris Graves or Malcolm Green have little variation clear up to somebody like Picasso who didn't feel stuck at all. He did one thing when he felt like it, and when it was time to do another, he did that. And he was very successful at that. It helps to be good.

EW: *Yeah, but your work is more diffused because with Picasso it was still painting, drawing, or sculpture. And you're pushing those points on the constellation further apart. I think that's an interesting direction to go. But that makes it more difficult.*

SK: There's a delay.

EW: *So where did you get all this confidence? You weren't worried about leaving New York or going off the grid.*

SK: My mom and dad told me from the age of one that the drawings I did were great. I didn't realize they were being good parents and encouraging their kid until I was in grammar school. I looked back at those things and realized, "Oh they're actually not that good." I sort of knew too much to do good kid art. I began understanding perspective and atmospheric perspective when I was pretty young. I've been an artist all my life. When I was in second grade, my teacher on the last day of school got the attention of the whole class and said, "When there's a person who's going to be a great artist... [laughs] ...it only makes sense to give them paper and paint to work with." So she gave me a set of watercolors and a tablet of watercolor paper. I remember walking home that day. I usually took an hour to get home, that day I got home in twenty minutes. I was so excited.

I knew about Renaissance art primarily. So I told myself, "I'm gonna paint Jesus. I'm gonna do a big painting of Jesus."

EW: *Do you think having a start like that is how artists end up with a very reductive conceptual practice? In terms of your personal timeline, you're doing perspective and doing a lot of things people don't discover until much later. You said, "I was always an artist." Do you think you go on the path of figuring out art at a different pace than other people?*

SK: It's possible, but I think it still goes back to confidence. Even once I realized they were just being good parents, I still thought they were right whether they knew it or not.



Stephen Kaltenbach, *Open Before My Retrospective at MOCA in LA*, 1970 - present, Steel and unknown contents (time capsule); Courtesy of the artist

EW: Finally, I wanted to ask about the Time Capsules. I know you don't reveal the contents, but could you speak generally about them?

SK: I made a commitment early on not to reveal anything about the contents or even if there was content. But then after I'd been married for 25 years, my wife cornered me on our anniversary dinner and said, "You know you've never told me what's in the Time Capsules." And I said, "OK we have been married for 25 years, so I'll tell you one." And I told her and she said, "Is that all it is?!" So she just talked me out of telling her any of the other ones.

A lot of my *Artforum* ads are actually announcements for Time Capsules and what was going on in them. But I made no specific connection, except there's a connection in time. It felt like a good way to reveal what I was doing in retrospect but wouldn't be visible as it was happening. One piece I can talk about because it's obvious is when I did Barbara Rose's capsule. It said, "Barbara Rose: Please open this capsule when in your opinion I've achieved national prominence as an artist." And when I was doing that capsule I was doing an ad in *Arforum* that said, "Build a reputation."

EW: Did she open it yet?

SK: She lost it.

—[Erik Wenzel](#)

ArtSlant would like to thanks Stephen Kaltenbach for his assistance in making this interview possible

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2013

ARTS / VISUAL ART

Disappearing and reemerging with artist Stephen Kaltenbach

Posted by Andrea Gronvall today at 09:38 AM



COURTESY OF BERT GREEN FINE ART
Art Works (Sidewalk Plaque) by Stephen Kaltenbach

Stephen Kaltenbach has been among the most influential American artists since the late 1960s, when he helped introduce the movement known as conceptualism. Near the height of his youthful fame in 1970 he left the New York art scene for northern California, where he still resides.

A sculptor, painter, and installation and performance artist, Kaltenbach was in town last weekend for Expo Chicago. On Friday he spoke at the Independent Curators International (ICI) booth about his stainless steel *Untitled Time Capsules*. (ICI is also touring a group show, "State of Mind: New California Art Circa 1970," opening October 3 at the Smart Museum, which will feature Kaltenbach's *Art Works, 1968-2005* and *Artforum Ads, 1969-70*.)

Also last weekend he appeared at the opening of a show of his works at Bert Green Fine Art, where he spoke to me about his career.

AG: The other day when I asked you how long it took art followers to catch up with you, you replied that you weren't especially approachable when you were young, and had a hard time being serious. You mentioned that early on your supporters were not audiences, per se. Can you expound on that?

SK: I really liked humor in sculpture, painting, and conceptual art, so I was fine with being pretty inaccessible. I had learned a lot in art history classes: if you do art secretly, and you don't initially have a lot of luck, people will explain what you do, people who can explain it better than, say, I can.

When I was a student at UC-Davis, my professor Robert Arneson was very supportive. Another person who really helped me was my landlord in New York; he practically adopted me. There was so much coincidence involved that I began thinking there really was a God, because everything started falling into place.

What do you mean, exactly?

When I first arrived in New York, I asked the taxi driver to take me to the neighborhood where artists lived and worked. The cabbie took me to SoHo, and stopped on Greene Street. As I got out of the cab, I heard someone asking me, "Are you looking for a loft?" That guy owned a building, and rented me space at a very reasonable rate.

One of your early works was creating the persona and output of an artist called Clyde Dillon. Was that your suit? Seriously?

I bought the suit as a costume, and the wig and moustache. It was a "life drama"; I was still outside, looking in. As Clyde Dillon I would go through that artist's progression, occupying two careers at one time [his and mine]. More than 35 years later he finally got a one-person show at Another Year in LA.

How did that feel?

Fulfilling, in kind of an empty way. Even though I had to portray Clyde, I was still doing work as an artist doing another artist's work. More interesting to me really was that I was developing his work sort of decade to decade, from 1970 to 2009 or 2010. You could see the evolution in his work, even if it was in such a narrow way, since he kept going back to the same things over and over again.

Do you have a low threshold for boredom?

Pretty low. I'm always working on two or three things at the same time.

What are you working on now?

[Paging through his Moleskin notebook:] These are some sketches for a series of 'dumb objects.' The object sits on a pedestal, in an inset, so that it's slightly below the top surface of the pedestal. I might be working with lead for this one; I'm not sure yet. I'm constantly getting these images, and try to get them on paper.

I also have paintings waiting in a queue; two will be portraits of my son. I'm going to use two fiberglass and polyester panels I made back in 1971, although they didn't have subject matter then.

You must have known you were in it for the long haul.

I always had the goal of becoming known as an artist, then disappearing [from the limelight], but definitely with the idea all along of reemerging.

What are your dreams?

I have spiritual experiences that most people don't have. My faith in God is more like knowledge, because some positive things have happened regularly; they were not just chance. Sensations and a string of events made me feel like I was in the presence of divinity.

I was Lutheran as a child but left the church at 13 out of boredom. I had a strong feeling that God was available; I just had to find out how. In my search, I studied

Eastern philosophies. One day, at 38, I was able to impress things on my mind that had a great deal of consistency. Every thing that I had this impression of was what you'd refer to as a good deed. I was encouraged to do my work, and given help when I needed it.

Will any of your works be overtly spiritual?

I have in mind a portrait of the Transfiguration of Christ. It's going to be on a very big canvas, 10' x 10', just a face, so bright, and in pastel colors. There are two aspects to awe; I've experienced both of them. I see one as a kind of hyper-respect, and one as terror.

Austerity at play in a Stephen Kaltenbach survey

Bert Green Fine Art presents a wide-ranging look at one of conceptualism's founders.

By Andrea Gronvall



Stephen Kaltenbach, *Humilis*, Burnished Steel & Unknown Contents, Unique Time Capsule, 4 x 4 x 12", 1970 - Present

COURTESY BERT GREEN FINE ART

In the late 1960s, Stephen Kaltenbach was among a group of New York-based artists who founded the movement eventually called conceptualism. It became widely influential, in part because its parameters were so liquid: in its antimuseum, anticommodity stance, conceptualism privileged ideas over objects, words over images, communal sharing over individual ownership. It was a perfect fit for the era's burgeoning counterculture.

The new exhibit at Bert Green Fine Art surveys Kaltenbach's work since 1965. The artist's roots in minimalism are evident; everything is pared down to essentials, offering little to distract the viewer from grappling with the ideas that the work presents. The effect is at once austere and playful.

For example, the impression print *Lips (Kiss)* (2005) has its genesis in the rubber stamp Kaltenbach devised early in his career to add graffiti to public advertising posters. *Nothing Is Revealed* (2005) is a stenciled message spray-painted on paper that challenges passive consumers. *Esteemed Visitant* (1970s), a steel cube with a pinhole in the center, is a camera obscura: the image of the onlooker is projected into the interior, which means that viewers get their heads inside the box both literally and figuratively.

Two of the works are premieres, installations that predate the artist's celebrated 1967 "room constructions." Both *Shadow Wall* (1965) and *Diminished Corner, State II* (1965) emphasize the tensions between light and shadow, between clarity and opacity. This is art in its bare bones; if you could translate it into audio terms, it would be like the humming along a tight wire. In a recent interview, Kaltenbach told me, "The less the artwork covers the concept, the stronger it is, and the better I like it."

Most intriguing are the expressions of the artist's spiritual leanings, which combine self-referential elements and allusions to mortality and transcendence. The bronze plaque *Art Works* (1968), were it set in pavement like the New York sidewalk plaques that inspired it, would be obscured over time, its maker forgotten with its message. And mystery and the finite are central to Kaltenbach's time capsules, such as *Humilis* (1970), a burnished steel cylinder whose contents are unknown, and whose inscription teasingly reads, "Please open this capsule before deaccessing it." Following those instructions, of course, would make resale impossible.



Art

July 15th, 2013

INCONVERSATION**CONSTANCE LEWALLEN with Phong Bui**

State of Mind: New California Art circa 1970, curated by Constance Lewallen and Karen Moss and co-organized by the Orange County Museum of Art (OCMA) and the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA), was first presented at the OCMA in the fall of 2011 as part of the Getty Research Institute's initiative *Pacific Standard Time*. It subsequently traveled to BAM/PFA and has been touring the United States under the auspices of the Independent Curators International. Right after the festive opening reception of the exhibit at the Bronx Museum of the Arts (June 20–September 8, 2013), Lewallen paid a visit to the *Rail's* headquarters to talk with publisher Phong Bui about the genesis of the exhibit, and more.

Phong Bui (Rail): This exhibit seems timely in that while showing a real breadth, and the consistency of various sorts of conceptual thinking, it's in fact very useful in terms of ways in which an artist could reinvent their congenial mediums to express social, political, as well as artistic concerns.

Constance Lewallen: Well, what might be refreshing to general viewers who see the show, especially young artists, is the focus on the late '60s and early '70s before art was about the market. There was a collective and pervasive sense of freedom, especially in California, partly because there really was no infrastructure, or much of any kind of critical response, which in some ways worked to the artists' advantage. They had freedom to do what they wanted, to be playful and inventive with new materials and mediums. Karen Moss, my co-curator, and I hope that's what comes through in the exhibition.

Rail: Certainly. I think the show would attract particularly all artists, young and old, that good art doesn't need to rely on high production.

Rail: Stephen Kaltenbach is an amazing discovery for those who are not familiar with his work!

Lewallen: I agree. Kaltenbach was a graduate student at U.C. Davis, a year behind Nauman. He moved to New York in 1967, taught at the School of Visual Arts, and made provocative conceptual works like his "Artforum Ads," which we have in the show. He placed anonymous ads with texts like "Perpetrate a Hoax" and "Become a Legend" in a year's worth of the publication, from November '68 to December '69. Kaltenbach was especially interested in creating anonymous artworks that weren't necessarily recognized as art. He also designed room installations even before Nauman. Two were built in 1969, but none after until we built "Peaked Floor Room Construction" (1967) in *State of Mind* when it was installed at the OCMA (its first venue) and again when it moved to Berkeley. Unfortunately, there hasn't been enough space in any of the subsequent venues, including the Bronx, to build a room. For various reasons Kaltenbach left New York after only a few years, went back to Northern California, and taught for decades at Sacramento State, all the while continuing to make art. He contributed a piece called "Kiss" (1969) for the landmark show *When Attitudes Become Form* in Bern, Switzerland, in which he instructed Harald Szeemann, the curator, to have a stamp made in the form of lips and to stamp lip prints all around the city. He told me he doesn't really know if it ever was done. Kaltenbach was also included in the *9 at Leo Castelli* at the Castelli Warehouse in 1968 along with Nauman, Alan Saret, Keith Sonnier, Bill Bollinger, Eva Hesse, Giovanni Anselmo, and Gilberto Zorio. Szeemann saw that show when he was researching *Attitudes* and included every piece. Szeemann listened to what artists were telling him.

specific object / P!A^BCI Platzker

Stephen Kaltenbach : slantstep 2



specific object / david platzker

presents

Stephen Kaltenbach : slantstep 2

May 9 through June 10, 2011

Specific Object / David Platzker is pleased to announce the opening of the exhibition Stephen Kaltenbach : slantstep 2. The exhibition will be on view at Specific Object from May 9 through June 10, 2011. This exhibition celebrates slantstep 2, 1969, a multiple by Stephen Kaltenbach designed by William Plumb.

The Slant Step, an object discovered in the Mount Carmel Salvage Shop in Mill Valley, California in 1965 by William T. Wiley and Bruce Nauman, became an iconic inspiration, a muse, for Bay Area artists resulting in Slant Step themed artworks, exhibitions, books, and the slantstep 2.

The slantstep 2 was one of the ultimate ends to my investigation of conceptual minimalism. I believed I had attained an extreme simplicity of form in the room constructions where the form was so united with the space it existed in, that whether it was a form in space or a shaped space became equally true. Looking to further my minimalist investigation at this point led to a number of projects. One was the William Plumb redesign of the original Slant

Step. When Rosa Esman, was interested in doing a multiple with me, I asked her to choose an industrial designer to redesign the Slant Step to enhance its consumer appeal. My artistic motive was to cause the existence of an object which I had no part in its appearance, reducing to zero the artist's aesthetic involvement. I kept this non-involvement as pure as possible. I never met Bill Plumb and I never saw his design until the steps were made.

– Stephen Kaltenbach, 2011

The story of slantstep 2 dates back to 1969. I was working with Stephen Kaltenbach on his piece for the edition 7 Objects / 69 which I was publishing under the aegis of Tanglewood Press. At that time, Stephen proposed that I cooperate with him in the design of a contemporary version of the original Slant Step, a worn found object discovered by William T. Wiley in a salvage shop, which soon developed an iconic significance and inspiration to a group of Marin County artists. Stephen wanted to realize the worn Slant Step, a seemingly non-functional item, as newly-designed by a contemporary industrial designer of utilitarian objects. In some mysterious fashion which I do not recall, I was fortunately directed to William Plumb, who directed his own design studio, and who applied du jour design concepts with sensitivity and artistry, producing a pristine, plastic molded, brand-new slantstep 2 in three brightly colored variants. It was intended to be published in an edition of 75 by Tanglewood Press, but only 18 were produced - six in each of the three colors.

– Rosa Esman, 2011

One day in 1969 I got a call from Rosa Esman who wanted to discuss a design project. Though somewhat bizarre, the project interested me. I had at the time a fully equipped model shop capable of making prototype plastic parts such as I envisioned – that is, molded fiberglass. The idea was a low quantity multiple series and I had vendors capable of making such a short run once a prototype had been made. My shop could make a highly finished prototype. My designers and I could design it. My design background included a couple of years working in Italy with people at the forefront of what is now called "mid-century modern design." I was very active in creating products that answered a functional and esthetic need. My recollection is that Bruce Nauman brought the original item to my office then on 3rd Avenue and 17th Street in New York City. I know I had it at one time to examine it. We agreed that the new object should have all of the "functional" characteristics of the original, what they actually were was a mystery, of course – but one could figure out that it was a footrest of some kind with a slanted "ramp" for resting one's feet. My designers and I determined the rough dimensions of the object by measuring the original and did preliminary sketches of how it might be made in a mold, allowing for easy removal, and with an exterior configuration and finish that would be pleasing to the eye. My shop made a solid plaster model and from that we made a mold from fiberglass and from this we made several prototypes until we had one that pleased all the participants and that could be molded in enough copies to make the desired series.

– William Plumb, 2011

The exhibition at Specific Object features the original Slant Step on loan from The New York Society for the Preservation of the Slant Step, Slant Step inspired drawings by Kaltenbach, the Slant Step Book by Phil Weidman, an issue of Artforum from November 1969 featuring a full-page advertisement announcing the publication of the slantstep 2, and a copy of the slantstep 2 multiple.

“BECOME A LEGEND.” It was a command. But it was also a crazy dream to live by—a stunning credo Stephen Kaltenbach issued to himself and each of the thousands of readers of this magazine in the summer of '69. This was the eighth of twelve anonymous ads the now seventy-year-old artist placed in Artforum between November 1968 and December 1969. It is still, more than forty years later, the tightest, most thrilling “micro-manifesto” (his term) you could ever read. I want to put an exclamation mark at the end of it, but the original better reflects Kaltenbach’s own decision, made long beforehand, that he would become a legend quietly—in disguise, and through the back door. His art would be full of secrets and misdirection, mysteries and invisibility, hoaxes and questionable ethics, mischievous games and invented personae, sly humor and deferred surprises set to go off in the future like time bombs. The injunction to view oneself through the eye of history affirms that he has always been in it for the long haul. Conceived according to a logic of delayed reaction, every act in the present has been considered in relation to times to come.



Clyde Dillon in his studio, ca. 1969.

Landing in New York’s downtown art scene in 1967 after studying at the University of California, Davis, Kaltenbach found himself in the position of an anthropologist observing a foreign subculture. Weed, too, taught him an essential psychological remove, allowing him an analytic detachment from his new environment that crystallized and grew exponentially on mescaline and LSD. He forged a formative relationship with Lee Lozano, whose appetite for mind bending surpassed even his and whose radical “life-art” investigations catalyzed his conceptual development. Taking his adolescent contrarian instincts seriously, Kaltenbach followed what he called a protocol of opposites: Whenever he identified a structurally embedded social pattern of behavior among his artist peers, he would do the opposite.

Kaltenbach showed a genius for wrong choices and comically perverse moves. Instead of laboring to make a name for himself, he made work anonymously, such as the twelve Artforum ads that were virtually unidentifiable to the unprepared viewer as pieces (most provocatively recommended casting illusions as artistic strategy—TELL A LIE, START A RUMOR, PERPETRATE A HOAX, BUILD A REPUTATION, TEACH ART, SMOKE, TRIP). Against the idea that artists should exhibit only in galleries and museums, he committed “Street Works” in public, often unannounced, using graffiti stamps, stencils, sidewalk plaques, and disguises. Instead of showing work, he began hiding unidentified things in a (still ongoing) series of sealed “Time Capsules.” Instead of possessively guarding his ideas out of competitive ambition like the young artists hustling around him, he became more and more interested in giving his ideas away, purposefully sharing information and spreading artistic possibilities as ways of exercising broad influence: what he called his Causal Art.

In retrospect, it seems that Kaltenbach was working his way toward the exit even as he was emerging. If everyone was determined to build a successful career, he was going to kill his. After three short but highly prolific and successful years as a seminal figure of the new Conceptual art, Kaltenbach left New York in 1970. He withdrew at the height of his ascension, opting out of all the attention he was increasingly getting in response to his participation in numerous now historic gallery shows (such as “9 at Leo Castelli” and “Earthworks” at Dwan Gallery, both in New York; and “May 19–June 19, 1969,” organized by Seth Siegelaub at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia) as well as in the definitive museum exhibitions of the day, such as Harald Szeemann’s “When Attitudes Become Form,” Germano Celant’s “Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Land Art,” and Kynaston McShine’s “Information.”

Kaltenbach silently announced his departure—his “Fade to White”—by cryptically contributing a blank index card in a blank envelope to Lucy Lippard’s “955,000” exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1970. Then he dropped out. He was only thirty. He had already moved on beyond the art world by the time Cindy Nemser’s extensive interview with him appeared in Artforum in November of that year. Sometimes to become a legend you have to cultivate obscurity. It helped that dropping out was in the hippie air. Lozano had already tested a temporary withdrawal from the art world in her General Strike Piece, 1969, and would soon go further for longer in Dropout Piece of the early ’70s. And then there was Duchamp, Kaltenbach’s hero, who had publicly quit art for chess nearly a half century earlier in a deceptive retirement that, by 1969, turned out to have been a decoy enabling him to do his work in private.

Kaltenbach’s departure marked a rupture shot through with refusal and a defiance that critiqued the art establishment’s self-perceived exceptionalism. In one sense, it was a sharp break with the life and reputation he had built: He dramatically designated the action “Kill My Career.” He was punk minus the anger, if such a thing exists. But Kaltenbach’s withdrawal to the margins was also a specific, premeditated art action integral to the development of his larger artistic project. Disappearing was a contiguous extension, a consistent if extreme escalation of forces already far advanced in his thinking. That a position at California State University, Sacramento, allowed him to continue what he termed Teach Art (the pedagogical branch of Causal Art, dedicated to spreading influence) was the least of it. By dropping out, Kaltenbach was beginning a new, much larger and more radical, life-size art action.

Kaltenbach reinvented himself as a regional artist making conservative, and frequently full-on kitsch, figurative sculpture and painting. At the same time, he secretly continued his conceptual practice in private, referring to the entire masked project as his Black Period. Publicly, he chose to work with populist, even embarrassingly sentimental subject matter in a decorative realist style that would appeal greatly to general audiences but make his peers in the contemporary art world gag. It was an irresistible move in the wrong direction, an inside joke he kept to himself. Only in recent years has he broken his decades-long silence on the matter, beginning to speak openly about the covert aspects of his practice to the small handful of inquiring researchers, like myself, who have personally sought him out.

This was not the first time Kaltenbach had created a fictional artist persona. He had made several “Life Dramas” while in New York, experimenting with his identity and reputation in an Andy Kaufman–esque manner avant la lettre by temporarily becoming various made-up artists, generally of a comically peripheral, provincial type. The first “Life Drama,” 1968, was a kind of unannounced comedy in which Kaltenbach decided to become a painter of couch paintings, modeling the work of his assumed persona on the insipid still lifes and generic portraits he encountered in the art gallery of the Lord & Taylor department store. Framing his actions in terms of a twisted deadpan pursuit of Minimalism, he set out to make “minimally good” paintings. Apparently, they weren’t bad (or good) enough, and Lord & Taylor rejected the paintings he submitted for a show. In his second “Life Drama,” Kaltenbach secretly invented an alter ego: Clyde Dillon, a conservative abstract sculptor making the kind of work that fills your average, run-of-the-mill upscale bourgeois gallery, like those clustered in wealthy, aging neighborhoods from Manhattan’s Upper East Side to La Jolla, California. Always the amateur anthropologist, Kaltenbach brilliantly parsed the opposed registers of the various parallel art worlds that coexist within our culture without intersecting or even acknowledging each other. Though Dillon’s early bronzes from 1968 inadvertently ended up in the dump in Scarsdale, New York, evidence of his brief existence is—allegedly—preserved for posterity in one of Kaltenbach’s “Time Capsules” in the special collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

May 8 Paintings Schaefer 57 Street

Doris Leeper

Paintings and Sculpture March 29 through April 17 Bertha Schaefer 41 east 57 street

Perpetrate a hoax

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Advertisement by Stephen Kaltenbach in Artforum (April 1969).

The escalating scope of these early “Life Dramas” called for a drastic expansion in scale and intensification of commitment: In leaving New York, Kaltenbach actually and sincerely had to become the regional artist he invented for himself, not act out a temporary role as before. He was going for real, lived transformation. Fiction had to congeal into reality—and so it did. Since 1970, he has become a celebrated regional artist, well known in Sacramento for many prominent public sculptures such as *A Time to Cast Away Stones*, 1998—a large fountain in front of the Sacramento Convention Center strewn with drowning fragments of antique sculpture. His enormous tour-de-force painting *Portrait of My Father*, 1972–79—which directly targets the lay art-loving public (specifically, he says, his mother and anyone “who would never take mescaline”)—remains a crowd favorite at Sacramento’s Crocker Art Museum, a work especially popular, he notes, with “kids and elderly people.”

The idea behind this transformation was to carry out a “Life Drama” so big and astonishingly expansive over time that it could not be seen in its entirety from any given point. It was huge, operating on a different scale over and beyond everything else—a kind of transcendence. You’d have to step back too far to grasp the work’s vastness, which is now so thoroughly enmeshed with the artist’s lifestyle, career, and personality as to evade normative perception. Kaltenbach calls what he has done during the Black Period *The Elephant Project*, 1970–, so named for its dizzying size and protracted, ongoing life span (forty years and counting). He has also described it as minimally Minimal, maximalist, or (my favorite) “going for Baroque.” The work is so utterly convincing and faithfully carried out—like flawless Method acting or a one-to-one scale model—that it is basically imperceptible as art and suggests that being “of art” may be beside the point. The project acutely risks nonrecognition, defying our expectations of what is necessary to make a piece perceptible as a piece.

Ultimately, Kaltenbach conceived *The Elephant Project* as an elaborate strategy to target art historians down the road and give them something to discover and play with. He orchestrated his life as a mystery for us to solve. Concealment and unknowability lie at the core of his oeuvre. (Indeed, over the course of *The Elephant Project*, Kaltenbach has, he tells me, produced a large body of still secret works.) In this cultural moment of overexposure and rampant image proliferation, his practice offers the private thrill of invisibility, imagined possibilities, and leaps of faith. Much of his production has gone undocumented into the world—including the underlying conceptual claim of *The Elephant Project* itself—magnifying the role that unverifiable memory, anecdote, rumor, legend, and oral accounts must play in constructing (his) history. Kaltenbach’s art, which resides in the intangible private logic of daydreams and the mental turn-ons of ideas, takes the radical chance of escaping history altogether. He is just as interested in exposing the contingency, misinformation, loss of knowledge, permanent doubt, and (as Lozano would say) infiction that determine how art history gets written—its mechanisms and limits—as he is intent on being institutionalized within it. The flip side of his transformation into a “regional artist” has been his emergence as a “forgotten” or “outsider artist” and—as of late—a rediscovered one. All in good time and according to plan.

Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer is a writer based in Los Angeles.

April 17, 2009

Art in Review

By THE NEW YORK TIMES

FIA BACKSTROM,
Mario Garcia Torres,
Stephen Kaltenbach
Jack Hanley Gallery
136 Watts Street, TriBeCa
Through Saturday

This charmingly cerebral group show, organized by the independent curator Kate Fowle, might be titled "Fun With Institutional Critique." It spreads a fine net over past and present forms of institutional critique and pulls them together. In the most obvious instance, Stephen Kaltenbach's drawings for his 1967 installation at the [Whitney Museum of American Art](#) are displayed on a wall covered with Whitney-logo wallpaper by Fia Backstrom that appeared in her installation in the 2008 Whitney Biennial.

I'm not sure what Ms. Backstrom is up to in "Poetry and Pottery," but the 23 handmade ceramic vases (her first?) incised with elliptical, hope-filled phrases and displayed on untreated wood benches, set the show's appealing tone. They have something to do with Brutalist architecture, the founding of the [United Nations](#) and the hobbies of 1950s housewives longing to escape suburbia. (Ms. Backstrom will perform a live narration of the work on Saturday at 3 p.m.)

Often past and present occur within the same artwork. In "A Brief History of [Jimmy Johnson's](#) Legacy," Mario Garcia Torres traces the convention of staging unscheduled performance-art pieces in major museums (consisting mostly of running through them) back to Mexico City in the early 1960s and cites recurrences in Paris, Chicago and Los Angeles; he also documents a re-creation of his own.

Mr. Kaltenbach contributes a thigh-high steel monolith (contents unknown) dated "1970-present" and inscribed with its title, "Open Before My Retrospective at [MOMA](#) in NY." The show also includes a full complement of the small non sequitur ads that he ran in Artforum in 1968-69. The words and phrases, such as "Tell a lie," "Build a reputation," "Smoke" and "You are me," presage the tone of much advertising and are presented in their original contexts.

ROBERTA SMITH

October 30, 2009

ART REVIEW | '1969

The Year of Tumult

By [HOLLAND COTTER](#)

In the fall of 1969, the country was having a nervous breakdown, and I was in my last year in college. I'd spent half the summer working in the emergency room of a New England factory town hospital, the rest traveling across Canada in a ruin of a car to visit friends in San Francisco.

Being in Canada, away from the political tumult at home, was a huge relief, though news kept breaking in throughout the ride: war, the moon walk, [Charles Manson](#), Woodstock. Back in school in the fall there was more news: of Altamont, of Black Panthers killed in Chicago, of a panic-inducing draft lottery.

By many accounts, this was the year that finally snuffed out the flower-power high, turned the era sour. Whatever the reality, the cultural atmosphere was unforgettably manic and clamorous, though almost no sense of this comes through in the exhibition "1969" at [P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center](#) in Queens.

True, the show was conceived with certain restrictive parameters. Almost everything in it is from the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, P.S. 1 being a [MoMA](#) affiliate. Maybe this explains why the selection adheres so closely to the late-1960s art establishment demographics, with a negligible presence of black, Asian, Latin American and female artists.

In addition, almost every piece dates from the year of the title, a year that fell squarely within the early, intensively dematerializing phase of Conceptualism, an art movement that privileged ideas and words over object and left relatively little to look at — a printed phrase, a list of instructions, a documentary snapshot — after the visual glut of Abstract Expressionism, Pop and Minimalism.

Radical discretion, though, is what made this art look revolutionary, as is evident in the first gallery. On one side you see a kooky Pop drawing of a scowling face by [John Wesley](#), a gleaming brass [Donald Judd](#) box and a big [Helen Frankenthaler](#) painting that suggests a patch of aquamarine mold spreading elegantly across the wall.

Opposite the Frankenthaler is something quite small, a sheet of framed writing paper with a single typed phrase: "Something which can never be anything specific." It's by the Conceptual artist Robert Barry, who had earlier gained notice for a solo show consisting entirely of radio waves.

Farther down the wall is another framed sheet of paper, this one carrying a handwritten and heavily annotated proposal by the artist Lee Lozano for setting up one-on-one conversations between herself and invited guests. Ms. Lozano was a painter who also developed idiosyncratic forms of social art, which were and weren't performances.

For one piece, she withdrew from the New York art establishment in an extended boycott. For another, she resolved to stop talking to women. Needless to say, this decision seriously complicated her already complicated relationship to feminism, which — though you would not know this from the show — was already a significant political force by 1969.

Whether Ms. Lozano was, strictly speaking, a Conceptualist is a question, one that might also be asked about the German artist Joseph Beuys, who appears, matinee-idol pretty and unblinkingly staring, in a video by Lutz Mommartz. Beuys referred to himself, his thinking and everything he did and made as "social sculpture," thereby politicizing every aspect of daily life.

This was a sexy idea, particularly in the 1960s, and had enormous influence on young artists in Europe, though we learn little directly about Beuys's politics here, or about any other kind of politics in a burningly polemical, liberationist era. There's a flash of women's liberation in Ms. Lozano's sardonic word pieces and of gay liberation via [Andy Warhol](#)'s hilariously wearisome talk-and-tease "Blue Movie." A single poster by Emory Douglas, the official revolutionary artist for the Black Panther Party, is one of the few references to black power.

What does receive some detailed scrutiny is MoMA's own fraught history. A collection of letters, news releases and clippings is a reminder of ideological tussles between the museum and the Art Workers' Coalition, which formed in 1969 to demand rights for artists to control their work within the institution. In a separate display is a text-and-photo spread on the Guerrilla Action Art Group, whose bloodbath performance in MoMA's lobby to protest the war was conceived and executed with an activist vehemence apparently now extinct.

It is absent, at least, from much of the rest of the show, which tends to define radicality in aesthetic terms of less-is-more. A page from a [John Cage](#) score points to other examples of reductive playfulness: tiny items, like party favors with surprises inside, by members of Fluxus; an exhibition catalog published by the art dealer Seth Siegelaub, which doubled as the exhibition itself; 1969 issues of Artforum in which Stephen Kaltenbach ran advertisements consisting of nothing but cryptic commands: "Start a rumor," "Perpetuate a hoax," "Become a legend."

The show doesn't lack for conventional objects. Chunky wall pieces by five California artists have been installed in a gallery-within-a-gallery as a reminder of what art at MoMA in 1969 actually looked like. And there are solid-gold stars. Bruce Nauman is ubiquitous; for him 1969 was a very good year, as it seems to have been for [Richard Serra](#) and Robert Smithson, both skeptics of the dematerializing trend.

And sure enough, the trend didn't last. Galleries need retail; artists need to provide it; critics like to write about what they know. So it wasn't long before big, solid and bankable were back.

They're going strong still, and in a nice touch, the show's organizers — Neville Wakefield, P.S. 1 senior curatorial adviser; Michelle Elligott, a MoMA archivist; and Eva Respini, associate curator of photography at MoMA — have acknowledged the present by inviting some young artists to add a final word to the show.

Hank Willis Thomas brings black popular culture into the picture with doctored clips from 1969 issues of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines. The very-on-the-ball collective called the Bruce High Quality Foundation runs art historical pedagogy through visual shredders in its "portable museums."

And, in the spirit of early Conceptualism's rejection of the preciousness of objects, the San Francisco artist Stephanie Syjuco has created her own version of a multipart Beuys ensemble that is owned by MoMA but couldn't, for reasons of fragility, be brought to P.S. 1. The original, which consists of a sled, a flashlight, a roll of felt and a hunk of wax, was inspired by a formative, possibly fictional episode in Beuys's life when, after being shot down in a plane in World War II, he was rescued by nomadic Tartars, who rubbed him with fat, wrapped him in felt for warmth and transported him by sled to safety.

Ms. Syjuco specializes in making inexpensive, recyclable reproductions of famous art. Her solution in this case was to recreate the Beuys installation from elements contributed by friends she contacted by e-mail, thus creating a literal "social sculpture."

The piece was meant as a homage to Beuys, which is nice. But it's a funny thing: a work that was created as an emblem of a personal emergency, and that became a symbol of the artist-hero traveling with his survival kit of ideas and ideals through the world, looks, in reproduction, like a toy, intriguing but slight.

A lot of what's in "1969" looks that way: clever, hermetic, tame, even timid, an impression reinforced by the fact that early Conceptualism's one overarching political gesture — to make itself market-resistant, uncollectible — was a bust, as the very existence of "1969" demonstrates.

At the opening I watched an audience of mostly young people, no doubt many of them artists, drifting through the galleries. And I wondered three things. First, what could anyone who wasn't around in 1969 make of this stuff, given that someone who was around then was having such trouble connecting it to any lived experience of that time?

Second, did the old notion that art reflects, in some profound way, the era that produced it become invalid as work grew increasingly self-referential and inaccessible? Such a question should be placed in the hands of imaginative art historians, and it's too bad some weren't invited to shape and contextualize this show, which is ridiculously withholding of factual information.

And third, should young artists fret about any of this? To some extent, yes. Whether they are making history or not, history is making them all the time as news pours in, constant and

inescapable. They should pay attention to that news, sort through it, find their place in it, be as alert to the past as to the present. Then, overwhelmed, they should get behind the wheel, step on the gas and go till the tank's running dry.

"1969" is at P. S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, 22-25 Jackson Avenue, at 46th Avenue, Long Island City, Queens, through April 5.

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The Enigma of Stephen Kaltenbach, Almost

Posted on January 18, 2009 – 7:00 PM | by OldManFoster

by Elaine O'Brien Photos by Jesse Vasquez

The extraordinary career of Sacramento regional artist Stephen Kaltenbach has been a subject of rediscovery for the cosmopolitan art world in the last few years. His place at the center of the New York avant-garde in the late 1960s and the postminimal conceptual art he produced then and has produced since are now receiving serious international attention. Locally, however, Kaltenbach remains something of a famous unknown. Like a statue in a traffic island, he is a Presence most people here have seen only in part. What Sacramentans know best are the salient works on public display: the artist's mesmeric painting, *Portrait of my Father*, high point of the Crocker Art Museum's contemporary collection, and his disquietingly tranquil ruin, *A Time to Cast Away Stones*, at the Sacramento Convention Center. The enigma of Stephen Kaltenbach is partly the phenomenon of the prophet disregarded at home, but beyond that, mystery is intrinsic to his best art and paradigmatic to the historically significant conceptual production, which relies on the viewer's curiosity in a fundamental way that his traditional paintings and sculptures do not. The first Sacramento exhibition of Kaltenbach's conceptual art, *Nuclear Projects and Other Works* – forty major pieces from the four decades of his production – opens at the Verge Gallery on January 8. Sacramento's newest and most intelligently spirited contemporary art space, Verge provides the spare, minimalist theater this art requires. The show will surprise local Kaltenbach fans who expect his art to be beautiful, display masterful skill, and make a statement. Nothing in *Nuclear Projects* is meant to do these things, at least in any traditional way. Many are commissioned works not fabricated entirely by the artist, who makes a point of leaving the traces of other makers. No object in the exhibition aims to please the eye alone or prescribe meaning. Instead, they challenge the viewer to seek a possible disclosure of secrets and discover his or her own meanings. In this art, it is the viewer's response that defines the work and determines its success. Only a playful ease with unease can yield pleasure and possibly reveal the complexity of an artist whose work is elusive on principle. The so-called anti-aesthetic strategies evident in *Nuclear Projects and Other Works* were developed and theorized by Kaltenbach and other conceptual artists in the late 1960s. Every critical issue of art today is rooted in the aesthetic and political reassessments of Kaltenbach's generation. His importance in art history derives from the ongoing influence of conceptualism -in one way or another- on every major artist who followed. Conceptual art has many global points of origin, but it emerged in New York out of Kaltenbach's milieu as a reaction to the formalist critical paradigm that dominated the late modernist art world in a way inconceivable today. In the context of worldwide youth protest and liberation movements, these artist "sixty-eighters" appropriated the radical strategies



of the historical avant-garde, above all Dada and the trickster methods of Duchamp already in re-play by the 1950s in movements such as neo-Dada, Gutai, Nouveau Réalisme, and Situationism.

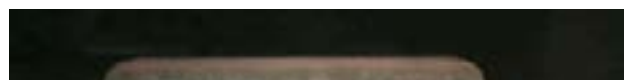


Kaltenbach moved to New York in 1967 after finishing graduate studies at UC Davis under Robert Arneson, William Wiley and Robert Mallery. By 1968 he was showing in a series of groundbreaking New York exhibitions that *Nuclear Projects and Other Works* brings forward. The famous 1968-69 exhibition *Nine* at Leo Castelli curated by Robert Morris with other icons of contemporary art such as Richard Serra, Eva Hesse and Kaltenbach's grad school classmate, Bruce Nauman, included a rug-shaped felt floor piece by Kaltenbach that came with instructions that it was to be arranged, and re-arranged everyday, by the gallery owner. Castelli's arrangement, Kaltenbach recalls with a smile, was "just perfect." For the historical 1968 Dwan Gallery *EARTH WORKS* exhibition with Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, Claes Oldenburg, Dennis Oppenheim, Walter de Maria, and Carl Andre, Kaltenbach exhibited three proposed artworks: mock blueprints doubtless inspired by suburban California landscaping, one of them titled *Earth Mound for a Kidney Shaped Swimming Pool*. In 1969 Kaltenbach showed in Harald Szeemann's *When Attitudes Become Form* at the Kunsthalle, Berne, Switzerland and London; and in 1970 he contributed six works to the breakthrough international exhibition, *Information*, at the New York Museum of Modern Art. At this point the artist vanished from the New York scene and moved back to Sacramento.



Kaltenbach's explanations of why he disappeared from the center of the art world just as he reached the top, so to speak, are various. There were conflicting desires to leave New York, but he sees the move back to northern California in 1970 as a conceptual art act much like those he had been performing in New York. The claim is persuasive. "Relinquishment," an *Artforum* reviewer recently observed, "is key to understanding Kaltenbach's work and its dissolution, even disappearance." As a professor at the School of Visual Arts in 1968 and 1969, for example, Kaltenbach had his students "carry out my streetworks for me by doing anything they wanted to do in a specified area." The same premise is behind the anonymous *Artforum* ads the artist published at this time. Two ads from 1969 were mock/sincere prescriptions: "Build a Reputation" and "Perpetuate a Hoax." These ads are word-works that specifically targeted the *Artforum* audience and effectively participated in the conceptualist project to multiply doubt, but they also evidence Kaltenbach's heightening ironic self-objectification. In much the same way, a performance piece from his last New York year "disappeared" his artistic identity in a series of nine easel paintings done in the style of a Sunday painter. With a haircut and suit he played at becoming another kind of artist, and, looking for "the worst gallery I could find in my own name," displayed the paintings in a little room at Lord & Taylor's department store. To Kaltenbach, leaving New York for Sacramento was essentially the same kind of art action, but "more untried." "I was trying to make it my life," he said. What's more, he expected to be "found" soon enough by the New York art world. The disappearing act could thus be seen as one of the "Bad Ideas" of extreme ego that Kaltenbach's art explores: absurdist dialectics of "success" and "failure," egotism and self-negation.

Nuclear Projects and Other Works displays many of Kaltenbach's "Bad Ideas" (i.e. "ideas about playing



God”) including 25 of his cryptic Time Capsules. The ongoing series of mock (almost) self-immortalizations began in 1967 soon after he arrived in New York and can be interpreted as theoretically consistent with the artist’s disappearing act three years later. Minimalist containers with unknown content sealed inside, the Time Capsules are mostly machine made in metal – copper, gold, aluminum, steel – some rusted, some highly polished and reflective, offering a Brancusi-like range of color and finish. Other symbolic materials, like ABS thermoplastic, are also used. The Time Capsules are shaped as cylinders, cubes, and rectangular boxes scaled to the human body. Machine made and engraved with a few carefully-chosen words in the manner of grave markers, they connote (for this viewer) fatality and an attitude toward high aspiration as tragedy and farce. Both the *Broken Obelisk* by Barnett Newman (cast steel, 1963) and Bruce Nauman’s *Henry Moore Bound to Fail* (cast iron, 1967-70) come to mind.



Four large Time Capsules are inscribed with directions to open them before Kaltenbach’s retrospectives at prestigious art museums. “OPEN BEFORE MY RETROSPECTIVE AT THE TATE IN LONDON,” one instructs. The others are to be opened before his retrospectives at the Staatliche Museum in Berlin, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Pompidou Center. Two paired five-inch circular aluminum capsules bear contradictory and mock (almost) self-deprecating text: “BURY WITH THE ARTIST” is partnered with “NOTHING OF VALUE.” There are small square capsules of rusted steel, each with a tiny hole like a faux camera obscura and engraved with descriptive text – “INVERTED OBSERVER,” “FUGITIVE IMAGE,” “KLEINES KLOSTER” (little cloister) – that seems incongruently poetic for the industrial medium and minimalist style. Other (eight-inch) cube-shaped capsules – each an individually numbered “object for investigation” – are tricks for the eye; appearing to be heavy metal like the rest, they are made of foam. Kaltenbach says he hopes that “someday someone opens one of these,” but it is with a smile of amused certainty that he predicts that no museum conservator will ever open a Time Capsule. Several of them have passed their opening dates. Oberlin College, for one, has yet to follow the directions on theirs to “OPEN AFTER JAN. 1. 2000 A.D.”

While the Time Capsules move between subjectivity and objectivity, between the art world and the real world, other “Bad Ideas” in the Verve exhibition work on a more objective level as a critique of human hubris, its destructive capacity. The enigma of *Nuclear Projects’* circle drawings is that of visual puzzles, their secrets less opaque and autobiographical than the Time Capsules. The nine-inch circles mean radically different things at first glance than they do on closer study. The whole order of meaning shifts. A smiley face on a black ground, for example, turns out to be a desperate Dr. Strangelove plan to “retarget the world’s arsenal of ICBMS to blast two ovals on the moon during the first quarter.” A drawing of a soccer ball is actually a project for iron cladding the sun, and a soap bubble is a representation of the Biosphere.

The Verve exhibition, like the works in it, is like a secret told after four decades, revealing Stephen Kaltenbach’s central place in the late 1960s cosmopolitan art world and his four decades of brilliant conceptualist production. To the current generation of concept-based artists for whom strategies of appropriation and relational art and the free circulation of ideas are paradigmatic, Kaltenbach’s relevance is obvious.

Stephen Kaltenbach @ Verge Gallery

Posted on 11 March 2009. Tags: Conceptual, stephen Kaltenbach



Steve Kaltenbach is one of the most intriguing figures in conceptual art. Best known for his anonymous ads in *Artforum* that encouraged readers to “Build a Reputation” and “Perpetuate a Hoax” — and for his cryptic Time Capsules whose inscriptions mixed self-deprecating humor with egocentric boasts — Kaltenbach was among the figureheads of the New York avant-garde in the late ‘60s. He mixed Duchampian absurdism with text-based object making to lampoon practically every myth the art world was manufacturing and refining. From the inflated notions of celebrity that took hold in Warhol’s heyday to the superheated art valuations that recently fell to Earth, Kaltenbach skewered them all without sparing himself.

At the height of his renown in 1970, Kaltenbach disappeared from the scene after accepting a teaching position at Sac State. But as “Nuclear Projects and Other Works” powerfully attests, he hasn’t stopped innovating. In this four-decade survey, Kaltenbach showed that the strategies he employed then are equally valid now.



His undated Time Capsules, which he’s built continuously since 1967, were the exhibition’s focal point. Made of various metals and fashioned into cylinders, disks, canisters and boxes, their content remains a mystery. It could be enriched uranium, the artist’s navel lint or nothing at all. Kaltenbach has never said, and it’s safe to assume no curator will ever wield a blowtorch to find out. With their epitaph-like inscriptions (“Bury with the Artist,” “Nothing of Great Value,”

“Open Before My Retrospective at the Tate in London”), they operate in much the same way that Barbara Kruger’s and Jenny Holzer’s aphorisms did in subsequent decades: they force viewers to question their perceptions and values.



“Bad Ideas” (2002-08), a series of works on paper, appear to assault the hubris of the Bush era. They suggest various ways the world’s arsenal of ICBM’s could be deployed to blast holes in the cosmos for entertainment and sport. Also on display was a replica of an atom bomb, replete with a low, rumbling soundtrack, and a “Black Hole,” a velvet-lined room whose aperture seemed to pull in

viewers with palpable force. Elsewhere, in a wall text called “The Divine Atom,” the artist uses the idea of transubstantiation to spin a post-9/11 tale of microbiology-assisted redemption, suggesting that faith and reason might not be as incompatible as we think.

That both systems of thought operate with equal force inside this highly respected artist gives viewers yet another conundrum to ponder.

–DAVID M. ROTH

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One Response to “Stephen Kaltenbach @ Verge Gallery”

1.



[j.jelks](#) says:

[April 24, 2009 at 1:06 AM](#)

David,

Art that sees beyond the eye

When **Stephen J. Kaltenbach** was a graduate student at UC Davis 40 years ago, art was being rigorously — and narrowly — defined as something that happened in the eye. Truly great art was, in the parlance of the day, retinal.

Kaltenbach was among a host of young artists who demurred — with a metaphoric stick in the eye. Nearly two dozen of his Conceptual works range across the last four decades in a show at *Another Year in L.A.* (surprisingly, only the second time he's shown at a gallery here), and they include several that are sly and provocative.

The most famous is "Slant Step 2." The original slant step, a now-legendary object found in 1965 by Bruce Nauman and William T. Wiley, was a kind of step-stool whose tread was set at an angle — not level — which meant that stepping on it would cause you to slip and fall on your face.

Functional yet useless, the strange homemade object passed among several artists in California and New York over the next few years, inspiring a variety of responses to its perception-altering wit. Kaltenbach's rejoinder was to modernize and multiply: He commissioned an edition of 75 slant steps in bright-yellow molded fiberglass and black rubber.

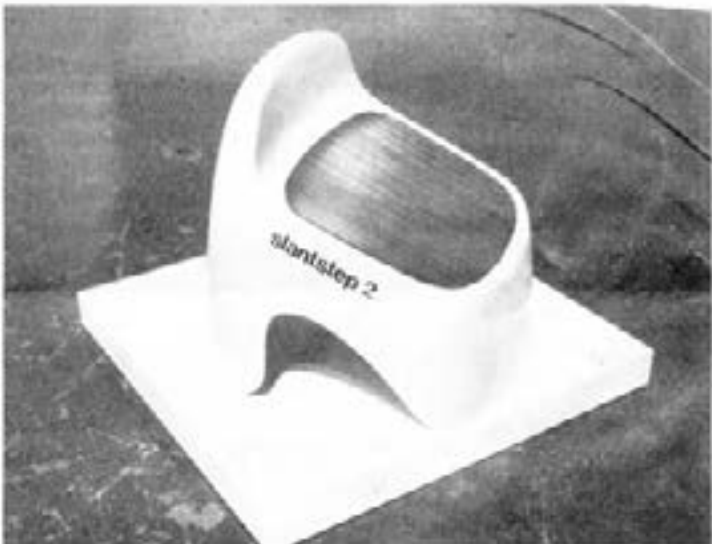
Mass-producing a unique object deflates the aura of originality, which had grown to mythic proportions with the slant-step legend. It also adds an unexpected layer of distinctive weird-

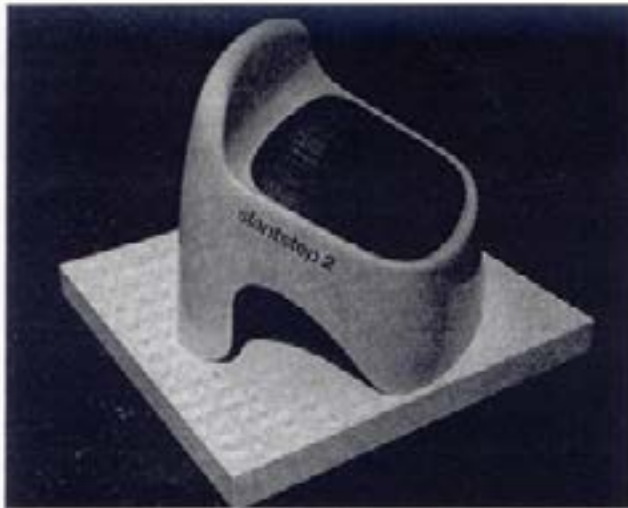
ness. Forget sculpture; "Slant Step 2" looks like some cheerful product of the military-industrial complex. No amount of obviously expensive engineering can salvage its attractive inutil-ity. Someone plainly went to great lengths to conceive, design and manufacture this yellow thingamabob. Visually, it's discordant — a fact that twists the retinal ideal into knots.

Kaltenbach's best work plays with art's visual edge, a notion introduced even before you get inside the gallery. Stenciled on an outside wall are the words "Nothing is revealed." The idea of stenciling graffiti — a deeply individual utterance, by definition endowed with autograph personality — is a wonderful contradiction. And nothingness — the void — is something artists have confronted as a defining experience of the modern era. When "nothing is revealed," some sort of spiritually satisfying artistic plateau has been reached.

Er, hasn't it? Kaltenbach's show is characterized by such puzzling, evanescent nuggets.

Another Year in L.A., 2121 San Fernando Road, Suite 13, L.A. (323) 723-4000, www.anotheryearinla.com, through July 29. Closed Sundays and Mondays.





Stephen J. Kaltenbach, *Slantstep 2*, 1969, molded fiberglass and rubber, 15 x 14 x 10".



Stan Kaplan, *Painting with Pink and Blue*, 2005, oil on canvas, 66 x 87".

autobiographical bent. Though the faces mature, the locations change, and the light shifts, this is work by an artist candidly picturing environments that are particular to his life. The sequence of the exhibition is chronological, though there tends to be thematic unity in the artist's particular focus at any given moment, and self-portraits appear with more regularity at the beginning and end of the show. The first, formative works are moody interiors and self-portraits in bathroom and bedroom mirrors that reflect the painter's perennially bearded face. In more recent images, like *RB on De Haro Street*, 2004, a charcoal night interior, Bechtle looks forward with earnestness. It's a darker vision, yet one communicated with the same clarity that distinguished this retrospective as a whole.

—Glen Feldman

LOS ANGELES

STEPHEN J. KALTENBACH ANOTHER YEAR IN LA

Recording Conceptual Art, Alexander Alberro's 2001 edition of Patricia Norvell's fascinating 1969 audio interviews, helps recall the mellow Other to Conceptual art's frequently stern diagrammatics: Dennis Oppenheim's sunburns, Robert Barry's belief in telepathy and the invisible, and Stephen J. Kaltenbach's experiments with astrology, ESP, and weed. Norvell taped Kaltenbach talking about smoking pot for the first time: "I could remove myself from my ego a little bit and see myself and my work more clearly." A year later, in a lengthy interview for *Artforum*, Kaltenbach located the moment's art in relation to the

munchies: "For conceptual work, the taste buds are mostly in the mind."

From *Couch Painting*, 1969, of the proto-Jim Shaw-ish "Lord & Taylor" series, to "room construction" plans and more recent projects, this forty-year minisurvey operated as if another of the artist's notorious time capsules were finally opened. *Canvas Drapery Arrangement*, 1967, a neutral "canvas to be arranged differently every day," was spread again like an abandoned picnic blanket from a *dejeuner sur l'herbe*, with photos documenting its various historical situations. In interviews, Kaltenbach has emphasized the "drapery" aspect of the piece—fabric's relation to artists' models or a still life's ground—rather than its timely but uninterrogated beige commentary on readymade painting in relation to sculpture. Initially Kaltenbach himself would arrange the drape; then, in good Conceptualist fashion, he made diagrams of different folding and placement possibilities for others to carry out with any piece of fabric. By the time it appeared in the remarkable Robert Morris-curated warehouse show "Nine at Leo Castelli" in 1968, he had "reversed" the process, "providing the shape of the material" but no diagrams for its arrangement, relinquishing almost all artistic control.

Relinquishment is key to understanding Kaltenbach's work and its dissolution, even disappearance: "You are really limited in what you can do by what you are. The thing that I have been looking for was how to get around that. One possibility is giving the work to other people to do." His series of ads, run anonymously in *Artforum* from November 1968 through December 1969, began to explore such strategies of circumvention. Most encouraged unverifi-

able, even suspect actions (BECOME A LEGEND; TELL A LIE); the last ad ended with a complete sentence, dissolving the boundaries of identity: YOU ARE ME.

Time, 1968, extends Kaltenbach's predilection for remaking, restaging, or repositioning others' works in a context of his own choice or devising. Combining two pieces of string with a sliding metal washer, he fashioned a makeshift clock and attributed it to Lee Lozano. His funky yellow fiberglass *Slantstep 2*, 1969, began as a Bill Wiley junk-shop find given to Bruce Nauman, who remade versions of it before Richard Serra "stole" the "original"; Kaltenbach then "borrowed" the stool to show the industrial designer Bill Plumb, his advisor in producing the "Kaltenbach" edition of it for Tanglewood Press. His procedures only became more self-questioning and suggestive: anonymous cast-bronze street plaques and stamped-ink lips on subway posters. He asked his students to "carry out my streetworks for me by doing anything they wanted to do in a specified area."

Kaltenbach's work haunts current art procedures: Where Tino Sehgal stridently authorizes and controls "his" immateriality by relying on institutional imprimatur to publicize and textually materialize his investment in signatory ego, notoriety, and recognition, Kaltenbach has always been more interested in circulating ideas—literally—on the free market, unsigned. Before so-called Appropriation, he investigated the exchange value and social hierarchies of artistic influence and propriety.

One of Kaltenbach's most recent works, *The End* (Xulon Press, 2004), is a novel about the capture at the end of the world. An edition of one hundred was

stamped with a STEPHEN J. KALTENBACH inkpad signature that is itself canceled by another, superimposed: CECI N'EST PAS UNE AUTEUR. The bio on back of the book discloses, "He has been a Christian since 1979." I have trouble not reading it all as an allegory for the art world's machinations and as reason to reconsider the influence of the underacknowledged and left behind. In the lingo of his heyday: *heavy*.

—Bruce Hainley

DANIEL MARZONA

conceptual Art

TASCHEN

ART WORKS

Cast iron, 13.5 x 21 cm

Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Nationalgalerie, Marzona collection

b. 1940 in Battle Creek (MI), USA

Like Bruce Nauman, Stephen Kaltenbach must also be seen, by dint of the variety of his artistic approaches, as an unorthodox representative of North American Concept Art. During his time as a student at the University of California in Davis between 1966 and 1967, he worked on "walk through" room constructions – geometrically simple structures which, while showing a relationship in the formal respect with Minimal Art, nonetheless were set up with the declared aim of having a lasting and disconcerting effect on those who passed through them.

In the middle of 1967, Kaltenbach moved to New York, where until 1970 he always sought to undermine traditional views of art. While they are structurally fundamentally different, Kaltenbach's projects have at least one thing in common: namely that they circumvent the institutional context of art by addressing the public in unconventional ways.

In November 1968 Kaltenbach placed his first ad in the magazine "Artforum": it took the form of his statement *ART WORKS*, and appeared without any indication of authorship between various announcements of exhibitions. In later ads, the relationship of his anonymous communications to art increasingly evaporated when he started placing brief instructions such as *Build a Reputation* or suggestive messages like *You Are Me*. At the same time Kaltenbach, over the space of a decade, sent to fellow artists and people he knew from the art world his *Time Capsules* – welded metal tubes, in which he had instructions to the respective recipient engraved. Thus on the *Time Capsule for Bruce Nauman* there is the message "Retain possession of this capsule. Do not open it until notified.", while the capsule addressed to the art critic Barbara Rose bore the message "Please open this capsule when, in your opinion, I have attained (national) prominence as an artist." In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art there is a capsule with the instruction to open it after his death.

The *Time Capsules* project reveals two telling characteristics of Kaltenbach's total art production. On the one hand, even conceptually they are impossible for the art market to make any money out of, and on the other they contain, at least virtually, the negation of their

status as artwork, which they would lose at the moment of their opening because this would deprive them of their concealment function. In comparable fashion, nearly all of Kaltenbach's projects of the late 1960s move in a grey area between art and the everyday.

With his 1968 *Sidewalk Plaque Series* Kaltenbach literally took his art onto the street by having bronze plaques made, which were intended to be set in the concrete of New York's sidewalks. The six anonymous plaques, sited in New York's public space, bearing the inscriptions "Art Works", "Air", "Blood", "Bone", "Fire" and "Water" bear witness to Kaltenbach's radical view of art: he deliberately dispensed with any claim to authorship or with saleability, in order to be able to test the functional value of art in changed contexts.



Time Capsule – Open After WW III (2), n. d.

AN INTERVIEW WITH STEPHEN KALTENBACH by Cindy Nemser, Artforum, November, 1970

Do you consider yourself a conceptual artist?

Yes. I think most of the work is heavily weighted towards ideas and away from the visual. Most of my art is direct action. Art is traditionally shown in galleries and the folks who traditionally show it there are trying to make the showing system work with conceptual art. It seems to me to be a difficult thing to do because the gallery/museum setup is designed for an experience which is primarily savored with the eye. For conceptual work, the taste buds are mostly in the mind.

I think that conceptual art is about art. It is an emphasis of a position of art; one way to look at art. New art is often an aspect of old art emphasized with the older percentage removed. I think there have always been concepts in an artist's production. Praxiteles' conception of the gods or Duchamp's readymades, or the conception of the possibility of painting a painting about 'nothing or nothing real. Conceptual art is the strengthening of the head aspect and the minimalizing of the other aspects, like the visual. Besides, with the excess attention given to the development of art thinking, it's not surprising that art thinking itself should receive the emphasis necessary to become a movement.

My teaching is one of my most important conceptual art involvements now. As an artist, it's as logical for me to work with a person's perception as it is for me to make beauty available. In a sense it's like working in reverse. Instead of making beautiful objects to be seen, I try to make the eye see beauty in everything that's about. I want my students to see the problems and possibilities I have encountered in trying to make people see beautifully. Since I can't show them how to do it, I can show them how I'm doing it. Therefore, teaching is also a process through which I can expose myself so that other people can see what I am. This is as pure a conceptual work as anything I'm doing.

Yet what am I going to show? I put an ad in Artforum saying Teach Art. It's a suggestion about possibilities and an announcement of an art action I'm undertaking. It's more comparable with a situation or an idea or a point of view. To write it all down and to put it into a conceptual show becomes secondary. It doesn't have anything to do with the art action itself.

Does your work have a philosophical center?

It seems to me there's a way of looking at what a person does as a game. Whether or not the something is a game depends on your viewpoint. I think that my art work is about setting up processes like someone would set up a chess or checkers game and going through with it. I have a variety of reasons for setting up games. I'll set up a game to bring me success or to bring me notoriety, or to give me feelings of adequacy. Sometimes I set up my games to work out problems I have in myself. It seems my art is becoming those game things more and more directly. Let me give you an example. Here is a game I used to help me out of a hangup. It was in a show at Berne, "When Attitude Becomes Form." It was a little rubber stamp of my lips. (When you make an art object it can still be directly a game.) I took dark lipstick and put it on. Then I made a print so that it looked like the lips were blotted. Well, I sent it to Europe and told them to make up the stamps and sell it as cheap as they could. People could use them as graffiti stamps to put the lips on subway posters, bathrooms, etc. Ever since I was in grammar school, I was self-conscious about my mouth and the size of my lips. It was a feature of myself that I really hated, so much so that I was seriously considering having plastic surgery done to make my lips lighter in color and smaller. Well from 1963 to last year, when I did the stamp piece, I was working

my way out of that thing. Now I realize that everyone has a part of his body that he doesn't like, and with the making of the stamp, it was clear to me that I really felt OK about my mouth. The problem was solved, stamped, finished.

Were the ads in Artforum related to hangups, too?

Yes, some were. They were a series of five illusions. I am interested in the fact that you can provide verbal illusions as interesting as visual illusions. They were all similar things: Tell a Lie, Start a Rumor, Perpetrate a Hoax, Build a Reputation, and Become a Legend. I wanted to suggest these illusions as possibilities for artists to work with. Several of these ads had more meaning to me than others. The first one, Tell a Lie, was like a freeing game. I was always a fantastic liar and if I was not lying, I was exaggerating. I see it as the result of my inability to accept myself as I was, so I lied to make myself more interesting or to correct something in myself I saw as a fault. My inability to accept the act of falsifying was the hangup for me, and the ad was the claiming that I do lie and that it's OK, acceptable to me. Being able to publish the ad in Artforum really made me see that now I could tell everybody "I'm a liar." Were the other ads in that series also connected with your personal hangups?

Yes, Build a Reputation was. The idea of becoming a famous artist has been strongly with me ever since I knew I was an artist, and that was since my grammar school days... when I would win the watercolors at the end of the year. I have always been involved with reputation and I'm always playing it down and not admitting what a big aspect of my drive to make art it is. Anyway, I got out of school in California and I couldn't get the kind of job I wanted because getting a job depends on a reputation. I was also ineffectual as an artist because a lot of my ideas were expensive and I had no money and no one was interested in underwriting them there. So I came to New York for a reputation, and it has helped me to some extent in that way. However, now I know that any reputation I've built is an illusion. It's not me. It's about me and the illusion of me as anyone sees me. All reputations are like that. If they really get out of hand, they become legends.

Could you tell me about the room construction that you did at the Whitney?

When I was still a student at the University of California in 1966 and 1967, as part of my MA thesis, Robert Mallary, my instructor, asked me to describe my work physically and philosophically as far back as I could remember. Then I had to present a variety of proposals as if I were applying for a Guggenheim grant which would extend my work from the present state to possible future development. The room constructions came out of that assignment. It gave me an objective viewpoint of my work that I wouldn't have had normally. That experience showed me that my primary concerns were with reducing the number of elements that could be removed before the work itself disappeared and that the possibility of nothing being acceptable as art was not acceptable to me at that time. So, felt that once I had arrived at the point where I was really minimal, nothing but a simple geometric shape, then other things would have to be done to reduce the experience. I accomplished that by reducing the visual complexity in the room or space where the piece was to be seen. One way I did this was by surfacing the geometric shape with a traditional interior finishing material so that it would become part of the room. It did have that effect. The negative space became more important and that reduced the value or strength of the positive space of the object a great deal.

Then you saw this room construction as a strictly formal problem?

Yes, very formal. It was like an abstract word thought, "I am making a minimal work-I am trying to make it more minimal." Then it became translated to the spatial object which became translated to human experience as people ran into

the thing. If it was claustrophobic that was the result of human beings interacting with it, not the things I planned.

There were also sketches for other rooms. They presented difficult problems for those who came into them. If, as I assume, you envisioned these rooms in terms of human beings entering them, why do they present such obstacles as to make people climb and crawl about them? Why are they designed to make visitors so uncomfortable? They're not living rooms. Everyone is used to spaces designed for human comfort. My rooms don't accede to that at all because they are about other things. They are a confrontation, in a way. You open the door and the floor which has risen to fill the lower half of the room blocks the doorway leaving only a space of one and a half feet at the top. It's enough to crawl through, but it's really barring the entrance. If you like being obstructed, or if you're very athletic, then the rooms don't obstruct you. If not, you have to make more effort. You can make of the rooms whatever you like. It all depends on where you are at as to how you react.

Are your early rooms connected with the newest room constructions in any way?

Out of the early rooms came the process of turning three-dimensional work inside out. Several of the pieces became shaped spaces that you could enter. Rather than perceiving the shape of the space externally, it was to be seen from the inside. Those things led to the wall paintings and room paintings. The six-sided ones completely enclose you. Of course, there was Samaras's mirror room and all sort of other leads to follow.

But your new rooms are not just a problem in reduction for you?

No. The star room is my being cut off from the sky. In New York there is no sky and I'm used to lots of sky, so I made my own. There are no intellectual flip-flops in the brain. It has to do with a visual feast. Making something beautiful.

Did these sky pieces grow out of a specific experience?

I was helping a friend work on a summer cabin and we were at Wright's lake, high in the Sierra Nevadas near Lake Tahoe, above the timber line. There was not much above the level of the lake, only some boulders about 200 feet high and a few trees. At three A.M. I got up to go to the john which was the bushes outside. There was no moon and no wind, but a hundred billion stars were out. It was really clear, and there was sky above and sky below. The sky was in the lake. I went back for my friend and we sat on the shore and marveled. Then we went for a ride in a rowboat and took a blanket. In the middle of the lake there was a cement block about four feet square which cleared the water by about a foot and a half. My friend left me on it with the blanket. Then the water cleared up and calmed down, and I was really floating in the universe. It was an amazing experience.

Could you describe this new star room?

It's an eight foot square room with a six and a half foot ceiling. It is entered through a concealed trapdoor in the floor of my sleeping platform which lets you into the room through the ceiling.

The trapdoor is nearly invisible from the inside when closed. The room is white and on the floor, walls, and ceiling are painted about 10,000 dots of invisible blue luminescent paint ranging in size from half inch to a pin point. When the light is on, the dots are invisible. I imagine the experience is like that of being locked in a refrigerator. When the light is off, you expand outward. I wanted the difference. The one makes the other stronger.

Was the room expensive to build?

No, not too expensive. It's in my loft and I built it when I built interior spaces for my living quarters. It cost about \$100.

How long has this room been here?

Since December. I also built one in the Reese Palley Gallery in San Francisco, but that one had no rounded corners. It was a room with an obvious doorway.

Who has seen this room?

Mostly my friends and my students. I don't advertise it, but anyone is welcome to see it. However, just the logistics make that difficult. It's in my house and my house isn't a gallery.

What about the time capsules?

The time capsules began as a consideration of the legality of things. I got to thinking about legality and illegality versus morality and immorality and whether there was any correlation at all. Sometimes, something I would consider evil would also be illegal, but then, sometimes it wouldn't be. Sometimes some things I would consider good would be legal and sometimes not. It didn't seem to be one following the other as I was taught. Anyway, my first thinking about the time capsules had to do with the idea that I could possibly select laws which I thought had nothing to do with morality and break them and put the evidence in a time capsule in order to escape social retribution, but not hide my act forever. I was thinking about those things during the spring of 1967, but I didn't do any of them because I was in the process of getting myself together to come to New York. By the time I got around to making the capsules my ideas had completely changed.

What's inside the capsules?

They possibly contain things and possibly they do not contain things. I don't say anything about their content, or that there's any content at all, because I found out the concealment of information is as primary a function of the capsule as its preservation. When they are to be opened is on the outside of the capsule. The first three were not objects that could be handled in any commercial way. They required a specific environment to function in, and I just had to make them and place them and the ownership is not defined. I made one that Bruce Nauman is taking care of but I'm not sure he owns it. I don't think it matters that it be owned.

What came after the capsules?

The plaques were next. Coming to New York, I was turned on to sidewalk hardware. There were plaques uptown that say "Private Property," and plaques that say "Water." There are Life Magazine plaques that they use for paperweights at newspaper stands. All those things led me to make the sidewalk plaques. There was also a specific influence. I was turned on by Bruce Nauman's art. He had done a piece a year or two before which was a message, "Rose has no teeth." It was a plaque that he screwed to a tree which the bark will eventually cover. In a similar way, my plaques are to be set in cement on a sidewalk where they will eventually be worn out as they are trodden on. I like Bruce's thinking and use a lot of his ideas. Usually it's pretty much unconscious. This time the source didn't occur to me until the plaques were cast in bronze.

Weren't they advertised in the May, 1970 issue of Artforum?

That was something else. It's continuing the chain. It went from Bruce to me and on to Jerry Walburg and Bob Arneson. Jerry made tin copies from my mold for the

"Art Works" sidewalk plaque and titled them forgeries. Bob Arneson used the mold to make clay art work. So the idea continues as we pass it around.

What happened when you realized that you had taken Nauman's idea and used it so directly?

I considered what had happened and thought I would like to try it again and see what it felt like. So I tried using someone's idea without altering it in any way. When I was asked to be in the telephone show in the Chicago Museum of Art, I submitted Walter de Maria's telephone piece. They would install a phone in the Museum and he would periodically call the Museum and speak to whoever happened to be nearby. It was an idea that had appealed to me since I saw it in Letter Edged In Black Press. Unfortunately Jan van der Marck said the piece didn't turn him on, and so I had to give him something else.

You and Robert Morris worked with felt pieces about the same time. How do you feel about that?

Bob Morris has been a large part of my art ego. It started in California. We were duplicating each other's work a lot. I was hearing a lot about him, and seeing his work constantly in Artforum made me feel very ineffectual and I was very much concerned with that kind of thing. One of the first things I did when I got to New York was to try to influence Bob's work. It was my first pure causal art work. Most of the first causal work was secret. I documented it, but my ego was so involved I really didn't know how to consider it. I wanted to specify it as an art activity and bring it into the realm of something which could be credited to me. When I first got to New York, Barbara Rose told me Bob was working with cloth manipulation. I arranged for a friend to take me to his studio for an introduction and to see his work. I then invited him over to see my work and showed him drawings for cloth pieces I'd done. I think that the art action may have stimulated some change for him. It certainly worked the other way. I was using canvas for my artistic draperies, but the felt made more sense to me after seeing it in Bob's work. Hemming isn't necessary to keep the edges from unraveling, and Bob turned me on to a place that sold a huge variety I of textures, colors, and thicknesses. Besides benefiting from his material suggestions, I got a better feeling for the possibilities of scale from his felt pieces. Accepting the fact that causation is a two way road has made me much more comfortable with that kind of work. It has set up possibilities for working as an artist. I'm influenced, others are influenced by me, and I in turn am influenced by them - groovy.

How did you develop the idea for the cloth pieces that you showed at the Castelli warehouse in January of 1968?

The idea of arranging cloth things came out of an experience at Davis. Some models were dancing around in class with props. One model opened up a huge bolt of cloth and threw it over a ladder and started doing things with the cloth. Thoughts connected in my mind to the use of it in art. There are all those draperies of one kind or another. You never get away from it. Well I got interested in it and it seemed to be something in itself, something that didn't require a table or a vase of flowers or a beautiful body under it. It seemed very important in itself as something beautiful to work with. So I first went through a lot of possibilities of just arranging cloth loosely on the floor and on the wall. Then I made a diagram of these possibilities and if someone was interested in a piece, I would give them the diagram and ask that they select their own material of specific proportions, but any size or color. They could follow the diagrams or do their own things with it. Then by the time it got to the Castelli show, the process reversed itself, so that I was providing the shape of the material but not the arrangement of it. I assigned Leo or someone

of his delegation the responsibility of arranging the piece any way he wanted to.

You were relinquishing some control over your own piece?

I am really interested in the way things get done, how what I am-the nature of myself-controls what I can do. You are really limited in what you can do by what you are. The thing that I have r been looking for was how to get around that. One possibility is giving the work to other people to do.

How have you been able to incorporate those possibilities in other works you've done?

I use other people in my work a lot. Here is an aboveboard application of that. Here was this object, the slant step, which California artists have been into for three or four years. Bill Wiley found this enigmatic, homemade; homely thing in a junk shop. It was made like a step stool, but the step was slanting so you couldn't stand on it. He bought it for fifty cents and gave it to Bruce Nauman who made a variety of things from it He made a mold for a modern version of it and a movie about how to build it. Other people got on to making their own versions of it. They had a show and then Richard Serra stole the original slant step from the show and spirited it away to New York. It next went to Philadelphia and then back to California. The ownership, or more accurately, the possession of the original kept moving around here and there. I managed to borrow it for a while myself and at that time Rosa Esman, of the Tanglewood Press, was looking for things to make into large editions. It was a great opportunity to let someone else do some art work for me. I suggested that she take the original slant step to an industrial designer and have him re-design it for consumer appeal. That was all had to do with it-making the suggestion. So she took it to an industrial designer named Bill Plumb and he came up with a smooth design and reproduced a number of them. I think it's pretty much an unlimited edition, like 25 in each color. Since the eye can perceive hundreds of thousands of shades there is no limit to the number that can be made, except that they are not selling very well. It's interesting that it has become a useful sort of thing, due, (suppose, to the fact that industrial designers make usable things. It's a comfortable footstool.

Maybe that's why it's not selling?

Well, it does throw a wrench in the works depending upon how you look at it. Some people think that art objects are not supposed to be usable and therefore it was questionable if this stool was an art object. To me it was acceptable. I'm in there accepting whatever happens to my work as it develops. I don't give things an evil connotation because they are usable. This is something I've had to do to remain a happy artist. So many of the projects I set up and get going turn out to be very small scale, and, at least from one point of view, are miserable failures.

A good example of this is the tread design I made for the astronauts. As you know, last year there was a great deal of talk about the astronauts' first footsteps on the moon, and so I got into making a lot of different tread designs for it. I went through dumb things like eagles and stars and stripes-things I didn't really care much about and finally I came up with an idea I liked. What I really wanted to do was to make the first footprint myself. So I made a cast of my bare foot and made a rubber mold from it and sent it off to NASA. Of course, they ignored it. There was no question about them offering Neil Armstrong a tread design of my foot. The project was set up to be a failure. "Born to lose." I have that experience a lot. I have really grandiose ideas, but I'm not the kind of person that is required to make things happen that way. I'm really a

Walter Mitty, coming up with inventions which are concepts and therefore art works. At first when I had an idea for an invention, I tried to set up something in a way which would bring financial return to me or at least credit for it. This became much too cumbersome because it called for much more of an involvement in a secondary aspect than I wanted to have. So now if I have an idea for a new kind of sanding disc or a new toy or a new means of advertising, I write it down, as tersely as possible, and ship it out to someone who might be interested in it. But I don't see the results, and if there are results, I don't know what they are. I seldom experience the work in a state that might be normally seen as completed. So the possibility exists that the idea has had no action, in other words, it's a failure.

Do you find that hard to live with?

It's something that I don't have a hard time accepting any more. In my secret outdoor work, there is no way to measure or determine the results. There is no quantitative measurement possible and very little qualitative measurement either. You never really see what you've done, and, in a sense, it brings up problems if you are used to working in a traditional way. For instance, I do a piece of work and the return from that often feeds the next piece, the reaction gives me my ideas for the next development in that line of investigation. In a lot of cases the lack of return limits the development. Well, it's OK though. It forces you out of that way of working and into something else--working without a return or with a purely imagined reaction." I think that a lot of feedback is unnecessary or can lead you to things that aren't interesting or confusing. You don't have to deal with these things when you don't have feedback. You don't have to deal with reality or maybe it's a matter of being free to choose the reality that you like or the one that fits the work. Any situation provides possibilities for working. Anything I can do as an artist is determined not only by my talents but also by my ineptness.

You mentioned secret outdoor work. That leads us to the streetworks. How did you get into them and how have they been developing?

I got into them here in New York. I don't know all the forces that pushed me that way. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that I've never lived in a city before and suddenly I was in the biggest city in the world. I found the subways exciting to ride and the graffiti all over the posters and walls was really interesting to me. It was because of seeing this graffiti that I felt a heavy urge to work outside and do graffiti myself. I got the idea of altering the subway posters by using what existed and extending it. My lip stamp was especially intended for one poster. It was a Fruit of the Loom stocking poster, which displayed a pretty chick with a very short dress and nice legs. Right up high on her thigh was a stamp that said "Fruit of the Loom." So when I rode the subways I carried the stamp in my pocket and whenever I'd come on one of those posters, I'd put my stamp right beside it.

Just working with graffiti like that got me thinking about the reaction to artwork when it's known as art work. So much of everything depends on what we read into it. You see things in your own terms from your own point of view. I think art can be anything. We make up the word and we use it and we apply it. It really depends on what we apply it to. It's a matter of who you convince and who comes to see it your way. If it's someone in a position of identifying what is art, then what you're doing becomes art. I was interested in the possibilities of giving someone an experience that was much more open-ended.

How were you able to do that?

To me one of the most important aspects of streetworks, especially the later things, was the fact that they were secret works. I felt if they were

identified as my work, they would be identified as art, since everything an artist has ever done sooner or later has come to be considered an art work. If I wanted to set up an experience unidentified as an art work, it was necessary to be anonymous.

In that case, you really can't tell me what the streetworks were, since you would be defeating your own purpose.

That's true, but streetworks quickly became "streetworks," and that's when I began to lose interest in them. They brought the museum out into the street and they identified what was going on as art work. They became specific again. It was, in my opinion, losing the aspect of it that was of primary interest to me. The experience became, once again, an art experience, and it was another thing. However, that's not definitely a bad thing. I think there have been a lot of really pretty and interesting streetworks done and I've been interested in involving myself with that also.

I participated in all of the organized streetworks, but I never actually did anything myself in them. For one of the streetworks, I asked my classes of 105 people to carry out my streetworks for me by doing anything they wanted to do in a specified area. It was a problem of amplifying the strength of what was done and releasing control of what was done as much as I could. That was the second streetwork. The first streetwork was centered in a 10-block square in midtown. After the event there was a party which was an admirable setup for what I wanted to do. I had decided not to do anything, but to go to the party and describe the things I'd done. In other words, I wanted to tell a pack of lies and see how much substance nothing could be given. It was fairly successful, as it gained a little substance because John Perreault wrote about some of the pieces in the Village Voice.

Was that the one where you tried to sell something?

I used five or six lies. First I said I had a brown paper package which I offered to 100 people. The price to the first person was \$100 and it was reduced by one dollar each time it was offered. I also said I took some Polaroid photos of sidewalk squares on Greene Street to record the position of the litter on them. Then I said that I'd gathered up the litter and brought it uptown and set it out on Fifth Avenue sidewalk squares to match the photo.

But none of this really happened?

Correct. The artwork was the possibility of making something out of nothing, which was generated out of the situation of my being faced with establishment streetworks.

You mean if you are expected to do that sort of thing why bother to do it? It's just as easy to say you did as to do it. That sort of action is traditional in terms of the way people behave, but not in terms of the way art is made.

It seems a lot of works are like that. Artists are bound by some traditions. In getting out of art traditions, they must take from other traditions.

What about the art work that went on at Max's Kansas City in May? You seemed to be doing something with lights.

Yes. Frank Owen and I decided to do a piece together. We didn't know what we were going to do until we were doing it. In this case, we decided to do a scent piece with oil of spearmint. We squirted it under all the tables and filled the back room with it. It was like sticking gum under the tables. We didn't want to say anything about that piece, so we did a cover piece. We bought eight lights, 100-watt bulbs, and set them up in front to boost the daylight. But we plugged

them into a line that didn't have enough current, so we kept blowing fuses. Frank and I are both from California, and out there, there is a lot of malfunction when it comes to mechanical art shows. Artists are always setting up one mechanical thing or another and they won't work. So we spent an hour running back and forth. I was tearing around the whole time changing fuses and resetting the lights. The piece never functioned from beginning to end. So it was a matter of watching the artist struggle with his processes.

Then your work was also a kind of satire?

I thought it was a good opportunity. It's all games, just games and jokes.

Some people might resent art being fun and games.

Maybe it depends on whether you think having fun is detrimental to the experience art is able to give. If artists are doing a lot of fooling around and if the end result is no beauty for anyone, maybe you are going to get uptight about it. But all art has obviously not been serious.

But don't you think that it is unfair that the artists participating in the streetworks should be having such a good time while the people on the street have no idea what is happening? Shouldn't art communicate to more than a few people?

It seems to me that the nature of each thing determines who it's for and who it can get to. The idea that it has to be for a specific group or a specific number of people can certainly limit what you can do. Sometimes my art work will be for lots of people, sometimes for only one person, and sometimes it's just for myself.

Do you still think it's valid to do more traditional kinds of art works?

The thing is that I don't really believe in any of it as being the way, the right way, or the best way - just a way of doing it. And one way is as good as another. All seem to offer time-filling, interest-producing processes. I work in a traditional way because I feel one thing doesn't pull me out of the other. It's all just aspects of the same thing which somehow seem to work harmoniously together.

Are you working on anything that you consider to be of a traditional nature at this time?

I am working on a stained glass wall which utilizes a combination of the techniques of stained glass and cloisonne enamel. This is part of my religious art, which falls into two categories: object making and conceptual. The object-oriented work is in the tradition of the production of votive objects. Jewelry, stained glass, cloisonne, and Liberace's gold-sequined sports coat are part of this traditional art. It functions, in a sense, like the hypnotist's jewel to distract attention from the mundane and to redirect it toward the visionary experience of non-ordinary reality. My art, like most other art work of this sort, is a crude representation of a vision available through a variety of routes including meditation and mescaline. I'm using the materials and techniques available to duplicate as closely as possible the two most outstanding visual aspects of "the other side." The first is that light seems to emanate from all things rather than being reflected by them, and I, therefore, chose stained glass as a medium. The second aspect is the incredible minute articulation everything takes on. This geometric organization, I feel, can only be poorly imitated at best, and the traditional stained glass technique of joining pieces of glass with lead is especially unsuitable. Therefore, I'm utilizing an aspect of cloisonne enamel in order to approach more closely the light color of stained glass.

What kind of light will you use?

I want the light to come horizontally through the wall directly at the observer, so I will use the most intense artificial light that is obtainable and practical.

Will there be any specific image used?

This piece is about as strong or as total a beauty as possible. Therefore, it seemed to me, that if I I'm trying to create a beautiful experience, I should start out with as much beauty beforehand as I could. The image is the face of a girl who is as beautiful as anything I know about right now.

What about the conceptual side of your religious art?

I think I can explain the conceptual side of my religious art by describing a work I did last year for a concept show at the museum in Leverkusen, Germany. This piece was designed to be executed by using the power of positive thought. Rather than contributing a work to the show, I decided to attempt to improve the show itself. I built, in my mind, a picture of perfect communication and understanding between each artist and each spectator. I think that the existing action to which this work comes closest is prayer.

How about your piece in the "Information" show? It seems to go back to games.

That project came from my involvement with graffiti and also from my last ad in Artforum, which was a statement You are me, period. It's like a description of a philosophical position or viewpoint from which things can be seen. It seems to me that in my experience, my clearest understanding of others comes from the clearest understanding I have of myself. It's the knowledge that we are all really the same as much as we are different. It comes from realizing that each person you are relating to is a you, separate, but each person is also a me, an entity not unlike myself. So the piece at the Museum of Modern Art is the command "Expose Your Self." Your Self being two words to suggest the possibility of self examination as a means of understanding the self and therefore others.

How did you present the piece?

The piece is in the Museum stenciled on the wall. It is intentionally sexually oriented as this seems to me, from my own experience, that that was the side of myself it was the hardest to know. It was the side of myself most bound up by traditional thinking and by my own fear. I asked that before the show some of the museum people stencil it here and there in the city in public restrooms. I guess my primary reason for doing that is that I like the idea of its being there. I get to be an awful preacher sometimes, as a lot of teachers do, and this takes the edge off of it a bit. In the john it's just more bathroom writing.

Have you done many other things with your own body?

Yes. I've done a variety of things. One of the first things I did, which I now consider as a part of my art, was to make wound prints. Every time I'd cut myself, I would make a monoprint by pressing paper on to the wound. It's a record of what happened to me, and I have those things dated and in my filing cabinet. The second thing I did was when I was in a motorcycle accident in 1963 and I had to have a toe amputated. It turned out that a pre-med student friend, who was in my ceramics class, did the clean-up for the operation, and I asked him to save the toe for me. Since I was stuck in the hospital for two months after the operation, I asked him to put it in an unfired pot and cremate it for me. When I got out of the hospital, I mixed the ashes from my toe into a Japanese ash glaze, and put it on a small pot. This suggested to me that when I die, I would be cremated and have my ashes glaze a nice Chinese vase. I might donate it to the Brundage Collection. It's like a sea animal who dies and leaves

a shell you can sell for \$50 on 59th Street. It's trying to make your remains beautiful.

Have you made other objects out of the need to create beauty?

I make objects for people I love and when I do it, I call it the art of love. Mostly they are small things that I mail out like paintings on autumn leaves or seashells. They are always things that are given-never things that are sold, and they are always made with a specific person in mind and a strong feeling in myself. Often what the feeling is determines the nature of the art work. Sometimes it's a very platonic feeling of love. Other times, if there's an attraction, it becomes a kind of courting thing, a favor. When I feel strongly for someone, and I want to show my feelings, I make something beautiful for them.

Do you make the art of love in a conceptual way too?

It's not always an object. Sometimes it's simply a communication-telling someone that I love them and being real to them instead of being phony, which is often my first inclination. The art of love is trying to make myself able to express my true self, to expose myself. It's something that runs through my life and my work. It's not easy for me, since it's a thing that is so involved with ego and possibilities for rejection and hurting and being hurt. It seems to involve things that are dangerous and not easy or natural. For a long time, I considered these works of love as a kind of minor thing and not really my art, but now, it seems that the experience of making them is probably the best kind of experience for me. When I use a strong, honest expression, it's always good.

Stephen James Kaltenbach

Date of Birth: May 5, 1940

Place of Birth: Battle Creek, Michigan

1966 A.B. University of California, Davis

1967 M.A. University of California, Davis

Exhibitions:

Oakland Annual Craftsmen's Exhibition, 1963

Marin Art Society, 1963, 2nd Prize, Ceramics

Marin Art Society Annual Show, 1963, 2nd Prize, Ceramics

Walnut Creek, 9th Annual, 1964, \$75 Award

State Fair, 1964, 3rd Award, Painting

Marin Annual, 1964, 1st Award, Ceramics

Richmond, Calif. Print and Sculpture Annual, 1964, 2nd Award, Sculpture

Delta Art Show, 1964, 1st Award, Sculpture

October Show, 1964, 1st Prize, Sculpture; 1st Prize, Graphics; 1st Prize, Pottery

Fiber-Clay-Metal, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1964, Peter Vouklos, Juror,
2 Purchase Awards

Crocker Biennial, 1965

Scripps College Invitational, 1965

Richmond Craft Show, 1965

Stockton Art Annual, 1965

Marin Annual, 1965, 1st Award, Painting

New Ceramic Forms, Museum of Contemporary Crafts, New York, 1965

Ceramics by Six, Boston, Massachusetts, 1966

Raymond College Polychrome Sculpture, 1966

New Modes in California Sculpture, La Jolla Museum of Art, 1966

Arneson's Students, Museum West, 1966

Four New Artists—Dilexi Gallery, San Francisco, 1967

San Francisco Museum of Art, 1967

October 30-December 15, 1969

Whitney Museum of American Art

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Stephen Kaltenbach

Room Alterations

A Short Article on Art Expression

The manipulation of perception is a valid goal of art expression.

The alteration of perception is a valid means for art expression.

There are three factors which determine the nature of any perception: the object perceived, the environment in which the perception takes place, and the person who experiences the perception.

It is possible to manipulate an object to achieve an alteration in the perception of the object or the environment. An object may also be manipulated to bring about an alteration in perception itself.

The environment may be manipulated to attain a modification of the perception of an object or the environment.

A manipulation of perception per se may also be achieved through a manipulation of the environs.

It is possible to manipulate an observer to achieve an alteration in his perception of an object, of his environment, or to simply initiate a change in his perception.

Questions:

Is it important that an artist be able to consider these manipulations separately even though it may be impossible to initiate one without affecting others?

Is it important for an artist to be able to distinguish between manipulation of perception as a means for art expression from its manipulation as a result?

Is there a significant difference between the manipulation of the perception of an object or an environment and the effecting of a change in perception per se?

Does the manipulation of perception by the application of psychotherapy or meditation techniques or drugs hold potential as a means for art expression?

Do the following fields of endeavor have potential as means for art expression: art education, art history, the dissemination of art information and opinion, art dealing and patronage, and education?

Has this article potential value as a work of art?

Stephen Kaltenbach
81 Greene Street
New York, N. Y. 10012
April 11, 1968

Dear Marcia,

Hi. Here are some things to discuss at this Wednesday's meeting. Good luck.

1. Install lock on the inside of sliding doors. I will enter the room at the beginning of the show and remain inside for its duration which is to be not less than two weeks and no more than three. The door will remain locked for the entire show. I will take with me into the room some containers, the contents of which will not be disclosed.

Enclosed are blueprints and drawings for the following pieces:

2. The room constructions.

3. A room divider which should be permanently installed parallel to Madison Avenue and should divide the room exactly down the middle.

4. A cedar shingled hip roof built on the floor covering the entire floor space.

5. A room construction of the same shape as #4.

6. A translucent screen of cloth which can be hooked in place from the outside is stretched over the door.

✱ Onto the screen is projected fire from a film loop.

✱ A recorder with loop provides sounds of fire.

Sincerely yours,

