

Martha Schwendener, "4 Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now: Kim Jones," *The New York Times*, December 30, 2020.

The New York Times



Kim Jones

Through Jan. 9. Bridget Donahue, 99 Bowery, 2nd floor, Manhattan.
646-896-1368; bridgetdonahue.nyc.

The trauma of being a U.S. soldier in the Vietnam War reverberates through Kim Jones's tough, gritty assemblage-sculptures, drawings and endurance performances. Examples from 50 years of Mr. Jones's oeuvre are on view in "RATS LIVE ON NO EVIL STAR" (a cryptically evocative palindrome) at Bridget Donahue.

Mud, rats and thrift-store objects play a prominent role for Mr. Jones's creative universe. (An early performance, partially referencing his experience at war, consisted of burning live rats onstage, which raised the ire of activists.) Here, "Little Tike" a sculpture reworked from 1973 to 1999, is built around a pink toy plastic vehicle augmented with foam, wire, gauze, and other materials and parked vertically on the wall. "Untitled" (1969-2019) is a pair of military trousers issued to Mr. Jones; with eerie, spectral figures painted on the legs, he may also be referencing the leg braces he wore in childhood.

Photographs of Mr. Jones's grueling urban performances in the 1970s are included in this show, as well as recent drawings, often over photographs. A video on Bridget Donahue's website documents a 1979 performance-walk in which Mr. Jones slathered himself with mud and carried a big homemade armature around the streets of San Francisco. At once artist, shaman and alienated Everyman, his work resonates at this moment, when raw creativity is being summoned in the service of healing battered bodies, psyches and spirits.

MARTHA SCHWENDENER

Sebastian Smee, "How the Vietnam War changed art forever", *Washington Post*, March 18, 2019.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/how-the-vietnam-war-changed-art-forever/2019/03/18/619eff44-4743-11e9-90f0-0ccfeec87a61_story.html

Museums

Review

How the Vietnam War changed art forever

By

[Sebastian Smee](#)

Art critic

March 18, 2019 at 2:42 p.m. EDT



Kim Jones, "Mudman Structure (large)," 1974.

(Courtesy of Zeno X Gallery/Copyright Kim Jones, courtesy Gladstone Gallery)

Kim Jones was back from active duty in Vietnam eight years when, on his 32nd birthday, he turned himself into, as he put it, "a walking sculpture that's eighteen miles long."

He put on combat boots, pulled a nylon stocking over his face and donned a makeshift crown of foam rubber and aviary wire. He slathered his body in mud and strapped to his back a weird, latticelike construction of sticks tied with rope. He then walked westward along Wilshire Boulevard from downtown Los Angeles toward the Pacific Ocean. Toward Vietnam.

Before going to Vietnam, Jones had been an art student. After it . . . what?

The cruel, unanswerable question of how art should respond to war is at the heart of “Artists Respond: American Art and the Vietnam War, 1965-1975,” a must-see show at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. It’s an exhibition of miscellaneous work made by a diverse group of artists during the peak years of a war that changed everything — including art.

It’s the first time the Vietnam War has been addressed on this scale by an art museum. Organized by Melissa Ho, it pulsates with anguish from first to last. And it reminds us that though Saigon fell more than 40 years ago, that anguish is still with us. Today’s polarized politics — from the culture wars to congressional gridlock — are shot through with the aftershocks of Vietnam (just think of the recent tweets exchanged by President Trump and John McCain’s daughter Meghan McCain), as are the memories, family histories and inner lives of millions.

“Sweat like pigs work like dogs live like rats red dust covered everything.” That’s how Jones described his time in Vietnam. For bystanders, “Mudman” — the persona he created for performances that led to “Wilshire Boulevard Walk” — was frightening, dissonant, uncomfortable. But it was still more uncomfortable for him. “Wilshire Boulevard Walk” wasn’t intended as a metaphor. It wasn’t even explicitly about Vietnam — although, according to Jones, other veterans got it, and several approached Mudman saying, “Yeah, I know what it was like.” Instead, the performance expressed Jones’s personal struggle and the wider crisis of American society.

The shock of Vietnam made conventional art forms such as painting and sculpture look inadequate. Its reverberations inspired a rapid expansion of the possible forms art could take and a search for new audiences. Public performances, video, installations, land art and agitprop all flourished during the war.

Vietnam also opened up avant-garde art to previously neglected voices, including women, African Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans. There has been a long delay in recognizing this, and part of the triumph of “Artists Respond” is that it shows how many artists from marginalized groups gave their unique responses to the war urgent and potent expression...

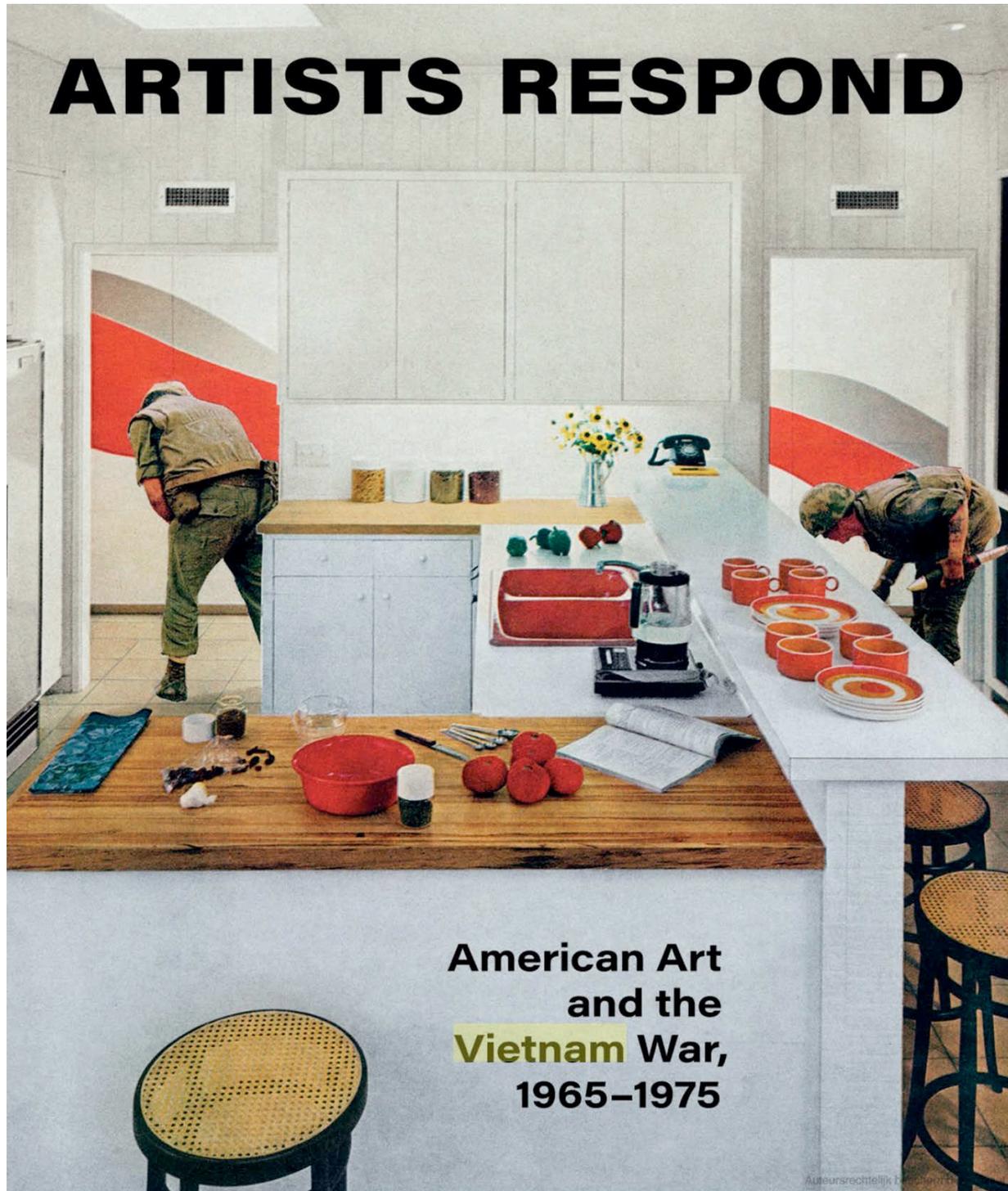
...“Paintings don’t change wars,” as the passionately political painter Leon Golub said in 1967. “They show feelings about wars.”

Are feelings enough? If you compare the art in “Artists Respond” to the magnitude of the war, it can seem paltry. That does not mean it wasn’t poignant, courageous, estimable. It was just no match for the bigger forces at work.

Being no match for bigger, catastrophic forces is the very definition of tragedy. And if tragedy teaches us anything, it is humility.

That’s why, for me, the abiding image from this show is still the humble wooden lattice Kim Jones wore on his back as Mudman. It leans against a wall, like a prop from a Samuel Beckett play. Next to it are his mud-covered combat boots (they can’t help but put you in mind of van Gogh’s shoes). “Wilshire Boulevard Walk” was about more than the Vietnam War. It was about homelessness, humility and heartbreak.

Melissa Ho, "Kim Jones", *Artists Respond: American Art and the Vietnam War, 1965-1975*, Princeton University Press and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2019, p.273-276.



MELISSA HO
THOMAS CROW
ERICA LEVIN
KATHERINE MARKOSKI
MIGNON NIXON
MARTHA ROSLER

Edited by Melissa Ho

ARTISTS RESPOND

**American Art
and the
Vietnam War,
1965–1975**

Smithsonian American Art Museum,
Washington, D.C., in association with
Princeton University Press,
Princeton and Oxford

Kim Jones | b. 1944, San Bernardino, CA

IN THE EARLY MORNING OF JANUARY 28, 1976, Kim Jones set out on foot from near Pershing Square in downtown Los Angeles, heading west along Wilshire Boulevard. He was a strange sight: a man seemingly embedded within an irregular matrix of sticks and lengths of wood lashed together with bits of rope, cloth, and electrical tape. On his head he bore a smaller construction, predominantly of foam rubber and aviary wire, and over his face, a nylon stocking, rendering his visage featureless. He otherwise wore only shorts, combat boots, and, slathered over both his bare skin and clothes, a unifying layer of mud. Thus transformed, Jones marched slowly toward the Pacific Ocean, a trek that took him from dawn to dusk. A week later, on February 4, Jones repeated the walk along the same route, this time traveling from dusk to dawn.¹ His mask and the wooden structure on his back made him look intimidating, but they were also a burden, preventing Jones from seeing clearly or moving fast. He compares his self-presentation as Mudman² to a defensive feint: “[I]t’s what animals do: make yourself seem more dangerous than you actually are. . . . [The structure] makes me larger but it also hides me. . . . it makes me more powerful and it cripples me.”³

Jones conceived of this performance, *Wilshire Boulevard Walk*, as “a walking sculpture that’s eighteen miles long.”⁴ It was a durational, living artwork, unwitnessed in its entirety by anyone other than the artist himself. Over his twelve-hour trip, Jones walked in and out of the lives of countless passersby, a fleeting and startling apparition. While Jones does not openly announce performances like *Wilshire Boulevard Walk* as related to his experience of war, his choice of imagery—the combat boots,

the mud, the walking⁵—is recognizable enough that strangers have at times identified Mudman as a fellow Vietnam veteran: “[They] would sometimes approach me and say, ‘Yeah, I know what it was like.’”⁶ More often, people perceive Mudman as a kind of alien, pitiable or imposing but always “an outsider, a spiky thing, walking through the main artery of the city. Molecules fit in, but if something is spiky, it doesn’t fit in.”⁷

Before enlisting in the Marine Corps in 1966, Jones had been an art school student, studying drawing and painting. It wasn’t until the early 1970s, several years after he returned from Vietnam and resumed his education, that he turned to performance art.⁸ Inspired by the early body-based work of Vito Acconci and Chris Burden [pp. 230–31], Jones developed a performance practice grounded in lived reality. For him, performance is “not a metaphor. . . it actually is what it is.”⁹ He began going out into the streets as Mudman in 1973, initially in his immediate neighborhood in Venice and later venturing further afield.

Jones’s dawn-to-dusk rendition of *Wilshire Boulevard Walk* took place on the artist’s thirty-second birthday, which was also the eighth anniversary of his homecoming from active duty in Vietnam. On that day, he had made the final stage of his return by foot, walking from a bus depot in Santa Monica to his parents’ house in Pacific Palisades. He has recalled how strange it felt to be back in “the world” after a year serving in Đông Hà, near the demilitarized zone between North and South Vietnam.¹⁰ Of life there, he has written: “vietnam dong ha marines it’s summer time 125 degrees heat sweat like pigs work like dogs live like rats red dust covered everything.”¹¹ One imagines Jones felt very “spiky” to suddenly find himself strolling among civilians near the ocean on a peaceful Southern Californian day. Speaking of his art, Jones has said that he “reaches for the more potent

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Kim Jones

Mudman Structure
(large)

1974

sticks, mud, rope, foam rubber,
shellac, acrylic; shown with
chair, boots, and bucket of mud



Kim Jones

Wilshire Boulevard Walk

1976
performance

275



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Kim Jones

Wilshire Boulevard Walk

1976

performance



Daniela Oliver, 'Ruby City Announces Acquisition of Kim Jones Sculpture' *Ruby City Newsletter*, September 2018.

Ruby City Announces Acquisition of Kim Jones Sculpture



Kim Jones, *Untitled*, 1974 – 2013. Acrylic and graphite on wood. 36 X 35 X 28 inches
© Kim Jones. Linda Pace Foundation Collection, Ruby City San Antonio.

San Antonio, TX (September 14, 2018) – Ruby City is pleased to announce the acquisition of Kim Jones' sculpture, *Untitled*, (1974-2013) a handcrafted wooden dollhouse painted with acrylic and graphite. In this combination of drawing and sculpture, there is a physical, expressive and uncanny representation of Jones' childhood memory. Autobiography and the context of where he grew up in San Bernardino, California play an important factor in the creation of his work, specifically at a young age when he was diagnosed with an illness forcing him to wear leg braces. During this fairly immobile period he developed a private magical world in his head and conceived his first war drawings. His participation as a soldier in the Vietnam War also had a great influence on his oeuvre.

"I started making it (the dollhouse) in 1974. It was made from scratch. Each slab of wood was cut and shaped by me. The walls are layered like a LOG CABIN.... Then a few years ago I painted it again and made a War Drawing on the inside. I first made the Doll House for my mother. It was in my fathers house in the attic...."

For a recent solo exhibition, *Walgrove*, he revisited the sculpture that he created decades before and incorporated his iconic war drawings all over the interior walls of the miniature house. Oftentimes he will rework certain drawings and sculptures, as if recalling a trauma or enacting a ritual remembrance. Frequent reuse of materials and motifs remain an important aspect of the artist's work. The dollhouse structure is a

reference to the schools the artist attended when he was young—all connected by Walgrove Avenue, on the border between Mar Vista and Venice, California. The artwork examines the many places where much of Jones' sense of the world began.

About Kim Jones

Kim Jones was born in 1944 in San Bernadino, California and has been consistently working since the 1970s. After returning from the Vietnam War, he earned a BFA from the California Institute of Arts (1971) and an MFA from the Otis Art Institute (1973). His work has been included in exhibitions at the Sydney Biennale; Venice Biennale; Guggenheim Museum, New York; MCASD; LACMA and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

About Ruby City

Ruby City is a 14,472 sq ft contemporary art center in San Antonio, TX, dedicated to providing a space for the city's thriving creative community to experience works by both local and internationally-acclaimed artists. Envisioned in 2007 by the late collector, philanthropist and artist Linda Pace, Ruby City presents works from Pace's own collection of more than 800 paintings, sculptures, installations and video works. The new building, designed by renowned architect Sir David Adjaye and slated for completion later this year is part of a growing campus, which also includes Chris Park, a one-acre public green space named in memory of Pace's son, and Studio, an auxiliary exhibition space which presents curated shows and programming throughout the year. Ruby City is free and open to the public.

About Linda Pace Foundation

Linda Pace Foundation was founded in 2003 as the owner and steward of Pace's collection. Guided by its donor's conviction that contemporary art is essential to a dynamic society, Linda Pace Foundation fosters the creation, presentation and understanding of innovative expression through contemporary art. In addition to its exhibition spaces Ruby City and Studio, Linda Pace Foundation shares its collection through loans to museums and institutions around the world. The Foundation also actively acquires new works each year, which, echoing the themes and character of Pace's own collecting, reflect a feminist perspective, engage social issues and consider aspects of spirituality and beauty.

For more information visit www.rubycity.org

Media Contacts:

Emily Alli | Sutton | emily@suttonpr.com | 212.202.3402

Daniela Oliver | Marketing + Communications | Daniela@danielaoliver.com | 210.383.9180

Robert Storr, "Kim Jones", *Robert Storr- Interviews on Art*, ed. Francesca Pietropaolo, Heni Publishing, 2017.

Robert Storr

Louise Bourgeois

Buckminster Fuller

Rudy Burckhardt

Chris Burden

Sophie Calle

Vija Celmins

Olga Chernysheva

Francesco Clemente

Chuck Close

Stan Douglas

Tom Friedman

Robert Gober

Felix Gonzalez-Torres

Pierre Huyghe

Jörg Immendorff

Neil Jenney

Kim Jones

Ilya Kabakov

Alex Katz

Mike Kelley

Ellsworth Kelly

Jeff Koons

Guillermo Kuitca

Jac Leirner

Robert Mangold

Brice Marden

Paul McCarthy

Annette Messenger

Andrei Monastyrski

Malcolm Morley

Elizabeth Murray

Wangechi Mutu

Bruce Nauman

Gabriel Orozco

Gary Panter

Philip Pearlstein

Raymond Pettibon

Adrian Piper

Yvonne Rainer

Charles Ray

Mary Reid Kelley

Gerhard Richter

Robert Ryman

Peter Saul

Richard Serra

Harald Szeemann

Tatiana Trouvé

Kirk Varnedoe

Kara Walker

Lawrence Weiner

Jack Whitten

Interviews on Art

Kim Jones

b.1944, San Bernardino, California; lives and works in New York

The interview was conducted by Robert Storr at his house, Brooklyn, New York on 23 November 2015. It has been edited, in consultation with the artist, for this publication. The full version of the edited transcript appeared as “Kim Jones and Robert Storr: A Conversation” in *Kim Jones* (Zeno X Books, Antwerpen, 2016), pp.6–23.



Kim Jones
Courtesy the artist

Kim Jones

ROBERT STORR *Most people don't know what your preparation was. So can you say a little bit about that?*

KIM JONES I went to several different art schools, and the last one, to get my masters, was Otis [Art Institute of Los Angeles]. That was roughly from 1972 to 1974. I was a lot older than a lot of the other students; at that time I was twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty. Before that, during high school, I went to Saturday classes at the Art Center school which was in the La Brea Tar Pits area [of Los Angeles]. And that's when I met John Altoon, who was a friend of my teachers. I was very impressed as a sixteen/seventeen-year-old. I drove back with him one time after class. He had a studio in Venice and I was much too timid to hang out in Venice at that time. I was basically a good little boy, a little bit like the Ozzie and Harriet kid of the 1950s and early 60s. Then I got a scholarship to Art Center so, right after high school, I went for one semester there and I realized it was too strict and too commercial. But that's also where I met Lorser Feitelson. I used to listen to his lectures when I was still in high school. He was very inspiring. A very charming old guy who talked about New York in the turn of the century.

RS *He was a huge inspiration for Philip Guston.*

KJ I didn't know that. He touched on a lot of different scenes. I remember one time, years later, after I was doing *Mudman*¹ and I was modeling at Art Center school and he was still there – it was the late 1970s, early 80s, before I moved to New York. I think I sort of pissed him off because he knew about *Mudman* and he was talking about it being theater and at that point, around 1980, I got riled up about that and I said, "It's not theater!" We had an argument about that. At any rate, I was really impressed with him. So I went to Art Center and I quit, and then I got another small scholarship to San Francisco Art Academy. I was there for about a month and then I left and enrolled at Chouinard [Art Institute] in 1964. I went there for two years and by that time I was out of high school four years and I was going to be drafted. Mostly to please or impress my father, I joined the marines for three years and I had to do duty in Vietnam in 1967 and part of 1968. Part of the time I spent in Okinawa and I went to Vietnam. After I got out of service in 1969 I went back to Chouinard for another two years, and graduated.

1. Kim Jones created his performance alter ego, *Mudman*, in the 1970s. His naked body covered in mud, a nylon stocking stretched over his face, he walked on the streets of Los Angeles and Venice, California, carrying on his back a large, irregular lattice-work structure of sticks, tape, mud, and twine.

RS *Were you on the G.I. Bill? Did you get government support for your studies because of your military service like Ellsworth Kelly, Al Held, and so many others did after World War II?*

KJ Yeah, it wasn't a lot of money but it was something. And that's another reason why, after I graduated from Chouinard and got my BFA, I decided to go back to school because I would get more money from the VA [Veterans Administration] – very selfish and self-serving.

RS *But you'd earned it too.*

KJ So after studying at Chouinard and then at Otis, I started taking woodworking classes at Santa Monica College to get a little more money from the VA. That's actually where I made the first major structure because I had this wood shop where I could use all these tools. This structure was covered with shellac, a resin made by the tropical lac bug. The piece looked like Icarus's wings. It had a sticky golden look to it. Now it's kind of old and nasty looking, which is the way people get after a while unfortunately – not always. I remember that in high school we would put shellac on everything. It's nasty stuff, but it is certainly beautiful. That is also where I made the dollhouse around 1974.

RS *That early?*

KJ Yeah. It's completely handmade. I built it like a log cabin, I laid the wood down; it's three stories. I gave it to my mother. When she died, my father kept it, but after he got married again and was living in Seattle, he was about to throw it away because he didn't want to have this thing around. At that point, I was having a show at the Henry Art Gallery in Seattle and I just went over to his house and picked it up. That's when I filled it with rats. It was part of the show at the Henry Art Gallery. Then I showed it with the rats for a while until I got tired of them. So I painted the dollhouse again and made a war drawing on the inside and painted on the outside.

RS *I remember the Henry [Art Gallery] show and I remember seeing it also in its current state at Pierogi [in Brooklyn] around two or three years ago.*

So, you began with a relatively conventional kind of education and then, what broke things up for you?

KJ Vince Robbins, a teacher at Otis, was the one who encouraged me to start doing performance art. It was around 1972. My idea of performance art is a form of reality. My form. I don't know if it's a purist thing or not, but it is closer to Chris Burden – because you can't repeat it. It's real life. It's pretty much what I do normally but maybe, hopefully, a bit more interesting than what I do. A lot of people do theater or stand-up comedy or some sort of entertainment dance and they call that performance art. But I don't think it's performance art. That's my description.

RS *The difference being that ...?*

KJ It's really like the Chinese artist, Tehching Hsieh. He wasn't acting; he was living. Living indoors and outdoors, with Linda Montano. When I did the *Wilshire Boulevard Walk*² – it was twice, sunrise to sunset and then a week later, through the night sunset to sunrise; I walked eighteen miles with the structure, and the mud. All the way, each time, east to west from downtown LA, to Santa Monica, to the beach.

2. This performance took place on 28 January 1976.

It took twelve hours. It's like an art object making a line for eighteen miles. That's my definition of performance.

RS *How much of this was documented and how much of it was documented by people that you invited to do that?*

KJ The Wilshire Boulevard Walk was one of the first that was documented. At first, when we talked about doing it, I just wanted to do it at night and then they suggested I should do it twice because otherwise nobody will see it during the night. So I said, "Fine" and they said, "Do you want us to get a film crew to follow you?". I said, "No," because that would be too much like a film shoot. So we hired a photographer who met me when I started out and then would get in the car and meet me in different spots along Wilshire Boulevard to take pictures. I was mostly alone walking. I've talked about this before, but during the day, once, there was a woman artist who followed me for a few miles when I first started out and by the time I got to Beverly Hills, around noon, I stopped to rest. At that time I had long hair and looked kind of strange to people. I was sort of stretching and I was surrounded by five cop cars. They said, "What are you doing, son?" And I had this card and I said, "This is an art piece," and they looked at it and they said, "Just keep moving, just keep walking." They didn't want to deal with me, because I was all muddy, and just too much of a pain in the ass to deal with.

RS *Given the reputation of the Los Angeles police, you fared pretty well.*

KJ I was very lucky, yeah. I knew better. I didn't act aggressive. And I think that even at that time they just figured, "He seems timid, just let him go".

RS *How did other people react? Did you get other dialogs with people along the way?*

KJ When I was in Santa Monica, this little old lady walked up to me and said, "Does your mother know you're doing this?" Earlier when I was crossing La Cienega, where there used to be a gas station, I had to pee, and so I went and parked my structure outside. When I went inside, the attendant was laughing and came up to me and said, "No, no, no, get out of here." I didn't realize how strange I must have looked to those people. This is in 1976, on 28 January, my birthday. So I had to continue on walking and I just peed in my pants. The night walk was much more quiet, nobody talked to me, except around Fairfax. The piece was sponsored by two women, Marilyn Nix and Barbara Burden who was Chris Burden's ex-wife. The art organization was called CARP. They met me. At that point, I think Marilyn was seeing Bruce Nauman, and he was there. He gave me a little cup of whiskey, and someone took a photograph of us, and I think Barbara and her boyfriend at that time met me, and we had coffee – this was during the night.

RS *Were any people bothering you during the night walk?*

KJ It was much less aggressive. At that time I used to model for art class a lot, and about two years later, when I was modeling, we were on a break and I mentioned doing the *Mudman* performance and this older woman – probably in her forties – said, "Oh I saw you, only I was on the bus on Wilshire Boulevard, in 1976, during the day, and by the time I grabbed my husband to turn around, you disappeared. We were on the bus going the opposite way and I always wondered what that was, that I saw." I like that, seeing something you're not quite sure what it is, whether it is art or not art. Then there were several people who got mad because they couldn't find me. I found out later. We had an artist dinner after the performance, and Chris Burden came and

he was a little miffed because he was driving up and down Wilshire Boulevard and he couldn't find me.

RS *How conscious were you of Chris and Bruce and people like that, and were you thinking about their work at all when conceptualizing yours or were you just aware of them as people in your world?*

KJ I thought about their work a lot. But at that time I didn't really know Bruce Nauman except for a couple of times that I saw him on the Wilshire walk. Plus I saw him a couple of other times, and he was always pretty friendly and easy going. I knew Chris a little better, because I lived on the boardwalk in Venice where his studio was and I actually used to go onto his roof and throw these little model airplanes off the roof with firecrackers and let them explode. That probably wouldn't be too good nowadays because of all the terrorists. I remember riding in Chris's B-Car. I used to hang out with him a little bit. He was friendly and then sometimes he wouldn't be friendly. That is just Chris. But I knew him a little better than Bruce. At that time, in the 1970s, people were doing all these extreme actions and I was into mail art. A friend of mine, sort of a homeless guy at the beach, gave me a live bullet. I think it was a .38 he'd found in the grass. So I had put it in an envelope and I got a stamp on the envelope so it looked like it came from the post office and I put it in Chris's mailbox, so it looked like I mailed a bullet to him. And I think he actually thought I mailed it to him. Pretty naively I had put down my address, "from Kim Jones" with the bullet. Chris said that that's basically a felony. He smiled and said, "Have you ever been in jail, Kim?" I never told him that I hadn't actually mailed it. It was a fake mail art.

RS *Or a messenger service piece. What kind of things were you thinking about in relation to all the rest of the conceptually oriented work being done? How did you see yourself as being different?*

KJ I never thought that much about being different. I wanted to be accepted, but I was too timid at that time to really connect. It was an attitude. Chris Burden's whole idea of not asking for money for doing a performance is that afterwards they can't bitch about it if they didn't pay you for it. And this whole thing about something being real is that you actually do it. In that way I felt most connected to Chris Burden, but I have no idea what he felt.

RS *Was endurance an issue? With Chris, and with Bruce, there were a lot of issues about endurance, and was the length of your walk and the conditions you were walking in – was that a kind of a deliberate ordeal?*

KJ Not that much. I was very careful – friends of Chris Burden told me about how very careful Chris actually was. I think sometimes he went to extremes and took chances. But mine wasn't endurance necessarily; it was difficult to walk Wilshire Boulevard because the strap dug into my shoulders a lot and I wasn't sure whether I could do it. I figured, eighteen miles in twelve hours: that's roughly a mile and a half an hour. I stopped to rest whenever I felt like it. It wasn't that big of a deal physically, I was much younger and stronger then. It was more for me the idea, my idea about this art piece making a line eighteen miles long.

RS *Did it have any connection whatsoever with the kind of marching or hiking you did in the military?*

KJ Yes, there is that, the military experience, although that was more strenuous in that you had a guy in front of you and a guy behind you setting the pace. [I remember

that] at camp Pendleton we did a five-mile half march, half run in the middle of summer. You had to suck rocks and not eat beforehand ...

RS *Suck rocks?*

KJ Yeah, to keep you from dehydrating.

RS *You were in Vietnam, and Vietnam was the war that caused a lot of people to ask, "What the hell is going on here?"*

KJ At that time I wasn't that aware of things, although by the time I arrived in Vietnam I realized they were trying to kill me. I get a bit cynical about it. There's a lot of anger. I'm OK, but there's a lot of bitterness about that. But there's this other thing ... when people write about my work, they say it's like anti-war and blah, blah, blah. But listen, I don't think it's very political, though everything is political, and I don't think it's anti-war. I certainly don't want to go to war any more. It's pretty much my experience, what I did.

RS *And you saw it pretty rough too.*

KJ It was pretty rough. The joke is, I mostly delivered mail as a postal clerk. That was my job, and that's the other thing that saved my ass. When I went over to Vietnam, my sergeant used to call me "snake" because I had a way of wiggling out of things. When I got there this lieutenant, who hated my guts, said, "Private Jones, I'd love to send you to Hill 881," south near Khe Sanh at the border. It was pretty deadly, since they were losing a lot of people. It was the middle of summer and people were dying, getting wounded, and he wanted to send me out there right away. Then he said, "but I can't because you are the only postal clerk that I have and if you get killed or wounded, the colonel would be on my ass. Postal lucky!" Then I was stationed at Dong Ha. We were about eleven miles from DMZ [demilitarized zone]. They would attack us with rockets, artillery mortars. I got out of there just before the Tet Offensive. I got back to the States on 28 January 1968. Before that there were big alerts where we were up all night waiting for them to come over.

RS *Years ago, we talked about your work when I selected some of it for my third exhibition at MoMA, Mapping [in 1994], and you told me how the war drawings had started well before you saw any service at all – in fact when you were still a boy – and that you had resumed making them after you came out of the army. Is that right?*

KJ Yeah. The earliest I have are from around 1957–8, when I was thirteen or fourteen.

RS *Do they look like the ones you are making since?*

KJ A little bit. Basically it's a maze or labyrinth. I think it's a take-off from children's books where you find a treasure at the middle of the maze or labyrinth. It's also a take-off on architectural drawings of houses; they show you a two-dimensional view, a plan. And it was a secret game I played. At that point, when I was thirteen, I wanted to be a cartoonist. And so my regular drawings, which I called my serious drawings, were terrible, with more shading than the cartoons; they tried to look realistic. And then there were the war drawings. I didn't show them in an art context until 1980. It was in an installation I did in downtown LA on 9th Street in an alternative art space.³ After that I took them down and didn't show them until around 1990. I think

3. The show, *Plant Wars*, took place in the store window of Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Arts (LAICA), 1980.

I showed them at Lorence-Monk gallery [in New York], and people started to buy them. Before that I actually threw some away. So I started keeping these.

RS *I bought one from Jasper Johns's annual benefit auction in 1992. I thought you'd been selling them for longer than that.*

KJ No, roughly around 1990. I know that the big show was at Lorence-Monk in January 1990. And that's when Roberta Smith did a big article about it, a very positive review. Which was very good for me, because I didn't have a very big reputation.

RS *But you'd already been in the art world in California, no?*

KJ Yeah. I got to know the performance people mostly around 1978, when I was invited by Barbara Smith to do a performance at the LAICA [Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Arts]; that's where I did the grandfather piece and that's where I met Paul McCarthy, John Duncan, Linda Montano, Nancy Buchanan – the whole bunch. That's when *High Performance* magazine started up. So I really got connected with that performance crowd, hung around the Woman's Building. It was the combination of feminist art and super macho types, me, Paul and Chris. It doesn't mean we're tough and all, we were just macho types.

RS *Do you think that the men actively learned from what the women were doing at that time in California? Many people make that case in regard to Mike Kelley but, from a distance, I don't know if that was true or not. I suspect it was true but did you feel there was stuff to be gained by paying close attention to what the women artists were doing?*

KJ No, not really. Barbara Smith was the person that actually helped me a lot. She helped Chris Burden, earlier on, and she helped Paul McCarthy and many others. I wasn't all that influenced by all the performances. I saw them and was there, but I was more into my own thing. The influences again were Chris Burden, the Viennese, destruction art, Raphael Ortiz, and Edward Kienholz.

RS *Talking about the Viennese, how did you come to know about them?*

KJ Through *Time* magazine, the Robert Hughes article in 1972. It was about Rudolf Schwarzkogler, whom Hughes mistakenly claimed had cut his dick off, but who did bandage himself. Plus New York art performance people. Vito Acconci is one: he did these actions when he bit himself, or where he was at the bottom of the hallway with a baseball bat making his own territory. Anybody could do that and it's more or less interesting; anything you do is art, but some of it is not so interesting, that's all. And for many reasons: intensity, duration, focus, time ...

RS *So you mentioned Ed Kienholz and Bruce Conner as people you thought about.*

KJ Kienholz especially. Getting back to when I got into Otis, I could draw really well and I was painting frogs. My work was a bit more sexy then, frogs with purple dicks and tits, and they were fucking each other and flying and smoking and drinking and having a good time. Watercolors, squishy sort of things like [Chaim] Soutine. The more conservative teachers at Otis loved it. Because it was well made. Obviously this guy could paint and draw, so we'll let him in. And when I got in, I just got bored with it after a few months and that's where I joined the other group at Otis. Lowell Darling and other radical Neo-Dada conceptual types. And those two camps hated each other. I had to change my major from sculpture to design because they didn't want to call it art. I burned a rat in the sculpture garden as part of a design project in April 1972; the sculpture teacher wanted to beat me up. He was so furious. They had a big meeting, and they were ready to kick me out. They'd sent me a letter saying

don't do this any more, blah, blah, blah. Because there was confusion, they liked me and didn't like me. So they gave me another chance. So I didn't burn any more rats. I'd always been looking for a place to do it. It wasn't until a few years after I got out in 1976 that somebody offered me to do something and I took it. Frank Brown was a gallery director at California State University [Los Angeles] and he asked me to do a performance and I said "yes", but it involved killing rats. He said, "OK". Do whatever you want, just don't tell me." And that's when I did the rat piece and people got very, very upset.

RS *So what did killing rats, burning rats, come from?*

KJ That's one of the few performances that came directly from Vietnam. When we were in Vietnam, our camp at Dong Ha was covered with rats. We used to have to put our sleeping bags over our heads because they would jump on us at night. One guy actually got bitten. So we'd catch them and put them in little wire cages and then pour lighter fluid on them, and set them on fire, and watch them run, just for fun. For entertainment. I remember there was a rat crawling along the side of this room, at the side of this wall, maybe thirty feet away, as far as to where the door is over there, and this marine had a Zippo lighter. If you threw this metal thing, you could kill somebody with it. And he said, he was a southern guy, "Do you think I could hit that rat from here?" This marine just looked at the rat, judged it, and WHACK, he threw that Zippo lighter and he killed that rat. But so, rats were sort of our friends and sort of things that we tortured.

RS *They were your familiars.*

KJ They lived with us, bed buddies.

Yeah, killing them was cleansing, in a certain way, sort of a ritual. But I don't think we were aware of it at that time. Later, when I read more about rituals, I realized, in a primitive way, that was what we were doing. I wanted to take that action, a real action, and take it to Los Angeles in 1976 as a gift to the thirty-odd people at Cal State LA, a gift that they didn't necessarily want. Half the people ran out when I started to do it; the performance was roughly about a half an hour. It began with a list of three pages about how it felt to do performances. I was doing it like a clown, with mud sticks, and talking. Funny, people were giggling. The cage was covered with an old sheet that I had covered with numbers, almost like a magic act. So then I uncovered it and poured Wizard lighter fluid on the rats, and set them on fire and continued pouring it on until they died. When they started screaming in agony, I screamed with them and they finally died – a horrible death. Terrible thing to do, but I had to do it. And [the] smell, this gets back to performance art, it's not like a photograph, it's not like even a good novel, or a good story about killing something, or the smell of death or the guilt of death. It's actually being there and having the choice. I was clumsy with the sticks. I was nude, barefoot, they could have easily come and pushed me over and saved the rats, but they didn't. I don't blame them: who wants to do that, get involved? But that's the case in many instances.

RS *You were treated like a pariah after that, right?*

KJ They were very upset about that, yes. A few people, who were for it, were positive. But they were also disturbed by this crazy, naked artist. In 1976 people worried about me being nude. They were very upset. Those were the Nixon years and it was already a backlash against the 1960s, when nudity was common.

Yeah, what was most important was the smell and the actual experience. I heard afterwards that the district attorney's office was divided. Half of them wanted to make it a felony and the other half didn't care, so they eventually made it a misdemeanor: three counts, one for each rat. I had to go to court, I had to hire a lawyer – at that time I couldn't afford a lawyer, and so my father luckily paid for the lawyer. I paid a fine, I think, of \$190. So I was lucky. Also, I learned later that my father, who at that time worked for the city of LA (he went from a plumber to building inspector), apparently talked to the head of ASPCA [American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals]. And the guy said, "Ray," (my dad is Ray) "if I knew it was your kid, I would have chucked it under the rug, it doesn't matter." I found out later that I had pull in City Hall, but he didn't know that they really wanted me to go to jail. My dad was very private, he was ashamed that I had to go to court, but he went to court with me. I never actually went to trial. As I said, I just ended up paying a fine.

RS *When you did the façade of Site Santa Fe in 2004,⁴ you did a variation of that burning ritual. Can you tell me about that?*

KJ Yes, I remember thinking about that. I remember when you asked me to cover the front of the site at Santa Fe. I recall looking at it and thinking, "Oh shit, what am I going to do?" And I saw the big scaffolding the artist before me had built and I thought about the rats, about dolls. We went out and we bought all the dolls in Santa Fe. None of the kids would have dolls. And we bought a lot of rats in a novelty shop in mid-Manhattan. They were black. I didn't want to burn any more rats. I thought, "I've done that." It was like poking fun at myself in a certain way because there were the big barbecue pits and, instead of burning rubber rats, I had people burn sausages and throw them in the air and on the ground.

RS *As you said at one point, that performance piece was a sort of parody, an art joke, indirectly at your own expense. In terms of that particular context, there were people outside the building coming into the Biennial and there was somebody having a barbecue. I remember you blackened the sausages and they came flying out in the air at the public. It was a perfect mix of physical comedy and aggression. As if to say, with a greasy, charred weenie: "Welcome to our show, look out."*

KJ "Watch out!" Yeah, that's my sense of humor too, a rather dark sense of humor. I think it's funny, but not everyone thinks it's funny. And I remember actually being out there in that courtyard; I don't think you saw this, but we pulled one of the dolls down and with one of the art people, we were kicking the dolls like a soccer game out there, being goofy during the opening. Also our idea of humor may, or may not be, funny to others. I've used the rats after that, many times after the show. That happens when you don't sell out: I had boxes and boxes of rubber rats.

RS *When was the last time you did Mudman?*

KJ It's been a few years now; I did it for Barbara Gladstone Gallery. Ugo Rondinone invited me to be in a show. It was a show in both of their galleries and I showed the big structure and I did two performances. They wanted me to do more, but I just couldn't do more. The first one nobody was invited, so it was just for whoever was there. Which is another aspect of performance art: you don't tell anybody, it's the

4. Robert Storr organized the Site Santa Fe's 5th International Biennial exhibition. *Disporities and Deformations: Our Grotesque*. 2004. Kim Jones was among the participating artists.

RS *Then you set that aside for a while and did mostly... what?*

KJ When I stopped painting?

RS *When you stopped making those kind of drawings, in the late 1960s – early 1970s, and then you set it aside, is that right?*

KJ No, I actually continued doing that all along, sort of an aside, with the war drawings. I never showed the war drawings, but the other drawings, I just continued. But there was no place to show them in LA, in the early 1970s. It wasn't until 1978 or so that there was a place where I could show them, round 1980, when I finally started to connect with the LA art world. I knew about it. I went to school with some of these guys. The Dill brothers.

RS *Did they start taking notice of you?*

KJ They pretty much ignored me. The only ones that were really close were Paul McCarthy, Barbara Smith, and John Duncan. Linda Montano. But the other ones, a lot of the artists like Dills and those people that were more minimal, sort of more abstract, I was not close to.

RS *You were special in that you pursued a variety of different kinds of work. If not simultaneously, then at least overlapping.*

KJ Yes, I never showed the drawings to anybody until I first moved to New York in 1982. I sold some drawings. Several people were kind of surprised: "I didn't know you could draw too!" 'Cause I needed money to move to New York. But I never showed my drawings; as I said, there was no place to show them. Mostly I was known for either installation or performance.

RS *But not for the figurative drawings? And you also began to draw over photographs and the one behind you now [indicates photograph hanging on the wall] is one of those, and recently you've done more, you've taken classical sculptures and embellished them, you've taken all kinds of photographs of your own performances and elaborated on them. I wonder if you could talk about that dimension of your work, and when it started.*

KJ The drawings over the photographs started around 1974, when I was drawing over a lot of the photographs that were in my art history book. And then advertisements that I found, and I liked. Or photographs from nudist magazines. Anything that was of interest I would draw over it. The ones that were in the show are – in different combinations – based on photographs of the classical Greek and Roman art. I also drew over photographs that friends and girlfriends took of me doing a performance. Another category comprises photographs of me as a kid that I drew over as an adult, like this one taken by my father, I think.

RS *Was that before, or after, you contracted polio?*

KJ It was after. From ages seven to ten, I had the Perthes disease, a hip disorder. When I was eleven, my mother wanted me to do modeling – I was a cute little boy, I guess. So that's why they took this photograph of me.

RS *Photos and regular drawings, all different aspects of a single personality. It's sort of like a sculptor who keeps adding on clay, taking it off, adding it on again, and then taking it off again. You've made reference to other sources. Have you read any anthropological sources? Are you interested in where this stuff comes from, or you're just interested in it as it comes to your imagination?*

KJ I haven't read a lot, but Sir James Frazer, which is old hat I suppose.

RS *It's pretty rich.*

KJ Pretty rich. A lot of my ex-girlfriends knew his work and some recommended that I read *The Golden Bough*⁶ and all these other things.

RS Did you read Jung?

KJ No, I never did – Jung nor Freud.

RS Did you avoid them or did you just never get to them?

KJ Never got to them. Bits and pieces, but nothing really serious. Mostly novels. Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1957), and *The Green Man* (1969).

RS Let's change gear a little bit. There is another kind of drawing that you did at the time of the rat performance piece. Jasper Johns owns several of them, I think. But they are between this kind of flowing, somewhat fantastical style and the grittiness of the war drawings. Can you talk about those drawings? And what has their role been?

KJ I know he has several drawings. There is a different feel to them. In one I'm almost having sex with a rat and grabbing a rat, it looks [as if] I'm just about to fuck it in the ass. And that's also part of playing with extremes in the 1970s. There is one performance where I got a dead rat and I put it in this sculpture by a friend of mine that was like this Adobe sort of room, about 2 x 2 ft. And I just left this dead rat in there, and finally it was eaten by bugs, and it ended up just being a skeleton at the end of the show. And that's where I also had a rat in a cage that I took for a walk on Hollywood Boulevard. I tried to put a leash on it and it fainted, so I actually left the rat in my car and just took my sculpture for a walk on Hollywood Boulevard instead. This was in 1980, I think. And that's when Rachel Rosenthal, who lived upstairs from LACE [Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions] in downtown LA, fell in love with this rat, so I gave it to her. That's the story of that rat; it survived and had a happy little life with Rachel. I was doing a lot of drawings after performances, that's actually another way how I got back to drawing: I started making drawings of my sculpture, and then making drawings of my performances after I did them. Or imaginary performances; I did a few suicide performances where I had to be in a really good mood, and I'd go to this special place and shoot myself in the head. In another performance, I'd blow myself up. Those weren't all that serious. It's not like I would like to kill myself. Just playing with that. Because you could do it in a drawing. You can draw anything you want. But when you actually do it, that's it. During that time there was a lot of performances, "I'm going to kill myself. I'm going to do this; this is my last performance." I don't think that actually anybody ever committed suicide as a performance, that I know of, but people at that point were playing around with those things. Well, Chris [Burden] got pretty close, he had himself electrocuted. It couldn't have been fatal but it was pretty extreme.

He told me stories later about when he shot a pistol at the airplane, in 1974. The cops came into his studio and said, "It doesn't matter if its blanks or whatever, if it's a pistol we can arrest you, it's a felony to shoot, to even point a gun at an airplane like that." So he had to tell them that it was a toy gun. It wasn't a real gun. And when he had himself shot, and he had to go to the hospital, he had to tell them it was an accident. He couldn't say a friend of his shot him, because they would arrest him. Also firing a weapon is a felony in New York. The other thing was the kidnap performance, where he was in the radio station. That was one of the more risky ones, because he

6. Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* (1890).

actually threatened the woman who was interviewing him, and he destroyed the station's tape, and had his own tape. They could easily have pressed charges. But he was lucky. I feel so bad about his dying.

RS *Yes. It's very sad; he was sixty-nine, pretty young.*

Can we talk about some of the pieces where the structures have become garments? And I love the wall pieces with toy three-wheelers that seem to trail lines behind them. They're like racetracks for children's scooters, or children's bikes. Can you talk about those things a little bit?

KJ They are sculptures. I used to make these sort of organic sculptures, looking like Eva Hesse, etc., and years later I began covering them with acrylic paint and preserving them, and then attaching them to various structures. They're toys that I found on the street. A friend of mine, another artist, actually gave me some of his kids' toys that I also used, and I actually went out to Toys "R" Us and bought some toys and spent about two days putting them together and it was really hard to put it all together. I'm not a builder of toys. So I used all these to make these sculptures, and then I had these sculptures on the floor and they disappeared against that expanse. So I thought of having them on the wall and making it more dynamic by putting the lines that make it seem like they're racing around the wall.

And just drawing on the wall in this sort of discursive way – just mark-making – doesn't represent anything exactly, doesn't really look like the tracks of the creature. Of the car. It's like an energy line. It gives the impression that it's moving.

RS *There is one other assemblage you made, where you added a new ingredient. You made a book/reliquary with human shit. And paint. I wonder if that ever happened again and how that happened in the first place.*

KJ Just that one time, I made a lot of these sculpture books full of my drawings, very organic-looking on the top. And there were complex ones, which Zeno X has now. It was around 1980, and I did it for a Neo-Dada art show at a little gallery in Venice. It was on a pedestal. So at the opening I went there, and I had a jar full of my shit. And I came in and put my hand in there and smeared my shit over the book in the show. And then left. I heard later that there were fights and people were very upset because of course I ruined the opening with the smell of my shit. But I really thought, "It's Dada, come on, get real." And so they kicked the sculpture out and this friend of mine brought it back to my apartment. And it smelled so bad, I had it sort of hanging out of the window for a long time. Eventually it dried up and it was fine. And then I continued working on that book sculpture. The shit all dried up, I don't think any disease or anything will happen. It's covered with acrylic also. Acrylic solved everything.

RS *The Warhol Oxidation Paintings, his Piss Paintings, when they're packed, they're rolled upon around themselves and they really start to stink again.*

KJ There were several performances at LAICA and LACE and in New York, too, where aside from the mud I would tell these stories, usually about my life, and I would put my own shit on my body. And I did it during a lecture. I was in a show at the New Museum called Choices [in 1986] and we had a panel talk. So they invited all these very wealthy collector types, curator types to come and hear people talk about performance art. And Marina [Abramovic] was there and Linda Montano, I think. And so I told Tom [McEvelley], "I'll go last because I don't want to really fuck

it up for everybody else.” And when it came to my turn to talk about performance, I didn’t have the full structure; I just had the hat on and an old overcoat, and I had the jar with my shit in it, so I talked about how important smell was in performance and I was very neat, the people were waiting for some intellectual thing. So I reached in and pulled out a clump of my shit and I very neatly put it on a piece of newspaper. And the people were like, “What the fuck is this?” and somebody threw a paper wad at me, and I said, “OK, you want to start throwing things, I can throw things.” And they were going, “Oh, no, no, no. OK, OK, calm down, Kim, calm down.” I continued talking and gave my little lecture. I think afterwards, Tom came up and said, “Kim why did you do that?” I said, “Well it’s performance.” People were very, very upset. But that’s where I met Lawrence Weiner. Marina didn’t seem like she was happy with my performance. But Lawrence Weiner was very calm. I haven’t seen him in a while but he was very friendly. He didn’t want to shake my hand, but was very friendly. At that time I couldn’t even sleep, I had to put plastic over my hand. No matter how many times I washed my hands, it was stuck in my fingernails. It smelled like shit for a long time. There was another performance [where I used shit]. I was invited by Rachel Rosenthal to do a piece at one of her performance garage things. At the start I sprayed Jean Naté, a cheap perfume, on all the seats, so it smelled like this cheap perfume. And at the very end of the performance, I opened up a suitcase that contained dog shit and popcorn, and I smeared shit on my body and I sort of did my thing. The opposite of this sweet sick smell was this nasty smell.

RS *In fact, two nasty smells.*

KJ Yes. Using smell was especially important with the rat piece: the smell of something dying.

RS *Burning.*

KJ Burning, horrible death, obviously.

RS *When you were in Vietnam, did you smell a lot of death, was it present in the environment?*

KJ Yeah. This bad luck battalion 1-26 was ambushed and they were bringing in people and I was helping them take bodies and wounded people off the helicopter. There were dead people piled up all around us.

RS *You are one of the gentlest of men I’ve ever met.*

KJ I’m fairly gentle; it covers a lot of the inner ...

RS *I didn’t say your imagination or psychology is gentle, just you are gentle. Either your nature is working like a charm or it’s a very complicated dialectic in your makeup and in your art. Because a lot of your art is really literally in your face and it’s up your nostrils. Yet, I would say there is very little aggression in your way of being.*

KJ Yes, it’s mostly because I’m not a big man. So it’s more a matter of wisdom.

If I was a very large man, a very strong one, it might be a lot easier to be aggressive. Or maybe again, you wouldn’t have to be, because people would be frightened anyhow. It comes back to camouflage. I remember when I lived in Venice, I had very long hair for a while, a beard – I looked weird, even for that time. And all my friends were people I would be afraid to talk to now. They wouldn’t accept me now. A lot of my friends at that time were bikers.

RS *It’s almost as if someone had a violent imagination but a gentle nature; how do you camouflage yourself?*

KJ Also in the Marines you had to yell a lot. It might be a reaction also to that. We didn't talk like that necessarily, but when we were talking to a sergeant, especially a lieutenant, we said, "SIR, YES, SIR." In the marines you didn't talk softly. Nobody called me Kim there, because Kim is a girl's name.

RS *Almost like Johnny Cash's song about the boy named Sue.*

KJ Yeah, the boy named Sue, that is me, the boy named Kim.

RS *Did your parents accept your decision to be an artist?*

KJ No, not at all, I think both my father and my mother wanted me to get a regular job. And teach. Even when I was going to art school my father insisted on my taking commercial art classes. And those were the two classes in which I got bad grades. After that I joined the marines. When I came back, I figured I was going to do whatever I wanted. I think I was afraid of my father for a long time; he never beat me but he scared us. Joining the marines was a way of proving to him that I was a man. I think that's part of it. But it's hard to talk about it; he's dead now. He died [a] pretty long time ago.

RS *Was he able to see your work?*

KJ Actually he saw the show I did at the Henry Art Gallery.

RS *Because you went to get the dollhouse?*

KJ Yeah, so he was there. He couldn't believe that they actually paid to move all of this stuff from New York. He was impressed. And when I got a few grants I think he was impressed. But both he and my mother wanted me to be an illustrator. They wanted me to teach art and then maybe paint on the weekend or something like that. They wanted something safe, that's understandable; they wanted something that wasn't tenuous. It's like artists that I knew even from 1982, artists that I worked with. We all moved to New York together. You know, it's tough. There's no promises, very few promises. And that's a common story, but when you see it over and over again, you have to make a choice even if you do devote yourself to it.

RS *Your odds are long*

KJ Maybe, maybe not.

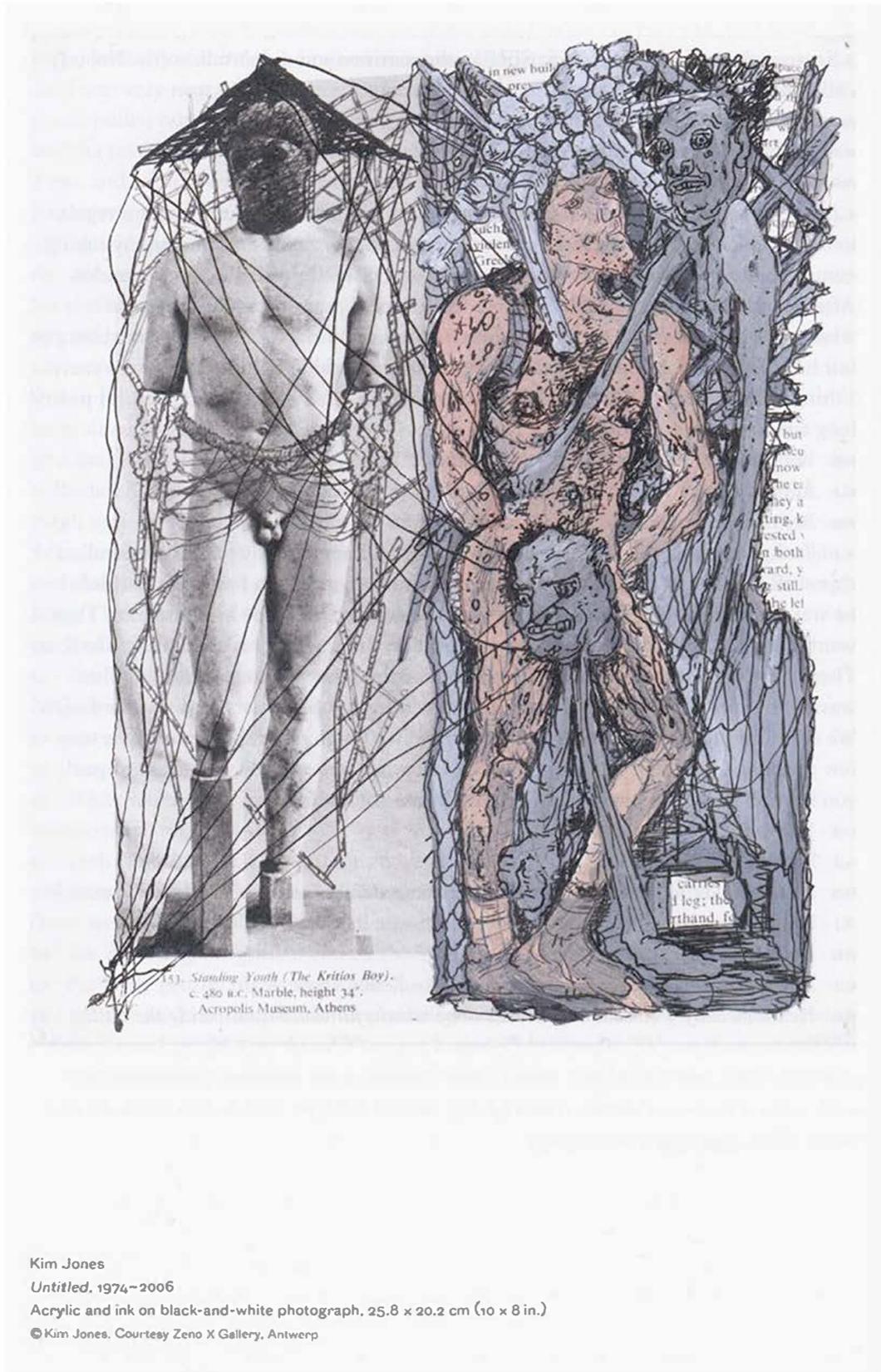
RS *Has anybody in New York ever thought about doing a retrospective [of your work]?*

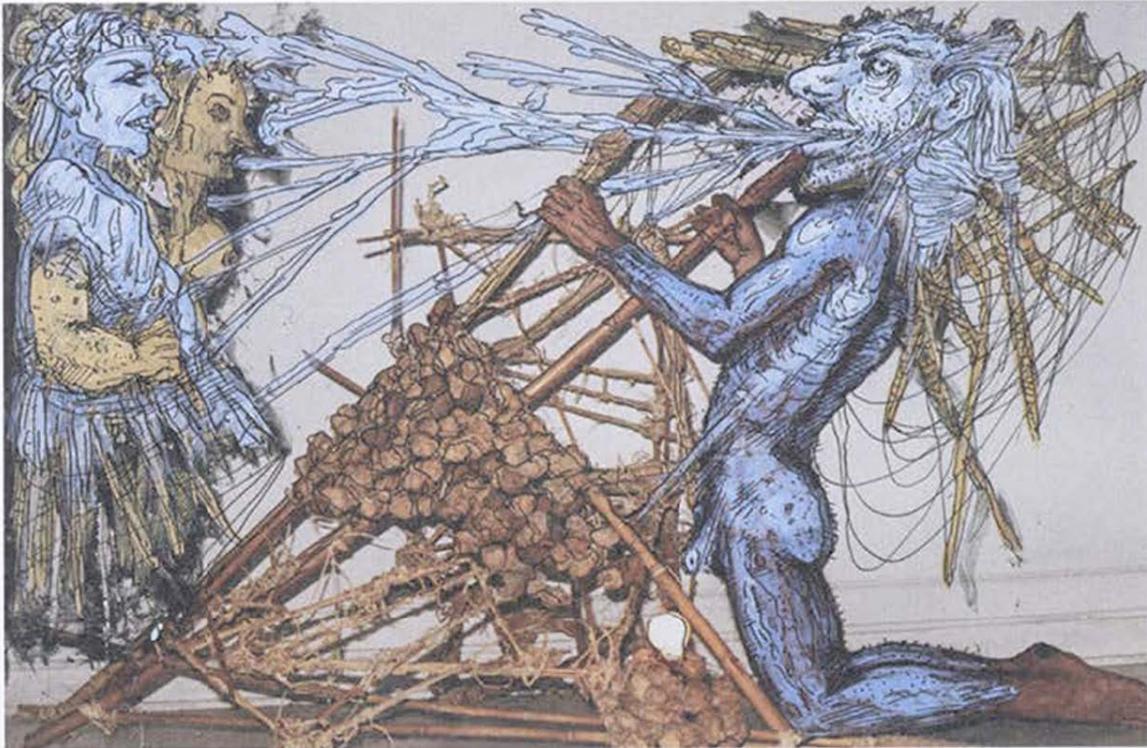
KJ Not in New York, no.

RS *Do you know [curator] Peter Eleey at PS1?*

KJ Yes, I met him. He invited me to the Mike Kelley show, yeah.

RS *He's somebody who could do it. He's done wonderful exhibitions beside the Kelley, which was excellent. [His shows on] Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt and Maria Lassnig were also very good. And like Mike's, Maria's and Tommy's work resonates sympathetically with yours. It's about time the general public in New York got a chance to really see and think about what you've been doing.*





Kim Jones

Untitled, 1974–2010

Acrylic and ink on color photograph, 27.9 x 36.6 cm (11 x 14 in.)

© Kim Jones. Photo: Peter Cox. Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp



Kim Jones

Doll House. 1974–2013

Acrylic and graphite on wood, approximately 92 x 90.5 x 72 cm (13 x 11 x 12 in.)

© Kim Jones. Photo: Peter Cox. Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp



Kim Jones

Wilshire Boulevard Walk, 1976

Photograph, 20.3 x 25.4 cm (8 x 10 in.)

© Kim Jones. Photo: Jeff Gubbins. Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp



Kim Jones

Untitled (War Drawing), 1990s/2000/2010/2011

Pencil on paper, 63.2 x 96.4 cm (25 x 40 in.)

© Kim Jones. Photo: Peter Cox. Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp



Kim Jones

Mudman, 2012–13

Photograph, 25.4 x 20.3 cm (10 x 8 in.)

© Kim Jones. Photo: Megan Ratner, Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

Richard Klein, "Kim Jones - White Crow" (exhibition catalogue), The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, 2016.

KIM JONES



The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

Kim Jones: *White Crow*

by Richard Klein

In a career that now spans over four decades, Kim Jones has created a singular and subjective body of work based on both extreme personal experience and a diverse range of artistic influences. Commentary about his work often dwells on details of his biography, and these facts certainly have a bearing on understanding aspects of his artistic output, but Jones's life story has a tendency to induce a viewer to presuppose meaning prior to direct acquaintance, a situation that can limit interpretation. The artist's life experiences, however, have clearly led to his thinking of himself as an outsider, and this estrangement has been played out throughout his career with an interrelated series of performances, sculptures, drawings, and writings that are defined by a range of elemental and expressionistic impulses. The title of this exhibition, *White Crow*, refers to the extremely rare occurrence when a crow is born without any pigment in its plumage. This marks the bird as not only an outsider, but also, in folk mythology, as an omen of impending change.

Jones has often used animals as protagonists in his work, most often the rat, with which he identifies as a species that, although usually reviled, is resourceful and intelligent, and lives in close association with human society. Rats and crows have benefited from humankind's global expansion, particularly in urban areas, with the populations of both species growing as the populations of most other animals have declined. In this exhibition, the rat and the crow both appear as transitional elements/figures, connecting a series of indoor installations with what is one of the artist's largest outdoor site-specific works to date. This installation, which was created during a ten-day residency at the Museum, involved the transformation of a grove of four small crabapple trees into a festooned and

wrapped sculpture. The Museum had planned to cut down the trees, but as Jones frequently utilizes branches as elements in his work, prior to their removal they were offered to him as raw material. This suggestion to use the trees was taken up with enthusiasm and their location in front of the Museum, together with their spatial relationship, suggested the potential for a dramatic, stage-like tableau. Jones has utilized the Museum's camera obscura, a small room that looks out towards the grove of crabapples, for an installation involving both sculpture and wall drawing. This includes the camera obscura's projected image of the trees, linking his intervention in the landscape with the indoor environment. The camera obscura is the only place in the exhibition where the white crow appears, perched in the center of the camera's upside-down photographic image. It should be noted that Jones thinks of the diverse elements in *White Crow* as one continuous installation, echoing the interrelated nature of his art and life over the past forty-plus years.

Surviving a severe childhood illness, as well as serving in the Marines during the Vietnam War, has tempered Jones's life and work. He recounts his infirmity and convalescence in *A Life of Secrets*,¹ a narrative written in 2008 that combines fictional and non-fiction elements:

One morning I woke up and crawled out of bed. I can't walk. I'm seven years old. My mother takes me to various doctors trying to find out what is wrong. The doctors decide I have a polio-like disease called perthis. My hipbones are being eaten away. The only cure they can think of for now is to keep pressure off my hipbones. They put me in The Children's Hospital for three months. I'm in a bed in traction. My legs are bound in leather, metal, and wires and raised up...

Being ill as a child (Jones couldn't walk for three years) led to the artist to having a rich inner life, and during his convalescence he turned to art as

both entertainment and release, an interest that intensified during his teenage years. It might seem unusual for an artist to be influenced by infirmity, but examples exist; for instance, Frida Kahlo was seriously injured in a bus accident as a teenager, with the resulting disability becoming a major source of subject matter for her painting. Physical trauma is imprinted on the psyche—particularly when it occurs at an early age—and Jones's childhood incapacitation cast a long shadow over both the form and content of his work as he developed as artist.

Two years after he enrolled at Los Angeles's Chouinard Art Institute (later the California Institute of the Arts) his studies were interrupted by the Vietnam War. On track to being drafted, Jones enlisted at the age of twenty-two, serving in the Marines from 1966 to 1969. It was in Vietnam that he first encountered rats, sharing his life—and a sense of survival—with them, a situation that formed a curious bond between man and animal. Again, from *A Life of Secrets*:

The rainy season in Vietnam. I am with the U.S. Marines at a camp near the DMZ. I am 23 years old. The area around us is a moonscape, with water in the craters. A damp heat surrounds me. I am tired. The NVA (North Vietnamese Army) hit our camp with rockets last night. They will hit us again tonight. I am sitting in the dirt holding my knees. I am bored. I see a baby rat sitting under a piece of cardboard. I pick it up. The tiny creature lays curled in the palm of my hand, hairless. It feels like a wet noodle with arms and legs and head and tail, like a slug. I gently place the fetal rodent in a large puddle. It swims frantically towards the edge of the puddle keeping its head above water. I watch as it struggles, paddling with front and back paws. Finally the child-rat reaches dry land. It looks exhausted. I pick it up and place it in the middle of the pool of muddy water again. The rat sinks to the bottom and drowns.

There are conflicting estimates as to the number of rats that exist on the earth at any given time, but a conservative approximation puts the number at twelve billion. Rats can live almost anywhere, but they especially thrive in cities as the urban environment provides ample supplies of both food and shelter. The battlefield has historically been a site where humans and rats live—and die—together. In World War I, during the intense artillery bombardments, hordes of frightened rats swarmed into the trenches, terrifying the soldiers as much as the gunfire. Their physiology has made them perfect surrogates for humans in medical research and the majority of the products in our pharmacopeia have been first tested on the ubiquitous laboratory rat. In Jones's work, the rat takes on multiple roles, from doppelgänger for the artist to metaphor for civilization itself; the rat invokes elements of curiosity and fear in equal measure, echoing the complex relationship man has with these creatures, whose success has been predicated on human success.

After his service in Vietnam, Jones returned to college, earning his MFA in 1973. At this point in his career, he was primarily a painter, a situation that was to change with his performance work as "Mudman," a walking sculpture that appeared first in 1975 in Los Angeles and then in New York in 1982, after the artist had moved to the city. Jones's use of his body was one of the defining moments of performance art in the 1970s, a period of innovation that was frequently categorized by extreme and durational physicality. In recent years Jones has curtailed his performances as Mudman, but both the physical aspects and the psychology of the character remain a central, defining presence in his work. Over time, Mudman has morphed into more of a mythical character than an art-historical footnote, living in the folklore of visual culture and reappearing frequently in many of Jones's drawings and hybrid works done on top of photographs. Even though the Mudman is not obviously present, his legacy appears in various guises throughout this exhibition.

White Crow includes an installation of five sculptures that have been worked on over an extended period of time. Jones rarely discards anything, and photographs of performances and other ephemera are frequently used as a platform for the creation of new works or the basis for significant reconfiguration. The five sculptures in the Museum's Opatrny Gallery were reworked over a period of almost thirty years (1973-99), which although not unheard of, is certainly unusual in the practice of most artists. True to Jones's interest in expanding the meaning of existing works, the sculptures in the Opatrny installation are animated and integrated into the space via drawings that radiate like tracks or webs across the expanse of the gallery's walls. Four of these five sculptures are built off children's wheeled toys, including a "Big Wheel"; the fifth, a triangular construction, has at its core a baby doll. These works with toys point to memory and recollection as a major undercurrent running through Jones's work. The trauma that he experienced as a young man has never left him and the toys function as references to childhood, a fact that is readily apparent in the work *Untitled (big wheel)*. Cantilevered off the sculpture is a wooden appendage to which a radiating group of toy soldiers are affixed with wrappings of electrical tape. These soldiers were Jones's as a child and their presence is an allusion to both innocence and experience, visually recapitulating Wordsworth's famous line, "The child is father of the man."²

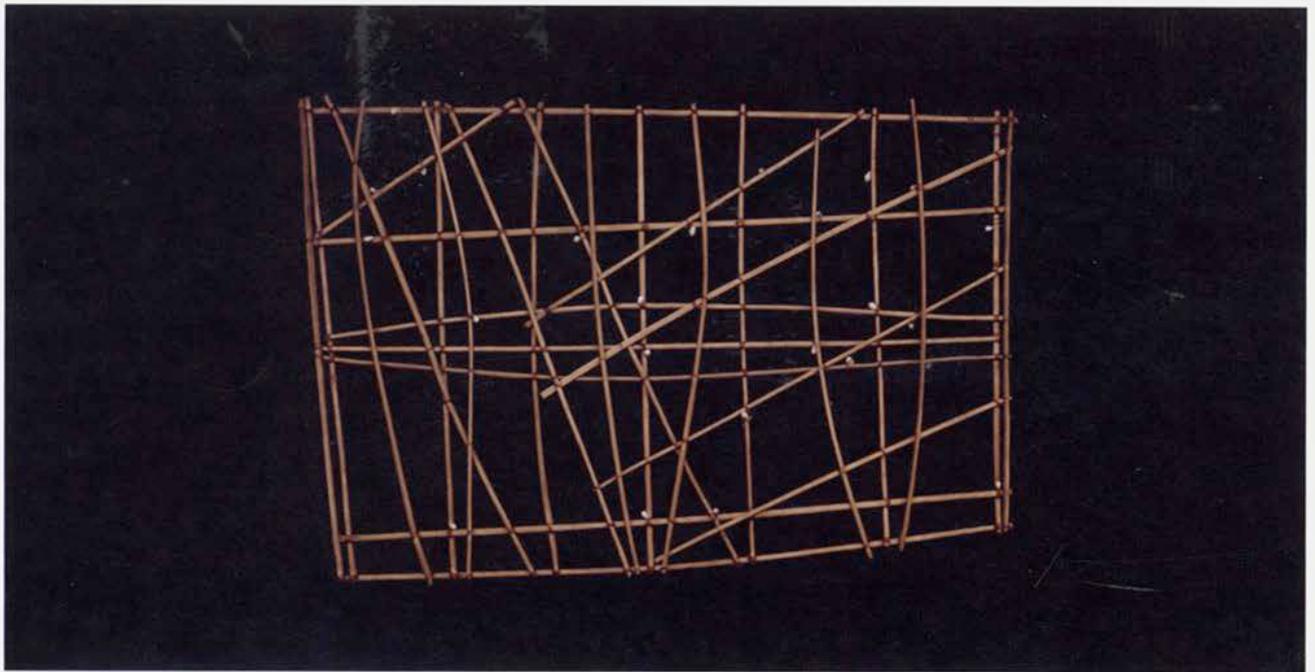
Many of Mudman's performances were journeys, with Jones traversing both urban and natural environments. The figure of Mudman moving through space, burdened with his spiky, ad hoc construction, summons deep ancestral memory; everything from Jesus with His cross and crown of thorns, to the refugee or immigrant painfully hauling life's necessities. All of the sculptures installed in the Opatrny Gallery are built off vehicles, evoking the migratory nature of Mudman. Even the one work that doesn't incorporate a child's wheeled toy alludes to travel: *Untitled (baby)*, the dark, triangular construction



that includes a baby doll, resembles the travois, a transport device used by Native American peoples that consisted of two poles joined by a frame and drawn by an animal. Other tangential connections, although not immediately obvious, are to the soldier's backpack, an object that conflates tools,

(top to bottom)
Mudman, Venice, California, December 1975
 Photo: Ned Sloane
 Courtesy of the artist

Native American Travois, Great Plains, late nineteenth century



weapons, food, and shelter; or to the improvised vehicle of the insurgent, with weapons and supplies strapped on à la *Mad Max*. Jones makes multiple references to his burdensome constructions in *A Life of Secrets*:

When I was mature and large enough the doctors built a structure for me. This was my physical support. I could walk.

My structure keeps me warm.

The structure looks too much like a trap.

My structure acts like the part of a sticky briar patch bed.

I feel a great pain as my bones dissolve and the structure collapses around me.

It should come as no surprise that, besides comics and cartoons—the bedrock of twentieth-century American cultural experience—Jones's earliest direct influence was German Expressionism.

Categorized by a highly subjective and personal perspective, Expressionism spoke of alienation and disruption through often jarring, violent, and cataclysmic imagery. These concerns, transferred to California in the 1950s, gave birth to a range of artists one generation older than Jones whose work also had a major influence on his evolution. Artists such as Ed Kienholz and Bruce Conner, both of whom made constructions incorporating found objects, reveled in gritty, sordid, and abject subject matter, a position that naturally appealed to Jones's sense of estrangement. Many have commented on the seemingly shamanistic nature of Jones's work, a categorization that the artist flatly rejects. Although exhibiting primitivistic tendencies, his practice does not involve spirituality or healing; rather, it is more cathartic, a personal purgation of memories and emotions that speak broadly of the human condition.

Included in the exhibition, and augmented by a surrounding drawing done directly on the gallery wall, is one of Jones's "war drawings," a continuing series that he began as a teenager in the late 1950s. Jones didn't show his war drawings for many years,

tentatively exhibiting them for the first time in 1980. Obsessive and labyrinthine, these drawings evoke the diagrammatic battle drawings done by children with their aerial perspective, weapon trajectory lines, and geographical and architectural abstraction. True to his overall approach to art making, the war drawings are never finished (until they leave the artist's possession), being worked and reworked over extended periods. Jones looks at his labors on these drawings as performances of sorts, considering them to be durational "games" that are played by drawing and erasing in equal measure. In a 2005 interview, Jones commented on the drawings:

*I think the idea came from typical war games that little boys play, and also those labyrinth games where you find the treasure that were printed in children's books. Those are a very basic idea of a maze or labyrinth. I remember seeing them when I was a child and being fascinated by them. That's partly where the idea for using a labyrinth or a maze in a two-dimensional space came from. That's basically children's art.*³

Comparing a war drawing with one of the artist's spiky wood constructions, the viewer is struck by a formal similarity: an organization of space that is tentative, web-like, and subject to forces of both creation and destruction. Jones's constructions resemble the primitive—yet strong—bamboo scaffolding that is used in Asia, or the protective, quill-covered back of a porcupine; they frequently have specific references to the body, including pantyhose-wrapped and painted elements that resemble viscera, and surfaces covered by crepuscular, biomorphic drawing. Jones has mentioned both Pre-Columbian and Polynesian

art as influences, and the spatial organization of his constructions bears a passing resemblance to the sculptural maps made by traditional cultures in the Pacific as aids to navigation. Jones's war drawings are really maps, and considering the peripatetic nature of *Mudman*, one can look at a much of his work as a charting of movement through both time and space.

Jones's outdoor intervention in the grove of trees is one of his most ambitious temporary works to date. Three of the trees have been bound with rope, black plastic tarps, and electrical tape, forming an ominous, dark, cocoon-like construction that resembles an apparition one might find in a work of horror or science fiction. An unwrapped central tree bears strange fruit: sprouting from its branches are groups of bound black rubber rats, radiating like the toy soldiers on Jones's *Untitled (big wheel)*. This tree, the axis mundi of the installation, resembles an odd family tree, rooted in the earth and bifurcating skyward like an exploding firework. Inside the Museum, the artist's *Rat Ball (2)* is a sculpture made of a tangle of rubber rats. In both instances, these spherical constructions are studded with eyes like Panoptes, the figure from Greek mythology whose body was covered with one hundred eyes. Although Jones's work is intensely personal and inward looking, it also expands outward into the world. The fragile skeletons that surround his works are sensitive receivers of experience and transmitters of memory, while his tough and resourceful companions, *rattus* and *corvus*⁴, follow and inform him on his journey.

Kim Jones was born in 1944 in San Bernardino, California; he lives and works in New York City.

1. Kim Jones, *A Life of Secrets, Spit, War Drawing* (Brooklyn, NY: Pierogi Press, 2008).

2. William Wordsworth, "My Heart Leaps Up," www.bartleby.com/145/ww194.html

3. Kim Jones, *War Paint*, interview with Susan Swenson (Brooklyn, NY: Pierogi Gallery, 2005), p. 8.

4. The American Crow, *corvus brachyrhynchos*, is divided into several subspecies, with *corvus brachyrhynchos brachyrhynchos* being the crow common to both Connecticut and New York. *Rattus rattus*, the Black Rat, is the most common rat species in New York City, with an estimated population of over two million. Originating in Asia, it spread around the world and was introduced into North America by European colonization.

surprise, you just appear on the street. I walked as *Mudman* back and forth between the gallery on [530 West] 21st Street and that on [515 West] 24th Street. A week later we invited people, people came and watched me do the performance. That was the last time I did *Mudman*. I did the *Mudman* before that at the Henry Art Gallery, for the opening of that show.

RS *I remember seeing you do it one time on West Broadway in the old days of SoHo.*

KJ In the early 1980s, yes. When I moved to New York, in 1982. I don't think I would have moved unless I had a girlfriend at that time who lived in the East Village. She was a poet, and she was connected to Saint Mark's Church, a casual girlfriend. She invited me to stay with her, so I had a place to live. Richard Serra heard that I was moving there and he offered me a job.⁵ I should clarify: at that time I was working as a janitor for Gemini [G.E.L. Graphic Editions Limited] so I met all those people there. For almost a year I kept my structure at Richard Serra's studio on Duane Street. I couldn't keep my structure at my girlfriend's place. It was a tenement, a small apartment. I got a studio in 1983, at PS1, so I had a place for my structure there. That's basically why I moved to New York: I had a job, a place to stay, and a girlfriend. And then of course she very quickly got sick of me and went to another place.

RS *I've got an over painted photo of Mudman on the wall here right behind me. In it, you've got a little skeleton in your hand.*

KJ I think that was around 1983; I did a performance at this strange hotel in downtown LA. Paul McCarthy did a performance and John Duncan did one. I did this performance called *Here is Icarus* with this little sculpture skeleton. After I finished the performance this punk guy came up to me. He looked like my idea of a French poet, very handsome, thin, slightly sick looking, and he came up and said, "I really liked your performance," and he pulled out a big chunk of his hair. I still have his hair in a jar in my storage, and I have a photograph of him handing me over the hair, and I remember saying, "Oh thanks, that's great." I gave him the structure that I was wearing on my back and I have no idea what he did with it; later I found out that he was dying of cancer. Apparently he was in chemotherapy, which was why it was so easy to pull his hair out. Which is sad. I don't know what happened to that structure. I have two structures left, the main one and another one that I built at PS1. All the other structures that I built on site in Europe and in the US were destroyed.

RS *As a part of the performance?*

KJ Yes.

RS *Do you feel good as Mudman?*

KJ Not always; there's a certain strength. Partly it's connected to the war because it's about winning and losing, it's about making myself think that I'm stronger, I look larger and I look more aggressive. But actually I'm weaker and more vulnerable. These things are running through my mind but I'm hiding because my face is covered with pantyhose, and my body is covered with mud. Camouflage. But I'm also exposing myself – you can see me a lot. I stand out. There is one example when I did a twelve-hour performance in San Francisco. I walked across the Golden Gate Bridge and through San Francisco from 6am to 6pm. It was sponsored by 80 Langton Street. Towards the end of the performance, I was walking back to 80 Langton Street and

5. Jones worked as Serra's assistant for two years.

I walked by this cop car, and the San Francisco cops leaned out and said, "Son, you better be careful, this is kind of a dangerous neighborhood." I said "OK, thank you." The cops were very nice. I continued walking and I looked across the street and there where these two bikers sitting on a stoop, across the street, and they looked like Hell's Angels. They looked serious, and I thought, "Oh shit, these guys are going to give me a hard time." So I just walked along, obviously this is like a big target: "Hello, here I am" – and I heard this very deep scary voice going, "Hey, hey." And I turned around and said, "Yes?" And he said, "I respect you! Anybody that walks around like that I respect," and I said, "OK, thank you," and I continued walking and that was the end of the performance.

RS *There are those of us who write about such work, but don't do it, so we're not presuming to speak in the first person but, at the same time, we experience it from the outside.*

KJ The other aspect of that, though, is the beauty of the writing, the clarity of the writing. I'm not a writer but it is like making a painting; especially with the war drawings, I feel like I'm actually a dot or an X. It's very comforting to be in this place. But I'm not. And I both, win, and lose. I'm on both sides at the same time. I even think with art. When you make a drawing, it's your idea of the world.

RS *Let's talk a little bit about the drawings; the drawings have evolved a lot. Once we get outside of the war drawings, they've evolved a lot in the past decade. I've known you for about twenty-five years, that's a pretty long time. Longer than that, maybe. In any case, a while back, you were pulling drawings out of drawers, portfolios and starting to work on them again. But I think that most of those sheets go back to the 1980s, is that correct?*

KJ No, they go back to around 1971, some even earlier.

RS *Aspects of a certain number of those drawings resemble the drawings John Altoon made.*

KJ Yeah, John died in 1969, of a heart attack, I think. By the time I went back to Chouinard he was dead. I remember seeing the drawings of frogs and roosters with big dicks, and little girls, little princesses and cowboys and Indians, and cowgirls. Very sexual drawings. It gave me permission in a certain way to make drawings with frogs, dicks.

RS *Really good drawing with a really bad subject matter.*

KJ Yes. It was 1969, 1970, 1971, I felt more comfortable drawing frogs and roosters. And sexy people.

RS *Well you were a young sexy guy, so ...*

KJ Yes, why draw something that is boring? It was interesting for me at that time. Looking at Ingres, Delacroix, any number of artists: Degas, Tintoretto, Tiepolo the Elder, the Younger, Domenico. Actually I've been looking at those artists since early college days. That's why I had trouble at Chouinard. I had a very academic love for drawing and painting. I couldn't paint at that point, but I could draw pretty well. And in the early 1960s, everybody, including my teachers, used to say, "Don't do cross hatching." There was more Minimal art, and Pop art maybe, but ...

You could tell when somebody went to UCLA because the drawing looked like Rico Lebrun. But I loved to draw that way. So I just continued. I stopped painting in 1972. I was influenced by Eva Hesse. Even Joseph Beuys a little bit – working with different materials. And from making the sculpture I made a circle and came back to painting. And it was like refueling for me.

Kristine Stiles, "Kim Jones, War and Art (2007)", *Concerning Consequences - Studies in Art, Destruction, and Trauma - Teaching A Dead Hand To Draw*, University of Chicago Press, 2016, p.176-193.

*Teaching A Dead Hand To Draw: Kim Jones, War, and Art (2007)*¹

I

Basic training psychologically authorizes people to kill before combat even begins (figure 18). One Vietnam veteran remembered that his “drill sergeant forced the squad to crush kittens to death in their hands,” reported clinical psychologist Edward Tick in *War and the Soul* (2005). When this soldier was unable to do the act and broke down, “declaring that it was wrong,” he was “shamed until near breaking.” Then, he killed his kitten. He “cried over the kitten’s death,” but was later able “to kill people without remorse.”² This soldier killed with a “dead hand”—a term that Kim Jones, also a Marine and Vietnam veteran, would later coin in another context.

Jones arrived at this association in an artist’s book/sculpture he made by hand, entitled *Teaching a Dead Hand to Draw*, begun in 1976 and not completed until 1995—an object to which I shall return in the conclusion. For now, I wish only to introduce Jones’s title as the pretext for pointing out that the hand that draws an image from the imagination (whether in pictorial, sculptural, or performative language) is also the hand that draws and fires a gun. Moreover, a “dead hand” is a corporeal instrument able to extend the psyche trained to kill into the act itself. The relationship between a dead and a live hand is the generative operation at work in how Kim Jones translated the language of war trauma into the languages of art.

Khaki Marine Shirt (2005) is a stunning demonstration of Jones’s decoding. This composite object is simultaneously a wearable shirt of Marine military issue and a drawing/sculpture. On the back of the shirt, Jones drew graphic symbols of troops and movements on a ground painted white. The drawing depicts the opposing forces of a battle in spare black graphic signs of Xs and dots, as well as rectangles for tanks and fortresses; lines for tank movement, combat, and containment; and directional forces in a “war that never ends . . . an X-man, dot-man war game.”³ As Jones explains:

They have no gender. They’re Xs and dots. They’re symbols. They’re erased to show movement. I’ll draw a tank, or I’ll draw an X, and erase it, then re-draw it in a different position. Or I’ll make a line of tanks that shows them moving

FIGURE 18. Kim Jones, *Walk from WPA to White House to Vietnam Memorial*, April 30, 1983, Washington. Performance sponsored by Washington Project for the Arts. Photograph © Mark Gulezian, Quicksilver Photographers. Courtesy of Kim Jones and Pierogi Gallery, Brooklyn, NY.

through their two-dimensional world. But when they're killed they're erased and that leaves a ghost image. So the erasing is a very important element of the war drawings. . . . The important thing is that it's always changing.⁴

Jones augmented the drawing by adding a wood frame on the middle of the back, which is also overpainted in white with line drawings that continue the action. The frame is embedded in the shirt and projects from it, isolating a section of the larger drawing that appears overall to be a circular encampment. Framed as such in the middle of the back, this part of the drawing also doubles for and looks like a target, marking its wearer as the object of assault. In addition to its original function as a shirt, the framing device enables the shirt/drawing/sculpture to be converted into a tabletop/cover that stabilizes the object flatly on a surface where the drawing may be observed more closely, as if by those who would plan battle strategy. Thus does *Khaki Marine Shirt* serve multiple purposes, as do many military items carried into the theater of battle.

Photographed wearing this drawing/sculpture/tabletop object, with his head covered in pantyhose, Jones became a generic Marine with the burden of battle born on his back, targeted for death. Jones has noted that his war drawings are "like a diary—like a writer keeping a daily diary."⁵ In this way, the very shirt on his back records a daily meditation on his inner life, his memories as a Marine, and his continued sense of self as a soldier. But the photograph also attests to the fact that it sits uneasily on his back, as the embedded frame distorts the shirt, forcing Jones's body into an unnatural pose. Jones's naked arms ex-

tend awkwardly from the garment's short sleeves, and his "dead hand" dangles, ready to do battle and draw the war of which it is a specter. *Khaki Marine Shirt* must be understood both as a work of art and a relic of the Vietnam War that has never ended for Jones, whose art must be considered the precise aesthetic expression of the Vietnam War for how his unique language of artistic forms simultaneously indexes and expresses its physical conditions and psychological toll.

11.

The kitten story recounted above amplifies Jones's *Rat Piece*, carried out in the Union Gallery at California State University, Los Angeles, on February 17, 1976. At the beginning of this event and in the company of viewers, Jones transformed himself into his persona that became known as Mudman. Disrobing and covering parts of his naked body in mud, he then pulled pantyhose over his head to cover his face and strapped onto his back a towering macabre sculptural apparatus made of (among other materials) twigs, foam rubber, and mud lashed together with electrical tape. Spotting a photographer taking pictures of his action in the gallery, Jones asked if any had been taken before he had donned the mask. When the answer came back negative, Jones is reported to have commented: "Good, because I don't want my face in this."⁶ As "performance is not acting" for Jones,⁷ his insistence on visual anonymity reinforced an aesthetic determination to draw the representation of a "mudman" such that actions undertaken as that icon would stand in for the experiences of others.⁸ Jones then read a text that referred to a range of emotions, which one viewer described as "feelings about his nakedness, the structure on his back, reactions to his performance and to himself as though the structure were part of his physical being, feeling like a mad thing caught in the wind, trying to escape and to identify his feelings."⁹ Another witness remembered that the performance had "a theme of needing recognition."¹⁰ Following his verbal commentary, Jones doused three rats confined in a cage with lighter fluid, and burned them alive.¹¹ The rats screeched as they burned, and Jones bent down and screamed along with the tortured animals.¹²

In this tragic action, Jones pictured the viciousness of war and its haunting residue in his imagination, conduct, and very ability to endure senseless brutality. In his screams, Jones dislodged parts of the radical intrusion of the imprint of war and death on his psyche that is the legacy of trauma, defined succinctly as a normal response to extreme stress resulting in chronic anxiety. Jones also presented the public with a faceless apparition able to carry out such violence—violence as a means in itself, and violence as a force to conjure the mayhem of the Vietnam War. Mudman is he who came out of the mud and marched into a world that did not want to see what he had lived: flesh-burning napalm; relentless rain and monsoon-drenched red soil that rendered survival as tenuous as it eliminated difference and reduced soldiers to hulking fly-ridden

beings; labyrinthine tangles of jungles, hills, and mountains that hid unremitting threats of attack—the legacy of guerilla war; and the constant delivery of bodies to death in bloody, rotting corpses, burned and smelling of shrapnel and gun powder.

As much as Jones created a metaphoric representation of the lived conditions of Vietnam, he also reenacted an explicit behavior that he and other soldiers had performed in Dong Ha, where they were stationed. In his words:

vietnam dong ha marine corps our camp covered with rats they crawled over
 us at night they got in our food we catch them in cages and burn them to
 death I remember the smell
 some enjoyed watching the terrified ball of flame run
 vietnam dong ha marine corps feel sorry for one and let it go my comrades
 attack me verbally
 vietnam dong ha marine corps guard duty it was my turn to sleep a duck was
 quacking bothered me threw a rock at the duck hit its head next morning
 it was staggering around crippled I couldn't kill it a friend crushed its
 head with his boot¹³

As this remarkable narrative of war attests, *Rat Piece* revived actual events and presented metaphoric qualities of the extremes to which Jones and others had become accustomed in a situation of survival where sensitivity to crushing a duck's head or to burning rats alive were themselves acts of mental and emotional survival in a context of uncontrollable threat.

Jones' nakedness in *Rat Piece*, as well as his use of women's pantyhose as a mask, also summoned the eroticism of both sex and death that hung over Vietnam, which, together with alcohol and drugs, momentarily tranquilized and sedated anxieties and tensions as much as it fed despair.¹⁴ Indeed, "acting out through rageful and violent expressions, including during sexual activity, often became a source of shame, guilt, and self-degradation years later [for Vietnam veterans], and a source of preoccupation with fear that one might once again become 'evil' or violent as one did during the war."¹⁵ These aspects of Mudman return in Jones' erotic drawings, which he reworked decade after decade, changing, updating, and redrawing, or repainting. In many of these works a composite surrealistic creature—half human, half beast—presides in a wide range of sexual activities and postures, simultaneously perpetrator and victim, predator and hunted. Male figures, split in half, appear in landscapes of sandbags; blood and demons issue from mouth to penis and anus; entrails double as bamboo. Such drawings often picture a gigantic phallus: vehicle of orgasm, signifier of pleasure, and object of threat in the larger landscape of Thanatos, where the primitive impulses for destruction, decay, and death, or what Sigmund Freud theorized as the "death wish," coexist with the life instinct. (The French refer to this death within the Eros/Thanatos dyad as *le petit mort*, or the "small death" that occurs at orgasm.)

Eros and Thanatos are even more explicitly rendered in *Self Love*, a drawing/painting/photograph from 1986. Nude, but wearing the “walking sculpture” of *Rat Piece*, Jones eradicated his own face and amplified his walking sculpture by drawing over the photograph with a graphic tangle of what appear to be hybrid organic forms that fuse entrails with roots. A kind of stump appears around his legs, over which Jones has penned phrases such as “self love” and “love of self.” This work recalls the narcissism that Freud identified in his study of World War I combat neuroses in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Such self-love (narcissism), Freud argued, is a traumatic manifestation of “intense, unmanageable self-directed sexual energies,” or what psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton, reading Freud, called an “internal narcissistic conflict” that is leveled at the self in direct proportion to unexamined traumatic experiences that make up the life/death paradigm and symbolization of the self.¹⁶ Evidence of this complex interweaving of self and other is particularly heightened in Jones’s overdrawings of illustrations of pinup girls from “girlie” magazines. These drawings catch the partially naked women in a webbed labyrinth that resembles Jones’s walking sculpture.

In a telling comment made in 2005, Jones noted that his walking sculpture was also like a “skeleton outside my body.”¹⁷ The skeleton has been associated with the personification of death, but also with suffering and the reaper, who culls life unto death. The image of the skeleton equally signifies Chronos, who in Greek myth is included as one of the Orphic triad: Phanes (or Eros), Chaos, and Chronos (or Time). Together, the members of the triad emanate from unknowable worlds to create change and transformation.

Space does not permit deeper consideration of the significance of the ancient triad in Jones’ work, but this relationship is part of the structure through which Jones moved from Chaos through Eros over Time toward healing. The photographs of women’s bodies in his drawings appear to be metaphoric representations of Jones himself, sexual objects enclosed in his own exoskeleton: these are self-portraits, albeit projected, altered, and hybrid.¹⁸ What I have been describing is how Jones drew himself as the “mad thing” that he became in and after Vietnam, and which he described in his spoken/read narrative during *Rat Piece*. This is the naked man who is simultaneously soldier, Mudman, and skeleton, and who asks for recognition of nightmarish war experiences; for acknowledgment of the psychological torment of returning to a hostile nation after sacrificing his youth; for admission that veterans were forced to forfeit a burgeoning, once innocent, sexuality; and for acceptance as the social misfits veterans understood themselves to be in the wake of experiences that only other veterans could share.

Furthermore, in the drawing/photograph *Self Love*, Jones holds a small sculptural skeleton made of sticks and twigs: the figure also wears a walking sculpture on its back. Mimetic, but not a mirror image, the skeleton doll represents a lifeless yet differentiated double of the artist: a skeletal echo in which death is inextricably conjoined with life as a narcissistic extension of self and self-image. In turning his skeletal self inside out and wearing it on his back,

and in re-creating a skeleton to hold in his hands (itself wearing a skeleton on its back), Jones visualized interior emotions as multiple representations of psychic death in an agonizingly negative self-image that pictures the skeleton not twice but thrice. This visualization draws out as an image “the extreme fear and terror that many combat personnel have experienced, [which] almost never was disclosed during war duty,” and the self-condemnation for feeling fear, as well as fear “that others might be cruelly and brutally condemning of the emotional states produced by difficult situations.”¹⁹ The body’s skeletal frame doubles as icon of death and inner numbness, depicting Jones’s inner psychic structure as a vehicle for exhibiting his inner feelings.²⁰ Displacing the skeletal frame and emotions onto an external source, Jones’s skeletal double echoed the self exhibited in the drawings, which was embellished to read as contaminated and overgrown, the site of exposed guts.

The walking sculpture-cum-skeleton might be said to function as a metaphorical Möbius strip, drawing a line from interior to exterior life, a line that connects as much as it depicts the continuity between inner and outer modes of dissociation.²¹ Jones’s post-traumatic stress disorder is especially vivid in terms of psychic death, numbing that reflects “internally directed rage and blame, . . . impacted grief, and profound fear—fear of ‘going crazy’ over a seeming inability to forget the immersion in death trauma.”²² To make the psychological complexity of these experiences more difficult, combat troops are trained in psychic numbing and denial, training that includes dehumanizing the enemy as a tactic for killing “it.” In the Vietnam War, such tactics were epitomized by “repeating the mantra, ‘Fuck it, it don’t mean nothing.’”²³ Jones’s drawings especially visualize this separation of mind from experience: the traumatic discontinuity and rupture that is nevertheless part of an unremitting metonymic continuity that extends to, and is embodied in, his art.

III

Jones had already made the rat his moniker several years after returning from Vietnam, repeatedly revisiting this sentence in his writing: “vietnam dong ha marines its summer time 125 degrees heat sweat like pigs work like dogs live like rats red dust covered everything.”²⁴ Such a description of living like rats summons the widespread negative cultural concept of the rat as a vicious, unclean, parasitic pest that steals food and spreads disease. This view of rats signals, in part, the legacy of the black rat that carried parasites on its back, vermin that in turn bore the Black Plague bacillus, causing the fourteenth-century Black Death, killing millions.²⁵ Central to this image is the rat as the intermediary for the death of millions, a representation that recalls statistics of the Vietnam War in which US veterans were themselves made to be the medium through which nearly two million Vietnamese, two hundred thousand Cambodians, and one hundred thousand Laotians died. Adding to these overwhelming statistics, more than three million Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians were wounded,

and some fourteen million people were displaced as refugees. At the same time, the veterans were also victims of the war machine that killed or maimed its own forces: more than 58,000 US soldiers died; nearly 304,000 were wounded; and some 33,000 were paralyzed. In addition, some 110,000 veterans died from unspecified “war-related” problems; 35,000 civilians were killed as noncombatants; and nearly 2,500 soldiers remain missing in action today.²⁶ These statistics of great carnage remain unconsidered in the very psyche of the United States itself, which has still not come to terms with its role in the Vietnam War.²⁷

While Jones materialized the underlying cultural psychosis related to the Vietnam War in *Rat Piece*, his book *Rat Piece* documents the cultural response to the work, systematically detailing the sequential unfolding of the performance, beginning with his own statement and moving to announcements by the gallery of his show, news articles about it, and responses by the art community (which never mention Vietnam or the fact that Jones was a veteran). The book also records the repercussions of *Rat Piece* in the legal system and how money changed hands, including fines for undertaking the action and fees to attorneys. *Rat Piece* shows how Jones was vilified as “sick”; how the police and the courts prosecuted him for cruelty to animals; how Frank Brown, who organized Jones’s performance at the Union Gallery, was fired by the university; and how some powerful voices in the art world found Jones’s performance “sensation-seeking rather than art” (the opinion of Marxist critic Max Kozloff, then executive editor of *Artforum*). Lacking insight into a quintessential representation of the Vietnam War by one of its veterans, Kozloff refused to publish images of *Rat Piece*, which he deemed “cruel theatricalism,” while paradoxically acknowledging the photographs of Jones’s performance as “quite arresting.”²⁸ For his part, Robert Hughes, then art critic for *Time* Magazine, pointed out:

Nearly ten years ago on the first night of *US*—Peter Hall’s [sic]²⁹ celebrated play about Vietnam—when members of the cast burned live butterflies on stage. At this point dozens of people rose to protest about cruelty to animals, before storming indignantly out to supper in restaurants where they ate the force-fed, diseased livers of geese and the flesh of large slaughtered mammals.³⁰

Hughes, of course, was right about the hypocritical public response.

The book *Rat Piece* concludes with three documents. The first is a prayer to St. Jude that appears as a photocopy of a small prayer card from the National Shrine of St. Jude in Chicago. It beseeches the saint “of hopeless cases, of things almost despaired of,” to pray for the supplicant.³¹ When one “send[s] . . . prayers and petitions to the National Shrine of St. Jude, they are incorporated into the Masses, prayers, and good works of the Claretians in Chicago, and [in the prayers of those] in more than sixty countries around the world.”³² St. Jude cured the leper. That Jones selected this saint for his book is evidence that he identified with the pariah, experiencing intense isolation and misunderstanding for his art and his participation in the Vietnam War.

The back of the page dedicated to St. Jude corroborated this identifica-

tion with the outcast. A letter from the dean of Otis Art Institute of Los Angeles County, James G. Souden, written to Jones in 1972, explains that should the artist continue working on filming the death of a "white rat doused in lighter fluid and set afire" (a film Jones was making in 1972, nearly four years before performing *Rat Piece* and four years after being honorably discharged from Vietnam), the faculty council (to whom the letter was copied) would "not countenance this kind of action." The dean closed with the suggestion that Jones might consider continuing his "graduate work at another institution."³³ Initially threatened with abandonment by the society he loyally served in Vietnam, Jones also was threatened with being forsaken by the very art institutions in which he sought succor. Four years before the diagnosis of PTSD, in 1980 no one could understand that Jones's sacrificial act (burning of rats) in the name of art released anger and mourning in the name of war, discharging traumatic pain as a means to live.

The last entry in *Rat Piece* is titled "Kali-Yuga," the name of the period in Hindu and Buddhist calendars characterized by the spiritual degeneration of civilization, or the "age of darkness." It is also the Buddhist term for the current period, and worth citing in full:

the date authoritatively recognized as the beginning of this
 kali yuga of ours is February 17, 3102 bc
 krita yuga ideal and perfect age 1,728,000 years
 treta yuga one quarter less virtuous 1,296,000 years
 dvapara yuga another quarter gone 864,000 years
 kali yuga our own age the worst 432,000 years
 the sum of all four is 4,320,000 the length of the great yuga
 at the end of that time the sun's heat will supposedly ignite everything
 and a cosmic deluge dissolve all back into its source the cosmic sea
RATS LIVE ON NO EVIL STAR
 A PALINDROME ON THE SIDE OF A BARN IN IRELAND.

Such a closure to Jones's performance and book draws the work into a larger frame of guilt, confession, redemption, and forgiveness, as well as the cosmic cycle of creation and destruction that brings renewal even for the despised rat, part of the minutiae of matter that makes up the "cosmic sea" of stars. A palindrome is the linguistic equivalent of a no-win situation, wherein one remains within its defining perimeters between paradox and contradiction. That Jones has maintained this palindrome as a key representation of self/rat/Mudman/skeleton signifies the depth of his understanding of the social, political, cultural, and existential situation in which the negative and positive poles of rats and stars circulate as metaphors of good and evil, as well as of injustice and its opposite: the dispassionate principles of moral right in which fairness and truths about the real nature, causes, and circumstances of actions may be gained (or, in the case of Vietnam, never were).

While Jones never named Vietnam directly in the performance or book, he

nonetheless documented the hysteria by which the public displaced its metaphors as a way to avoid examining the impact and lasting effect of Vietnam on veterans of that war.³⁴ Vietnam veterans were put in the position of the “double bind,” or the communication of contradictory messages. Anthropologist Gregory Bateson coined this term and used it to theorize such messages as a factor contributing to schizophrenia. Taking up the psychological and social ramifications of double bind in relation to the cultural expectations of the social contract in “said/meant” relationships, Kathy O’Dell has pointed out:

By 1970, it had become clear in the context of the Vietnam War that there was a growing discrepancy between what was fact and . . . represented as fact by individuals in positions of power. As people followed the war from home (on television or in the newspaper), they became aware that body counts were being inflated and that atrocities such as the My Lai massacre were common. The gap between “what was said” by those in power and “what was meant” grew wider and wider, [leading to] erosion of faith in the allegedly consensual relationship between the citizen and the state in the early 1970s.³⁵

O’Dell further argued that as a result, some performance artists of the 1970s took suffering upon themselves. While O’Dell cited artists who did not fight in Vietnam, such as Chris Burden (to whom Jones dedicated his book *Rat Piece*) and Vito Acconci, her observations are doubly true for an actual veteran like Jones.

Jones must have been contemplating what he would do in *Rat Piece* when he performed *Wilshire Boulevard Walk* nearly two weeks earlier, on January 28, 1976. Walking from sunrise to sunset the length of Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles while wearing the walking sculpture, Jones simply “walk[ed] in an out of” the lives of people he met on the street.³⁶ Walking in his combat boots with his body smeared in mud, Jones appeared as a phantom of Vietnam, not unlike Ho Chi Minh, the great Vietnamese statesman and leader of Vietnam independence, who wrote “Endless Rains” in his *Prison Diary* while incarcerated in China by the British during the 1930s for his labor activities:

Nine days of rain, of sunshine one day:
Really the sky above has shown no feeling.
Tattered shoes, muddy road, legs caked in clay!
Still, tirelessly I must keep slogging.³⁷

Jones and other veterans would not have been able to read Ho’s diary in the late 1960s in Vietnam.³⁸ They were not told that Ho was the revolutionary who founded the Viet Minh independence movement in 1941 and established Communist control in northern Vietnam in the 1950s only after President Harry S. Truman refused to answer eight letters in 1945 from Ho requesting further assistance from the Central Intelligence Agency and the US government (which

had helped him resist Communist Chinese domination in Vietnam in the early 1940s). Jones would only have been taught that the president of North Vietnam (from 1955 until his death in 1969), along with his Viet Minh and Viet Cong soldiers, was to be vanquished as a “gook” or “slope,” the racist expressions brought to Vietnam by Korean War veterans and used to refer to anyone of Asian origin.³⁹

It is not inconsequential that Jones performed *Wilshire Boulevard Walk* and *Rat Piece* ten years after he had volunteered in 1966 for military service when his draft status came up 1A. Only nine months before he performed these actions, Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese on April 30, 1975, and the last Marines were evacuated from the rooftop of the US embassy in that city. Six months after Jones performed these two works, North and South Vietnam united to form the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on July 2. Ten years later, in 1986, Oliver Stone, himself a Vietnam veteran, brought out the film *Platoon*. Unlike Jones, whose courageous work was not understood, *Platoon* would be hailed for the very realism for which Jones was maligned — for “its feeling of verisimilitude for the discomfort, ants, heat, and mud — of the jungle and brush: the fatigue of the patrols, the boredom and sense of release of base camp, the terror of ambushes, and the chaos and cacophony of night firefights.”⁴⁰

IV

Kim Jones never killed anyone in Vietnam. Stationed just a few miles south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ),⁴¹ in Dong Ha, he delivered the mail. This job, which for some would have been a relief from direct combat, humiliated Jones, who descends from a long line of soldiers.⁴² The area where he was stationed witnessed some of the fiercest battles of the war: Quang Tri, Con Thien, Camlo, Camp Carroll, the Rockpile, and Hamburger Hill. Khe Sanh, where a bloody battle began on January 21, 1968, was only forty miles from Dong Ha.⁴³ To make matters worse, Jones was shipped out of Vietnam on January 28, 1968, days before the infamous and deadly Tet Offensive began (on the night of January 30, 1968; it lasted until early June 1969). Dong Ha, Jones’s home base, was totally destroyed in April 1968. That Jones missed these battles is part of the burden Mudman carries on his back: a weight of skeletons, sorrow, anguish, unfocused fury, and guilt. When asked about his guilt, Jones responded that “probably, maybe” he did feel such emotions, and added:

But there was this other guy that I knew with 3rd battalion 4th Marines H & S company. I came over from Okinawa . . . with them, and they were right in the middle of Operation Hickory attacking these hills in Khe Sanh. There was a lieutenant who hated my guts and he took me aside and said, “I’d really like to send you out to Hill 881 South and 881 North⁴⁴ but we are short on postal clerks. If I send you out and you get killed I’ll be in trouble.” But there was an office typist, and they sent him out; they had extra typists, they needed people. There were the black guys and Hispanics who were protesting. The black guys

were better organized and refused to go. Some of those battles were pretty fierce. So there is guilt about that — not being sent out to those places. It wasn't something that I would volunteer for. I give a lot of credit to people who were really into it. I do think there is a certain kind of heroism in them. I have a lot of respect for those guys and I have a lot of respect for those who protested too.⁴⁵

Jones strongly discourages romanticizing his experience in Vietnam, considering his service lowly when compared with the heroism of other Marines. But one cannot look at his art without seeing the scenes of carnage that have come to memorialize the violence and destruction represented by the war in Vietnam. For Jones was also sent on convoy missions while delivering mail to places near Dong Ha, eleven miles from the DMZ; Camp Carroll, a key Marine base to which Jones often refers, was near Khe Sanh. Moreover, as Jones recalled, "the base at Dong Ha was always getting hit by rockets and artillery; they [the National Liberation Front (NLF) and Vietcong (VC)] were all around us; you had to stand guard duty, go on the convoys, burn your shit."⁴⁶ But while Jones experienced some of the worst fighting in Vietnam, he realized that he was perceived as expendable because he was, in his words, "a fuck-up."⁴⁷ So when a shortage of mail occurred, Jones and other "non-essential" soldiers were sent straight to the DMZ to "stuff sandbags." He explains that the soldiers "hung out . . . just waiting for them [NLF and VC] from December 1967 to January 1968—like speed bumps to slow them down."⁴⁸ Jones emphasizes that he and his fellow GIs were "not heroes, just people the military could spare and didn't need."⁴⁹ Jones' sentiment was shared by hundreds of thousands of veterans unwilling to assume the mantle of hero when they had been "scared to death; never a hero," in the words of John Ketwig, another veteran.⁵⁰

Upon his return to the United States, Jones immediately began to grow his hair long. He kept it like that for more than a decade, understanding what he had missed of the legendary Sixties while in Vietnam, not wishing to be identified with the vilified veterans by deeply engaging in art. But he finally cut his hair in 1981, and remembered that not long after that "I started making those *Star* sculptures in about 1984–1985 with black electrical tape and tree branches."⁵¹ He made "hundreds and hundreds of them, but ended up throwing them away" — not before, however, giving his sculptures what he described as "a haircut." "They all look like they have butch haircuts, like hippies going into the Marines," he commented.⁵² Jones treated the *Star* sculptures as metonymically coextensive with himself, giving them a physical identity like that of a Marine, an identity that he would himself reassume in 1981 and keep until today. About his relation to the Marines, Jones has noted that it is "a very controlling organization" that he was relieved to get out of, though at the same time they could "be comforting because everything is more or less taken care of for you; you don't have to make decisions."⁵³

The *Stars* appear again in other situations, among them two untitled installations, one at Lorence Monk Gallery in New York in 1990 and the other at P.S. 1

Attic in New York, for the exhibition *Out of Site 1990–1993*. A photograph of the first installation shows the artist dressed as Mudman and wearing his walking sculpture. He kneels in front of a wall and windowsill, dripping with black mud, among numerous scattered *Stars*. For the P.S. 1 installation, Jones covered the floor of a stark white room with newspapers and then splattered the entire space—furniture, floor, and windowsills—with tar-like black mud, strewing the spiky spidery *Stars* (also besmirched with black) about the room. When I described this installation to Jones as a massacre scene, he responded that he found it “comfortable” and “familiar.” “It’s like the mother of the serial killer,” he explained. Asked if he was the serial killer, Jones answered, “I’m not; I’m just speaking about how my work looks; it’s scary . . . it is noisy in a certain way.”⁵⁴

Jones’ mention of the “serial killer” suggests a relationship between the repetition compulsion of the serial killer to kill and the expectation and requirement of a soldier to kill in an environment bordering on bedlam. The word bedlam comes from the Bethlem Royal Hospital of London, the world’s oldest psychiatric hospital (variously known as St. Mary of Bethlehem, Bethlem Hospital, Bethlehem Hospital, and Bedlam). Long associated with the uproar and confusion of the lunatic asylum, war similarly is a situation of madness and chaos. This is the muddy embattled world in which the *Stars* are “comfortable.” Indeed, many of Jones’s untitled war drawings, especially of battles like those in *Khaki Marine Shirt* or *Puffy Jacket* (2005), exhibit grounds filled to overflowing, a situation referred to in art historical terms as *horror vacui*: fear of empty space. Such overexcited cramped fields are often related to drawings and paintings associated with “outsider” art or the art of schizophrenics.⁵⁵ When I pointed this out to Jones, he responded that his war drawings began in the 1950s as a teenage boy’s game that he kept private for decades. When asked why he secreted them away, and if he was ashamed of his game, Jones answered:

Maybe—it was a little too strange. At that time it didn’t seem like artists did things like that. . . . Maybe it was too personal, too close to like the inside of my brain.⁵⁶

Then, in response to the suggestion that his drawings resemble *horror vacui*, best experienced in schizophrenic’s drawings, Jones recalled his surprise when he had first learned of the works of artist Mirit Cohen:

She committed suicide around 1990 by jumping off a building; she bought a bunch of roses and jumped off a building. She was Israeli and did these drawings that fill up all kinds of space. Her drawings are very *horror vacui* like Paul Klee and they fill the space. I saw them and thought, “Holy shit! There is someone doing work like mine.”⁵⁷

While Jones acknowledges the visual similarity between his work and that of a troubled artist like Cohen, who could not endure her demons, or the schizo-

phrenic, who translates messages from unknown sources into the visual world of the psyche, Jones's war drawings are of a completely different order.

Jones replays, restages, rethinks, and rearranges the site of his traumatic experiences, gaining control and mastery over that which eluded him in Vietnam. When I asked if the drawings were a response to the many wars that followed Vietnam, Jones replied, "No, and they are not about Vietnam."⁵⁸ Nevertheless, in this regard, combat maps of Vietnam military campaigns that bear an odd resemblance to those made by Jones are available for purchase over the Internet. They include topographical and tactical maps, diagramming battles in which "one grid square equals one kilometer."⁵⁹ While Jones is aware of such maps, he never used them:

People often think the War Drawings look like some place — i.e., Los Angeles, London, Paris, etc. — but they are all places in my head. They look like maps but they are maps that are constantly changing. To me they are alive. I DON'T DENY that they are also drawings, and that the shapes in them come from various art historical references.⁶⁰

What the Internet site demonstrates is how consumed the public in general remains with the Vietnam War in particular, constantly replaying its battles, which remain as "alive" for them as they do for Jones.

Returning to the *Stars* that Jones scattered about in the P.S. 1 installation, he commented further:

They are watching you and it's their world, and you are allowed to walk through it. It feels like if you ever turn your back on it, it moves. Rats are real survivors.⁶¹

Rats are opportunistic survivors, existing with and in close proximity to humans. In this regard, survivors of traumatic experience lead lives akin to that of a rat, to say nothing of one who pictures himself as a rat, as Jones does (he once wrote, "I need to live with rats").⁶² The traumatized understand themselves to be close to, but not really a part of, everyday human intercourse. This is precisely how Jones experienced himself upon his return from Vietnam, feeling more comfortable with those on the margins of society: the homeless, the addicts, the street people.⁶³ To be sure, Raymond Monsour Scurfield, a specialist in war trauma, has observed: "Vietnam veterans, especially in the several years immediately following their service in Vietnam, denied and avoided directly talking about their war experiences with most everyone, [as they were] embarrassed, fearful, ashamed, enraged, or ignorant of the link between postwar problems and the war itself; many men and women withdrew and became psychologically isolated."⁶⁴

Being an artist, Jones creatively addressed his isolation by assuming the identity and behavior of the rat, at the same time communing with and drawing out the hidden underbelly of war and society in actions, sculptures, drawings, and installations. As early as 1973, he began showing work on the street:

There was no place to show work at that time. It was a comfortable thing to do. I started out in Venice where I knew people and it was comfortable going out on the street and showing my art. It started out with the foam rubber room installation in 1973–74, [in a place] on the boardwalk in Venice that I took over [for] about \$25 a month rent. . . . I covered the space with sand and foam rubber. In April of '74, I made another foam rubber room. . . . It was very comforting. I did several pieces when I was in there. It was like a nest or a cave. There was this one older homeless woman who moved in when I left for a week. She had her bags and stuff. It was easy to walk in. I told her to get out and she sort of grumbled and got out.⁶⁵

Asked about the significance of the foam-rubber room, which in photographs appears claustrophobic and manic, Jones replied:

It was a social piece for me—a way of meeting people like David Hammons [who] loves to go out after 12:00 midnight and he feels comfortable. That's the same way I felt in Venice at that time. It was a way of making my sculpture without having to deal with someone telling me what to do, like a gallery or museum. There is a kind of a freedom in doing that.⁶⁶

V

In addition to hanging out on the streets late at night and in the early mornings, Jones developed the character Spit, about whom he wrote in a self-published text titled *Spit* (1981).⁶⁷ This surrealist tale narrates an encounter with a street person who compulsively spits—at people, places, and things. Spit is simultaneously someone else (an actual person that Jones observed on the street) and Jones himself. The spitting reflex appears to be a reaction to the state of the world, self, and cosmos in general, as Spit expectorates even at stones. Each page of the story is surrounded by drawings that resemble Jones's walking sculptures. The drawings meander, taking the form of soft entrails and bony structures as well as rootlike hybrids similar to those Jones drew on his photograph in *Self Love*. In *Spit*, however, these forms morph into crosses, telephone poles, ducks (a duck is killed in the story), trees (transformed into "upside-down nude women with their legs spread apart"), and both rigid and limp phalluses.⁶⁸ The strange tale describes a violent journey with Spit that ends in an eerie account of an operation (one Jones actually did undergo around the time he wrote the piece) that—like *Spit*—has been altered to fit an hallucinogenic nightmare-like chronicle.

This story is, like so much of Jones's art, a testimony to the artist's unparalleled ability to draw art from traumatic experience using a variety of media. Another important text that deserves more attention than I can give here is *A Life of Secrets* (1994), in which Jones narrates a powerful dream/history of US Marine recruit training in San Diego, where he sees a novice nearly drown during an exercise in which the men are required to "leap, boots first, into the 12-foot-deep

pool. . . slip off boots and float to the top.”⁶⁹ The recruit “sinks to the bottom,” is pulled out, and lies “like a wet sack of laundry” before “two hands push down on his chest,” causing water to squirt “from his mouth like an uncorked champagne bottle.” This introduction to drowning in basic training is immediately followed by a description of the “rainy season in Vietnam,” which transforms the environment into a kind of “moonscape” near the DMZ. “Damp heat surrounds” the twenty-three year old Jones, who is “tired” as a result of rockets having fallen all night, but also “bored.” He spies a “baby rat sitting under a piece of cardboard” and rescues it, only to put it in a puddle and watch it “frantically” swim to the edge “keeping its head above water.” Jones continues his narration:

Finally the child-rat reaches dry land. It looks exhausted. I pick it up and place it in the middle of the pool of muddy water again. The rat sinks to the bottom and drowns.⁷⁰

This tale of a tortured baby rat, irrationally sacrificed, is the dream of the veteran who has been shocked by basic training, shattered by war, and psychologically damaged by leaving comrades and by surviving, and who therefore feels comfortable in the context of the outcast and outsider, as well as in spaces of visual turmoil that recall the site of the original trauma, which he reenacts daily in both his conscious and unconscious mind. This is the profile of the traumatized survivor. It is a picture of the psychological pattern that prevails throughout the history of war in which veterans “cannot leave war’s expectations, values, and losses behind, [and for whom war] becomes the eternal present” — veterans for whom a “frozen war consciousness” (associated with PTSD) is comfortable.⁷¹

Roméo Dallaire, the Canadian lieutenant-general force commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda between 1993 and 1994, suffered similarly. Unable to use his force to prevent the genocide in Rwanda, despite his now-renowned heroic attempts to intervene without support from the United States or the world community, Dellaire has compellingly written about his subsequent PTSD, alcoholism, low self-esteem, and identification with the social outcast in his memoir *Shake Hands with the Devil* (2003).⁷² For such soldiers, the psychological pain of war never ends. Indeed, “of the 3.14 million Vietnam theater veterans who served in the war zone . . . between 1964 and 1975, it is estimated that 15.2% currently have complete PTSD, [and] an additional 11.2% currently have ‘partial PTSD,’ that is, one or more PTSD symptoms, but do not meet full diagnostic criteria.”⁷³ These figures reflect “the most comprehensive and sophisticated psychiatric epidemiological survey ever conducted on veterans of any era of service in the United States,” and they show that “over one-fourth of the entire Vietnam veteran population have war-related problems some seventeen years since the last U.S. troops were evacuated from Vietnam.”⁷⁴

What these studies further demonstrate is that before examining the histories of Vietnam veterans, “psychoanalytic theory did not consider either the environment or adult experiences to be central to personality development in the

life span. In terms of adult traumatic reactions, it was presumed that emotional distress would dissipate and hence that postwar psychological sequelae would be transitional in nature."⁷⁵ It should not, however, be surprising that many veterans of various wars, including the Vietnam War, "vigorously deny the validity of PTSD as a valid condition in order not to admit to themselves their own problems that may be at least partly war-related" and that they fear being the carrier of the "death taint which is aversive to others."⁷⁶ Moreover, environmental factors are central to trauma and to personality development throughout life, including long-term and potentially permanent neurological effects; traumatic reactions do not necessarily dissipate, nor are they transitional in nature; and the psychobiology of the individual is an important factor in whether one will be affected by traumatic stress.⁷⁷ As Harry A. Wilmer, a Vietnam veteran, put it:

It seems to most of us that Vietnam was a long time ago, that it is past history. It is not. It still lives in the nightmares of combat veterans and the collective unconscious of us all. It is an illusion to declare that the Vietnam Syndrome is over. Denial never killed anything.⁷⁸

Regardless of the fact that the memory of the Vietnam War could not be killed, "it was common for Americans . . . to confuse their feelings and perceptions about the Vietnam War with their feelings about the warriors who fought in it, [and] many ordinary citizens and veterans of earlier wars scapegoated Vietnam veterans," calling them such pejoratives as "baby-killers,' 'losers,' 'cry-babies,' and 'walking time bombs.'"⁷⁹ To some degree, these are the terms in which Vietnam veterans' emotional problems are still perceived, as witnessed by the character Lester Farley in Philip Roth's book *The Human Stain* (2000). Roth described Farley as "a trained killer [who was] not supposed to come back."⁸⁰ Farley kills his former wife and her lover, and the book ends with the veteran sitting on an upturned bucket while ice fishing alone on a frozen lake in the middle of a vast landscape. It is an astonishing representation of the Vietnam survivor's icy rage and frozen loneliness, of the person who feels more comfortable apart from others, and who—like Farley—describes himself as having already died in Vietnam: "I am a man who fucking died."⁸¹

VI

Jones typed the text for his artist's book *Teaching a Dead Hand to Draw* on an old manual typewriter. Later, he cut up this text and collaged it onto pages that look burned and are heaped with layers of objects like twigs and sticks, giving it a heavy thick appearance, a visual look that is augmented by black tar-like paint that covers the book's exterior and much of its interior decoration. Tiny repetitive grids of black decorate full pages, with a small bit of color in the center of each. Other patterns and abstract drawings fill many of the book's few thick pages, over which the collaged bits of text articulate the narrative. The over-

whelming appearance of the book is one of a scorched remnant, Jones's visual aid in teaching a dead hand to draw. For the title of his book, Jones borrowed from Joseph Beuys's famous performance *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965). While Beuys, a voluntary soldier in Hitler's Luftwaffe, displaced his wartime experience onto the form of a dead animal (to whom he "described" his own drawings, images presumably descriptive of heinous wartime deeds), Jones incinerated his own animal persona, the rat, killing himself metaphorically in order to teach his own "dead hand" to draw—that is, to live.⁸²

While dressed as Mudman in his walking sculpture and pantyhose mask, Jones performed the narrative of *Teaching a Dead Hand to Draw* in an action that was videotaped in his studio in 2001. The video is striking for how Mudman stands passively, numb before the camera. After a moment or two, a voice (presumably the cameraman off screen) instructs Jones to "reach over and pick up the book." Jones then walks over, picks up *Teaching a Dead Hand to Draw*, and begins reading. The first sentence is the leitmotif of his art: "vietnam dong ha marines it's summer time 125 degrees heat sweat like pigs work like dogs live like rats red dust covered everything." The story continues, describing rockets, artillery, and mortar attacks on the Marines, who "jump in our rat holes" and "live in a constant state of tension and anger" without "hamburgers or ice cream." Jones drones on without emotional affect: "They are playing a game, but what game is it?" At the end of the performance, Jones recites the dates on which he worked on the book: "1976, 1987, 1988, 1995." Anyone familiar with the artist's work will immediately recognize the text of *Teaching a Dead Hand to Draw* to be comprised of fragments culled from his statement at the beginning of his *Rat Piece* book. This, and Jones's continuous working and reworking of the book *Teaching a Dead Hand to Draw* (like so many of his drawings and sculptures) attest to how his art cycles through and back to the key tropes of his life and art, decade after decade: killing, the killing of animals, being an animal, the brutality of killing and of being an animal—erotic and, paradoxically, numb.

In the video, Jones also shows other books that he has made and comments that "stories are hidden inside," so that this book, the one holds, would have to be "destroyed" so that one can find the stories. Jones then describes as a kind of "skin" the cover of the very book that would have to be destroyed so that its secrets could be learned. Thinking about skin as an organ of communication, O'Dell has noted (following psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu) that skin

is the body's only "external sense" that functions reflexively. Touching oneself, Anzieu writes, renders the sensation of "being a piece of skin that touches at the same time as being a piece of skin that is touched. . . . It is on the model of tactile reflexivity that the other sensory reflexivities (hearing oneself make sounds . . . looking at oneself in the mirror), and subsequently the reflexivity of thinking, are constructed.⁸³

O'Dell further observed that the experience of "it's me" is a "quality of the body [that] is particularly palpable" in some kinds of very intense artistic perfor-

mances.⁸⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty summoned thoughts similar to those of Anzieu in his notion of “coiling-over” in *Le visible et l’invisible* (1964).

Extrapolating the meaning of skin as a medium of self-reflexivity, of knowing oneself, it is possible to understand that, in part, Jones grasps the skin of his book as a metaphorical cover that stands in for the suppressed memories that bind his life in layers, and which, if known, threaten his destruction. This metaphor suggests that Jones fears that the knowledge of his stories (memories) would destroy him because the book (his body) is more than a metaphor—it is his skin, a surface connecting to him and to his life, which extends from the artist as a shadow to Vietnam: different, but the same.

This discourse on skin suggests that teaching his “dead hand” to draw represents a powerful encounter between Jones’s artistic identity and his soldier self: the artist grasps the core of his own being as at once dead and alive, and has the wisdom, courage, and self-respect to coach life back into the traumatized shell of the veteran. In this respect, Jones has endured to teach himself to survive through a wide variety of forms, none as poignant and powerful as “a dead hand.” This very act of endurance requires patience and fortitude, and recalls comments by Robert Jay Lifton:

Survivors can go one of two ways, or usually both ways: one is, having touched death, they can close down and remain numbed and really be incapacitated by what they’ve been through. Or they can confront, in some degree, what they have experienced and derive a certain amount of insight and even wisdom from it that informs their lives. I think that great achievements have occurred in relation to survival, including spiritual and religious moments. And so there’s another dimension of the survivor. . . . The general idea is that one can use a death encounter and re-create oneself in relation to it.⁸⁵

Jones has had the temerity and exceptional force of temperament, personality, ingenuity, and originality to teach his hand to draw. Through that act, in all its aesthetic variety, he continually overcomes the grief and memories of experiences beyond comprehension that are the legacy of the Vietnam War, and of which Kim Jones is the consummate artist.

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KIM JONES

AVERNO



KIM JONES in Conversation with SUSAN SWENSON

Brooklyn, August 22, 2012

SS: You were talking about the title of your new group of work, *Averno*, after a book of poems by Louise Glück, referencing Averno Lake, a volcanic, crater lake that the Ancient Romans believed to be the entrance to the underworld, or hell. You mentioned that you consider that a possible entrance point to your work as well. Could you elaborate on that?

KJ: For me, it's very difficult to describe this series of drawings because they range from the early seventies to the present, and they're a combination of drawings and paintings over photographs, mostly of myself performing, and also more pure drawings with no photographs. I like that title. Frankly, I'm not sure how to describe these pieces because there's a great variety. A lot of my work comes out of looking at older artists, long dead artists, from the Renaissance up to the Ashcan School. I remember the first time, when I was in high school, seeing Renoir and the Impressionist paintings and then seeing John Sloan and Robert Henry from the Ashcan school and I remember being really impressed by that and learning from that and knowing more and more about the Renaissance artists from Tintoretto to Tiepolo, [Giovanni] Battista, and even his son [Giovanni] Domenico. So all of these things, in addition to my own life experiences and the people that I've met, faces that I've seen, I think get transferred into the faces of the people who inhabit these drawings. It all gets mixed up and sort of spit out in a certain way. I've looked at this work starting about fifty years ago, since high school. I used to make copies of Rembrandts early on and lately I've been trying to copy a few Tiepolos, which are incredibly hard. Rembrandt is hard too, but I've found I can look at these paintings and drawings but it's different if you try to copy it because it forces you to look and to actually see what you're looking at. If you just look at it, you can see a certain amount of things. If you look at it over and over again. If you try to copy these, aside from the skill you need to copy it, it makes you, forces you, to pick out not just the details but how everything relates and it's very difficult to get the proportions right and you can see that immediately when you try to copy things. I can see it with things I try to do, aside from just the touch the artist had, it's very difficult, you can't really repeat it.

SS: You're trying to technically reproduce what they did but also trying to see the way they saw.

KJ: Yeah, there are certain paintings, for example *The Tempest* by Giorgione. I still really love his work but I remember the first time I saw that painting in Venice in the eighties, it was so small. I remembered it from art history classes as a slide. Suddenly I was confronted by this painting in kind of a dingy space, all by itself and you could look at that painting and you know, it was almost too much.

SS: When you're studying art history and looking at pictures of paintings in books they take on a mythic, larger-than-life scale.

KJ: Right, and you don't always see the right colors and usually, well now with the digital camera you can see a lot, but even with the digital camera they don't always capture the right colors.

SS: Isn't that the way that many artists used to train? They would travel to see a painting by an artist they liked and try to copy it?

KJ: Right. I had a very traditional art education. First, I got a small scholarship to Art Center School for one semester and I took drawing classes there on Saturdays when I was in high school, in '61 or '62. They were very traditional. It was mostly a commercial art school. They didn't put up with you expressing yourself. Chouinard's was more about that, but Art Center was very strict, how to draw the figure and the proportion, drawing from skeletons, drawing from plaster statues. It was actually too strict. I couldn't deal with it.

SS: Your work is very contemporary but your references span centuries, even the way the figure is beautifully rendered. Well, not beautifully rendered because it's a complicated image sometimes made simply with a line...

KJ: Beautifully rendered is okay, that's fine (laughs).

SS: I don't mean rendered in a conventional way, but with a spontaneous, elegant line unique to you.

KJ: Well, I think people don't always talk about that ... the current show of Ellsworth Kelly's plant drawings, with a very elegant beautiful line, and some of the earlier studies of plants, bizarre almost realist looking things at the Met and a number of artists, like Jasper Johns, use beautiful lines, but for me line is a very important thing. It's not just ... you can use it to describe a form, whether it's a figure or something you're not quite sure what it is. These drawings that I do are entirely different from the so-called war drawings, which are like maps but they aren't really maps, if you think of a map as a map of New York or LA or Venice. These are maps of something that's in my head, but they have to be very clear like a map, it has to show where everything is, but they're moving maps. I erase and move the white and black tanks and the x's and the dots around their two-dimensional world. Those end up being very beautiful lines. That's because I've been drawing for a long time but I'm not really concerned about aesthetics with those drawings.

SS: Like a map of activity.

KJ: Right, and the so-called figurative drawings are more concerned about, well, I don't consciously think about Tiepolo or Tintoretto, but they're in my head which I

can't help, so that comes out.

SS: You mentioned before that, included in a number of drawings you've done, particularly in the last group that you showed at Pierogi, were some of the earliest drawings you had made in high school.

KJ: Right in '60, '61 or so.

SS: With new lines laid on top of and incorporated into the older ones. I remember you saying that one of the interesting things for you has been seeing the difference in your hand from that age to now and how it's evolved and become much more assured.

KJ: Well that's something I think that probably any artist who's honest with him or herself can say. When I first started drawing with pen and ink it seemed like I didn't have to work very hard, it was a natural thing, there was no hesitation, it was immediate, like a duck to water. I wasn't really afraid of it. But at that point when I was seventeen or eighteen I didn't have that confidence. Even in my twenties and thirties, I had more confidence but there's a difference between a drawing done when I was eighteen or nineteen and a drawing done now that I'm in my sixties. It was about fear. I'm still filled with fear, but I have a lot more confidence in drawing and not thinking about mistakes. It's something I've thought about for a long time. You can't really make mistakes at a certain point. Of course there are quite a few drawings that you try to save but they end up in the trash can, unfortunately.

SS: It seems that most artists don't necessarily want to expose that. They want to move away from their earlier efforts. Works that you're making now, drawn and painted on top of your older drawings, retain some the earlier, more hesitant marks exposing the comparison. I don't know of anyone else who does that in the same way.

KJ: I'm not sure... I mean, I have drawings that I've just done in 2012, but I think it's very difficult for anybody to be completely honest, for many reasons. I try to be as straight or honest as possible, as far as things that have influenced me, not for anybody else but just for myself, I know where things are coming from. In the early sixties I remember looking at the Aztec and Meztec Codices. All these different kinds of cartoon cells of their rituals. These little men with squiggly things on their backs. I remember being fascinated with those when I was nineteen or twenty.

I was already out of high school when I got that small scholarship to Art Center School in 1962, and I went to Santa Monica Junior College and took academic classes and I also took art classes there. Then I went to Chouinard [Art Institute] in '64 for two years, and that's where I really started to struggle because at that time at Chouinard the hip art was minimalism, Robert Irwin, McCracken and all the rest. All of my teachers hated my drawings because I was still stuck in the Renaissance, up to John Sloan or Degas. I was trying to draw like that and I didn't really have the self-confidence or even the skill to challenge these professors. They would get mad at me, and say 'stop cross-

hatching.' I remember how they made fun of me. I was very confused and was rebelling in my own way I think. In '66 I joined the Marines because at that time everyone was being drafted. I was in the Marines from '66 to '69 and then when I got out I went back to Chouinard and, by that time, I'd grown up a little bit and had more confidence in my drawing ability and started drawing and painting and it was much better at that time.

SS: That's something difficult for artists to negotiate because most are just trying to make their artwork, but at the same time they're trying to engage with the art world and have people see their work and show their work. It puts you as an artist in a difficult position if you don't fit in with the current curatorial or critical trends, even if things are much more fragmented than they used to be. You have to stick firmly to what you believe, without much encouragement sometimes.

KJ: Yeah, I think a lot if it is just a matter of luck. I mean, I was raised in LA so I was pretty much stuck with the LA art scene. If I was raised in New York it might have been different, I don't know. But if you're raised in the Midwest you're kind of stuck there, and if you stay there then you're really stuck. So that's why people move to New York or wherever, it's just a matter of luck, being in the right place at the right time.

SS: Right, well I guess that's something personal.

KJ: Yeah.

SS: The war drawings are a mapping of activity that you're describing, whereas the other drawings and paintings are mapping your process, or psyche.

KJ: They're more connected to art history. The war drawings I don't think are connected to art history. They're about a game, a very serious game in my mind but still a game with a structure. It's a more or less rigid structure. I'm not sure if rigid is the right word, but they have a certain formula, certain rules that I've made up that they have to follow. The other drawings are wide open, whatever is going on in my head, whatever sexual, violence, but also just dreams or things in general that are occurring. You could also relate them to African, Polynesian, or Mexican art, all of these things are just jumbled together with Western European art, and also Chinese and Japanese drawings... all those things sort of bunch up in my head and selectively come out.

SS: I always find it was interesting that you're influenced by everything from Renaissance Art to Aztec and Meztec Codices, but also Disney comics. I remember you saying that cartoons were one of the first things you tried drawing.

KJ: Yeah, as a child...

SS: ...growing up in California.

KJ: Growing up in California, comic books were, more or less, my literary education. Disney comics especially. I was drawing Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck – Donald Duck was always difficult because his bill was hard to draw – Lady and the Tramp... Actually all the way through high school I wanted to be a cartoonist until at some point I finally realized I didn't want to make cartoons.

SS: I don't see that in your work as much as the other references.

KJ: Well, I pretty much erased a lot of Disney. I don't think Walt Disney would be very happy with my work now.

SS: Disney comics are one thing, but a lot of other comics and cartoons are very dark, very humorous.

KJ: Yeah, in the sixties that all changed. I think even the first Mickey Mouse was more rat looking, but of course Walt Disney had this whole idea – sort of like the Ozzie and Harriet idea of the fifties and the early sixties – of America and this good, nuclear family... mom, dad and two kids, with no problems, and I grew up that way. I grew up believing all that, and my family was a little like Ozzie and Harriet. I had a sister, mom and dad, very middle-class, nice little family. And of course in the mid-sixties all of that suddenly changed with the Vietnam War and long hair and The Beatles, The Stones, and this culture, and it was part of my waking up. You realized things weren't quite as nice as you'd thought.

SS: The American idea or ideal at that time was so particular and it didn't leave any room for anything else, so all of that had to come out somewhere.

KJ: Yeah, both of us probably, and you're much younger, but it was a white, middle-class childhood and obviously I know for many other people in America at that time, it wasn't the same. It was awful. I know I had a very protected childhood. I'm just getting back to all this other art that is another aspect of my experience.

SS: You began to filter all of those images.

KJ: Yeah those images start to come out I guess.

SS: In Louise Glück's book, *Averno*, there's a poem called "Crater Lake." In it she writes, "There was a war between good and evil, we decided to call the body good, and that made death evil. It turned the soul against death completely." In this book the crater, besides being a point of transition between two worlds, is the only source of light and heat in a desolate landscape. Virgil and a number of other poets have referenced this geographical site as well. In his poem, "Aeneid," Virgil represented it as the entrance to Hades. He considered it a demonic place, a point of connection

between the land of the living and the land of the dead. Both he and Glück suggest, though, that it is not simply an entrance to the underworld but is a point of connection between the underworld and the earthly plane, although not necessarily one that invites accord between the two worlds.

KJ: I think she also talks about how there are three levels: Heaven, Earth, and the underworld. And there are these different connections but, in a certain sense as you're talking about it, for me to interpret Louise Glück or Virgil, I wouldn't want to do that. But when you're drawing, it's like a living thing making this mark, which is actually dead...

SS: The mark is dead once it's made.

KJ: Yeah, once it's made it's dead. There's something there... maybe it's all bullshit, I don't know.

SS: What made you first move from drawing to the performance work?

KJ: It was around '72 when I was in graduate school at Otis. From around '69-'72 I was painting some abstract things but mostly frogs with big purple penises, flying and smoking, frogs with big breasts, naked frogs basically. They were aggressive and sexual, in sort of happy colors, probably influenced by [Chaim] Soutine or some Expressionist, maybe a bit of Francis Bacon but mostly Soutine, with very loose brush strokes. And then there was a certain point where I was too good at it; it was too easy to do that frog painting. I ended up rolling a bunch of them up. I think I sold a few. I don't know where they are now, somebody stole one from my studio at Chouinard's. Then when I went to graduate school in '72 I got bored with it and stopped. There was one art teacher, Vincent Robbins, who was one of my advisors at Otis in the graduate class, and he said "Kim, why are you competing with a couple of thousand years of painters? Why don't you just try doing installation or performance art?" And around '72 I read the article in *Time Magazine* by Robert Hughes about the Viennese artist, Hermann Nitsch, and all those guys. I also started reading about Eva Hesse, and I knew about Robert Morris and Bruce Nauman, and I started looking more closely at his work, and Vito Acconci and Chris Burden, who were doing their own performances. So I became much more aware of all of these things that were happening in Europe and New York mostly, and I thought wow this is really great. I started investigating materials like tar, foam rubber, wax, cheesecloth, and I began making sculpture out of that, and from there it was around '73 when I started to attach them to my body to activate them more. My girlfriend at the time took photographs of me, mostly on the roof of a studio I had in Venice [CA], or in a friend's apartment, of me attaching various sculptures that I had made out of bamboo, cheesecloth, wax, foam rubber, onto my body, and then from there in late '74 I made the first structure. I started to wear it around Venice and Santa Monica. Everybody knew me in Venice, because of my long hair I looked very weird.

SS: Most people didn't have long hair then?

KJ: Most people did but at that time my hair was very thick and bushy...

SS: Jesus-like?

KJ: Very Jesus-like, sort of crazy guy. So, even though I was actually very timid, I was pretty much accepted by all the bikers and the drug-dealers and the psychopaths. They were all kind of like 'that's just crazy Kim' walking around with mud and sticks attached to him in Venice. I was just like one of them in their minds, so it was fairly easy for me to do it there. That environment was actually fairly accepting of my presence. I probably could've gotten away with it in New York, maybe, but a lot of my getting way with it at that time was because the locals there just put up with me. By the time I moved to New York in '82 and I started doing it first in SoHo, near all the art galleries, it was more acceptable to be a crazy artist I guess. But in the early seventies, even when I did the Wilshire Boulevard walk in '76, the cops stopped me, but they didn't arrest me. I was afraid of that. I did a lot of walks, maybe once a week. In '79, for 80 Langton Street, I walked across the Golden Gate Bridge from sunrise to sunset. I was a lot stronger then. I did twelve hour pieces. When I walked through San Francisco most of the people who really got into it were homeless types. There was one guy who followed me on Market Street saying "this guy's from Jupiter." He really loved me. It depends on where you did it. If I did it in the Midwest or in Missouri or somewhere maybe they would've shot me or something.

SS: So you were reading more about European and New York performance artists than artists you experienced first-hand in California?

KJ: No, I hadn't met the performance people [in LA]. I knew about Barbara Smith and maybe a couple of others in LA. In 1978 Barbara Smith invited me to do a performance at LAICA [Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art]. I did a performance there with Paul McCarthy and Linda Montano. That's where I met Paul and Barbara Smith. Barbara is great. She's one of those people who helped Chris Burden early on. She was part of F Space, where Chris Burden did his shoot piece, and I also met Nancy Buchanan. Barbara helped me and a lot of other artists, she helped Paul McCarthy early on. So suddenly I was part of the performance art scene, and in '78 *High Performance* magazine started, so I met the people through that. *High Performance* basically saved performance art in certain ways. You'd just send in black and white photographs of your performance and text describing the performance and they'd give you two pages in the magazine. There was no editing. That section of the magazine was called "Artist Chronicles." It just had to be that you'd done the performance during that year and they'd publish it. It went on for quite a long time, until the eighties.

There were a lot of things happening in LA and San Francisco that weren't really talked about. I mean in New York and in Europe there were magazines and critics that were talking about it but in LA you'd do these pieces and your friends would see them. Even

if you had a show everybody would come look at it but that was it. That's part of what I'm talking about. Being in the right place at the right time. The first performance I did where the art world actually paid attention was with Carp, which was run by Barbara Burden and Marilyn Nix. They sponsored performances by various artists, including Chris Burden, Bruce Nauman, Alexis Smith. I felt very lucky that they noticed my work and asked me to do a performance. I talked about doing the Wilshire Boulevard Walk, and my first idea was that I wanted to do it at night, from sunset to sunrise, the eighteen miles. I think it was Barbara Burden who said "Why don't you do it twice?" So I said okay and I did it on January 28 – which is my birthday – 1976, from sunrise to sunset, from East to West on Wilshire Boulevard, which is eighteen miles. And a week later, on February 4, I did it from sunset to sunrise, through the night, so it was the full span. At first we got out a map and we thought about all the logistics of doing that piece and thought about hiring a photographer and a film crew, but we realized it'd just be a film shoot if they followed me the whole way. It would just be a film. So we decided not to do that and to just have the photographer meet me at different parts of Wilshire Boulevard and snap the photographs get back in his car and meet me a few miles later. We also thought about asking the police for permission because we worried I'd be arrested at some point, for being weird I guess. We immediately all agreed that that was giving too much power to the state to ask for permission, so we just did it. I had my ID and I thought okay, this is an art show, this is my driver's license, so we didn't ask for any permission. The only problem was during the daytime walk, when I got to Beverly Hills on Wilshire Boulevard I stopped in front of the Wells Fargo bank and lifted the pantyhose up and had the structure off and had my long hair sort of leaking out of the pantyhose which was stretched out and I was surrounded by five cop cars and heard "Okay son, what's going on?" I explained and they said "Okay, just keep walking," they didn't want to deal with it.

SS: Just don't stop in front of the bank (laughs).

KJ: Yeah, I was this muddy guy, 'all right just keep walking.' So it was fine. But the date is important. I've used that date at different points and January 28 is important to me because it's my birthday. By coincidence I came back from overseas and flew into El Toro Marine Base in California on January 28, 1968. It was just a coincidence that I came back from overseas on my birthday. That is important to me.

SS: So it was eight years later, in '76, that you did the Wilshire Boulevard Walks.

KJ: Yeah, I guess it was.

SS: You said you were in the Marines from '66 to '69. And you were in Vietnam.

KJ: Yeah, I joined the Marines in June of '66 and I got out three months early in April of '69. The tour of duty was thirteen months. I went over on January 1, 1967. They took us on a troop ship, called the S.S. Walker, and I think it took 25 days to go across. We landed in Okinawa, where we stayed for a few months. Then I joined up with the 9th

Marine Amphibious Brigade, and from there I joined up with 3-4, a battalion landing team. We took a small ship from Okinawa to Dong Ha, and then went up river to the Marine Base in Dong Ha. That's where I was stationed. So that's my military experience.

SS: You mentioned when you were talking about the Aztec and Mezttec Codices that some of the drawings include figures wearing strange objects on their backs and that you had seen those as early as the 1960s.

KJ: In 1962 or 1963 I remember reading about them in the college library at Santa Monica and seeing photographs in the various books they had about Mexican and Central American art.

SS: Did you think about any of those things when you first started developing the structure?

KJ: I remember being really fascinated by those things but I didn't really make the connection with my art for a long time, until the early seventies when it started to make more sense. I was looking at them and it sunk in, and a lot of African art that I would look at just sort of seemed interesting to me but I didn't actively try to use it in my art. I was more obsessed with Renaissance art at that time.

SS: So when you started making those structures it wasn't a conscious thought?

KJ: Well, when I started making sculptures I was more influenced by Eva Hesse, Robert Morris, and Bruce Nauman and performances by artists like Chris Burden, Vito Acconci, and early Bruce Nauman. In January 1968, when they sent me on R&R, called "Rest and Recreation." They give you five days where you can go wherever you want. I chose Hong Kong. I remember seeing the scaffolding for the skyscrapers. It's all bamboo, or it was. Apparently it's very safe and it's really beautiful. I remember being fascinated by that but I couldn't quite connect it to my art. When I came back in the seventies, after I got out of the service and was back in school, I remember looking at the star maps that the Polynesians, the Marshall Islanders made. They made bamboo or wood structures like a map of the waves and the currents and the stars, and they used them on their boats to go from island to island. It was a structure that was tied together, and made of bamboo or thin wood, like a lattice.

SS: They would use these as a kind of map?

KJ: I think it would show where a star was in relation to the current and the island positions, and they would have to memorize these things. That's apparently how they were able to go from island to island. At the Met there's one of these star maps from the Marshall Islands that I have a photograph of.

SS: And that was something that you saw afterwards? It wasn't something you saw

KJ: Actually, my friend Megan took photographs and she said she was a little surprised at how fast I was, but the second time I did it she was ready for me.

SS: It's different too based on the environment that you're doing it in and the kind of audience you have. For the first performances that you did the audience was whoever happened to be on the streets. This recent one was the same in that the audience was whoever happened to be there. But it was done in Chelsea in Manhattan where there are lots of galleries, and people's awareness of art and performance art has changed to the degree that some people were really surprised and reacted as if thinking, 'what's going on?' but other people were like 'oh, it's an art happening.'

KJ: Yeah that's the obvious difference between doing it in a museum or gallery where people just say 'oh this is art' so it's fine, and doing it in SoHo in the early eighties, it was a little weird but it's art so it's fine. But when I did it in Chinatown I had older Chinese people looking at me like 'what the fuck is that' and laughing at me. When I did it in San Francisco, on the way back to 80 Langton Street, it was the end of the day, this was in '79, most of the people that saw it were not artists they were just people on the street in San Francisco. There were different reactions. Mostly friendly reactions. I remember coming back from doing that piece. It was getting dark, I was walking back to 80 Langton Street and it was a pretty rough neighborhood. I saw these two very large bikers sitting on the stoop across the street, and I remember walking by and thinking 'oh shit, these guys are gonna give me a hard time.' I was just trying to walk by, trying to be inconspicuous with this big structure on me. I heard this voice growl at me "hey, hey you." I turned around and said "yes?" and I heard, "I respect you. Anyone that walks around like that I respect." I said "thank you" and I continued walking and was thankful they didn't decide to beat me up. They didn't really care much about art I don't think. They probably thought I was just some crazy guy and they liked the way I looked I guess.

SS: Like somebody not trying to fit in.

KJ: I guess, walking around like that I look like an outsider even though I'm part of the art world. I guess, I don't know, bikers feel like they're outsiders. Certainly they're not part of the main stream, working in a bank.

SS: And they've chosen to be outsiders.

KJ: Yes. I can imagine they chose their lifestyles and they looked at me and said 'there's somebody else who chose his lifestyle. I respect that.' But you know each case is different. When I did it in Germany in Hamburg, there were these art clubs. The great thing about Europe is there are older and younger people in these art clubs, and there were these little old ladies looking up at me when I was doing a performance and they would ask me really polite questions and were just curious about this mudman standing before them. It really depends on where you are.

being destroyed which I've done with several pieces. Usually I'll save my work but that's another way of working and making art.

SS: You recently did a performance for a show at Barbara Gladstone Gallery ["The Spirit Level"], curated by Ugo Rondinone. That was the first one you had done since...

KJ: I think the last time I did it was at the Henry Gallery in Seattle.

SS: You did that performance in the museum only and didn't go outside, right?

KJ: Right, that was only inside the museum. But for the one that was part of the group show at Barbara Gladstone Gallery, I walked back and forth between her 21st Street and 24th Street galleries. So the last one was in 2012.

SS: You doing a performance like that is a bit like working over the drawings that you started so many years ago. You're doing the performance now but it's built upon the earlier ones and is different now.

KJ: Yeah, this is what I've talked about, probably influenced by the paintings that Rembrandt did of himself as a young man and then himself as an older man. I started doing performances when I was around 29 or 30. The difference between my body when I was 29 or 30 and my body now when I'm 68, is quite big. I'm weaker and the body changes, everything changes. I like that idea. It's the same performance, the same person, but a different body.

SS: You did a good job though!

KJ: Thank you. I couldn't do it for twelve hours, though.

SS: It took twelve hours to go eighteen miles, and you stopped once in a while.

KJ: Yeah, I stopped. The thing I realized after doing the twelve-hour piece, it was almost like I was on a train. It was actually, in a certain way kind of easy, because I was only going a few miles an hour. But when I stopped to rest it was like I was getting off the train and resting, and then getting back on. Whenever I do the performances, I'm usually thinking, 'why the fuck am I doing this again, this is such a pain in the butt' and afterwards I'm tired and I'm glad it's over. But when I'm doing it, I almost get into some kind of trance, it's almost like taking drugs, I think. Trance is the only word I can think of. In a way it was almost the same feeling when I did it in April 2012, it was much shorter, only a few blocks back and forth, but still it was that kind of excitement and the dread before I did it. And once I was into it this trance, and bringing back the thought of how your mind is becoming a sculpture I guess, at least in my mind.

SS: It seemed, by the way you were moving, that you got a momentum going and you didn't want to lose that momentum.

KJ: Actually, my friend Megan took photographs and she said she was a little surprised at how fast I was, but the second time I did it she was ready for me.

SS: It's different too based on the environment that you're doing it in and the kind of audience you have. For the first performances that you did the audience was whoever happened to be on the streets. This recent one was the same in that the audience was whoever happened to be there. But it was done in Chelsea in Manhattan where there are lots of galleries, and people's awareness of art and performance art has changed to the degree that some people were really surprised and reacted as if thinking, 'what's going on?' but other people were like 'oh, it's an art happening.'

KJ: Yeah that's the obvious difference between doing it in a museum or gallery where people just say 'oh this is art' so it's fine, and doing it in SoHo in the early eighties, it was a little weird but it's art so it's fine. But when I did it in Chinatown I had older Chinese people looking at me like 'what the fuck is that' and laughing at me. When I did it in San Francisco, on the way back to 80 Langton Street, it was the end of the day, this was in '79, most of the people that saw it were not artists they were just people on the street in San Francisco. There were different reactions. Mostly friendly reactions. I remember coming back from doing that piece. It was getting dark, I was walking back to 80 Langton Street and it was a pretty rough neighborhood. I saw these two very large bikers sitting on the stoop across the street, and I remember walking by and thinking 'oh shit, these guys are gonna give me a hard time.' I was just trying to walk by, trying to be inconspicuous with this big structure on me. I heard this voice growl at me "hey, hey you." I turned around and said "yes?" and I heard, "I respect you. Anyone that walks around like that I respect." I said "thank you" and I continued walking and was thankful they didn't decide to beat me up. They didn't really care much about art I don't think. They probably thought I was just some crazy guy and they liked the way I looked I guess.

SS: Like somebody not trying to fit in.

KJ: I guess, walking around like that I look like an outsider even though I'm part of the art world. I guess, I don't know, bikers feel like they're outsiders. Certainly they're not part of the main stream, working in a bank.

SS: And they've chosen to be outsiders.

KJ: Yes. I can imagine they chose their lifestyles and they looked at me and said 'there's somebody else who chose his lifestyle. I respect that.' But you know each case is different. When I did it in Germany in Hamburg, there were these art clubs. The great thing about Europe is there are older and younger people in these art clubs, and there were these little old ladies looking up at me when I was doing a performance and they would ask me really polite questions and were just curious about this mudman standing before them. It really depends on where you are.

SS: A certain maturity is knowing that you can do something new and you don't have to throw everything away. You don't have to throw away the old things just because you want to move forward.

KJ: Yeah, I think that's part of why it took me a long time to get the skill and the confidence to do what I wanted to do. That doesn't mean you'll be successful or not, it doesn't even mean you'll make good art, but at least in the last five or ten years or so, I feel I have much more confidence in my line than I did before. I remember I read something about Hokusai, I think he lived to be in his nineties, but just before he died he said 'if I could only live another ten years, I would be able to draw even better.' And he was a pretty amazing artist anyhow. That's why I love to draw.

SS: That's an interesting thing about today as compared to, well the sixties, a time of enormous change and upheaval. Which I guess you had to, everyone had to go through that in order to let go of so many outdated ways, but now we've come to the point where we can reincorporate worthwhile things from the past. Now things seem to be more openly a mix of old and new.

KJ: Yeah, now there are obviously a lot more artists. I don't think there's any one style, not that I know of.

SS: When we were talking yesterday about using this image as the book cover, you were saying that mudman made these drawings. Do you think about it in that way?

KJ: Yeah, it's not like I made the drawings when I had mud all over me and I was wearing the stick structure. But it was... it was mudman, it's me basically, it's Kim. I just have a different set of clothes on, so it's like a walking sculpture but it's still me. Just like the drawings are a part of me. I suppose there's a certain amount of anger in me, but that's just what I think about.

SS: Well, I always think of them as being beautiful.

KJ: Well that's good, that's how I think of them. Some people have a hard time with that. They used to think that Impressionist paintings were of people with a skin disease.

Christopher Knight, "What rose up out of the Mudman", *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 2007.

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2007-mar-30-et-mudman30-story.html>

Los Angeles Times

What rose up out of the Mudman

By CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT

MARCH 30, 2007

TIMES STAFF WRITER

A myth or legend is a story that is not factually true -- a fiction that conjures the supernatural. All societies fabricate them, to orient people toward a moral dimension that is real but elusive, natural but invisible to the naked eye.

Freud called them "public dreams." As personifications of collective social truths, myths can be as elaborate as a full-blown creation story, like the Iroquois Sky People or Genesis, and as childishly simplistic as George Washington and the cherry tree.

And then there is Mudman.

On Jan. 28, 1976, an apparition appeared on Wilshire Boulevard. A man slathered with mud carried on his back a big, unwieldy lattice, cobbled together from wooden slats, tree branches and lengths of bamboo daubed with paint and lashed with twine, black electrical tape and shredded cheesecloth. A human tumbleweed, Mudman was crowned with a nominal hat of scrunched foam rubber and sticks. A nylon stocking was pulled down over his head, obscuring his face. He could see us, but we couldn't see him.

Mudman appeared on a Wednesday at dawn at the corner of Grand Avenue, where he began his westward trek. At dusk he arrived at the Pacific Ocean. In between he passed through Wilshire's disparate neighborhoods -- commercial, civic and residential -- like some primitive organism traveling the city's spine on a mad return-journey to the sea. At Johnie's diner on the corner of Fairfax Avenue, Mudman stopped and met friends for coffee.

That small detail tells us something important about Kim Jones' creation of this mythic character, something further illuminated in the new exhibition at Cal State Los Angeles' Luckman Gallery. "Kim Jones: A Retrospective" brings together 10 sculptural constructions, 34 works on paper and 77 documentary photographs in a concise yet probing analysis of the artist's career. Together they underscore this disconcerting truth: Mudman is one mythic, legendary concatenation that is fact, not fiction.

Jones did not invent the genre of performance art, but he was a significant figure within its 1970s American efflorescence. When he performed, he was not acting a role. Whether on his 1976 "Wilshire Walk" -- undertaken on his 32nd birthday, he reversed the trip one week later in a second walk from the sea to downtown L.A. -- or in seemingly random appearances in his Venice neighborhood or, following a move to New York City in 1980, on downtown streets or the plaza at Lincoln Center, he was always being himself. His strange, attenuated appearance, at once attractive and repulsive, gave outward form to an inner dynamic.

Along Wilshire Boulevard, Jones' performance had no aesthetic frame of reference. It was just there, out on the sidewalk, moving with the flow of pedestrian traffic and turning heads.

At Luckman, the unwieldy backpack is shown wedged between a wall and a plain wooden chair, where the artist might sit to slip his arms through the foam-padded straps to hoist the apparatus onto his back. On the floor in front of the chair is a pair of heavily worn black motorcycle boots. The footwear is as notable for its ordinariness as the backpack is for its eccentricity.

At least since Van Gogh, shoes have symbolized the absent artist's humble presence in a work of art. Here the boots seem to be adding another layer: The weird-gear of the backpack is no less real -- and no more fictive -- than the everyday boots. Both are what Jones wears in his capacity as a human being who is an artist, and no substantive difference separates them.

Jointly organized by Luckman Gallery director Julie Joyce and Sandra Q. Firmin, gallery curator at the University at Buffalo, New York, where it was seen last fall, the show lays out Mudman's origins.

Long shelves line two walls on which documentary photographs are displayed. The first is an enlargement of a 1953 newspaper clipping in which Jane Powell and Gordon MacRae greet a little girl and a 9-year-old boy, Jones, on the Warner Bros. set of "Three Sailors and a Girl." Jones raises his leg to show Powell, a celebrated dancer, the heavy braces he wore as a result of a polio-like disease. The actors, according to the photo caption, are supporting the "Easter Seal campaign for crippled children."

Nearby, another photograph of a grinning Jones, now 11, shows him standing tall and straight before a blank white background. His feet seem stressed, but no braces encase his sturdy bare legs.

Jones, the artist, altered the clinical snapshot in 1999, using acrylic paint to transform his youthful boxer shorts into a tangle of intestines. They're extruded from his body and rise up around him on a rickety superstructure, creating an aura not unlike the latticework backpack.

As in most of the show's drawings, the prevailing paint-color is gray -- the middle ground between black and white, but rendered without a trace of light, deadened and inert. And frequently Jones' art carries multiple dates -- 1974-2004, say, or 1980-2003 -- since pieces were worked on over extended periods of time. They have a diary-like aspect.

Other photographs show Jones after he joined the Marines, at boot camp in San Diego and during his 1967-68 tour of duty in Vietnam. In one, his unit is done up in Mohawk haircuts and loincloths, mugging for the camera like a second-grade birthday party, all grown up, or a band of primitive warriors.

When Mudman emerges, he seems to be an outgrowth of these painful formative experiences. (Jones was 23 when he went to Dong Ha.) Extreme violence is common to myths, whether Beowulf or the Minotaur, and here the brutality blends the physical and psychological.

A familiar superhero legend takes an unexpected turn: The crippled child conquers debilitating juvenile trauma and becomes a Marine, American symbol of invincible masculinity; then he goes to war, where a second brutal transformation leaves behind a broken, burdened adult. Mudman is a kind of real-life Edward Scissorhands, minus the sentimental sweetness.

Jones made his mark with extreme performance art, and the drawings add only occasional illumination. A few other assemblage sculptures, including two that transform a toy tricycle and a shopping cart into something suggestive of military tanks crossed with paramedic gurneys, are also on view.

The most powerful is an evident self-portrait. "Little Marine" (1989-1999-2005) entombs a small toy soldier in a Mudman-like lattice and outfits the doll with enormous prosthetic legs. Standing 5 feet tall, it's impossible to play with.

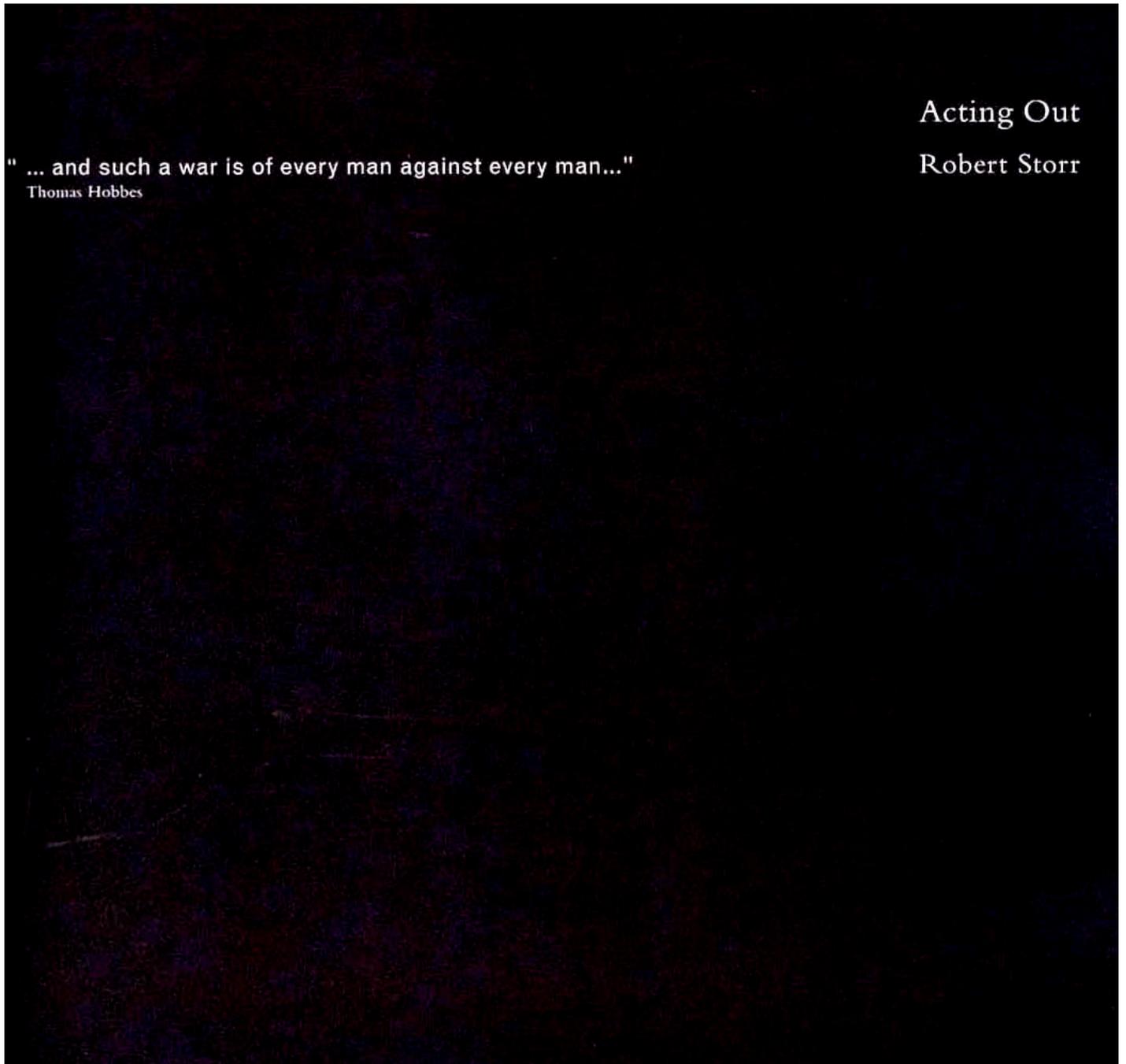
The Luckman show is also something of a homecoming, since Jones' most notorious performance, "Rat Piece," took place at Cal State L.A. just 13 days after his second "Wilshire Walk." Donning his dysfunctional Icarus ensemble in front of the assembled audience, he eventually unveiled a wire cage holding three live rats, which he doused with lighter fluid and set on fire. As they screamed so did Mudman, although only the animals died. The shocking performance ignited its own firestorm of controversy, which led to the gallery director's dismissal and a court case for the artist.

Even sight unseen, "Rat Piece" was cruel and it was stupid. The sacrifice of animals might be an ancient superstitious practice, and their covert daily torture a commonplace in our industrialized food supply. The immolation was no more cruel -- and far less stupid -- than any number of socially tolerated activities in the then-recent past, such as the American slaughter of Vietnamese civilians. But even a stark opposition to the mediation of their suffering, vaguely glimpsed in the back of television-saturated minds, could hardly justify an equally grotesque performance piece.

Mudman was not acting, since his performance art is not separated from his life. (In subsequent interviews, he explained how, in rat-infested Vietnamese military encampments, the horrid activity undertaken in the performance was common.) But it does not follow that the same erasure of a line between art and life exists for the audience. Some observers fled, and no one intervened to stop the killing. But that's no surprise; they were watching a performance, not life on the street.

The excellent catalog for the Luckman exhibition tackles the problematic "Rat Piece" head-on -- and thoughtfully -- in the context of pervasive violence and war. It's timeliness is palpable. But even now, 31 years after the fact, a certain skittishness prevails. Due to space limitations, several works shown in Buffalo have been trimmed for the presentation here, including the grainy half-hour video documentation of the notorious performance.

Robert Storr, "Acting Out", *Mudman: The Odyssey of Kim Jones*, ed. Sandra Q Firmin and Julie Joyce, 2007, p.85-106.



Meet the artist and the art.

In the first instance they would seem to be one and the same. Imagine a trim, well-built man of medium height walking on a sidewalk. In some cases his gait may be more like walking in place, a slow shifting of positions within a relatively small radius defined in part by the man's own choreographic sense, in part by the loose crowd that tends to gather when he makes an appearance. In other instances the walk may last for hours and miles, with passing cars and wary pedestrians on their own trajectories being the only witnesses. That people should stop and look, or at least rubberneck, is guaranteed by the man's trappings: a slack loincloth, a stocking mask that obscures his facial features, brown mud slathered over his otherwise naked body, and, on his back and shoulders, a towering contraption made of bound wooden branches that is a cross between scaffolding and a harness. The combination of elements makes the man at once slightly alarming and oddly vulnerable, an enigmatic icon of modesty coupled with exhibitionism, alienation fused with an improbable sociability. For despite his outlandish getup, the man's demeanor is consistently friendly, as he patiently answers the questions of onlookers or at least patiently parries them when they veer too far from his understanding of what he is doing there and why.

In the terminology of contemporary art, the man Kim Jones is a "living sculpture." As such he belongs to a wayward lineage. It includes the sometime flaneur Günter Brus, who in the 1960s donned a proper suit and tie, painted himself all over (complete with a bifurcating line running from head to toe), and then traversed Vienna on foot until the police of that conservative city arrested him in effect for the crime of being *unheimlich*, or uncanny. Also in this company is the British team of Gilbert & George. During the late 1960s and on into the 70s, they too took to posing in proper suits and ties (occasionally after painting themselves silver or gold), as well as to singing Victorian songs in galleries or standing before outdoor vistas in which they were photographed or drawn in as genteel protagonists.

Yet—while Brus (like his Austrian Actionist colleagues Hermann Nitsch and Otto Mühl) was for the most part aggressive in his performances and the

arrière-garde vaudevillian duo of Gilbert & George passive-aggressive—Jones, a moving target and a roving cause of unease, is harder to define. He does not exactly confront viewers, and he does not exactly tease them either. Rather he interacts with them aided by a portable blind that partially shelters even as it exposes him, a full body mask that allows him to study his interlocutors at least as closely as they scrutinize him. Although tension suffuses the encounter, it does not electrify the air between Jones and the viewer so much as hover around him like a nimbus emanating from and drawn through his wooden labyrinth. It is an emotional microclimate flowing in and out of the core of his being without erupting beyond the boundaries set by the framework he carries. The structure functions like a collapsed cage that simultaneously contains and displays otherwise intangible feelings. It corporeally binds them to their source even as that source, the artist, is partially disguised to inhibit attempts at reading his expressions in order to interpret the presiding subjectivity and turn ambient uncertainties into a verifiable psychological profile.

Now turn away from the man and enter into a gallery down the block.

There are pencil drawings resembling maps. Sometimes the size of a small blueprint, sometimes that of a mural, they might be inscribed on paper or directly on the wall. And they are maps, but of no identifiable place. The rudimentary topographical codes that compose them are equally puzzling. They consist of compound brackets, clustered lozenges inside what appear to be architectural contours, small pronged trapezoids each labeled with an X or a dot, large long forms that seem to be bundled tubes, and much else in the same schematic vein. The drawings are economical, blunt, sure, and energetic but devoid of any obvious flourishes. That lack of added stylization coincides with the purposefulness of the imagery. Although fanciful, these are not pictures for delectation but working diagrams. Although playful in intent, the game they record is a war of attrition. The only graphic embellishments to be found are signs of loss. These are owed to insistent erasures whose muffled explosions of tone all but obliterate some of the shapes that were so painstakingly rendered that the dent of the initial pencil markings and a residue of lead invariably survives as ghosts.

To recent generations raised on seamlessly morphing digital gimmickry, the radically simplified, abstract format of these fantasy conflicts will no doubt seem primitive. However, it is precisely abstraction's omission of naturalistic detail that opens passageways to heightened identification with the struggle between X and dot men.

This need to supply information not actually described creates a charged current between the maker and the picture, the picture and the viewer. And absent the sound effects that video games automatically provide, it is in character with such bellicose projections that maker and viewer will likely provide these mentally, if not audibly. At least if they are or were boys for whom visions of battle and guttural noises come almost instinctively. All of which is to say that insofar as these drawings may at a distance recall the cartography of Land art or the geometric layouts of Minimal and Conceptual art—and without question these tendencies are manifest—they take on a different, decidedly gestural aspect when seen up close and, like all gesturalisms, a performative one too. Yet we have not entered the terrain of existentialist cancellation (Alberto Giacometti carving and eroding an image) or of expressionist agon (Willem de Kooning outlining, dismembering, then scraping away an image). But we are watching an adjacent territory being charted.

In addition, from the 1970s onward Jones has produced and revised graphic works of other types. Notable among them have been complex figurative tableaux featuring raunchy nudes and antic monsters—some recall 1960s Bay Area "head comix," while others display the sinuous draftsmanship of the late John Altoon, a Los Angeles-based artist like Jones at the time—as well as retouched photographs with much the same iconography overlaid on pin-up pictures, fashion shots, and self-portraits. Unless one was looking at a drawing where Jones's alter ego Mudman actually appears, one might not suspect that the often delicately delineated if often indelicately imagined works on paper on which he labors either intermittently over years, or more or less continuously over weeks and months, were in fact the product of the same artist. But the distinctions between rough and refined have more to do with the chosen material—pen and ink arabesques, pencil incrustations, bravura paint strokes, or twisting branches tied together in intricate webs—than with the basic syntax of his compositions, which almost always involves progressive elaboration bordering on the baroque.

There are other types of sculpture, too. For example, plastic scooters and tricycles transformed by sticks and brown packing tape and hung on the wall are trailed by graphite bursts of imagery like drag racers spewing exhaust and throwing sparks. Packing tape is also the adhesive binder for clusters of twigs to which plastic miniature soldiers are attached, making each a fierce spiny ball like some primitive form of anti-personal device. In swarms or squadrons, the imaginary level of threat they pose increases exponentially, yet the toy aspect lent by the little men with guns keeps them from crossing over into literal endangerment. There are also variants of his Mudman costume: old shirts framed

with wooden armatures and emblazoned with war maps such that the wearer would be straight-jacketed by impending conflagration much as a suicide bomber wraps himself in the very thing that will atomize him. Then there are books in which images are mounted as they would be in reliquaries or illuminated manuscripts, though the heavily constructed covers are more closely akin to the prickly carapaces of sea creatures and reptilian predators or to fetish objects of biker culture. One book is rubbed with human shit, adding an extra layer of tactile and aromatic repulsion to what is already at the limits of what Giacometti called "a disagreeable object."

Thus far I have tried to describe what one sees when confronting—or when confronted by—Jones's art or Jones-as-art. There is a back story to it all—actually several. They begin with his early experience of a crippling childhood illness that transformed him into a poster boy for Perthes disease. This unwanted apprenticeship in physical suffering and the lessons it taught about the fragility of the body and its structures are of course fundamental to Mudman's identity, since what defines him first and foremost is his exoskeleton, the artificial brace that reinforces him even as it constrains and bears down on him. Jones's stint as an angelic all-American emblem of that illness may, in turn, partially explain his attraction to public situations and, given his "exceptional" characteristics, his ease in dealing with them. In the first instance, this "exceptionality" was imposed upon him by his damaged health; since then he has chosen and elaborated it as a part of his self-re-creation.

The other chapter of Jones's life that directly informs his work is his tour of duty in "in country" during the Vietnam War. There was a time when the memories of America's drawn-out misadventure in Southeast Asia were so vivid and so loaded that the mere mention of the war sent a jolt of recognition, anxiety, and piercingly equivocal meaning through anything—story, picture, film, song—associated with it. That period lasted until the 1980s, when it became national policy at the highest levels of government to overcome the "Vietnam syndrome" and put it "all behind us," as if history were an object one could shelve and walk away from rather than being a wound whose scar one carried for life. Afterwards there was an interval during which mention of the war triggered reflex declarations of patriotic support for the "boys" who served and a commitment to bring home the M.I.A.s—those reported "missing in action" but rumored to be prisoners of war—followed by blank or troubled expressions of partial forgetfulness, denial, and, especially for succeeding post-Vietnam generations, outright incomprehension. Now, the "Vietnam syndrome" is back with all the ambivalent thoughts and feelings it compounds. It haunts the present as new miscalculations, new

delusions, and new ghosts are added to cohorts of the old: the jungles of Asia have turned into the deserts of the Middle East, "gooks" have become "terrorists," and we, the United States, have become the keepers of unregistered prisoners in undocumented locations. As a result, history has come back off the shelf, old wounds have reopened, and new ones are daily being inflicted.

With this as background, consideration of Jones's war in Vietnam, once automatic and horribly fresh in mind and then almost anachronistic, is reconjugated from the past into the present tense. Some details stand out. In 1976 Jones staged the burning of live rats, a grisly pastime of his unit in Vietnam. This event brought down the wrath of people who judged it a gratuitous act of cruelty towards animals when in fact it was a ritual demonstration of the dehumanization of war. Establishing a continuum between the organized destruction of life that is combat and the recreational sadism of those whose instinct for killing has been brought to the surface and focused by intensive training, Jones's performance simultaneously aligned the statistical abstraction of the daily body counts broadcast on television "back home" during the fighting with a foul synesthetic exercise in actual slaughter complete with the smell of seared flesh. More recently, Jones reprised the imagery in the façade he created for the 2004 SITE Santa Fe Biennial. On that occasion, he built a grid of branches across the entire front of the gallery in which the exhibition was mounted, hanging on it a variety of maimed baby dolls, taped clusters of sticks and plastic soldiers, and hundreds of life-sized black plastic rats that squeaked when squeezed. At the opening, Jones had assistants man barbecues on which they cooked—or rather, scorched—hot dogs that were tossed out to, and often at, the attendant crowd of art-loving party goers. In this second performance, no explicit allusions were made to Vietnam, real rats were replaced by novelty-shop surrogates, and the odor of carbonized dead things was substituted with that of overdone mass-produced sausages.

The temporal, artistic, and emotional span between these two incineration projects provides a measure against which to calibrate Jones's work overall and a further caution against reading its psychological import as an all but unmediated product of the traumas Jones experienced. On the face of it, his artful ambushing of the audience argues against any such view. He is not just acting out, but also acting in and on himself the better to provoke, probe, and so act in and on the viewer. That is to say he works through his own feelings of aggression, disgust, and complicity by sublimating them into an overt theatricality that fundamentally recasts them as a "boyish" tragicomedy. As such his work revolves around grotesque scenarios capable not only of transferring the content he has extracted from experience and from within his own troubled

soul to the viewer, who finds himself identifying with them through horrid fascination, but also of projecting a destabilizing sense of play to which even actively resistant viewers tend to succumb.

If I have explicitly defined the viewer as male, it is only to underscore the degree to which the fantasies and realities Jones treats have, until recently in our society, been typically "masculine" rather than "feminine." Other societies have well-established traditions of the female warrior, and it remains to be seen in the United States if a "gender-neutral" armed forces will change things. Certainly there is no bar to women participating in Jones's games. Nevertheless, it seems inarguable that the plastic soldiers Jones deploys in his sculptures are tokens of a recycled boyhood and its belligerent daydreams. And though not all boys are prone to such things, a majority of men will immediately recognize them as fetishes of their past lives. Meanwhile, the phrase "boyish tragicomedy" intentionally echoes the previous reference to "the 'boys' who served" in Vietnam, since it is not for the most part men who are sent to war but boys who are recruited to the campaigns men design. And it is such boys-to-men who bring their immature enthusiasm for adventure to the fighting and their restlessness (and occasionally their spontaneous vandalism) to the hours of enforced inactivity that set the rhythm of military life, as *Jarhead* (2003), Anthony Swofford's ambivalent memoir of his never-consummated service as a sniper in the first Gulf War, makes plain.

In this connection it is significant to point out that Jones's war drawings originated in late childhood and early adolescence, long before real soldiering was even a prospect. It was some time after returning from duty in Vietnam that he resumed the practice as a regressive exorcism in which relived violence is replaced by mock combat. For many of Jones's contemporaries, the war was remote in the sense that it was witnessed on television and read about it in the papers, though its domestic effects were deeply disturbing and direct. Yet even for those who have never been under fire, a strange inversion of perspectives renders the violence of war accessible through grown-up reengagement with his drawings. One enters into them hoping to retrieve an innocent delight in make-believe carnage but soon discovers that one is not building fortresses at the beach or in the snow, nor roaming the fields where weekend reenactors ambush one another, nor sitting at a table where maps and counters have been laid out for armchair generals. Instead a kind of reverse alchemy occurs in Jones's drawings, as the "gold" of reverie is transmuted into lead. Thus the artist's methodical but remorseless hand tells the viewer that innocence has been lost forever, such that every erased X or dot tank simultaneously becomes

a cancelled memory of carefree mayhem and a palimpsest of decimation and destruction. And since the same hand controls both armies, triumph for one side of the subject's ludic identity necessarily entails liquidation of the other. And so defeat hounds victory, forming a vicious circle from which no definitive winner or unified self can emerge.

As absurdist purges, the two rat-burning performances also bracket adult and childhood realities. The first was an unpredictable burst of actual killing, the second essentially a "food fight"; the former was hideously "raw," the latter choreographed toward comic excess and so "precooked," then overcooked, like the wieners themselves. At two extremes of the metaphoric, each contains elements of the other, and neither is as literal in poetic and psychological resonance as they might initially appear. That is to say that both oscillate between the repellent and the ludicrous, the off-putting and the subversively inclusive. Thus, with rare insight borne of an acute instinct for the fault lines of the psyche and of hardships relatively few have endured, Jones puts his finger on widely shared and deeply disconcerting ambiguities that pit our better nature against our worst, the desire for whimsical release against an unshakeable dread inspired by the realization that we are trapped in mazes, structures, and bodies we cannot escape. Once having found that knot of nerves, he presses hard.

To engage with any action or image belonging to Jones's repertoire of ordeals, assaults, and double-edged fun comes at the price of tacitly assuming some of his burdens. Or rather, of admitting that while less visibly and perhaps lightly, we, better disguised because of our more conventional clothing, have been shouldering our own part of them all along. In sum, his is an invitation to guilty knowledge of how lousy the world can be and how puny, miserable, ignoble, and finally ridiculous is the fate of the ordinary person caught up by forces he can only pretend to control in the realm of the imaginary (and even then cannot channel away from repeated disasters). Make no mistake, there is much visual wit in what Jones does, as well as moments of disarming intimacy. For like a mesmerizing nomad on the street or in the subway—both have been Mudman's territory, and he is of that tribe as much as he belongs to any performance tradition—Jones's manner when accosting us can be surprisingly gentle and welcome, a sign of mutuality from epitomized dimensions of our own being that in their near nakedness would ordinarily frighten us, a believably "magical"—because frankly contemporary rather than falsely archaic—crystallization of primal states.

These are among the rewards he and his work consistently provide, along with the formal rigor, lurking delicacy of touch, and bizarre beauty that imbue

his generally improvised and frequently "ugly" choices of imagery and materials. Nevertheless, the universe Jones inhabits remains a basically Hobbesian one. There the innate instincts and antagonisms that drive human behavior—including the battle of the sexes, which is the main subject of those drawings that do not portray military battles—leave little hope for the sovereignty of Reason. Moreover, departing from the example of Joseph Beuys and other would-be modern shamans, Jones offers no healer's nostrums, no utopian alternatives to the ongoing strife that both surrounds and emanates from us. "Force and fraud are, in times of war, the two cardinal virtues," Hobbes wrote. In just such times, and we seem never to get beyond them—with the result that the artist's larger themes are always current, indeed urgent, and never fade as the topical, no matter how searing, inevitably does—Jones's art counters with authenticity and eccentric grace.

Sandra Q. Firmin, "Lines in Time and Space", *Mudman: The Odyssey of Kim Jones*, ed. Sandra Q Firmin and Julie Joyce, 2007, p.107-118

Lines in Time and Space

Sandra Q. Firmin

"My father's right arm ended not in a hand but, at the elbow, in a bony swelling."¹ Thus begins *The Gift of Stones*, Jim Crace's 1988 novel about a community of stoneworkers on the eve of the Bronze Age. Crace's narrator is a little girl whose father spins an inexhaustible string of explanations, analogies, and similes for his missing limb: "It came away at birth," "It was torn free by an animal," "Think of a pollard tree in silhouette," "The indented scar was like those made in the ice by boys with stones."² Such a storyteller mode can be detected in the performances, sculptures, drawings, and short stories of Kim Jones. Jones delights in associative play, fibs, and revisiting a story from multiple angles, especially as it is told differently through objects, pictures, and words. In *The Gift of Stones*, the father's disfigurement is a necessary feature that positions him at the fringes of normative society. Since he cannot be a productive worker, he slips into the role of performer and prophet who is known to attach oblique meanings to social customs and day-to-day encounters. Throughout Jones's body of work one encounters similarly maimed characters whose absent limbs are visible markers of their peripheral and mystical status.

Imagination and deformity were knotted together from the start by Crace and Jones through childhood events. Two noteworthy moments in Jones's youth linger in his memory and inform the content of his work. The first was his confinement to a wheelchair and then leg braces from ages seven to ten because of Perthes, a polio-like illness that caused deterioration in his hip bones. Growing up in Venice, Mar Vista, and Santa Monica, he remembers spending most of his time in bed while he was sick: "I play games, read comic books, draw, and make animals and people out of modeling clay...Sometimes my bed becomes an ocean. I slip the wool blanket over my head and pretend I'm under water."³ The second memory involves his grandfather, also wheelchair-bound after losing his arms and legs as a result of an injury received fighting in the first World War. When Jones's friends would ask his grandfather why he did not have any arms or legs, he would, eyes twinkling, caution them against chewing their finger- and toenails.⁴

Jones, the adult, has learned the lessons of the storyteller. The gravitational pull of the outsider and a devotion to analogies reach an apotheosis in *Mudman*,

who came into being in 1974 during the heyday of the Southern California performance art movement. Jones fabricated a towering lattice structure out of slabs of wood held together with paint, cloth, electrical tape, and, lastly, shellac, which he says gave it a sticky gold luminescence like the wings of an insect.⁵ Caked in mud, he would walk around Los Angeles, Santa Monica, and Venice with the immense structure strapped to his back. It was not until he moved to New York in 1982, however, that art critic Kim Levin started referring to Jones's construction as Mudman in the "Choices" section of the *Village Voice*.

Over the course of the last thirty years, Jones has become practically synonymous with his alter ego. Most of the literature on his work has focused exclusively on this striking figure along with Jones's Vietnam War experience, with cursory attention paid to his drawings and sculpture; even less consideration has been given to his writings. Mudman's gangly husk has invited comparisons to the homeless, camouflaged soldiers, peasants, superheroes, and shamans, whereas Jones describes Mudman as a walking sculpture influenced by Eva Hesse and Bruce Nauman's organic abstractions.⁶ Nothing is ever so simple, and he has also let slip other inspirations such as bamboo scaffolding he saw in Hong Kong in 1968, which latched onto the tall buildings under construction like prosthetics.⁷

Mudman's indeterminate form invites a multiplicity of symbolic possibilities that constantly fluctuate according to Jones's mood and the spectator's frame of reference. He suggests some answers to the frequently asked question "what do you symbolize?" in a stream-of-consciousness poem that he first read during his *Rat Piece* performance at California State University, Los Angeles, in 1976. Wearing his Mudman apparatus, he read the poem before immolating caged rats. Jones memorialized the event in an ink drawing from the same year that features a modified, handwritten version of the text:

A tree bush umbrella I'm meditating A star Christ A budda [*sic*] It's religious It's art I'm a house Architecture [*sic*] A thunder god Lighting Primitive Man Sophisticated Man Future Man Past Man a power source energy A wire man A telephone man A bird man Animal Soul carry an idea on my body Thoughts my soul your soul everyman Portable Art Thing an Atomic man Structure air man metal man vegetable man vacant lot man bogymen wood carrier carrying an abstract cross a portable heart TV Radio Antenna A weapon Fossilized worms blond hair a skeleton time an explosion.

Interpretations fall primarily into morphological similarities, religious symbols, and, arguably, twentieth-century magical modes—such as the radio

antenna—that exploit invisible electrical currents to transmit light, voices, and images. Without punctuation, the words flow together, ending with an explosion that levels all degrees of signification. By eluding linguistic certainties, Mudman enters the realm of the grotesque. According to art historian Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "when we use the word 'grotesque' we record, among other things, the sense that though our attention has been arrested, our understanding is unsatisfied."⁸ The grotesque operates by naming the indefinable and temporarily pacifying our frustration at not being able to account for an entity that is at once recognizable and inscrutable. It is akin to the "It's a bird...it's a plane...it's Superman!" phenomenon. Surprise, confusion, and wonderment circumscribe Mudman encounters—whether in real life, verbal descriptions, or drawings—and no matter how one tries to reduce it to a single thing—"it's Mudman!"—it exceeds one's capacity for understanding. Jones's artwork is grotesque, not because it is filled with bizarre creatures, although it is, but because it is entrenched in a philosophical worldview in which meanings associated with objects and words constantly shift, ambiguity and metamorphosis are embraced, and hierarchies and rigid classifications are collapsed.

It is not surprising that Jones has been repeatedly likened to a shaman, especially in light of his early stick sculptures that were bound with his signature materials of nylon, foam rubber, shellac, tape, and aviary wire and then photographed against his body, as if their latent energy could only be activated in a ceremonial performance enacted for the camera. To gain a deeper appreciation of this mystical aspect of Jones's oeuvre, one must map out his personal idiom of figures, animals, and formal structures as they move between graphic, sculptural, and literary representations and undergo metamorphoses of appearance and meaning in the process. Reappearing materials, motifs, and images produce a network that interconnects all of his artwork. Each object and drawing in his possession is continually subject to change, whether through aging or his repeated reworking of the surface. In the case of his drawings, he builds up layers of ink and acrylic paint, superimposing pictures one on top of the other. The tendency to revisit artworks at different stages in his life is evident in the dates of the works, which typically display multiple years from the 1950s up through the present day.

Jones's drawings can be divided into two distinct bodies. The war drawings, first conceived as a game to occupy himself during his childhood illness, are exhaustively detailed pencil and erasure marks that depict labyrinthian battlefields where schematic X and dot men endlessly engage and disengage each other. These skirmishes take place in a two-dimensional world organized by an

intricate network of city streets and buildings. Only the shorelines of rivers and lakes encroach on the linear regularity of these authoritarian topographies. The second group constitutes a bestiary in which human figures, animals, and vegetative matter morph into one another and into writhing landscapes that anchor the compositions. Here, the peregrinations of Mudman take him away from the familiar realm of streetscapes into esoteric lands populated by protean characters. The dynamic between the war drawings and the figurative works can be likened to the Renaissance excavation of the Domus Aurea, the ornate palace of the Roman emperor Nero that contained tantalizing frescoes that unleashed a bevy of fantastical beasts, chimeras, and hybrids into the cultural imagination of a society accustomed to classical principles of symmetry and composed naturalism. Despite the ostensible violence of the war drawings, Jones adheres to strict rules of engagement that unfold in detached and bloodless meditations on addition and subtraction. Yet, lurking beneath these military maps are subaltern worlds that threaten to upset the status quo.

Jones grew up near Hollywood during the 1950s and 60s, when Disney animation and postwar comics like Superman, Flash Gordon, and Dick Tracy contributed to the surreal atmosphere of a city enthralled with facades and fantasy. He was exposed to a strange mix of movie stars, animated animals, intergalactic travelers, and freakish criminals coupled with the equally mysterious deities worshipped in pagan cultures that he learned about mostly by reading H. W. Janson's *History of Art* (1962) and Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, a dizzying comparative analysis of thousands of magical and religious practices worldwide that was first published in 1890. A voracious reader, Jones also immersed himself in the psychologically charged terrains of Thomas Pynchon, Hermann Hesse, and T. S. Eliot, among others, whose narratives of individuals wandering in fantastic and destitute settings profoundly affected his own approach.⁹

Jones's attraction to mythology and far-flung religious beliefs reflected larger trends of the 1960s and 70s. Carl Jung's assertion of a collective unconscious in which universal archetypes and images are hardwired into the brain and Claude Lévi-Strauss's anthropological studies into the structure of mythical thought and other cultural systems contributed important theoretical frameworks for the performance art of the era. Lévi-Strauss predicated his work on the belief that because ways of looking at and interpreting the world have been lost as a result of Enlightenment thought and scientific methodologies, at least—if these elusive worldviews cannot be regained exactly, since people are subject to their own place in history—"we can try to become aware of their existence and their importance."¹⁰ Performance artists in the 1960s and 70s

appropriated spiritual and religious customs such as animal sacrifice, goddess worship, orgies, seances, and body modification and mutilation not only to connect to past cultures but as a way to comment on their own. Events of ritualized violence and sexuality—including Hermann Nitsch's ongoing Orgies Mystery Theater, Carolee Schneemann's *Meat Joy* (1964), and Barbara T. Smith's *Feed Me* (1973), to name just a few of the many performances based on ceremony taking place internationally—were enacted for a variety of reasons. Notably, these performances were conceived as spectacle and parody, as well as a way to attain self-awareness and empowerment, access primal drives, and subvert male hegemony.

In a series from the early 1970s, Jones drew directly onto pages torn out of Janson's *History of Art*, a *Playboy* calendar from 1969, and nudist magazines, opening a conduit through which photographs of real objects and people are incorporated into a world of his invention. In *Magazine Advertisement* (1974–75), a man and woman advertising Holiday Spa Health Clubs are shown in a loose embrace, but they are also linked by drawn tendrils and orbs sprouting from a linear veil obscuring the woman's face and growing out of her bikini. One feeler penetrates her lover's mouth while another stealthily encircles his body, entrapping him. The image looks backward to magical figures such as the sensual bare-breasted Minoan Snake Goddess (c. 1600 BCE) clasping two twisting snakes and forward to telecommunication technology and its accoutrements—a futuristic cyborg forecasting the human-machine interface seen in the head-gear gadgets prevalent in today's society.

In the Janson Art History drawings, skeins of thin lines emanate from Sumerian and Classical antiquities, wrap around the images, and, in some instances, tether two reproductions that appear on the same page together—a Jungian gesture that visualizes unseen forces connecting objects temporally and geographically dislocated to each other and to our own time. One 1974–75 drawing features a page with a reproduction of *Standing Youth (the Kritios Boy)*, a marble sculpture from circa 480 BCE that has since lost its feet and forearms and is now supported by a base beneath each leg; it calls to mind other limbless forms in Jones's repertoire. To it, he added elements that explicitly reference sculptures he was making at the time, including latticework in the background and intestinal coils that bulge from the severed elbows and are joined by threadlike lines. As if in an ironical twist of fate, this amputee is, according to Janson in the text adjacent to the reproduction, "the first statue we know that *stands* in the full sense of the word."¹¹ It is the first sculpture to employ what Renaissance artists later termed *contrapposto*. Its naturalism is achieved by presenting the body's axis not as a rigid straight line but as "a faint S-curve."¹²

Jones is fascinated by this sinuous two-dimensional line and its three-dimensional counterparts, the spiral and vortex. One finds these wriggling lines twisting, turning, and spinning throughout Jones's drawings and taking on myriad identities: telephone wires, intestinal coils, marionette-like strings, gunfire, and bodily excretions. As a graphic element, these lines convey dynamic motion—especially vortical—while making spiritual, psychological, and physical bonds between living things, the landscape, and organic abstractions palpable. Moreover, his compositions tend to be based on the vortex, and in this they are related to the Romantic maelstroms of J. M. W. Turner and William Blake, both of whom revolutionized the vortex by using it not only as a symbolic motif but as a structuring agent. According to art historian W. J. T. Mitchell, “the form that comprises the family of vortices or spirals cannot ‘last’ in any self-identical shape because its very structure suggests continuous movement, transformation, and denial of closure, coiling inward toward a perpetually vanishing center and outward toward a never attained boundary.”¹³ If, as Mitchell contends, Turner's vortex explores the relationship between perception and natural phenomenon (i.e., storms and hurricanes) and Blake's the confounding process of trying to mentally apprehend the world or, in other words, to think about things,¹⁴ then Jones's vortex works on two levels. First, as a system of lines, it moves backward and forward in time and space to interconnect places, objects, and beings; and second, as a metaphor, it insinuates that interpretation, and hence meaning, is inherently unstable.

Over the course of Jones's artistic career, the vortex penetrates and fuses together his pictorial strata; it also opens up a gateway that allows his objects to travel between two and three dimensions. On a timeline spanning millennia, it links our society not only with ancient and future civilizations but with fantastical worlds. For instance, in a collage drawing from 1998, a color photocopy cutout of Mudman from 1975 is pasted onto a black-and-white photocopy of a photograph Jones took in 1967 of the Rockpile, a military observation point in Quang Tri Province, which was located near the Demilitarized Zone separating North and South Vietnam. This area hosted some of the fiercest fighting during the war, and the use of the defoliant Agent Orange and landmines decimated the once-fertile farming region, transforming it into a virtual moonscape. Mudman is inserted into this battleground surrounded by the graphic lines frequently used in comic books to communicate action. Orange and blue coronas radiating from his body are traced with scalloped edges to signify his sudden emergence from the vortical luminescence into an otherworldly setting made more distant by the nebulous quality of the twice-removed reproduction. Circles and short dashes accentuating the leg muscles give the impression that he is caught midway

in his transformation from performance artist to comic book superhero. His powers are arguably that of time traveler and witness.

During the early 1970s, Jones became an observer of the eclectic Venice Beach community. He fit in because of his youth and long wavy hair but remained a maverick. At the time he began a number of ink caricatures of the eccentric personalities that gravitated to Venice. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War and 1960s radicalism, the American mood during the 70s is often recalled as depressed. Lyndon B. Johnson's bold proclamation of a War on Poverty in 1964 was never realized. Instead, the United States was in a recession and most cities, including Los Angeles, were impoverished and in decay. Within this malaise there existed an experimental spirit and a nothing-to-lose attitude upon which countercultures thrive. And Venice—at the most western edge of the United States—had long established itself as home for the carnivalesque. Hanging out on its beaches and boardwalks were the last of the hippies, left-wing radicals, astrologers, artists, poets, anarchists, beatniks, muscle men, bikers, roller skaters, skateboarders, surfers, and homeless people.

In an untitled drawing from 1971, the pictorial space is organized around the vortex (see image p. 133). A whirlpool of spectators originates in the background, churns towards the middle ground—which features a row of seated, seemingly conventional middle-aged women—and flows into the viewer's space, incorporating us into the audience. Jones has identified the stout women as Jewish émigrés who would sit on the boardwalk daily and were integral to the countercultural vibe. Many of them were concentration-camp survivors whose number-tattooed arms left a lasting impression on Jones.¹⁵ All eyes are directed toward a motley crew in the center of the maelstrom: a tutu-clad dancer, a woman with bunny ears, a naked William Burroughs-esque photographer with an erection, two bathers, a black man in a wizard's hat, and a young woman in the center partially clothed in sunglasses and thigh-high stockings who, like the nude in the foreground of Édouard Manet's *Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe* (1863), unabashedly confronts our gaze. In fact, the entire composition updates Manet's bohemian challenge to bourgeois good taste while also harking back to Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's exuberant exposés of Paris's cabarets and brothels of the Belle Époque.

Despite the knobby bodies, comic facial expressions, and oddball atmosphere, these drawings of the Venice Beach community demonstrate a realism that Jones would increasingly blend with fantasy. It should be kept in mind, however, that these early drawings are the physical substructure for future palimpsests of stranger places and activities.

referred to by Jones as Rat Dog, it is one of the few extant pieces from this time period, reappearing in altered states throughout his performances and drawings.

Thus equipped with an expanded vocabulary of biomorphic forms and textured surfaces, Jones began to think differently about the representation of the human form in his drawings, focusing on its integuments—or the layers that enclose the body and its organs such as skin and other membranes—over frenzied postures. In fact, after Jones returned to drawing the human figure, he generally employed rather conventional *contrapposto* poses with one foot stepping forward and a slight twist of the body around a stable core. Wrapping around and, at times, penetrating the figure would be drawings of his sculptures, which were, up to that point, defined largely by their exteriority as appendages or extensions of his body. Conceptually conceiving the boundary separating his two- and three-dimensional work as porous, he crosspollinated his material explorations with his imagination that, like cloud-gazing, seeks ever-shifting visible likenesses in abstraction. By translating his sculptures into ink and acrylic, they took on new identities that communicate a deeply interior vision. Soft tubular and conical shapes undergo metamorphoses into quirky similitudes (hairy ice-cream cones, hanging carcasses, cocoons, honeycombs, elephant heads), creepy-crawlies (insects, serpents, caterpillars, rat tails), and anatomical parts (brains, hearts, intestines, testicles, vulva). This transfiguration is manifest in *Untitled (1973–1984–2004)*, when Rat Dog, presented as an X-shape composed of four valves stemming from an organ tinted red and yellow, alights from the sky like a flying bagpipe or alien being (see image p. 125). A comic-book speech bubble, which reads “poof,” doubles as an exhalation of air and announcement of the sculpture’s magical appearance into the two-dimensional world. In yet another drawing, *Untitled (1974–2004)*, Rat Dog is manifested as two eponymous demons (see image p. 127).

Over time, the overlapping layers of imagery, indicated by the years written in the bottom right- or left-hand corner of each drawing, have either been so completely integrated as to make them practically indistinguishable, or the pictures beneath have been subsumed by thick applications of acrylic. Still, there are visual clues pointing to distinct stylistic modes. In the early 1970s, Jones rendered his sculptures and Mudman in thin washes of acrylic that could easily be mistaken for watercolor or gouache. Pale reds, golden-wheat yellows, raspberry pinks, and grassy greens enclose delicately outlined globules and twigs in translucent skin. The Mudman structure softens into networks of nourishing tubular links. It is easy to imagine these swollen gossamers once inhabiting expanses of empty white space.

But then, about the time that Jones moved to New York City in 1982, the lines multiplied and thickened and human characters and rats came to dominate the tableaux, a trend also evident in his writings. Colors calcified into concrete grays. We can no longer peer through membranes. Rather, our eyes are arrested at roughly textured casings. Mudman is repeatedly shown reverting to a tree-like condition, twisting into the landscape and fossilizing its human host. Indeed, many of the figures exhibit arboreal traits. Because Jones applied paint in even coats that formed thin crusts on paper, he inferred coarseness primarily by means of graphic patterning, a technique that again relates his drawing style to comics. Sinewy muscles and skin fuse into ashen bark. Stomachs and breasts protrude like burls. Erect penises branch out. Elaborate canopies of twigs resembling bones sprout from heads. And mobility is drastically curtailed as feet take root and arms disappear into trunks. In some of these drawings, there are few traces of the original, but in others earlier diaphanous forms coexist with recent opaque ones, generating a lyrical interplay between the grounded and the ethereal.

Around 2000 there was another noticeable shift in Jones's style. He went over a number of drawings that he had not touched since the 1970s in semi-transparent washes of acrylic that recall his initial paint-handling. The fairy tale-like scenes are inhabited by giant creatures such as a man inside a dinosaur hovering above the landscape, see-through bodies exposing brightly colored viscera, or, conversely, Goliaths that contain nothing but air.

Yet, the question remains: how do we interpret the existence of these human, animal, vegetable hybrids and their esoteric exchanges? Jones's fantastical scenarios do not imagine monsters and lands totally alien to our own. It is as if we have stumbled down a rabbit hole into a dream world that is the flip side of our lived reality. There is much that is familiar in the landscape of his art. We can identify disembodied parts: hearts, brains, heads, and penises; and whole creatures: rats, serpents, young girls, old men, and insects. Even when the body is grossly distorted we can still make out attenuated limbs and disembodied baby heads floating in the atmosphere. The creatures often exhibit striking comparisons to the earth-dwelling spirits and the processional costumes described in the *Golden Bough*. Frazer recounted stories about a sylvan god who comes out at night and "has a big head, very long arms and legs, and a ponderous body"¹⁷ and the Little Leaf Man, a youth who, in celebration of May Day, is wrapped in branches so "only the shoes peep out from the leafy mantle."¹⁸

This interpenetration of lived reality and dream imagery is prevalent in twentieth-century film, literature, and visual arts. *Steppenwolf* (1927), Hesse's

phantasmagoria about an individual who must forfeit his sanity to attain self-realization, had a profound impact on Jones when he was in his twenties. It is telling that the protagonist's close association with a wolf is central to the narrative. In *Animalizing Imagination* (2000), cultural critic Alan Bleakley argued for such creative acts which, by positioning humans in a spiritually symbiotic relationship with animals rather than as alienated superiors, ascribe to an "animal-directed Shamanism, where the animal is the vehicle for illumination, the deity to whose realm the human is drawn and must aspire."¹⁹ The rat is Jones's recurring spirit guide. In one drawing, *Untitled* (1980), Mudman emerges from a whirlpool of excrement spilling forth from a rat (see image pp. 108–09). While this image calls to mind Sigmund Freud's Rat Man, who had nightmares about rats burrowing through his anus into his intestines, it lends itself less to a psychological reading and more to a shamanic interpretation in which the initiate undergoes a simultaneously violent and sexual encounter with his spirit animal in which he is devoured and then reborn.²⁰

Jones came of age during an era of boundary dissolutions, when systems supporting Enlightenment and modernist ideals were in the process of being swiftly dismantled. Projects meant to exercise complete control over the environment and amass unambiguous encyclopedic knowledge separating life into clearly delineated categories such as species, race, ethnicity, and sex exhausted themselves in the wake of such social revolutions as feminism, the civil-rights movement, and postcolonialism. Jones would have been acutely aware of the latter from his experience in Vietnam, a former French colony. Artists challenged medium specificity and the dominance of the art object. Art critic Thomas McEvilley pointed out that during the 1960s and 70s there was a revival of a Duchampian position that art is not "a set of objects but an attitude toward objects, or a cognitive stance."²¹ Simply put, emphasis was placed on the artist who, by turning his or her attention to an object or even worldview, incorporates it into the art realm. This alchemical stance that anything could be turned into art by the ordained artist, coupled with a concentrated cultural interest in non-Judeo-Christian practices, ushered in conceptual and performance genres based on the appropriation of ancient religious forms and magical rites.

Jones's work is often compared to that of Joseph Beuys, as the cycle of combat and regeneration is central to both of their practices and these universal concepts are communicated through repeated ceremonial use of specific symbols and materials. While Beuys presented himself as a spiritual healer and a firm believer that art could be used for social betterment, Jones's shamanic role is not that of healer but a harbinger of shifts in awareness that have

taken place globally in the second half of the twentieth century. In Bleakley's definition, the shaman "is precisely the figure who would attempt to restore 'ritual' (characterized by affectivity, ambiguity and paradox) over 'ceremony' (characterized by clarity and structures of oppositional thinking)."22 Jones represents a belief system that acknowledges that perceptions are relative to the perceiver. It is not surprising that when describing his work we fall back on a limitless list of "looks like" and "it's as if" analogies. We can only approximate meaning, and that meaning fluctuates. In *A Life of Secrets* (1994), a short story written by Jones, Mudman, accompanied by rats, roams in time and space from Los Angeles to New York and back again. Mudman's structure is a tree for birds, a briar-patch bed that prevents Jones from sleeping, and a human trap. It is perceived differently by different observers, different species, and even the same observer at different times. Jones speaks to fluid identities and unstable meanings, to an epoch that embraces ambiguities and exceptions and to a globalized world where the divisions separating people are increasingly untenable. He speaks to a world of walking hybrids.

NOTES

- 1 Jim Crace, *The Gift of Stones* (New York: Collier Books, 1988), 1.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Kim Jones, *A Life of Secrets* (New York: AC Project Room, 1994), 6.
- 4 Jones, interview by the author and Julie Joyce, digital recording, New York, 22 June 2006.
- 5 Jones, interview by the author, digital recording, New York, 9 August 2006.
- 6 In three consecutive interviews that took place in the summer of 2006, Jones stressed this connection to the author.
- 7 Jones was given five days of rest and relaxation from his tour of duty in Vietnam. Jones, interview by the author.
- 8 Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 3.
- 9 Jones, telephone conversation with the author, 29 June 2006.
- 10 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 5.
- 11 H. W. Janson, *The History of Art*, 5th ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall; and New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 102.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 W. J. T. Mitchell, "Hogarth, Turner, and Blake," in *Articulate Images: The Sister Arts from Hogarth to Tennyson*, ed. Richard Wendorf (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 127.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Jones, interview by the author.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1890), abridged ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 134.
- 18 Ibid., 148.
- 19 Alan Bleakley, *Animalizing Imagination: Totemism, Textuality and Ecocriticism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 27.
- 20 Ibid., 62.
- 21 For an insightful account of contemporary artists' appropriation of religious forms in 1960s and 70s performance and Conceptual art, see Thomas McEvilley, "Art in the Dark," *Artforum* (summer 1983): 63.
- 22 Bleakley, *Animalizing Imagination*, 140.

Kim Jones, "A Life of Secrets", *AC Project Room*, New York, January 14 – February 8, 1994.

A Life of Secrets

Kim Jones



WELCOME — Jane Powell and Gordon MacRae welcome Maria Aguello and Kim Jones to the set of "Three Sailors and a Girl" at Warner Bros. studio. Both Jane and Gordon urge full support to the Easter Seal campaign which helps crippled children to walk again.

Mountain of Health

I was born without bones in the year POKE was invented. POKE at that time was considered a marvel product. It extended a person's life and kept the individual strong, healthy, and young — as long as he or she drank one quart and jogged three miles per day.

Life without bones was difficult. The first 22 years were spent in ever larger test tubes. When I was mature and large enough the doctors built a structure for me. This was my physical support. I could walk.

Mentally I was close to rats. We grew up together. I understood their pain, test tube pain. I trusted no person, especially the doctors. They were always watching, probing, questioning, noting everything. I never answered them. I could not raise my hand. I listened, I absorbed, I lay in my comfy adolescent test tube and chewed constantly. My gums became very strong. My rat friends also chewed along with me. We communicated this way.

The walking was slow. One step, two steps, three steps more. Eventually I walked out of the room and back. Then up the hall and back. The rats followed me, constantly encouraging each new movement. *When I was 32, I walked 18 miles — a glorious achievement for me.*

The rats chewed with delight. They could smell my pride. My sense of smell was not as advanced as theirs, but my gums were well developed and I chewed a thank you.

The doctors gave me a limited freedom. They could monitor all my movements through the structure. They still probed and watched but I didn't care now.

I'm walking with rat friends: A moving tree surrounded by twitching furballs. We pass a garbage dump. They evaporate into mounds of paper, metal and plastic. A black plastic garbage bag comes alive twisting on the dirt, with bumps appearing and disappearing. I continue walking alone, chewing. Friends should be allowed their particular joys.

I am slow and awkward, bumping into telephone poles, trees and unob-servant pedestrians. In the distance the POKE runners, dressed in shiny red clothes and fat blue tennis shoes, bounce along the horizon. Their faces are strong, healthy and young — but their expressions are deathly. Gasping for air, like the last breath of a water torture victim.

Not everyone drinks POKE. Some smoke JOKE. They mostly sit or lay around, laughing. Their clothes are black from rolling around in fits of giggle. When not laughing they are usually sleeping with a contented smile on their soiled lips. They rarely die of heart attacks. Usually they leave this world by accident, crushed by a considerate car or truck.

I'm walking among buildings now. It is early Sunday morning. A grey mist covers everything. The sky, buildings and asphalt foam, merge and ooze into each other. I can feel my rat friends chewing near me. Garbage is piled along

the curb. There is a sanitation strike. Brightly dressed rubbish workers jog and bounce around the Labor Building block, holding yellow placards, demanding more money and less work, more benefits and less responsibility. POKE is expensive. I know the doctors are listening. I'm a walking TV station. I hate politics. But it is too late. The information is in. The damage is done. I walk away, down an alley, soft with old garbage. The rats follow. I stand in a valley where garbage is rising up, hill-like. Toilet paper sticks to cement walls all the way to up brittle black fire escapes. They seem to leap from the walls like skeletons of dead gargoyles. The garbage rises up past black windows to empty rooms. Everyone is either running or laughing outside on the sidewalk. The garbage rises past each dead floor like a silent film of skin. Even past the 13th floor. All the way to the top — the 46th floor. Past the yellow water tower to the yellow sun blending into a yellow smoggy sky. Like a soft yellow blanket it drifts down and gently touches my body and hard structure. I sleep now standing up. My feet are buried in garbage. The rats chew around me. I chew now only in dreams. They can smell me though. They smell my calmness.

I awake at 3 am in February. A new start in the dead of winter. Blue whiteness covers the garbage, the building, and me. The moon is full and white with blue spots jogging around and into its face. I resemble a giant snowflake. A spiderweb of ice. The structure keeps me warm. It nourishes my wormlike body by sucking yummy things out of the city air. Black rat eyes watch me. They caress my form with their rat eyes, their rat ears, their rat feelings, their rat minds.

I move. Ice falls like salt without noise on the body of old garbage. The strike has ended. More money, less work. The garbage remains. It is comforting, familiar. I begin walking, leaving a veil of ice behind me.

I walk out of the alley, carefully stepping over a JOKE smoker, curled on the sidewalk, frozen in laughter. I'm on the street now. Joggers hop around like colorful fleas. Trucks and cars roll by barely missing my structure. I slink along the sidewalk trying to avoid objects. The rats follow at a respectful distance, sensing my annoyance. I haven't had any coffee yet.

I edge into a cafe with big windows and big table and a big-hearted waitress. "Hi ya, honey. Nice tree on yer back there. Have a seat over here in the corner by the window! Coffee?" I sip the hot black fuel. The rats are lined up in formation outside on the sidewalk. At this distance they look like rows of chocolate kisses on a field of white icing. I order a large piece of angel food cake. The waitress knows me. She places a coffee cup under my stool. It is difficult for me to fit into cafe restrooms. The cake is soft, white and fluffy. I sit and chew and swallow. I have teeth. The doctors can sew very well. The spongy cake slips down my throat. I can feel the Doctors' commands echoing through a tunnel in my neck. The voices slip into a million blood vessels throughout my body. Each crumb is a promise: We, the Docs, can make you fat, we can make you thin, we can make you lose, and we can make you win. You better not cry, you better not pout, you better just shut yer fuckin' brown

lips up and be a good scout.

I march outside again. My heavy black boots crush the delicate frosty mirror of ice on the sidewalk. I have bones now. I can make a fist. It holds in the sadness. But it is not enough. The anger boils from my neck. I'm a walking popcorn machine. Why so sad? So bitter? I'm coming down from the sugar high of the sweet white cake. Falling from the glorious sweet tower — SMACK — to the sidewalk. I walk clump, clump, avoiding obstacles as usual until I reach the movie house. A trail of frozen-tear balls litter the sidewalk behind me, a beautiful delicate line. The people jog by scattering the little balls.

I pay and enter the theater. One rat follows me. I sit in back so my structure does not block anyone's view. The rat sits beside me. I slip to sleep with the sounds and lights of fantasy vibrating through my structure. When I wake, the movie room is yellow. The rat has chewed a hole in the seat next to me and sleeps in it. I walk outside to the park. It is Spring. Today is the "Grand POKE Three-Mile Marathon" sponsored by POKE industries. They run this event inside Central Park. The lawn is green and covered with runners dressed in purple, orange, blue, red and yellow suits. They move in a uniform fashion. A jerking mass of open mouths, gasping for air. Their feet crush the blades of grass. Sometimes I dream a giant coral snake is twisting through an endless back yard, with ten thousand tiny red open wounds.

The cars and trucks roll and rumble outside the park. POKE runners are harder to catch than JOKE sleepers, but the bright colors attract their motor senses. They fart and spit black oil in anticipation. Cars are usually not attracted to me. The structure looks too much like a trap. They see it, then skid and spin around me, leaving a skin of hot black rubber. Trucks are slower to react. They slow their engines to a low growl as they approach, then nervously pick up speed screeching and whining as they pass. If they hit me I die, of course, but the structure would leave a lasting impression on their insurance premiums. They fear this more than nails slashing their tires, more than sand rubbing their ball bearings raw, even more than the slow dry torture of no gas.

The mighty god of insurance swallows everything, gives and takes security. The doctors know this, the mayor knows this most of all. A citizen cannot purchase insurance unless he or she drinks POKE. The mayor is a great lover of POKE and also a major stockholder. He upholds the law. This does not affect me, a veteran of the test tube, an experiment in communication, a walking vegetable, a tree.

I don't mind. I walk toward the Hudson River. A red glow ripples the sky and buildings of New Jersey, falling on the black and red currents of the river. Large condom life rafts lay scattered around the pier like a bunch of throw rugs. Layers of latex creep over the sides. Evidence of an ancient giant race of gay men with the common sense to practice safe sex. Grand dribbling worms squirting into the blind deadness of latex. But there is also love.

My rat friends surround me. Noses are twitching, lips are chewing. They

also appreciate the sunset. They watch me with trusting, concerned eyes. Sometimes I am afraid of them, their teeth are so sharp and their eyes so black and blank. But I know them. I know each by name. Mooney, Minky, and Marky sit near me. Each nose, hard and long and furry-smooth, raises to greet the multiple smells that fall and drift and blow away. They chew contentment. I chew contentment. We sleep among the rubbers. My boots are buried in a spongy, muddy mattress of latex and love. In the morning the love has dried around my ankles. I move and it crackles and groans like the memories on the river, blue with the pain of change.

It's summer. I'm surrounded by craters, dimples in a moonscape of condos. Each hole contains a furry rat. Mooney is closest to me. Black eyes snap open as I pull free from the dried pearls of love. I'm walking downtown along the Westside Highway. Cars and trucks slow down to headlight me suspiciously. Mooney, Max and Mardell follow me. Moby, Mort, and Minney are in the lead. We all chew our destination in our one rat mind: Staten Island.

The Staten Island Ferry sits in the water like a giant piece of Swiss cheese. Rats rush into its many openings. I walk in after them, a spiky cautious construction. Mooney, Moe, and Monica guide me; their black eyes scan the immediate area around us, an insurance of safety. The only other human passengers are JOKE smokers. I stand at the guard rail observing the tall Manhattan buildings, the water below, and the island to my left in the distance. The boat moves. Mooney jerks his tail and raises his nose to smell my anxiety. He chews out a rodent story about a mouse, a flea, and a minister. I chuckle politely, in control, and feel the pressure in my head politely leaving. "Good-bye, feel ya later." I feel the wind. It touches my eye sockets, drifting in and around my eyeballs, twisting along the canal to my brain, leaving windy messages in my grey matter folds.

Staten Island sits on the horizon, a grey smudge. The sky is blue. Yellow sun spots leap from the red water. The grey smudge is getting larger. It pushes the blue out of my picture frame.

We arrive. The grey island covers the area in front of us. Mooney and I look back at Manhattan, a small spiky garden sitting in the past, the bottom part of a jaw full of black, spiky teeth. We turn and walk into Staten Island, which is more a dense cloud of grey soup than a rocksolid place. The rat mind is not afraid. I follow as they pour into the void. The JOKE folk stay aboard. I travel with the rats for months but it seems like minutes to me. We reach the end of the smudge. It is like the inside of a brain.

The sky is blue again. The buildings are also blue. I check into a small motel. Inside it is red. The rats wait outside in military formation – black spots on a long blue sidewalk.

The motel owner is a big fat friendly fellow with bulgy, blue, blinking eyes. "Hi ya, sonny," he blinks. "Nice tree on yer back there. Heh, heh. Got a nice big bright room for ya. Big doors for that tree and big windows so ya can see yer rat pals outside. Don't want to hurt their feelings. Heh, heh. If you know

what I mean. Heh, heh." What does he mean? I think. But I don't ask. I must sleep in my red room.

The future is impossible. Things will not always happen. You just wait and see. Pretty soon now. The rats dance outside on the sidewalk, twisting and hopping – not with JOKE, but with joy and hope. Their black eyes, pointy noses, and delicate pink ears sense my future. I chew a thought. The Doctors' eyes and mouths are smeared over the walls of my blood cells. They spy and feed on the outside world through me.

A small moth with pink, almost transparent wings flutters in my room. It touches the walls, the corners, the ceiling, and the floor. Finally it sits on my forehead. I'm laying down – a difficult feat. My structure acts the part of a sticky briar patch bed. The moth hops to my nose. I want to scratch but I don't. It sits there a moment, testing my nostrils with its antennae. The pink-winged explorer jumps, a swan dive, a graceful, high-arc leap into my open lips, past my strong gums and teeth. Down, down, down my slippery throat to my calm stomach. I feel pain and regret the invasion immediately.

The room is filled with intruders. The mayor flies about. Small pink wings grow from his fat back. His body is a rubbery sack of ivory-white skin held in the air by furiously flapping wings. His stupid head gasps for air. Hundreds of doctors with wings flutter around my head. Thousands of runners in shiny, sporty underwear crowd and bounce off the walls, floor, and ceiling. Their feet jog in the air like hanging victims. I have a vision of a large father tree with ten thousand souls hanging from his branches kicking lost tangos in the air. One hundred thousand JOKE smokers flop and twist in the room. They fill my environment with the only sound: laughter. I feel a great positive pain as my bones dissolve and the structure collapses around me. A gentle blanket of sticks helps me rest in my nest.

I wake in a purple room. It is the mayor's office. I am a small, blue butterfly. He smiles with the contentment of the wealthy and sly. I slap about his face, rubbing my wings over his dull rubbery skin. His mug sparkles like a wet white whale just surfacing from a black sea. I shit a purple jelly on his head. The rest of his body is left alone. The head is the point of entry. My blue needle tail jabs into the top of the fat POKE drunk. I'm sucking purple fluid into a handy test tube hanging from my belt. The liquid is safely corked in my container.

I wake again. I'm a child. Doctors buzz around nervously, watching my progress. Rats sit, stand and dance a waltz in sympathy. Their eyes see everything. Pink ears listen to blood flow in circles, around and into my body. Strong jaws chew their love for me. Long hard noses smell my future.

I sleep and dream of waking up as a child, each morning in a different room with different parents. Sometimes I wake up in a room with blue, red, and yellow-flowered wallpaper and my parents are black. Other times I wake in a room with clown wallpaper and my parents are white. Still other times I wake in a white room and my parents are colorless.

One morning I wake up and crawl out of bed. I can't walk. I'm seven years old. My mother takes me to various doctors trying to find out what is wrong. The doctors decide I have a polio-like disease called perthis. My hip bones are being eaten away. The only cure they can think of for now is to keep pressure off my hip bones. They put me in The Children's Hospital for six months. I'm in a bed in traction. My legs are bound in leather, metal, and wires and raised up. Three times a week the nurse puts me in water to exercise my leg muscles. Finally the doctors let me out of the hospital. I must use a wheelchair and my legs are still in braces. I go to the hospital once a week with my mother where they x-ray my legs to note any progress.

I have this disease from ages seven to ten. I spend most of the time by myself. I play games, read comic books, draw, and make animals and people out of modeling clay. I'm usually in bed. I look out my window at the green grass and the elm tree in my parents' backyard. I am happy in a world I have constructed on my bed. Sometimes my bed becomes an ocean. I slip the wool blanket over my head and pretend I'm under water.

I sleep and dream of my many futures.

Water Route

It is called "Dead Man's Float." I'm at the U.S. Marine Recruit Training Center in San Diego, California. The Drill Instructor yells at me to jump in the water. I leap, boots first, into the 12-foot-deep pool. Holding my breath, I slip off my boots and float to the top. I blow out air bubbles, suck in new air and let my head fall face down. My arms and legs are stretched out like a sky diver. I float, with my lungs full of air, about two inches below the water line. I blow out air bubbles, swing my arms down and suck in more air. This procedure is repeated for about 30 minutes.

One recruit sinks to the bottom of the pool. The Instructors allow him to swallow a little water, then pull him out of the pool. He lays there like a wet sack of laundry. Two hands push down on his chest. Water squirts from his mouth like an uncorked champagne bottle. He coughs and his eyes pop open.

The rainy season in Vietnam. I am with the U.S. Marines at a camp near the DMZ. I am 23 years old. The area around us is a moonscape, with water in the craters. A damp heat surrounds me. I am tired. The NVA hit our camp with rockets last night. They will hit us again tonight. I am sitting in the dirt holding my knees. I am bored. I see a baby rat sitting under a piece of cardboard. I pick it up. The tiny creature lays curled in the palm of my hand, hairless. It feels like a wet noodle with arms and legs and head and tail, like a slug. I gently place the fetal rodent in a large puddle. It swims frantically toward the edge of the puddle keeping its head above water. I watch as it struggles, paddling with front and back paws. Finally the child-rat reaches dry land. It looks exhausted. I pick it up and place it in the middle of the pool of muddy water again. The rat sinks to the bottom and drowns.

I wake and fall to sleep again.

I walk to the edge of the pier in Manhattan and leap into black water. Down, down, down to the sludge-slick, trash-littered bottom. I trudge across the floor of the New York Bay to the Atlantic, my structure bubbling. As I get farther out, I stir up milky clouds of wet sand. A walking powder cake. The rats follow me in an orderly line one hundred miles long. Black noses snort for air above the fierce waves. Strong legs and tails churn through dips and swells. They are good swimmers. No shark or any fish with good sense dares to bother this fearsome hoard of hard teeth and claws. They are my friends.

I only concern myself with walking underwater. I lift a boot in sucking sand, one step, two, and three. The rats circle me continuously. Sometimes they hold their breath and swim down to watch over my spiky form slowly rocking, edging along the coast. The structure preserves me. I hug the proud breast of the U.S.A. as I trudge and glide along the sandy coast, always under water.

I'm sleeping. I can feel my Grandfather's hard dick against my back. He is pushing me toward the end of the bed.

It seems to me like 11 minutes have passed since I jumped. It is really 11 years.

I think of when I was 11 years old on a Christmas day walking on a dirt path along Lake Street in Mar Vista, California. I kick a clump of dirt and look at the black Atlantic water around me.

Sometimes I get close enough to the shore that the tippy-top stick on my structure peeks out. I'm a submarine. My stick periscope spies on the Atlantic coast, gathering in information that I know nothing about. The Doctors know. I believe their knowledge is as vast as the black stars in the black sky. They eat everything and shit nothing. I'm carried by a sea current. I feel the black Atlantic Ocean water flow around my face. The rats swim around me. They are blacker than the black water surrounding us.

It seems like only three minutes have passed. It is now 14 years since I took the leap. *I'm 14 years old and taking a shower. My dick is hard. I feel the hot water bouncing off my skin.* I slip down the drain and into a sewer pipe that spits me back into the Atlantic Ocean moving south.

I drift along like a tumbling tumble weed. I tumble on down like a smiling apple seed. I'm scared as I whip around Washington D.C. Can't stop. Even more slippery here. Moving along with my rat tornado steed. I spin in lazy circles, gentle loops down to those friendly southern states. Don't Shoot. Just Kidden'. I tickle Florida, the Dick State, and slide on by with a warm Caribbean current to New Orleans. The sticks stir with the sounds of Jazz, the notes sprinkling down. I'm walking faster now that I got that rhythm. I swing past the Single Star State to Mexico and slow down. I'm sleeping as I glide over the hump of the Yucatan.

It has been 22 years since I made the leap. Seems to me like less than half-an-hour. *I'm walking in ankle-deep muddy water with fellow Marines. It's midnight and raining. We are on a training march through a valley just outside Oceanside, California.*

I wake on a roller-coaster ride to Guatemala. Then I bounce up and down, still underwater, to nudge Nicaragua. I sneak past paranoid Panama. There is a friendly rub up and over the grand hip of South America, followed by a spinning slide down to the elephant nose of Cape Horn. I rest for a Latin second then it's up, up the curve of South America, this time past Panama west and Central America and Mexico again for another siesta. I'm sleeping as I continue nose first into the Baja armpit and down and up to Tijuana, the Land of Gifts. No time to stop, though, San Diego is next. Watch those ships, Watch those sailors. Watch your back.

It's the first day at the U.S. Marine Recruit Training Center in San Diego. Thirty recruits are herded into a small shower room. They are all nude. The Drill Instructors watch us suspiciously to see if any of us are getting sexually aroused. The showers are turned on and we wash quick

ly as the D.I.s scream at us to hurry up.

In our platoon, if one recruit makes a mistake everyone suffers. The D.I.s have many ways to punish us. One method is the "sand pit." First the D.I.s make us exercise until we are sweating and close to exhaustion. Then they take us to the "sand pit." Thirty men are huddled together on their knees and forced to throw sand in the air. Very soon the air is filled with sand. We are breathing sand. Sand is sticking to our clothes, our hair, and our skin.

I feel the Pacific Ocean pushing me north as I sleep.

The West Coast is a long sandy freeway punctuated by bowls of granola for hungry travelers. Even underwater I can feel the throbbing heartbeat of dead hot dogs and live beer and zombie wet towels, waiting on the hot sand for a warm body. I ride a freeway current along an ever changing coastline to Santa Monica Beach. It feels like 90 minutes have passed but it is 90 years since I left Manhattan. A friendly wave takes me to shore. "Hi ya, folks! Wait! Don't run away!" The rats follow me. The beach is covered for miles, black with their wet fur. Still they come ashore, an invading nation. The Rat Marines have landed. Peaceful California gets a ratslick injection. I walk across the sand past empty beach towels to the boardwalk and order sushi to go. JOKE smokers sit in parked cars with the windows rolled up. They stare at me through the smog that surrounds them. Their mouths form small O's of laughter. POKE drinkers jog backwards away from me. I rub the dead fish on my genitals and walk to the Santa Monica mountains.

I'm sweating when I reach the side of the mountain. I don't feel 90 years old. I'm just a little tired. The sun is a white spot in the sky. I feel the heat on my back. I'm used to the black coldness of the ocean. But extreme contrasts in temperature do not harm me. I feel strong, healthy, and happy. I feel like I'm 22 years old. That old song swims through my brainfolds: "Twenty-two now, but ya won't be for long . . ." I cover my body with wet red dirt. When I shit, the warm material is rubbed over the mud. The Doctors watch the mountain, my dream, and the valley through the eyes of germs in my shit. I'm a walking sewer plant. My outer skin dries and flakes away daily. Each night I add more mud and my bowel movement. Each regular day brings the mountain, the movie, the motive closer. The rats chew dirt near my boots. I chew a polite thank you. They dance around me, stirring up a small cloud of dust, and disappear into the L.A. basin.

Valley of Death

I'm alone in the Santa Monica Mountains. It's the month of May. I don't belong here. I prepare myself for the journey back to the city of Los Angeles. I need to live with rats. I take a bottle of rat shit and blood out of my bag. This is a gift from another time. The shit and blood are mixed with mud and rubbed all over my body.

I'm walking. The structure on my back is heavy. It takes me 12 hours to reach MacArthur Park. I sit there and rest in the shade of a palm tree. *War, kidnapping, cannibalism. This is what I think about as I look out across the lake.* Behind me a large group of rats are feeding. Rats usually eat at night but this tribe likes to copy the habits of men. It is very peaceful.

I live with these rats. I watch them give birth, grow to maturity, and die. Mary and her son Moses are enjoying their midday meal. Marine is sitting beside me. I knew her as a child rat; now she is the mother of many sons. Her oldest son Manney is playing tag with his friend Mike, an adolescent like himself. They race around a park bench taking playful nips at an old woman's legs. The old woman squeals with joy.

Mary has moved to the edge of a large mound of trash. She is nibbling on a rotten mango. Three adult male rats are moving slowly around the trash pile sniffing. Mickey the top ranking male rat is sitting on top of the pile munching on an old Mounds candy bar. I feel close to these rats. This must be where I belong.

Suddenly a strong male scent surrounds me. I turn around looking for the source of this odor. Two black eyes glare at me from a small bush nearby. WHAM! With a sudden lunge he slams against my back and charges off. This is Moses, Mary's son. He is at the brink of social maturity. It is typical adult male rat style to bully anything that looks female. Because of my long hair, he must think I'm female. Poor Moses appears to be nervous. He is sniffing the dirt and walking in circles. I begin peeing as I walk slowly toward him. The little rat stops pacing and watches me. I continue peeing and get down on my hands and knees. I'm crawling toward him. I hold back a small amount of pee and let it go when I'm beside him. He sniffs it. We become close friends.

Some of the social gestures I've noticed in this rat society are sniffing, chewing and dancing. Threatening gestures and calls are also used by my rat friends, but only to let off steam. They are not mean. It just gets so hot and smoggy in the L.A. basin that the rats get moody. Sometimes actual fights even break out. I believe these are caused by insecure and irresponsible members of society. I explain this to them over and over again. They always chew this idea over in their heads, sniff a little and dance around my boots. I think they understand something.

Lately I've discovered that fights between different rat communities are often characterized by extreme brutality and even death. The home range of

the community I walk with is the city of L.A. The boundaries are regularly patrolled by adult male rats, usually in groups of two or three. If a rat patrol meets up with a group from another community both sides, after exchanging threats, are likely to withdraw discreetly back into home ground. But if a single individual is encountered, or a mother and child, the patrolling rats will usually chase and, if they can, attack the stranger. This rat race must have great hometown pride. I ask them why. They only smile and look up at me with their many small black eyes. I think to myself there are more ways than I know to chew, sniff, and dance in this large world of ours.

I'm walking alone near Third and Main in downtown L.A. I see a small black form lying in the gutter. It's Moses my little rat friend. He has been badly beaten and chewed up. This is obviously the work of an invading valley group. He is still alive. Deep red marks are etched into his black fur. I sit on the curb and watch Moses lick his wounds. Mary and several other females come by and sniff him. The females are dancing back and forth on the sidewalk near us. I go into a McDonald's restaurant and buy a Coke and donut to go. My friend in the gutter munches on the donut while I sip the Coke. Moses, I whisper, where is the law? We must have revenge. I will help you, Moses. We are the law. My little rat friend tips over the Coke and begins chewing on the ice cubes.

It is dark outside now. Mary leads us to an all night movie theater. I pay for three adults. We sit in the back row. It is warm inside. I fall asleep. In the morning when I wake up Mary is gone. Moses has chewed a large hole in his seat and is sleeping in it. I leave him there and go outside.

I walk west on Wilshire Boulevard for a few hours alone. When I reach Vermont Avenue there is a rat patrol marching south. Maybe this is the law and order group. I follow them. They look familiar. It's Mike and Manney — how fast these rats grow! Mickey is the leader. We finally reach the freeway heading west and march up the ramp. Cars are slowing down to observe us as we walk along the freeway shoulder. We move slowly past a massive traffic jam on our left side. I barely manage to keep up with my little friends. At last we reach the San Diego Freeway and head toward the valley. My muscles are aching. I'm carrying the structure on my back. This slows me down. They seem to understand and stop for a few minutes. Mickey walks up and sniffs my boots. Mike and Manney sit and watch the cars zoom by. We are marching again. After a few hours the valley is in sight. We get off at the first valley exit.

The L.A. rat patrol immediately spots a small brown female rat sitting on top of a parked Ford Mustang. They attack her. Poor valley rat doesn't have a chance. She just sits there and shits on herself. In a second Mickey has her by the throat. Mike and Manney each grab a leg. They all tumble off the car into the dirt. Brown fur, shit and blood are everywhere. After a few minutes the valley rat is dead. Mickey bites off her tail and brings it to me. I reach down and pick it up. Black L.A. rat eyes are watching me. Seems like they want me to eat it. I open my mouth and swallow. It wiggles down my throat.

I can feel it in my stomach like it's still alive. The rat patrol gets back on the freeway and heads home.

I'm sitting on the curb looking at the mangled body of the brown rat. I gather up the blood, shit and fur scattered around her body. This is mixed with dirt and rubbed over my tired muscles.

The Doctors see the street near my feet, covered with a skin of brown dust that spreads like a thin cloud over the curb, across the sidewalk and up the walls of the buildings that surround me. I begin walking through the valley. I will meet the valley rats. I want to know them.



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Roberta Smith, "Gallery view; The Vietnam War ricochets into the galleries; Kim Jones" *The New York Times*, January 21, 1990.

GALLERY VIEW

GALLERY VIEW; THE VIETNAM WAR RICOCHETS INTO THE GALLERIES

By Roberta Smith

Published: January 21, 1990

In many ways the war in Vietnam was the most relentlessly visual war America has known. While it was going on, it was brought home to countless television sets by the newly available portable TV cameras. Since its close, and especially since the release of "Apocalypse Now" in 1979, it has been a regular presence in America movies, where it has been variously dramatized, scrutinized, criticized or, in cases like the Rambo series, wildly romanticized.

During the late 1960's and early 70's, certain visual artists used their art to express their opposition to the war, most prominently Leon Golub, Nancy Spero and Peter Saul, while many others openly opposed the war through protests, newspaper advertisements and demonstrations. Yet surprisingly little art inspired by the war - whether made by veterans or nonveterans - has been visible, despite the growing number of artists making art from such real-life issues as sexism, racism and AIDS. It may be that few artists went to Vietnam, a war largely fought by the poor and undereducated. More likely, art about the American conflict in Vietnam has, like the nation's coming to terms with the complex implications of the war itself, taken a long time to evolve.

Asked about the apparent scarcity of art by Vietnam veterans, when media like film and literature have treated the subject extensively, the critic Lucy R. Lippard, who has helped organize two exhibitions on the subject, says that "art is always a more specialized vocation," practiced by fewer people and reaching a smaller audience than movies or books.

"As with people who have been raped," says Ms. Lippard, who has a longstanding interest in political art, "the experience tends to come out later. If you really look, there are lots and lots of vets making art out there. I know artists who don't want to be known as vets but who know the experience is in their work. Some of them had a lot of problems after they came out; they didn't exactly go sailing into the art world."

Still, art about the Vietnam War exists. It may be uneven in quality, but it is increasingly visible, both at the center and at the margins of the art world. One of the best shows in SoHo this month is that of Kim Jones, a former Marine whose Vietnam experiences inform all his art to one degree or another.

The first major survey of work inspired by the war in Vietnam was "War and Memory: In the Aftermath of Vietnam," a three-month program of art, film, theater and lectures organized in 1987 by the Washington Project for the Arts. Next month an exhibition titled "A Different War: Vietnam in Art" will open at DeCordova museum and Sculpture Park in Lincoln, Mass., the second stop on a two-year national tour that began last summer at the Whatcom Museum of History and Art in Bellingham, Wash.

Organized by Ms. Lippard, the exhibition contains works by 55 artists and is divided into three categories. "The World" contains art critical of and contemporaneous with the war, including the 1967 "Collage of Indignation," a communal work of protest whose creators included Roberto Matta, Irving Petlin and James Rosenquist, and the often scathing figurative paintings of Robert Colescott, Golub, Spero and Saul. The show's "In Country" section, devoted to art by veterans of the war, ranges from the realism of Cleveland R. Wright's "We Regret to Inform You," an image of a grieving black woman slumped in a kitchen chair, to the intentionally crude imagery of "Solitary Confinement: Insects Witness My Agony," a painting by Theodore Gostas, a former P.O.W. "In Retrospect" features works made in the 1980's by nonveterans and includes Roger Brown's somberly respectful "Vietnam Commemorative" and Wendy Watriss's photographs of Agent Orange victims.

In May an unusual exhibition titled "As Scene by Both Sides," which surveys art by both American and Vietnamese veterans, will open at the Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities, in Arvada, Colo., a suburb of Denver. The show will then travel for two years in the United States and two years in Vietnam. Perhaps the most extended effort has been made by the Vietnam Veterans Arts Group in Chicago, which has over the last decade amassed a collection of 400 works by artists of all nationalities who fought in the war. The collection, which travels around the country, is now being restored at the Columbia Museum of Art in Columbia, S.C., and will next be seen at the Louisville Art Center in Louisville, Ky., beginning March 18.

How the War Came to SoHo

In SoHo this season the Vietnam veteran - as artist or subject - has had a growing presence. October brought the impressive debut of David Smith at P.P.O.W (the gallery's name comes from the initials of its owners, Penny Pillington and Wendy Osloff). A Marine who served in Vietnam in 1969, Smith remains obsessed by the randomness of war, and this obsession infuses his paintings. "Chance was horribly and palpably real in Vietnam," the 39-year-old artist has written. "Why wasn't I killed?"

Smith, adept at math and science, uses a computer to determine the placement of the tiny forms that pattern his seemingly abstract paintings. He says he wants his compositions to remain true to the G.I.'s standard reaction to just about any event - victory, defeat, dying, not dying - "It don't mean nothin'." But up close Smith's miniature images present carefully rendered schemes of deadly chaos: silhouettes of falling helicopters, camouflage patterns and numbers suggesting geographical co-ordinates. Other paintings, such as "Little Hero of War," juxtapose these motifs with vertically striped horizontal elements based on military ribbons. In all, these are chilling distillations of war, in which the decorative and the real hold equal ground.

In December the John Weber Gallery exhibited the work of Terry Allen, an artist who didn't fight in the war but whose art has, for nearly seven years, treated its aftermath in often monumental terms. In 1983 Allen visited Southeast Asia seeking out American G.I.'s who stayed on after the war. The experience propelled him into his "Youth in Asia" project, a series of drawings, multimedia installations, music and a film dealing with the war's impact on individual soldiers and on the United States as a whole.

The Weber exhibition included "Big Witness," an installation in which a fragmented, geometric, but recognizably human figure made of lead-covered wood lies on the floor of a wire cage that is itself contained within a second house-shaped (and nearly house-sized) wire cage. Excerpts from self-improvement tapes - the verbal equivalent of a Band-Aid on a gaping wound - provide the soundtrack. Gradually it becomes clear that the interior cage has the form of a large couch. The dark, inert figure is entombed within a monument to complacency, conviviality and life as usual.

An Ex-Marine Armed With a Brush

At the moment, there is the unusually powerful exhibiton of work by **Kim Jones**, a 45-year-old artist who interrupted art school to serve two years in the Marines. Jone's exhibition, at the Lorence-Monk Gallery (578 Broadway at Prince Street) through Saturday, is a show of many parts, cooperating in what he hopes is a total artwork. It opens with snapshots of Jones's 1967-68 tour of duty in Vietnam, displayed on a table protectively surrounded by the bristling, low-lying sculptures that the artist calls stars.

The show also includes fields of these stars, made of sticks bound together, laid out on newspapers like creatures culled from the sea, a series of extraordinary lyrical bird's-eye-view drawings of battles tacked casually to the walls, and occasional performances by the artist himself in the guise of what he calls Mudman.

The primitive Mudman - covered with mud and burdened by an enormous sculpture made of sticks, tape and foam - is a kind of man of sorrows for all cultures, a persona that Jones has portrayed in galleries, performance spaces and on the street since the mid 1970's. (I first encountered Mudman as he stood quietly on West Broadway outside the Mary Boone Gallery one Saturday afternoon several years ago - a startling contrast to the plesantries of SoHo gallery-hopping.) Mudman has been at Lorence-Monk each Saturday of the exhibition, looking formidable but engaging visitors in conversation. During the week his stick apparatus and the rest of his costume, including a bucket of mud, are on display with the accouterments of other performances - a single glove that is sprouting twigs and a second, even heavier-looking, amalgam of sticks.

The means deployed are alternately refined and crude, naive and theatrical; the effects are rich. Conflicts both natural and man-made, Darwinian and technological are evoked. We see war as a figment of exuberant childhood fantasy and as the most devastating of man's diseases, all within a peculiarly pastoral framework.

Jones's stars, made of sticks, and twigs projecting outward from a central bulb of mud and tape, are embryonic versions of his towering stick apparatus. They resemble grisly Christmas tree ornaments or some particularly virulent strain of tumbleweed or jellyfish. But they also suggest bombs or land mines. When Jones marshals them onto the large fields of newspaper on the floor, they form a makeshift Vietnamese-style maginot line.

The best of them work as individual sculptures. With their centers painted with tiny grids and cell-like patterns, they can evoke intergalactic worlds or, just as easily, primitive life forms. Steven Spielberg's "Critters" sometimes comes to mind, and, as if to underscore this point, Jones has arranged a group of these things so that they seem to invade the gallery from a mud-covered window sill.

'Mudman,' symbol of a Troubled Time

As may be evident, there's a sliding scale of meaning in Jones's art, a neutrality in which different notions of war and peace, or East and West, cancel each other out, leaving viewers to their own devices. Mudman in particular refuses to take sides, vacillating between the military, the agrarian and the just plain crazed.

Outfitted with his foam, his fungus-like helmet and his burden of sticks, the artist resembles a soldier at once ingeniously camouflaged (like the Vietcong) and fantastically overequipped (like the Americans). While he looks threatening, he is effectively crippled by the apparatus, moving slowly and with difficulty, like a religious penitent or an exhausted peasant carrying a day's harvest on his back.

But Mudman also communicates an element of irrationality and outsized anger that pushes beyond these more normal resemblances toward outsider art. Some observers have compared Jones's Mudman to a tree, others to a homeless person, and the latter connection makes sense, since so many homeless men are Vietnam veterans.

Mudman may personify Jones's own feeling of confusion upon his return to the States. "I came out kind of neutral," the artist said in a recent interview. "I felt anger at the Vietnamese, but it seemed that President Johnson and President Nixon weren't exactly thinking about my life."

Sometimes Jones is more oblique about his Vietnam connection, more universal in his portrayal of war. The highlight of the exhibition at Lorence-Monk is a series of large pencil drawings, never before exhibited, that he has worked on intermittently since 1978. Exhaustively detailed yet schematic, they depict battles between minute, teeming forces of O's and X's. Look closely and you see forts, battlefields, rivers and confusing labyrinths as well as delicate thatches of crisscrossing lines that signify weapon fire. An even closer look reveals conference rooms, prisons, interrogation chambers, tanks and supertanks.

Drawings of a World at War

Pinned to the walls like battle plans, these drawings present a bird's-eye view of a world given over completely to war: as Jones puts it, "two different people who are always fighting each other - which is a very universal thing." Yet this view is suffused with a distanced, even classical beauty that makes manifest war's remoteness without quite masking its awful voraciousness. (its classicism may remind lovers of old maps of Jacops de' Barbari's astoundingly accurate "Bird's-Eye View of Venice," published in 1500.) Intriguingly, these drawings are almost identical to smaller ones the artist made as a 13-year old growing up in California, several of which are included in this show. In effect, they brings Jones full circle, back to the childhood war games through which young boys in particular learn to love war before they experience the real thing - games that, incidentally, provide the opening moments of "Born on the Fourth of July." Even more intriguing, the recent battle drawings are works in flux, being continually reworked by the artist. In this they form a kind of hand-made video game, with Jones constantly adding or erasing soldiers and weapons according to who he thinks is winning or losing. (While this batch is for sale, Jones says he will just keep working on them if they don't sell.) There is a restlessness to these drawings that melds with the Mudman performances and with the improvisational quality of Jones's sculpture, but their open-mindedness also suggests a therapeutic function. Jones's incessant reworking of these drawings must also be seen as providing an outlet for the incessantly recurring memories of war itself. Perhaps this is true of all art made by Vietnam veterans, but it is an idea that finds special clarity in the shifting forms and spaces of Kim Jones's battle drawings.

Photos: Kim Jones as Mudman at the Lorence-Monk Gallery - evoking conflicts both natural and man-made, Darwinian and technological (Cori Wells Braun) (pg. 31); David Smith's "Little Hero of War" (1989) - The artist wants his compositions to remain true to the G.I.'s standard reaction to just about any event - victory, defeat, dying, not dying - "It don't mean nothin'." (pg. 34)

Mudman in New York

Angelika Festa

Kim Jones was among the artists represented in *Choices: Making an Art of Everyday Life*, at New York's The New Museum of Contemporary Art from 1 February until 30 March 1986. In addition to Jones, who occupied the Window on Broadway of The New Museum, the artists in this exhibition were Marina Abramovic and Ulay, James Lee Byars, Spalding Gray, Alex Grey, Tehching Hsieh, Linda Montano, Morgan O'Hara, Michael Osterhout, United Art Contractors Dave and Terri, and Ian Wilson. Marcia Tucker, director of The New Museum and organizer of the exhibition, wrote in the catalog that the exhibition's intention was to remove the barriers between art and life.

During the exhibition Jones appeared periodically and unannounced as the Mudman. Dressed only in boots and shorts or a loincloth, his body caked with mud, a pair of pantyhose covered his face and a headdress made of bamboo and foam rubber rested on his head. Strapped to his back was a huge structure of sticks and mud. During the three- to six-hour performance presented two or three times a week, Jones animated the Window on Broadway, haunted the large exhibition space and the sidewalk outside, or crouched silently somewhere by the entrance, warming his body with an electric heater. When onlookers asked about his "dress" he would point to his body and casually answer, "Mud and sticks, that's all."

About two weeks before the opening of the exhibition, Jones spent a few hours each day converting the window space into his performance space. He covered portions of the walls with altered photos of figures in various panic-stricken positions. On the backwall, Jones drew a full-figure self-portrait of the Mudman with his sticks. Next to it he drew a large image of

a man hanging from a tree, his eyes bulging, his penis erect, as a small, female figure emerged out of the top of his head. Stylized sticks and branches were drawn directly on the white walls of the window space, creating the illusion of a jungle thicket. Sticks hung from the ceiling and made a canopy over the window space. The floor was littered with dried mud and sticks. In the middle of the space was a white, wooden chair, a small, plastic bucket of mud, a small pile of clothing, and muddy work boots. The Mudman's headdress and his "dog," another foam rubber and stick form, were propped against the wall. The large stick structure Jones carried on his back stood off to one side of the space. The installation resembled a temporary shelter or hideout.

On Thursday, 31 January at six o'clock, the exhibition opened to invited guests: trustees of the museum and patrons of the arts, collectors, curators and critics, museum staff and members, the exhibition's artists and their friends. By seven o'clock; the museum was packed with people, drinks in hand, milling about talking to each other. It was difficult to move through the crowd. Suddenly Jones stepped into his environment in the Window on Broadway, stripped off his street clothing and placed them in a tidy pile on the floor. As a curious crowd gathered on the street outside, he covered his genitals with a loincloth, rubbed black mud from a plastic bucket over his naked body, put on his foam rubber and stick headdress, and left the window space carrying his stick structure on his back. In a small side entrance of the museum, Jones proceeded to set fire to bits of crumpled newspaper in a small, metal bowl. Handing the burning bowl to a passerby he strapped his stick structure to his back, then took the bowl and placed it on the sidewalk just outside his window installation. With his back to the street, Jones stood in front of the window. The evening was freezing, the mud wasn't dry on his skin, and he shivered as he silently watched the fire burn. Passersby stopped and stared, but no one spoke to Jones. When the fire had burned down, he took the bowl, lit up a strong-smelling cigar, and smoked it for a while. Then he lumbered back into the museum where he was absorbed by the museum crowd. Very slowly he moved through the space, greeting friends and talking casually, carrying his stick burden on his back, now and then hiding his face behind a pair of pantyhose. He picked up a drink and occasionally sipped from it, his body still shivering from the cold. People pressed close around him, friends touched his mud-caked skin, strangers fingered his stick structure as if to check its substance. After about three hours, he returned to his window space, stripped off his sticks and headdress, pulled his street clothing over his mudcaked body, and left the window.

Three days later, several artists in the exhibition participated in a panel discussion held at The New Museum and moderated by art critic Thomas McEvelley. Jones said:

Well, a lot of my work has to do with mud and sticks and smell. Smell is very important because it helps your memory. So I brought something to sort of jog your memory. In Middle Eastern countries, I think, it's either the right hand or left hand that you use to wipe your ass with. And if you get caught stealing, they cut [the other hand] off—so you have to eat your food with the same hand that you wipe your ass with. Well, I don't eat my food with my right hand. I smoke my cigar with my left hand also. So this is my own shit. It's from about yesterday, I think. That's about all I have to say. So I'm just going to pat it

down there. I won't spread it around or anything. I'll just keep it in its own little territory. That's all I can get out. Thank you.

Jones's performance at The New Museum follows the ritual structure identified by Victor Turner in *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (1974) and *From Ritual to Theater* (1982): breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration. Periods of preparation and of cooling down are added. The performance is also framed in paradox as rituals often are. Jones's appearance as the Mudman on the evening of 31 January was not publicly announced—not even the museum staff knew if Jones would attend. This indeterminacy was repeated throughout the two months of Jones's participation in the exhibition and spectators never knew when he would appear or what he would do. In this light, the Mudman can be seen as a ritual-clown who, through “indeterminacy” and “interior instability” (Handelman 1981:333), serves to dissolve structure and thus represents the potential power of regeneration. In fact, this internal instability and self-contradiction are crucial to the meaning of the performance.

Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) has described the recently-revived tradition of Japanese monkey performances, an art form established by the beginning of the Chusei period (794–1603). The monkey and trainer in Japanese folk mythology function as mediator and messenger between the sacred and the profane. In the iconography of the monkey trainer, the monkey is usually pictured as “riding” on the back of the trainer, an indication of monkey “possession.” This union of the wild and the tame can be perceived as sexual and illicit, sacred and taboo. The monkey in Japan is also thought to have healing power: for instance, a burned and ground monkey head was used for ailments of the brain and head, including mental retardation and headaches. The monkey was also thought of as a tamer and healer of horses and kept leashed inside stables to keep the horses healthy and tame. Deities were thought to ride into the human world on horseback, so the significance of the monkey-trainer-horse conglomerate is rife with a crossing of boundaries, symbolizing both the passage and the gap between the human and the sacred, the weak and the powerful, the wild and the tame.

An analogy can be drawn between the Japanese monkey and trainer and Jones the Mudman. Both are liminal figures, both carry their opposite on their backs in painful and creative union. The Mudman's mudcaked, nearly-nude body is also reminiscent of the Australian shamanic practice of covering the body with mud or feces to signify a return from the netherworld. A mud/dirt/feces-covered body is a vegetable symbol suggestive of continual generation and regeneration. While the Mudman's body is covered with and represents the “made-up,” unborn, and mythical part of the earth—almost to the point of nondifferentiation from the earth—the stick structure on his back is by comparison stiff and rigid. It restricts movement, inflicts pain, and has a visual and structural dominance over Jones. The Mudman is a figure who carries his own destruction upon his back while at the same time promising rebirth by his direct connection to the earth and the undifferentiated. The persona of the Mudman can be seen as an oppositional structure, the polarity of eros and telos, a person possessed by her/his other side, the unconscious and unknown. This two-part image makes Jones the Mudman into a true “threshold” figure, symbol of ritual pairs: man-woman, human-divine, fetus-skeleton, life-death.

The parallel between Japanese monkey performances and Kim Jones is more than accidental. Jones was born on the 28th of January 1944, the Year of the Monkey in the Chinese calendar. In 1968, on a rest and recreation

leave from his military service in Vietnam, Jones visited the Temple of the Monkey in Hong Kong. Since 1976 he has been working on a series of drawings of performances in which the monkey is an integral part of the iconography. One large drawing done in 1983 shows Jones as the Mudman with a monkey riding on his back. His monkeys represent a wild and vicious force as well as a healing and taming agent, and this significance is reinforced by Jones's use of fire. The fire that Jones burns in the bowl in front of the Window on Broadway refers to the Christian votive fire and to Agni, the Vedic fire god. Fire is also the alchemical medium of transubstantiation and transformation. All this is further dramatized by the backpack stick structure—the skeletal remains of the burned wings of Icarus. In the performance at the museum, after the fire in the bowl had burned to ashes and the tension on the sidewalk subsided, Jones lit a cigar and smoked it for a while. This is a “cold” fire in contrast to the “hot” fire of the bowl. Jones's smoke is a social gesture of reintegration, a “cool” flame, not connected to the heat of battle, rebellion, and creation, but closer to the peaceful and warming fire of Demeter, the hearth of the Roman house-gods.

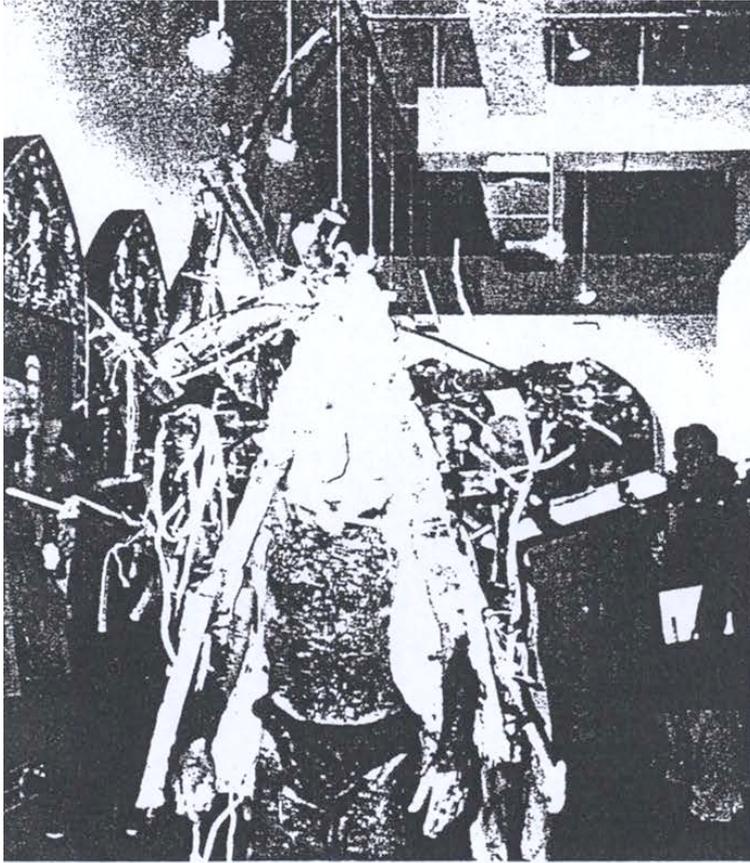
When Jones reenters the museum, this time through the main doors, he still appears like an outlandish stranger: terrifying, a bit foolish, and ominously unreal. As he slowly moves through the crowd, greeting friends and smiling at puzzled remarks, it is not clear who is Jones and who is the Mudman. His persona defies complete separation into the real and illusory, the natural and the rehearsed. This ambiguity of the performance frame makes for a certain uncomfortable tension among the spectators who, in a complex transference of action and perception, begin to perceive their own identity as located between that of performer/participant and spectator, in an equivocal interplay of contraries. This ludic exchange of authority/rebellion, life/death, self/other is the dyad embodied in the fire bowl, in Jones/Mudman, and in the performance itself as an act of seeing/reflecting, being/re-creating.

Jones as the Mudman is best experienced in the context of everyday life—suddenly appearing as a specter on the street, smelling bad and being messy, shuffling about with his mud and sticks. Jones the Mudman is a sensational and eccentric figure—he is also a crazy fool.

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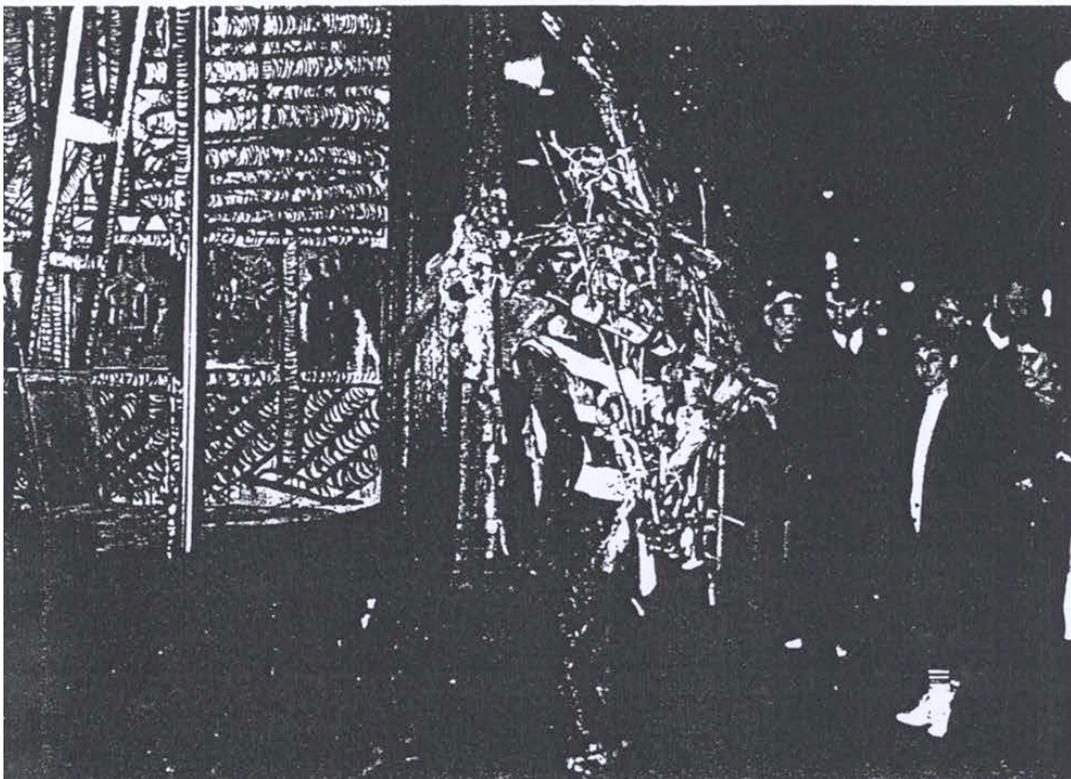
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Angelika Festa is a student at New York University's Department of Performance Studies. She is a performance artist who has presented her work in the United States and Canada.



16. Kim Jones as the Mudman enters the New Museum of Contemporary Art. (Photo by Dona Ann McAdams)

17. Outside the Window on Broadway, Mudman Kim Jones contemplates the small bowl in which a fire once burned. (Photo by Dona Ann McAdams)



Thomas McEvilley, "Art in the dark; Kim Jones" *Artforum*, summer 1984, p.62-71.

Thomas McEvilley

The development of the conceptual and performance genres changed the rules of art till it became virtually unrecognizable to those who had thought that it was theirs. The art activity flowed into the darkness beyond its traditional boundaries and explored areas that were previously as unmapped and mysterious as the other side of the moon. In recent years a tendency has been underway to close the book on those investigations, to contract again around the commodifiable esthetic object, and to forget the sometimes frightening visions of the other side. Yet if one opens the book—and it will not go away—the strange record is still there, like the fragmentary journals of explorers in new lands, filled with apparently unanswerable questions.

When Piero Manzoni, in 1959, canned his shit and put it on sale, in an art gallery, for its weight in gold; when Chris Burden had himself shot in the arm and crucified to the roof of a Volkswagen (in 1971 and 1974 respectively); when two American performance artists, in separate events, fucked human female corpses—how did such activities come to be called art? In fact the case at hand is not unique. Similar movements have occurred occasionally in cultural history when the necessary conditions were in place. Perhaps the most striking parallel is the development, in the Cynic school of Greek philosophy, of a style of "performance philosophy" that parallels the gestures of performance art in many respects.¹ If this material is approached with sympathy and with a broad enough cultural perspective it will reveal its inner seriousness and meaning.

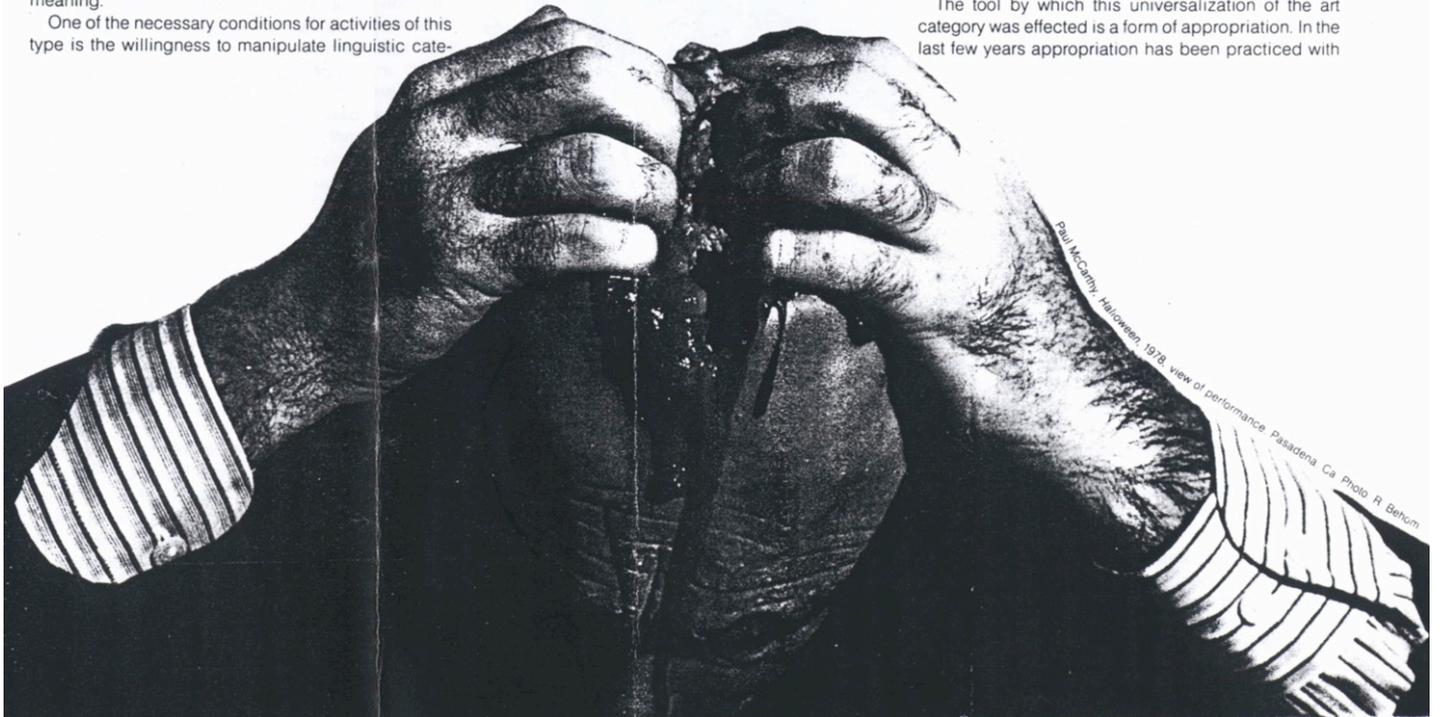
One of the necessary conditions for activities of this type is the willingness to manipulate linguistic cate-

ART IN THE DARK

gories at will. This willingness arises from a nominalist view of language which holds that words lack fixed ontological essences that are their meanings; meanings, rather, are seen to be created by convention alone, arbitrary, and hence manipulable. Ferdinand de Saussure pointed toward this with his perception of the arbitrariness of the link between signifier and signified. Even more, Ludwig Wittgenstein, by dissolving fixed meaning into the free-for-all of usage, demonstrated a culture's ability to alter its language games by rotations and reshaping of the semantic field. By manipulating semantic categories, by dissolving their boundaries selectively and allowing the contents of one to flow into another, shifts in cultural focus can be forced through language's control of affection and attitude. In the extreme instance, a certain category can be declared universal, coextensive with experience, its boundaries being utterly dissolved until its content melts into awareness itself. This universalization of a single category has at different times taken place in the areas of religion, philosophy, and, in our time, art.

A second necessary condition is a culture that is hurtling through shifts in awareness so rapidly that, like the tragic hero in Sophocles just before the fall, it becomes giddy with prospects of new accomplishments hardly describable in known terms. At such moments the boundaries of things seem outworn; the contents flow into and around one another dizzily. In a realm that, like art some twenty-five years ago, feels its inherited boundaries to be antiquated and ineffective, a sudden overflow in all directions can occur.

The tool by which this universalization of the art category was effected is a form of appropriation. In the last few years appropriation has been practiced with



Paul McCarthy, *Haloween*, 1978, view of performance Pasadena, Ca. Photo R. Behm

certain limits; the art category as a whole is left intact, though inner divisions such as those between stylistic periods are breached. The model of Francis Picabia is relevant here. But twenty-five years ago appropriation worked on the more universalizing model of Duchamp. In this case, the artist turns an eye upon preexisting entities with apparent destinies outside the art context, and, by that turning of the eye, appropriates them into the art realm, making them the property of art. This involves a presupposition that art is not a set of objects but an attitude toward objects, or a cognitive stance (as Oscar Wilde suggested, not a thing, but a way.) If one were to adopt such a stance to all of life, foregrounding the value of attention rather than issues of personal gain and loss, one would presumably have rendered life a seamlessly appreciative experience. Art then functions like a kind of universal awareness practice, not unlike the mindfulness of southern Buddhism or the "Attention!" of Zen. Clearly there is a residue of Romantic pantheistic mysticism here, with a hidden ethical request. But there is also a purely linguistic dimension to the procedure, bound up with the nominalist attitude. If words (such as "art") lack rigid essences, if they are, rather, empty variables that can be converted to different uses, then usage is the only ground of meaning in language. To be this or that is simply to be called this or that. To be art is to be called art, by the people who supposedly are in charge of the word—artists, critics, curators, art historians, and so on. There is no appeal from the foundation of usage, no higher court on the issue. If something (anything) is presented as art by an artist and contextualized as art within the system then it is art, and there is nothing anybody can do about it.²

Conversely, the defenders of the traditional boundaries of the realm will be forced to reify language. They will continue to insist that certain things are, by essence, art, and certain other things are, by essence, not art. But in an intellectual milieu dominated by linguistic philosophy and structural linguistics, the procedure of appropriation by designation, based on the authority of usage and the willingness to manipulate it, has for a while been rather widely accepted. During this time the artist has had a new option: to choose to manipulate language and context, which in turn manipulate mental focus by rearrangement of the category network within which our experience is organized.

The process of universalizing the art context goes back at least as far as Duchamp's showings of Ready-mades. Dada and Surrealism, of course, had their input. But the tendency came to maturity in the middle to late '50s, when Alain Robbe-Grillet, for example, insisted that if art is going to be anything it has to be everything.³ At about the same time Yves Klein, extending the tradition of French dandyism, said, "Life. Life itself. . . is the absolute art."⁴ Similarly, in America, Allan Kaprow suggested that "the line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps as indistinct, as possible."⁵ Duchamp had appropriated by signature, as Klein did when, in about 1947, he signed the sky. Later Klein would designate anything as art by painting it with his patented International Klein Blue. Manzoni sometimes designated preexisting objects as art by signing them, and at other times by placing



Günther Brus, *Kopfbemalung* (Head painting), 1964, view of performance, Vienna, Austria. Photo: Ludwig Hoffenreich.



Above and below: Günther Brus, *Malaktion* (Paint action), 1964–5, view of performance, Vienna, Austria. Photos: Ludwig Hoffenreich.



them on a sculpture base. In 1967 Dennis Oppenheim produced his "Sitemarkers," ceremonial stakes used to mark off areas of the world as art.

These procedures were sometimes employed in conscious parody of the theological concept of creation by the word. In 1960 Klein, imitating divine fiat, appropriated the entire universe into his Theater of the Void, as his piece for the Festival d'Art d'Avant-garde, in Paris. In the next year he painted a topographical globe International Klein Blue, thereby appropriating the earth into his portfolio; soon Manzoni, responding, placed the earth upon his Sculpture Base (*Socle du monde*, 1961), wresting it from Klein's portfolio into his own. Of course there is a difference between fiat and appropriation. The purely linguistic procedure of forcefully expanding the usage boundaries of a word does not create a wholly new reality, but shifts focus on an existing one. Any action that takes place in the appropriation zone is necessarily real as itself—yet semantically a kind of shadow-real. Insofar as the act's prior category is remembered, it remains what it was, just as a loan-word may retain a trace of its prior meaning—only it is reflected, as it were, into a new semantic category. Thus the process of universal appropriation has certain internal or logical limits; it is based on the assumption that a part can contain the whole, that art, for example, can contain life. But the only way that a part can contain its whole is by reflection, as a mirror may reflect a whole room, or by implication, as a map of a city implies the surrounding nation. The appropriation process, in other words, may rearrange the entire universe at the level of a shadow or reflection, and this is its great power. At the same time, as with the gems strung together in the Net of Indra, only the shadowy life of a reflection is really at issue, and this is its great limit.⁶

The infinite regress implicit in such a procedure was illustrated when, in 1962, Ben Vautier signed Klein's death and, in 1963, Manzoni's, thereby appropriating both those appropriators of the universe. The idea of signing a human being or a human life was in fact the central issue. In 1961 Manzoni exhibited a nude model on his sculpture base and signed her as his work. Later he issued his "Certificates of Authenticity," which declared that the owner, having been signed by Manzoni, was now permanently an artwork. But it was Klein who most clearly defined the central issue, saying, "The painter only has to create one masterpiece, himself, constantly." The idea that the artist is the work became a basic theme of the period in question. Ben acted it out, not long after the signing of Klein's death, by exhibiting himself as a living moving sculpture. Soon Gilbert & George did the same thing. As early as 1959 James Lee Byars had exhibited himself, seated alone in the center of an otherwise empty room. Such gestures are fraught with strange interplays of artistic and religious forms, as the pedestal has always been a variant of the altar.

It was in part the Abstract Expressionist emphasis on the direct expression of the artist's unique personality that prepared the way for the claim that the artist's person was in fact the art. Through the survival in the art realm of the Romantic idea of the specially inspired



Chris Burden. *Trans-fixed*. 1974. view of performance. Venice, Ca. Photo: Charles Hill



Carolee Schneemann. *Meat Jiv*. 1964. view of performance. New York. Photo: Al Giese

individual, it was possible, though in a sort of bracketed parody, to confer on an artist the status of a royal or sacred being who is on exhibit to other humans.

The underlying question (and an insoluble knot in philosophy) is that of the relation between substance and attribute; specifically, how does one tell the agent from the activity? Certain Indian texts, exploring imaginatively the relation between god and the world, ask how one can tell the dancer from the dance. In the visual arts the question has always seemed easier, since the painter or sculptor or photographer has traditionally made an object outside him- or herself. But universalizing appropriation had dissolved such a conception, and in performance art, as in the dance, the agent and activity often seem inseparable. In the last twenty years various performance artists (James Lee Byars, Chris Burden, Linda Montano, and others) carried this category shift or semantic rotation to its limit by moving into galleries and living there for extended periods as performances. In this situation even the minutest details of everyday life are temporarily distanced and made strange—made art, that is—by the imposition on them of a new category overlay that alters the cognitive focus of both the performer and the beholder. Something parallel, though with fewer possibilities for irony, occurs when novices in ashrams are advised to regard their experiences, at every moment of the day, as sacred and special.

That these creations by designation are linguistic, involving a willed change in the use of the word "art," does not altogether rob them of mystery and effectiveness. It should be emphasized that category shift by forced designation is the basis of many magical procedures. In the Roman Catholic mass, for example, certain well-known objects—bread and wine—are ritually designated as certain other objects—flesh and blood—which, in the manifest sense of everyday experience, they clearly are not; and the initiate who accepts the semantic rotation shifts his or her affection and sensibility accordingly. Art has often been thought of as exercising a sort of magic; around 1960, some artists adopted an actual magical procedure—basically a linguistic form of what Sir James Frazer called "sympathetic magic." At that moment art entered an ambiguous realm from which it has not yet definitively emerged. For the magical rite is already an appropriation of a piece of reality into a sheltered or bracketed zone of contemplation; when it is reappropriated into the realm of art, a double distancing occurs. Furthermore, the universalization of any category, or the complete submission of its ontology to the process of metaphor, blurs or even erases its individual identity. To be everything is not to be anything in particular. In regard to the universal set, the Law of Identity has no function. The semantical coextensiveness of art and life means either that art has disappeared into life, melting into it everywhere like a new spark of indwelling meaning, or (and this departs at once into theistic metaphor) that life has dissolved into art. In short it means ultimately that the terms have become meaningless in relation to one another, since language operates not by sameness but by difference, and two sets with the same contents are the same set.

The art of appropriation then, is a kind of shadowy recreation of the universe by drawing it, piece by piece, into the brackets of artistic contemplation. Artists engaged in this pursuit have concentrated on the appropriation of religious forms, of philosophical forms, of political forms, of popular forms, and more recently, of art historical styles. These enterprises have met different fates. The appropriation of religious contents has been the most unpopular, even taboo, while that based on philosophy, especially linguistic philosophy, for a while acquired a marketable chic. In this discrimination the Apollonian (to use Nietzsche's dichotomy) surfaced over the hidden depth of the Dionysian. Apollo represents the ego and its apparent clarity of identity; Dionysus, the unconscious, in which all things flow into and through one another. In the Apollonian light each thing is seen clear and separate, as itself; in the Dionysian dark all things merge into a flowing and molten invisibility. That our culture, in the age of science, should favor the Apollonian is not surprising. The value of light is beyond question; but where there is no darkness there can be no illumination. Rejection of the Dionysian does not serve the purpose of clear and total seeing.

Universal appropriation has an exacting task if it is to be practiced with sufficient range of feeling not to trivialize life. The levity, the sense of the will to entertain, that prevailed when Ben or Gilbert & George displayed themselves as sculptures was balanced by the sometimes horrifying ordeal through which the appropriation of religious forms unfolded. It was necessary to descend from the pedestal, with its Apollonian apotheosis of the ego, into the Dionysian night of the unconscious, and to bring into the light the logic of its darkness.

In Vienna in the early 1960s, Hermann Nitsch began presenting a series of performances that, in 1965, he would consolidate as the OM, or Orgies Mysteries, Theatre.¹ His work was a focused exercise to bring the performance genre to its darkest spaces, its most difficult test, at once. In OM presentations the performers tear apart and disembowel a lamb or bull, cover themselves and the environment with the blood and gore, pour the entrails and blood over one another, and so on. These events last up to three hours (though Nitsch is planning one that will last for six days and nights). They have occasionally been shut down by the police. They have occurred in art galleries and have been reported in art magazines and books.

The OM Theatre performances open into dizzyingly distant antiquities of human experience. In form they are essentially revivals of the Dionysian ritual called the *sparagmos*, or dismemberment, in which the initiates, in an altered state produced by alcohol, drugs, and wild dancing, tore apart and ate raw a goat that represented the god Dionysus, the god of all thrusting and wet and hot things in nature.² It was, in other words, a communion rite in which the partaker abandoned his or her individual identity to enter the ego-darkened paths of the unconscious and emerged, having eaten and incorporated the god, redesignated as divine. In such rites ordinary humanity ritually appropriates the aura of godhood, through the ecstatic ability to feel the

Law of Identity and its contrary at the same time.

Euripides, an ancient forerunner of the Viennese artists, featured this subject in several works. Like Nitsch, he did so partly because this was the subject matter hardest for his culture, as for ours, to assimilate in the light of day. In the *Bacchae* especially he presents the dismemberment as a terrifying instrument of simultaneous self-abandonment and self-discovery. The Apollonian tragic hero, Pentheus, like our whole rationalist culture, thought his boundaries were secure, his terrain clearly mapped, his identity established. Rejecting the Dionysian rite, which represents the violent tearing apart of all categories, he became its victim. Disguising himself as a Maenad, or female worshiper of Dionysus, he attempted to observe the ritual, but was himself mistaken for the sacrificial victim, torn apart, and eaten raw. In short, his ego-boundaries were violently breached, the sense of his identity exploded into fragments that were then ground down into the primal substrate of Dionysian darkness which both underlies and overrides civilization's attempts to elevate the conscious subject above nature.

Nitsch writes of his work in consciously Dionysian terms as celebrating a "drunken, all-encompassing rejoicing," a "drunken ecstasy of life," a "liberated joy of strong existence without barriers," "a liturgy of exultation, of ecstatic, orgiastic, boundless joy, of drugged rapture. . . ."³ He has created, in fact, a purely classical theory for it, based on Freudian and Jungian reinterpretations of ancient religious forms, on Aristotle's doctrine of catharsis, and on the ritual of the scapegoat as the wellspring of purification for the community.

Another stage of the OM ritual finds a young male standing or lying naked beneath a slain carcass marked with religious symbols and allowing the blood and guts to flow over his naked body. Again an ancient source has been appropriated. In the initiation rite called the *taurobolium*, the aspirant was placed naked in a pit over which, atop a lattice of branches, a bull, representing the god, was slain and disemboweled. When the initiate emerged covered with the bull's blood and entrails, he was hailed as the reborn god emerging from the earth womb.⁴

These works demonstrate the category shift involved in the appropriation process. In part this shift from the zone of religion to that of art represents the residual influence of Romanticism: the artist is seen as a kind of extramural initiation priest, a healer or guide who points the alienated soul back toward the depths of the psyche where it resonates to the rhythms of nature. In addition, it is the neutrality of the unbounded category that allows the transference to occur. Religious structures in our society allow no setting open enough or free enough to equate with that of ancient Greek religion, which was conspicuously nonexclusionary; the art realm in the age of boundary dissolution and the overflow did offer such a free or open zone. Günter Brus, another Viennese performer, has claimed that placing such contents within the art realm allows "free access to the action"⁵—a free access that the category of religion, with its weight of institutionalized beliefs,

does not allow. The assumption, in other words, is that in the age of the overflow the art context is a neutral and open context which has no proper and essential contents of its own. Art, then, is an open variable which, when applied to any culturally bound thing, will liberate it to direct experience. That this was the age of psychedelic drugs, and that psychedelic drugs were widely presumed to do the same thing, is not unimportant. As this tradition advanced along the path to the underworld, it was increasingly influenced by psychopharmacology with its sense of the eternally receding boundaries of experience.

Soon after Nitsch's first performances in Vienna, Carolee Schneemann presented a series of now-classic pieces also based on the appropriation of ritual activities from ancient and primitive sources. The general shape of these works arose, as among ancient shamans and magicians, from a variety of sources, including dream material and experiences with psychedelic drugs. Like Nitsch's works, Schneemann's are based both on depth psychology and on the appropriation of contents from the neolithic stratum of religious history, especially the religious genre of the fertility rite.

In *Meat Joy* (Paris, 1964) nearly naked men and women interacted, in a rather frenzied, Dionysian way, with one another and with hunks of raw meat and carcasses of fish and chickens. They smeared themselves with blood, imprinted their bodies on paper, tore chickens apart, threw chunks of raw meat and torn fowl about, slapped one another with them, kissed and rolled about "to exhaustion," and so on.⁶ The spargmatic dismemberment and the suggestion of the suspension of mating taboos both evoke Maenadism and the Dionysian cult. The wild freedom advocated by this ancient cult, as well as its suggestions of rebirth, seemed appropriate expressions of the unchecked newness that faced the art world as its boundaries dissolved and opened on all sides into unexpected vistas, where traditional media, torn apart and digested, were reborn in unaccountable new forms. The Dionysian subversion of ego in the cause of general fertility has become another persistent theme of appropriation performance. Barbara Smith has performed what she calls a Tantric ritual, that included sexual intercourse, in a gallery setting as an artwork.¹³

In general, performance works involving the appropriation of religious forms have fallen into two groups: those that select from the neolithic sensibility of fertility and blood sacrifice, and those that select from the paleolithic sensibility of shamanic magic and ordeal; often the two strains mix. Both may be seen as expressions of the desire, so widespread in the '60s and early '70s, to reconstitute within Modern civilization something like an ancient or primitive sensibility of oneness with nature.

Though the erotic content of the works based on the theme of fertility has been received with some shock, it is the work based on the shamanic ordeal that the art audience has found most difficult and repellent. Clearly that is part of the intention of the work, and in fact a part of its proper content. But it is important to make clear that these artists have an earnest desire to com-

municate, rather than simply shock. Seen in an adequate context, their work is not aggression but expression.

In 1965 Nitsch formed the *Wiener Aktionismus* group in conjunction with Otto Mühl, Günter Brus, and Rudolf Schwarzkogler. Much of their work focused on the motifs of self-mutilation and self-sacrifice that were implicit, though not foregrounded, both in Klein's career and in the OM Theatre performances. Brus, during his performing period (1964–1970), would appear in the performance space dressed in a woman's black stockings, brassiere, and garter belt, slash himself with scissors till he ran with blood, and perform various acts ordinarily taboo in public settings, such as shitting, eating his own shit, vomiting, and so on. Schwarzkogler's pieces presented young males as mutilated sacrificial victims, often wounded in the genitals, lying fetally contracted and partially mummy-wrapped as if comatose, in the midst of paraphernalia of violent death such as bullet cartridges and electrical wires. Not only the individual elements of these works, but their patterns of combination—specifically the combination of female imitation, self-injury, and the seeking of dishonor through the performance of taboo acts—find striking homologues in shamanic activities. The same motifs reappeared, not necessarily with direct influence from the Viennese, in the works of several American performance artists who have stretched audiences' sympathies beyond the breaking point.

Paul McCarthy, a major exponent of the art of the taboo gesture, first heard the calling not from the Viennese but from Klein. As a student at the University of Utah in 1968, he leapt from a second story window in emulation of Klein's Leap into the Void.¹⁴ By about 1974 his work had found its own distinctive form, developing into a modernized shamanic style so difficult for audiences to bear that the pieces were usually published only as video tapes. These performances, like Schneemann's, were often developed from dream material, indicating their intimate relation both with shamanic magic and with depth psychology. Like Brus, McCarthy has sometimes appeared dressed as a woman, and has worked, like Schwarzkogler, with the themes of self-mutilation and castration; some pieces have acted out the basic female imitation of feigning menstruation and parturition (magical pantomimes that are common in primitive initiation rites). In others, McCarthy has cut his hands and mixed the blood with food and water in bowls, clearly echoing various sacramental rites from the Dionysian to the Christian. In still others that, like Nitsch's, have sometimes been shut down by the police, he has acted out the seeking of dishonor as an exploration of the Dionysian-Freudian depths of psychobiological life. In *Sailor's Meat*, a videotape from 1975, for example, he appeared in a room in a wine hotel wearing black lace panties smeared with blood and a blonde female wig and lay on the bed fucking piles of raw meat and ground hamburger with his cock painted red and a hot dog shoved up his ass. As *Old Man in My Doctor*, 1978, he slit a rubber mask over his head to form a vagina-shaped opening on it and from the vagina gave birth to

a ketchup-covered doll. The piece was a conscious remaking of the myth of the birth of Athena from the cleft brainpan of Zeus, a myth that reverts to the age when male priests and their divinities sought to incorporate the female principle and its powers. In *Baby Boy*, 1982, McCarthy gave birth to a doll from between his ketchup-naked covered male thighs as he lay on his back with his feet in the air like a woman in missionary-style sexual intercourse. In these and other works self-mutilation, female imitation, and the performance of taboo acts are combined in a structure roughly parallel to that of Brus' work, though with a greater range of expressiveness.

Similar materials recur in the work of Kim Jones. In a performance in Chicago in 1981, Jones appeared naked except for a mask made of a woman's pantyhose, covered himself with mud (as both African and Australian shamans do when performing), and lay naked on the fire escape in the cold to accumulate energy (a shamanic practice known worldwide but most famous from Tibet). Returning to the performance space, he produced a mayonnaise jar filled with his own shit, smeared himself with it, embraced members of the audience while covered with it, and finally burned sticks and green plants till the smoke drove the remaining audience from the gallery. In another piece, Jones cut himself with a razor blade 27 times in a pattern suggesting the body's circulatory system, then pressed himself against the gallery wall for a self-portrait.¹⁵

Understandably, to audiences habituated to the traditional boundaries of art, to audiences for whom easel painting was still the quintessential art activity, these performances were offensive and even insulting. Of course, the point of such works when they first appeared was in part their seeming to be radically, even horrifyingly, out of context. But for twenty years they have been part of the art scene, if somewhat peripherally, legitimized by art world context and critical designation again and again. In order to understand the wellsprings of such works, in order to approach them with a degree of sympathy and clarity, it is necessary to frame them somewhat in cultural history, where in fact they have a clear context.

Many of the artists discussed here feel that shamanic material and primitive initiation rites are the most relevant cultural parallels to their work. But most of them feel that the tone of their work arose first, often under Freudian or Jungian influence, and was later confirmed and further shaped by some study of shamanic literature.¹⁶ The question of origins, then—whether from shamanic literature, or from the Jungian collective unconscious, or from the Freudian timeless repository of infantile memory, or from all these sources—though it is worthwhile to state, cannot be answered. In any case it is important in terms of any theory of the function of art that these artists have introduced into the art realm materials found elsewhere only in the psychiatric records of disturbed children and in the shamanic thread of the history of religion.¹⁷

In societies where the shamanic profession is intact, shamans have been perhaps the most fully rounded and powerful cultural figures in history. The poets,

mythographers, visual artists, musicians, medical doctors, psychotherapists, scientists, sorcerers, undertakers, psychopomps, and priests of their tribal groups, they have been one-person cultural establishments. They have also been independent, uncontrollable, and eccentric power figures whose careers have often originated in psychotic episodes—what anthropologists call the "sickness vocation."¹⁸ As a result, when societies increase their demands for internal order, the old shamanic role, with its unassimilable combination of power and freedom, is broken up into more manageable specialty professions: in our society, the doctor, the poet, the artist, and so on, have each inherited one scrap from the original shaman's robe. Beginning with the Romantic period an attempt was made to reconstitute something like the fullness of the shamanic role within the art realm; poets especially were apt to attribute both healing and transcendentalizing powers to the art experience. This project has been acted out in the last twenty years by those artists whose work appropriates its materials from the early history of religion.

Perhaps the most shocking element in the various performance works mentioned here is the practice of self-injury and self-mutilation. This has, however, been a standard feature of shamanic performances and primitive initiation rites around the world. Siberian shamans cut themselves while in ecstatic states brought on by drugs, alcohol, drumming, and dancing.¹⁹ Tibetan shamans are supposedly able to slit their bellies and exhibit their entrails.²⁰ Related practices are found in the performance art under discussion. Chris Burden crawled through broken glass with his hands behind his back (*Through the Night Softly*, 1973). Dennis Oppenheim did a piece in which for half an hour rocks were thrown at him (*Rocked Circle Fear*, 1971). Linda Montano inserted acupuncture needles around her eyes (*Mitchell's Death*, 1978). The Australian performance artist Stelarc, reproducing a feat of Ajivika ascetics in India, has had himself suspended in various positions in the air by means of fishhooks embedded in his flesh.²¹ The number of instances could easily be multiplied.

The element of female imitation, found in the works of Brus, McCarthy, Jones, and others, is also a standard shamanic and initiatory motif, involving sympathetic magic. Male shamans and priests around the world, as well as tribal boys at their puberty initiations, adopt female dress to incorporate the female and her powers.²² In lineages as far apart as North Asian and Amerindian, shamans have worn women's clothing and ritually married other men.²³ Akkadian priests of Ishtar dressed like their goddess, as did Ramakrishna in 19th-century India. A Sanskrit religious text instructs the devotee to "discard the male (*purusa*) in thee and become a woman (*prakriti*)."²⁴ Various tribal rites involve the ritual miming, by men, of female menstruation and parturition, as in the works of McCarthy.²⁵ Freudian and Jungian theories of the bisexuality of the psyche and the need to realize it are relevant both to archaic and to modern exercises of this sort.²⁶

Female imitation and self-mutilation combine in certain practices of ritual surgery found in primitive cul-



Hermann Nitsch. 50. Aktion (Action 50). 1975. view of performance. Prinzendorf, Austria

tures around the world, though most explicit in Australia. In Central Australian initiation rites, for example, a vulvalike opening is cut into the urethral surface of the penis, symbolically incorporating the female principle into the male body.²⁷ Bruno Bettelheim has observed this motif in the fantasies of disturbed children. Brus, in a performance, once cut a vulvalike slit in his groin, holding it open with hooks fastened in his flesh. Ritual surgery to create an androgynous appearance is common in archaic religious practice generally, as an attempt to combine male and female magical powers into one center. The emphasis on the mutilation of the male genitals in much of the Viennese work is relevant here. In classical antiquity the priests of Cybele castrated themselves totally (both penis and testicles) in their initiation, to become more like their goddess; thereafter they dressed like women and were called "females." In subsequent ecstatic performances they would cut themselves in the midst of frenzied dancing and offer the blood to the goddess.²⁸

The public performance of taboo acts is also an ancient religious custom with roots in shamanism and primitive magic. Both art and religion, through the bracketing of their activities in the half-light of ritual appropriation, provide zones where deliberate inversions of social custom can transpire; acts repressed in the public morality may surface there, simultaneously set loose for their power to balance and complete the sense of life, and held safely in check by the shadow reality of the arena they occur in.

A little-known Sanskrit book called the *Pasupata Sutra* formulates this practice in detail, under the heading of the Seeking of Dishonor.²⁹ The practitioner is enjoined to court contempt and abuse from his fellow humans by behavior deliberately contrived as the most inappropriate and offensive for the situation, whatever it may be. In shamanic contexts such practices had demonstrated the shaman's special status beyond convention, his ability to breach at will either metaphysical or ethical boundaries. In yogic terms the goal of the practice was the effacement of ego by the normalization of types of experience usually destructive to the self-image.³⁰ The shaman, the yogic seeker of dishonor, and the ritual scapegoat figure all offered themselves as targets for calamity, to draw it away from the communities they served. They were the individuals who went out on the razor's edge and, protected in part by the brackets of religious performance, publicly breached the taboos of their times. Today the exhibitionistic breaching of age and gender taboos, as well as other forays into the darkness of the disallowed within the brackets of the art performance, replicates this ancient custom, sometimes with the same cathartic intention. As the shoals of history break and flow and reassemble, to break and flow again, these and other primitive practices have resurfaced, in something like their original combination, in an altogether different context.

The preparation of his or her own body as a magico-sculptural object, for example, is a regular and essential part of the shaman's performance. An Australian shaman may cover his body with mud (symbol of recent arrival from the netherworld) and decorate it with

patterns of bird down fastened on with his own blood; an African shaman may wear human bones, skulls, and so forth, and may surgically alter his or her body in various ways; a Central Asian shaman may appear in a skeleton suit with mirrors on it. Frequently the shaman's body is tattooed or scarified or painted with magical symbols. Similarly, Schneemann has presented herself as a "body collage" decorated with symbols from ancient fertility religions. In a mixture of archaic and Christian materials, Linda Montano in *The Screaming Nun*, 1975, "dressed as a nun, danced, screamed, and heard confessions at Embarcadero Plaza [in San Francisco]."³¹ Other pieces by Montano have involved dancing blindfolded in a trance, drumming for six hours a day for six days, shape-changing and identity-changing, self-injury (with acupuncture needles), and astral travel events. Mary Beth Edelson's "Public Rituals" have involved the marking of her naked body with symbols from ancient goddess cults, the equation of her body with the earth, and the declaration of the end of patriarchy (*Your Five Thousand Years Are Up*, 1977).³² Kim Jones, as Mud Man, or Bill Harding emerging covered with mud from a hole in the ground in the middle of a circle of fire, are reconstituting before our eyes images from the elementary stratum of religious forms.

A motif that is absolutely central to shamanism, and that often also involves body decoration, is the attempt to incorporate the power of an animal species by imitation of it. Shamans in general adopt the identities of their power animals, act out their movements, and duplicate their sounds.³³ The claim to understand animal languages and to adopt an animal mind-set is basic to their mediation between culture and nature. Echoes of the practice are, of course, common in the annals of performance art. In Joseph Beuys' conversation with the dead rabbit the knowledge of an animal language combines with a belief in the shamanic ability to communicate with the dead. In *Chicken Dance*, 1972, Montano, attired in a chicken costume, appeared unannounced at various locations in San Francisco and danced wildly through the streets like a shaman possessed by the spirit and moved by the motions of her animal ally. Terry Fox slept on a gallery floor connected with two dead fish by string attached to his hair and teeth, attempting, like a shaman inviting his animal ally to communicate through a dream, to dream himself into the piscine mind in *Pisces*, 1971.

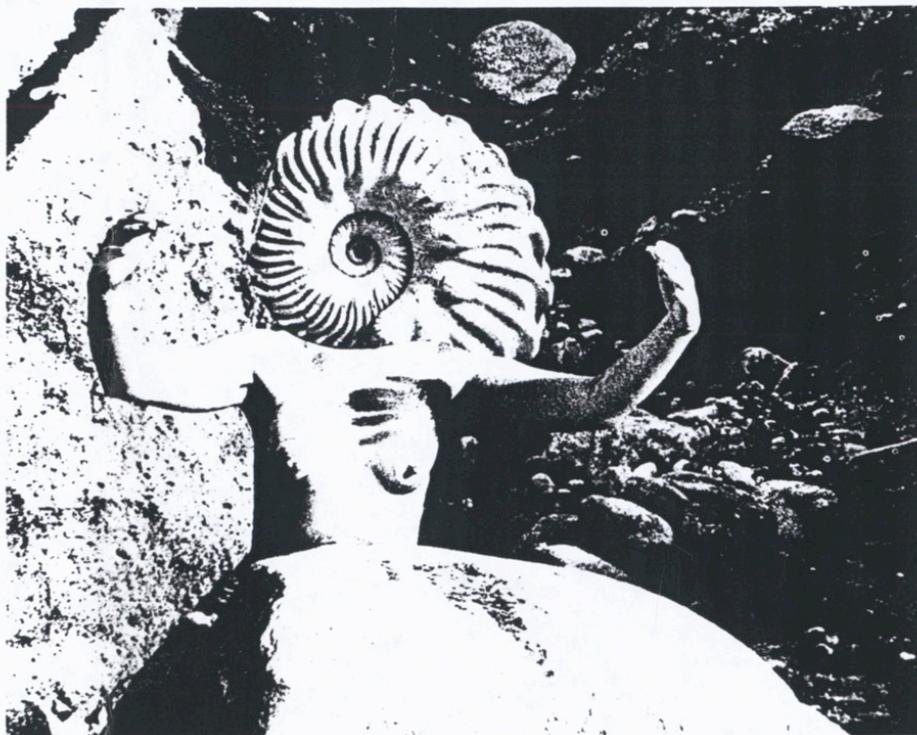
In such behavior a style of decision-making is involved that has much in common with the peculiar arbitrariness and rigor of religious vows in general, and with one called the Beast Vow in particular. Among the Pasupatas of India (the same who formalized the Seeking of Dishonor), the male practitioner commonly took the bull vow. (The bull is the most common shamanic animal by far.) He would spend a good part of each day bellowing like a bull and in general trying to transform his consciousness into that of a bull. Such behavior was usually vowed for a specific length of time, most frequently either for a year or for the rest of one's life. A person who took the frog vow would move for a year only by squatting and hopping; the snake vower would slither.³⁴ Such vows are very precise and

demanding. The novice, for example, may pick a certain cow and vow to imitate its every action. During the time of the vow the novice follows the cow everywhere: when the cow eats, the novice eats; when the cow sleeps, the novice sleeps; when the cow moos, the novice moos—and so on. (In ancient Mesopotamia cow-vowers were known as "grazers.") By such actions the paleolithic shaman attempts to affect ecology by infiltrating an animal species which can then be manipulated. The yogic practitioner hopes to escape from his or her own intentional horizon by entering into that of another species.

These activities are echoed in performance pieces in various ways. Bill Gordh, as Dead Dog, spent two

practice attested to in the *Atharva Veda* (about 1000–800 B.C.)³⁵ and still done today. In performance art the subgenre known as Endurance Art is similar in style, though the scale is much reduced.

In 1965 Beuys alternately stood and knelt on a small wooden platform for 24 hours during which he performed various symbolic gestures in immobile positions. In 1971 Burden, a major explorer of the Ordeal or Endurance genre, spent five days and nights fetally enclosed in a tiny metal locker (2 feet by 2 feet by 3 feet). In 1974 he combined the immobility vow with the keynote theme of the artist's person by sitting on an upright chair on a sculpture pedestal until, 48 hours later, he fell off from exhaustion (*Sculpture in Three*



Mary Beth Edelson, *Goddess Head*, 1975, collage of photographs from private ritual, Montauk, NY

years learning how to bark with a sense of expressiveness. James Lee Byars wore a pink silk tail everywhere he went for six months. Vito Acconci, in his *Following Piece*, 1969, would pick a passerby at random on the street and follow him or her till it was no longer possible to do so.

What I am especially concerned to point out in activities like this is a quality of decision-making that involves apparent aimlessness along with fine focus and rigor of execution. This is a mode of willing which is absolutely creative in the sense that it assumes that it is reasonable to do anything at all with life: all options are open and none is more meaningful or meaningless than any other. A Jain monk in India may vow to sit for a year and then follow that by standing up for a year—a

Parts). In *White Light/White Heat*, 1975, he spent 22 days alone and invisible to the public on a high shelf-like platform in a gallery, neither eating nor speaking nor seeing, nor seen by, another human being.³⁶

The first thing to notice about these artists is that no one is making them do it and usually no one is paying them to do it. The second is the absolute rigor with which, in the classic performance pieces, these very unpragmatic activities are carried out. This peculiar quality of decision-making has become a basic element of performance poetics. To a degree (which I do not wish to exaggerate) it underscores the relationship between this type of activity and the religious vocation. A good deal of performance art, in fact, might be called "Vow Art," as might a good deal of religious practice.

(Kafka's term "hunger artist" is not unrelated.)

Enthusiasms of this type have passed through cultures before, but usually in the provinces of religion or, more occasionally, philosophy. What is remarkable about our time is that it is happening in the realm of art, and being performed, often, by graduates of art schools rather than seminaries. In our time religion and philosophy have been more successful (or intransigent) than art in defending their traditional boundaries and preventing universal overflow with its harrowing responsibilities and consequences.

A classic source on the subject of Ordeal Art is a book called the *Path of Purification* by Buddhaghosa, a fifth century A.D. Ceylonese Buddhist.²⁷ It includes an intricately categorized compendium of behavioral vows designed to undermine the conditioned response systems that govern ordinary life. Among the most common are the vows of homelessness—the vow, for example to live out of doors for a year. This vow was acted out in New York recently by Tehching Hsieh, who stayed out of doors in Manhattan for a year as a work of art. Hsieh (who also has leapt from the second story of a building in emulation of Klein's leap) has specialized, in fact, in year-long vows acted out with great rigor. For one year he punched in hourly on a time clock in his studio, a device not unlike some used by forest yogis in India to restrict their physical movements and thus their intentional horizons. The performance piece of this type done on the largest scale was Hsieh's year of isolation in a cell built in his Soho studio, a year in which he neither left the cell nor spoke nor read. Even the scale of this piece, however, does not approach that of similar vows in traditional religious settings. Himalayan yogis as recently as a generation ago were apt to spend seven years in a light-tight cave, while Simeon Stylites, an early Christian ascetic in the Syrian desert, lived for the last 37 years of his life on a small platform on top of a pole.

The reduced scale of such vows in the art context reflects the difference in motivation between the religious ascetic and the performance artist. Religious vows are undertaken for pragmatic purposes. The shaman seeking the ability to fly, the yogi seeking the effacement of ego, the monk seeking salvation and eternal bliss, are all working within intricately formulated belief systems in pursuit of clearly defined and massively significant rewards. Less is at stake for the performance artist than for the pious believer; yet still something is at stake. An act that lacks any intention whatever is probably a contradiction in terms. For some artists (for example, Burden) work of this type has functioned as a personal initiation or catharsis, as well as an investigation of the limits of one's will; others (including Nitsch) are convinced that their performance work is cathartic for the audience as well and in that sense serves a social and therapeutic purpose. Rachel Rosenthal describes her performance work as "sucking diseases from society."²⁸

But in most work of this type attention is directed toward the exercise of will as an object of contemplation in itself. Appropriation art in general (and Vow Art in particular) is based on an esthetic of choosing and willing rather than conceiving and making. Personal

sensibility is active in the selection of the area of the universe to be appropriated, and in the specific, often highly individual character of the vow undertaken: the rigor with which the vow is maintained is, then, like a crafts devotion to perfection of form. Beyond this, the performance is often based on a suspension of judgment about whether or not the act has any value in itself, and a concentration on the purity of the doing. This activity posits as an ideal (though never of course perfectly attaining it) the purity of doing something with no pragmatic motivation. Like the Buddhist paradox of desiring not to desire, it requires a motivation to perform feats of motivelessness. It shares something of Arnold Toynbee's opinion that the highest cultures are the least pragmatic.

In this mode of decision and execution the conspicuously free exercise of will is framed as a kind of absolute. Displays of this type are attempts to break up the standard weave of everyday motivations and create openings in it through which new options may make their way to the light. These options are necessarily undefined, since no surrounding belief system is in place (or acknowledged). The radicality of work in this genre can be appraised precisely by how far it has allowed the boundaries of the art category to dissolve. Many works of the last twenty-five years have reached to the limits of life itself. Such activities have necessarily involved artists in areas where usually the psychoanalyst or anthropologist presides. The early explorations discussed here required the explicit demonstration of several daring strategies that had to be brought clearly into the light. Extreme actions seemed justified or even required, by the cultural moment. But the moment changes, and the mind becomes desensitized to such direct demonstrations after their first shock of brilliant simplicity. When an artist in 1983 announces that his or her entire life is designated as performance, the unadorned gesture cannot expect to be met with the enthusiastic interest with which its prototypes were greeted a generation ago. ■

Thomas McEvilley is a contributing editor to *Artforum* and a professor at the Institute for the Arts, Rice University, Houston

1. See Thomas McEvilley, "Diogenes of Sinope (c. 410–c. 320 B.C.): Selected Performance Pieces," *Artforum*, March 1983.
2. For a more detailed discussion of this process see Timothy Binkley, "Piece Contra Aesthetics," in Joseph Margolis, ed., *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978, pp. 25–44.
3. Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel*, New York: Grove Press, 1965, p. 43.
4. For this and other references to Klein the most convenient source is Thomas McEvilley, "Yves Klein, Conquistador of the Void," in exh. cat. *Yves Klein (1928–1962), A Retrospective*, Houston, Texas, and New York, 1982.
5. Allan Kaprow, *Assemblages, Environments, Happenings*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1966, p. 188.
6. For the image of the Net of Indra see Garma C.C. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, University Park, Pa. and London, 1974, pp. 165–66.
7. In English, see, e.g., Hermann Nitsch, in exh. cat. *The Spirit of Vienna*, New York: René Block Gallery, 1977, p. 64.
8. For the sparagmos see W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1950, pp. 45, 149, 171–72, and Walter F. Otto, *Dionysus, Myth and Cult*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965, pp. 192 ff., etc. For the presence of various drugs in ancient wines, see Carl A.P. Ruck's essay in R. Gordon Wasson, *The Road to Eleusis*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.
9. *The Spirit of Vienna*, pp. 31–32.
10. For the laurobolium see Franz Cumont, *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, New York: Dover Publications, 1956, p. 66.
11. Brus in *The Spirit of Vienna*, p. 8.
12. Carolee Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy, Complete Performance Works and Selected Writings*, New Paltz, N.Y.: Documentex, 1979, p. 66.
13. "As Above, So Below," 1981, see *High Performance* 15, vol. 4, no. 3, Fall 1981, pp. 19–25. Many of the performance works mentioned in this essay were first



Piero Manzoni and *Magic Base*, 1961. Photo: archives of Germano Celant

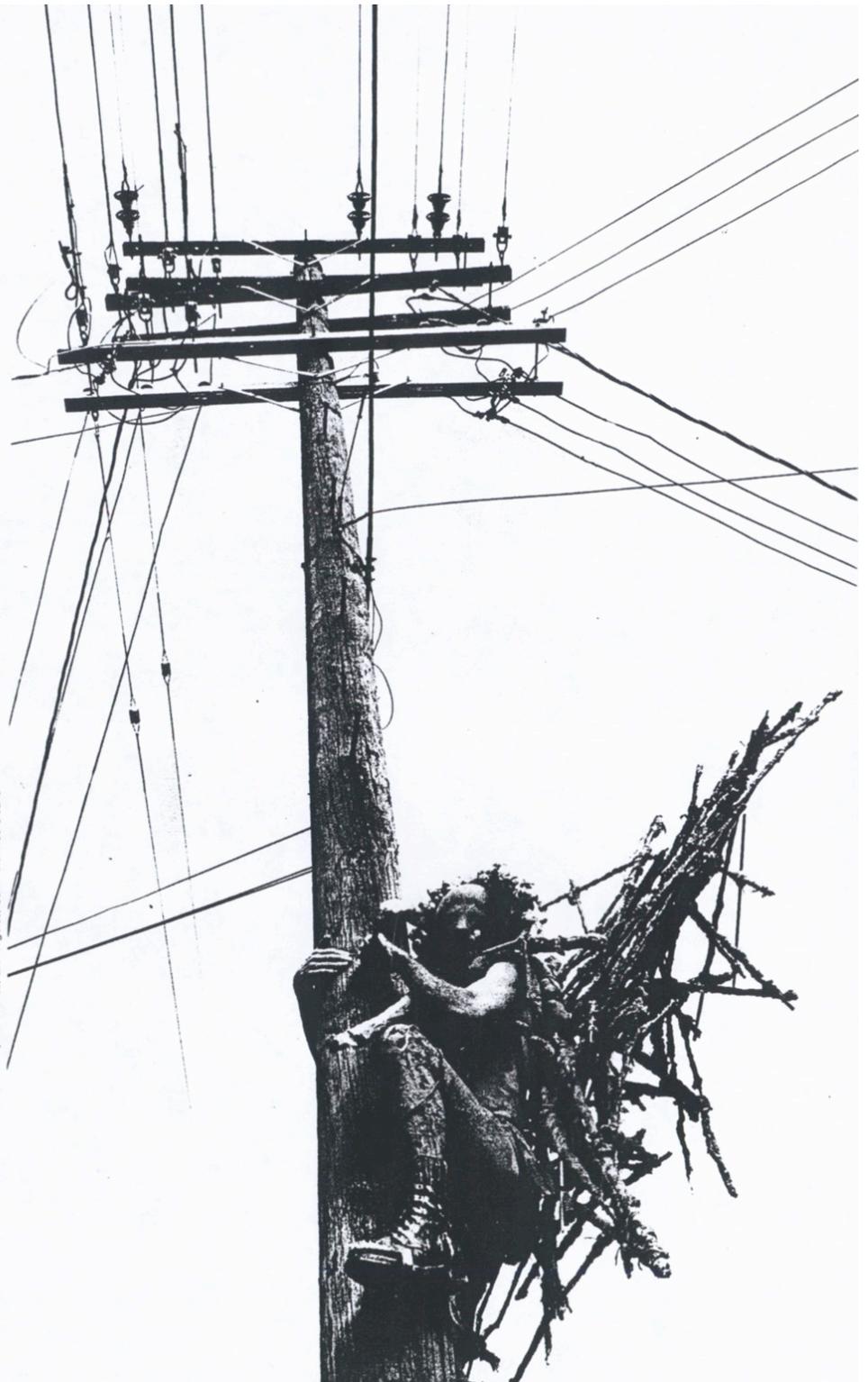


Bill Hardin, *Three Stages to Stability*, 1980, view of performance, Kansas City, Mo. Photo: Candace Higgins.

documented in *High Performance*, a basic source on the subject:

14. I have written about the history of Klein's leaps elsewhere (see note 4 above). The famous photograph is a photomontage of a leap made over a net (tarpaulin, really). But the evidence is indisputable that Klein did, on two occasions before the photographed event, make leaps from comparable heights, sustaining injury both times. It is intriguing to note how resistant people are to accepting this fact: at a panel discussion at the Guggenheim Museum in New York after the opening of the Klein retrospective (Nov. 21, 1982), this was the central, and often heated, topic of discussion.
15. The making of blood imprints, which was found also in Schneemann's work and parodied in McCarthy's performances of painting with his penis dipped in ketchup, reverts of course to Yves Klein. In addition to his body prints in ultramarine blue, Klein on two occasions made blood prints of women's naked bodies (once using the model's own menstrual blood), which he subsequently destroyed for fear of their negative magic. The directness of the imprint method influenced neo-primitive performance widely. Recently the Italian performance artist Giuditta Torretta has made blood imprints of her own pregnant body as performance works.
16. The works most commonly mentioned as influential are Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, often in the abridgment and revision of Theodore Gaster, and Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*, New York: Bollingen Foundation, dist. by Pantheon Books, 1964.
17. The parallels between tribal initiatory customs and the behavior of disturbed children are brought out by Bruno Bettelheim, *Symbolic Wounds: Puberty Rites and the Envious Male*, New York: Collier Books, 1962.
18. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*, chapters 1 and 2.
19. See, for example, S.M. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complexes of the Tungus*, London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1935, p. 364; V.M. Michaelowski, "Shamanism in Siberia and European Russia. Being the Second Part of *Shamanstvo*," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 24, 1894, p. 66.
20. Fokke Sierksma, *Tibet's Terrifying Deities*, from "Art in its Context; Studies in Ethno-Aesthetics, Museum Series," vol. 1, The Hague: Mouton, 1966, p. 73.
21. For the Ajivika austerity of hanging by hooks inserted in the flesh see Richard Morris, "Notes and Queries," *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, 1884, p. 95.
22. The classic source for shamanic transvestitism is Robert Briffault, *The Mothers*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1952, vol. 2, pp. 532 ff. For speculations on the female origin of shamanism see Georg Nioradze, *Der Schamanismus bei den sibirischen Völkern*, Stuttgart: Strecker und Schröder, 1925, pp. 51 ff., and Debprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayatā: A Study in Ancient Indian Maternalism*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1959, p. 285.
23. Waldemar G. Bogoras, *The Chukchee*, *Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History* 11, vol. XI, New York: G.E. Stechert, 1904-09, p. 448; Hans Findeisen, *Schamanentum, dargestellt am Beispiel der Bessenheispriester hordeurasischer Völker*, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1957, ch. XIII.
24. Cited by Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayatā*, p. 284.
25. Bettelheim, *Symbolic Wounds*, pp. 109-121.
26. See, e.g., Sigmund Freud, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes," *Collected Papers*, London: Hogarth Press, 1950, vol. 5.
27. Subincision is reported by Baldwin Spencer and Francis J. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, London: Macmillan and Co., 1899, p. 263, and described in detail by M.F. Ashley-Montagu, *Coming into Being among the Australian Aborigines*, London: G. Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1937, p. 293, varying psychoanalytical interpretations are given by Géza Róheim, *The Eternal Ones of the Dream*, New York: International Universities Press, 1945, and Bettelheim, *Symbolic Wounds*.
28. Grant Showerman, *The Great Mother of the Gods*, Chicago, 1969, pp. 16-18. For a psychoanalytic interpretation see E. Weigert-Vowinkel, "The Cult and Mythology of the Mothers: Matter from the Standpoint of Psychoanalysis," *Psychiatry* 1, 1938, pp. 348-49.
29. The text as a whole is not available in English; for excerpts and summary see Daniel H.H. Ingalls, "Cynics and Pasupatas," *Harvard Theological Review* 55, 1962.
30. Yoga is primarily a redefining of shamanic practices in terms of later forms of thought. See Thomas McEvilley, "An Archaeology of Yoga," *Res* (Journal of the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, and the Laboratoire d'Ethnologie, University of Paris) 1, pp. 44-77.
31. Linda Montano, *Art in Everyday Life*, Los Angeles: Astro Artz Press, 1981.
32. Mary Beth Edelson, *Seven Cycles: Public Rituals*, New York, 1980. In the feminist branch of performance art this shamanic element has been widely explored. It is well to pause for a moment over the fact of there being a feminist branch at all. There is of course more than a little justification in the history of religion for this development. In fact the prevalence of transvestitism in shamanism has led to an intriguing (but untestable) hypothesis that shamanism was originally a female practice that was adopted by men through the mediation of female dress. Still, the explicitly feminist thrust of some of this work involves it in areas of politics that breach somewhat the neutrality of the appropriation zone.
33. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex*, p. 309; Wilhelm Radloff, *Aus Sibirien*, Leipzig: T.O. Weigel, 1884, vol. 2, pp. 20-50; Mary A. Czaplicka, *Aboriginal Siberia: A Study in Social Anthropology*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914, pp. 171 ff.; Findeisen, *Schamanentum*, pp. 30 ff.; Adolph Friedrich and Georg Buddruss, joint eds. and translators, *Schamanengeschichten aus Sibirien*, Munich: O.W. Barth, 1955, p. 212.
34. On the Beast Vow see M.G. Bhagat, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1976, p. 145; Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayatā*, ch. 2; Ingalls, "Cynics and Pasupatas."
35. *Atharva Veda*, XV, 3; and see Haripada Chakrabarti, *Asceticism in Ancient India*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1973, pp. 368, 371, 437.
36. For the works by Chris Burden cited here see *Chris Burden*, 71-73, Los Angeles, 1974, and *Chris Burden*, 74-77, Los Angeles, 1978.
37. Bhikkhu Nyānamoli, trans., *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, Berkeley, Calif.: Shambhala Publications, dist. Random House, 1976. For the parallels drawn here, see, for example, the "tree-root-dweller's practice" (p. 74), and the "open-air-dweller's practice" (p. 75).
38. There are countless other examples of artists who might describe their work in such terms; some are omitted due to considerations of space, others because their work seems sensationalistic in motivation.

Kim Jones as Mud Man, Telephone Pole, 1978, view of performance, Los Angeles, Ca. Photo: Ned Sloane



Linda Weintraub, "In the Making: Creative Options for Contemporary Art; Kim Jones", *In the Making: Creative Options for Contemporary Art*, 2003, p. 208-212.

IN THE MAKING

Creative Options for Contemporary Art

Linda Weintraub

Kim Jones

Born 1944 San Bernardino, California

1964–1966 California Institute of Arts, Valencia, California

1969–1971 California Institute of Arts, BFA

1972–73 Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles, California, MFA

Lives and works in New York City

Kim Jones demonstrates that the human "self" need not be singular. "Himself" expands into "themselves" because Jones periodically transforms himself into his alter ego, Mudman. This alternative being manifests its own personality, mannerisms, interactions, physical form, impulses, trepidations, and desires. Alter egos are true and complementary beings, not to be confused with play-acting, role-playing, dressing-up, or pretending. Despite the full-body transformation of his appearance and behavior, Mudman is still Kim Jones. However, Mudman engages in a wider range of behaviors, conveying a more basic form of truth and possessing a greater potential to affect others.

Since 1973, Kim Jones has regularly transformed himself into an alter ego who captures the anguish of both a perpetrator and a victim of aggressive acts. His transformation begins by stripping off his clothing and plastering his almost-naked body with mud from head to foot, smearing a thick layer over his Marine-issue boots to produce an unnaturally ponderous appearance. Once his skin is obliterated behind this casing of earth, he attaches to his back an ungainly assemblage of wood, twigs, wire, tape, cheesecloth, latex, and foam that weighs as much as 150 pounds. His metamorphosis proceeds as he pulls panty hose over his face, further obscuring his features. Sometimes his alien appearance is augmented by puffs of odorous smoke that discharge from a fat cigar in his mouth. In this guise, Jones becomes the living sculpture he calls *Mudman*.

This strange and fearsome creature with the weighty appendage on his back has elicited diverging interpretations. Mudman has been described as a hallucinatory apparition of an earthly outcropping, an archaic being rising from the primal ooze, a shaman from a distant outpost, an uprooted tree, a peasant hauling his harvest on his back, and a camouflaged G.I. carrying a heavy backpack. But Mudman does not make his appearances in the badlands, the bog, the bush, the wilderness, or the jungle—locations consistent with these interpretations. For the past thirty years, he has regularly appeared in the urban arena, touring art galleries and walking the streets of Manhattan, Los Angeles, Hamburg, and Washington, D.C.

Jones is uncomfortable with grand propositions. He insists that Mudman does not originate in New Guinea, the Zuni, Zimbabwe, India, or Australia, where mud-smearing shamans frighten enemies, heal the sick, purify the land, and enact rites of regeneration when people die. "People talk about me being a shaman, but I'm not here to heal anybody. I don't associate with primitive cultures. All the materials used in my back sculpture are modern and industrial—nylon, foam, wire, shellac, acrylic paint, and wood. I'm not romantic about being a primitive man. I'm not rejecting contemporary Western civilization. I just reach for more potent images in my life."¹

Mudman came into being as a logical progression of Jones's studio practice. The shift from producing conventional paintings to becoming a living sculpture began when he abandoned painting to experiment with traditional forms of sculpture. When the conventional parameters of sculpture became too restrictive, several renowned vanguard sculptors



Kim Jones, *Wilshire Boulevard Walk*, January 28, 1976, 18 miles (1976), mixed media. Courtesy of the artist. Photograph: Jeff Gibbins.

provided him with the impetus to break into new territory. Eva Hesse, Chris Burden, and Bruce Nauman had laid the groundwork for adopting eccentric materials and unusual display tactics. They set the precedents for his work in foam, rubber, wax, bamboo, and wire, and for dislodging sculpture from its hallowed position upon pedestals. But even attaching three-dimensional work directly to the walls and floor quickly became unacceptably confining. His sculpture was finally and satisfactorily liberated when he attached it to his body. In 1973, Jones did his first performances wearing his sculpture. A year later he ventured into the streets with it on his back. The evolution culminated in the creation of Mudman. "I wanted to be more a part of the sculpture, more like a sculpture," Jones explains. "Adding mud changed me. It was like adding another skin, making me closer to the sticks and the cheesecloth. I became more like a walking, talking sculpture." The difficulty of acquiring the mud needed to become a sculpture is inevitable in the settings where Mudman performs. Cities obliterate the earth except in parks and vacant lots. "No Trespassing" signs often mark locations where the earth is accessible. Importing mud compromises the integrity of the endeavor. Jones explains, "I use mud from the place where I am. In New York, I got mud from Central Park and Washington Square Park. In Los Angeles, I used mud from the La Brea tar pits, which was foolish because it was full of oil. In Paris, I found it in a vacant lot. The healthiest mud came from the Santa Monica Mountains. The aesthetic quality of the mud is not as important as connecting to the place."

Although mud alienates Mudman from the asphalt and concrete streets of the major metropolises he wanders, it connects him to the people he encounters there. Jones reports that mud is his social intercessor, opening a channel for him to talk and for people to listen. "Mudman is a conversation piece. It makes me stand out and forces me to talk to people. Going out into the world as Mudman makes me more careful about dealing with people. I have to be more sensitive to their reaction to me. If they approach me, I calm them down. I tell them why I'm dressed this way. I ask how they feel about it. It makes me more conscious of how different I am." Without a touch of irony, he adds: "It's a nice way to meet people."

Thus, despite Mudman's bizarre appearance, Jones consistently reasserts his ordinariness. Mudman conducts no ceremony to honor the gods, no evocation of dream time, no entry into mythic space. As if to illustrate this point, Jones intentionally demystifies his actions by allowing the audience to witness his metamorphosis from Kim Jones into Mudman. In full view of the public, he removes his street clothes and neatly folds them before methodically smearing his body with mud, strapping his twig sculpture to his back, covering his face with panty hose, and sauntering forth. He is neither hostile, nor cheerful, nor belligerent. Indeed, his demeanor is designed to avoid frightening people. Mudman is polite. "Sometimes I am silent," Jones says. "If I approach people, they get scared. I am the wait-and-see type. If people approach me, I start talking. I tell them when I first made the structure it was made with wax and shellac and looked like wings. I thought about being Icarus or an insect. I tell them I like to think about being a tree."

The cumbersome sculpture that Mudman straps to his back may be abstract, but the physical strain it imposes on the artist's body is actual, especially since his performances are always long in duration (from sunrise to sunset) or long in distance (eighteen-mile walks). The mud draws heat out of his body, the stick structure strapped to his back is heavy and restricting. Mudman walks like a cripple in braces or a soldier lugging heavy weapons and survival gear. In fact, both of these metaphors comprise significant components of Jones's biography. As a child he was afflicted with a polio-like disease that kept him alternately in

a wheelchair and in traction for long periods of time. In order to occupy himself through periods of isolation, he devised a never-ending, solitary game.

With pencil on paper, Jones devised an army of Dot Men who waged wars against an army of X Men. The game immersed him in the imaginative realm from which Mudman would later emerge. Jones's adolescent militaristic fantasies burst into devastating actuality when he served a tour of duty in the Marine Corps in Dung Ha during some of the bloodiest years of the Vietnam War. "I was dirty, sweaty, and scared," he recalls. "Mud was everywhere." Jones slept in ditches and crawled through mud searching for booby traps. When he returned from Vietnam and became an artist, Jones continued to wage skirmishes and battles, but they were conducted with pencil on fields of paper. Jones's post-Vietnam drawings retain the nervous appearance of his adolescent drawings, but they are no longer products of play. Each drawing provides a detailed accounting of the functional components of adult warfare and its harsh, live-or-die urgency. His renderings include tables where soldiers gather to plan campaigns, pens for confining prisoners of war, chambers to interrogate the enemy, facilities to store ammunition, quarters where soldiers sleep and eat, places of worship, routes for transporting supplies, and parks for relaxation during periods of peace. Jones has even devised a manner of exhibiting the drawings to confirm their military imperatives. Instead of being matted and framed like fine-art objects, they are pinned to the wall like hastily drawn battle plans.

In each drawing, a proliferation of delicate pencil lines describes a world ruled by conflict, violence, danger, and terror. Battle lines are continually redrawn with pencil to record endless cycles of incursions and defensive actions by the warring factions. Tanks and their artillery ranges are sketched with obsessive and minute specifications. Crisscrossing lines signify weapon fire. Accumulations of tense markings represent advances and victories. Erased lines chronicle retreat, massacre, and defeat. Because these markings are never completely obliterated when they are erased, the drawings contain ghostly reminders of prior battles. Erasures and reworkings accumulate as disheartening reminders of the interminable role that war plays in constructing human history. On some drawings the combat and bloodshed are so intense, lines expand beyond the borders of the paper and invade the surrounding walls, resembling real-life escalations of military conflict. Jones sometimes provides accompanying legends to embellish the action, writing such texts as, "Defenders usually fire first, unless they are attacked from behind or ambushed. Each side has explosives at their disposal, useful for getting through fortified walls or in ambush. Ultimately, each side can also build a super-cannon, capable of penetrating the fortified walls and with an unlimited firing range. Immobility is their disadvantage: super-cannons can easily become sitting ducks."

Presenting the warring factions as contrasting icons of Xs and Os generalizes these drawings beyond their specific reference to American G.I.s and the Vietcong. Xs and Os can also represent cowboys and Indians, Huns and Visigoths, or any foes past and present. Jones accentuates this implied universality of conflict by depicting an array of battle sites: fortresses, bunkers, clusters of tepees, and fortified cities. Furthermore, the futility of resolving conflict through military action is enacted within Jones's working method—these drawings are never completed. He reworks them again and again, sometimes over the course of many years, until they are sold. But even sold works are sometimes continued if they are borrowed for an exhibition, providing Jones with another opportunity to extend the battles recorded on their surfaces. Over time, these paper fields of battle become tattered, brittle, and yellowed. As they are disfigured by the wars waged upon them, they

become transformed from simple pencil drawings into visual epics, relaying the conditional terms of all defeats and all triumphs. Jones reminds viewers that only strife is everlasting. "My war drawings are actually a different category from more traditional drawings which have an end. In the war drawings, there is no ending, there is living and fighting. You can see how things are changing. That is one of the basic rules of the world. That is what makes the two-dimensional world interesting to look at. You can visually see the way that particular world is changing. It's not that it is getting better or worse, it is just changing. I play the part of a minor god. I determine the fate of the Xs and Os. I am on both sides at the same time. Who wins depends on my mood. Individual Xs or Os are heroes; they are stronger and survive longer. But ultimately they all die. That is one of the basic rules of world."

When asked, "Are you still Kim Jones when you are Mudman?" he responds, "I am Kim Jones when I am Mudman and after I take a shower." Mudman and Jones co-exist. They inhabit the same mind and body, taking turns at visible embodiment. In the same manner, Jones is both the Xs and the Os whose perpetual battles he wages on paper. He is both good and evil. He is human and mythic. He is the aggressor and the victim. "Everything is nature." Thus, Mudman seems to derive from nowhere and everywhere. Wandering the city streets as a hulking humanoid who splatters mud on urban sidewalks or leaves a trail of flaked dirt on museum floors, he is a reminder that wildness can denote derangement or innocence or passion or hostility. Jones explains that these qualities are inherent to the sophisticated and the savage, the institution and the individual, human and nonhuman life forms, living and nonliving entities. "Nature grows out of control until it destroys itself through this so-called natural selection. Things run out of food and die. You can think about media and advertising that way. They are always growing, trying to feed themselves. They extend themselves until they kill off the host. I am not romantic about the way things are.... I like when people are nice to me, but the world seems, for the most part, an aggressive place. If you are weak, it will kill you. That's just the way it is all over the world. Something you think is weak is really sneaky."

Jones and his alter ego, Mudman, provide material evidence that the natural order resembles an interlocking network of relative strengths and momentary advantages. Everyone seems destined to play both roles. In a work entitled *David and the Giant* (1978) Mudman performed against himself. Jones installed a three-foot-tall plaster cast of Michelangelo's *David* at the L.A.C.E. Gallery in Los Angeles. As a work of art, *David* is a masterpiece and a symbol of human achievement. As a biblical figure, David represents the triumph of the weak. Jones initiated the performance by smearing mud over this emblem of greatness and victory. Next, he attached a miniature *Mudman* sculpture to the back of the plaster replica of *David* and covered its head with nylon. Then Jones walked about forty feet away and repeated the process of transformation upon himself. As a living sculpture he faced the half-sized plaster version of himself and began shooting marbles at it with a slingshot. Jones describes the event in his usual straightforward manner: "The rubber breaks. I fix it with my muddy hands and continue shooting. I'm getting closer and closer to him to improve my accuracy and destructiveness. Marbles are ricocheting everywhere. Some people in the audience are hit. Can't destroy David. I do manage to chip off parts of his leg and arm. I shoot off his genitals. The crowd cheers. After I lose all my marbles, Miles (a gallery employee) throws me a sledgehammer and I bash David's head and push him over. There are publicity shots taken of my victim and me. I leave and take a shower...and go home to bed."² In this manner Jones enacted his view of the natural disorder, the state when conflict is pervasive, the organism battles against itself.

Instead of seeking a remedy for the pervasive nature of strife, Jones seems to accept its inevitability. Throughout the thirty years that he has been a practicing artist, this courteous, reserved man has had a recurring impulse to confront combat. Early in his art career, Jones committed actual acts of aggression. *Rat Piece* (1976), performed in the gallery on the California State University campus in Los Angeles, included the methodical burning of live rats. Jones suggests the stimulus for this dark act in a hallucinatory text that he wrote in 1983: "vietnam dong ha marine corps our camp covered with rats they crawled over us at night they got in our food we catch them in cages and burn them to death i remember the smell."³ If this statement identifies the impulse for burning live rats as an artwork, the following one provides an explanation: "I wanted to bring this home, to show it with its smell, screams, and the responsibility for stopping it—not just tell about it. You can't really write about burning. It does not have the impact of actually seeing something die. It is horrible, to have control over it." A controversy erupted that resulted in Jones's arrest and conviction on the charge of cruelty to animals, a circumstance filled with paradox since killing soldiers does not normally result in convictions of cruelty to humans. It demonstrates the difficulty of categorizing acts of violence, especially in war, where heroism and humanitarianism are in opposition. Jones, the perpetrator of violence in *Rat Piece*, made this inconsistency apparent when he grieved the rats' deaths as he might grieve the torching of the war's human victims. The 1983 text about rats also states, "When they were burning and screaming, I bent down and screamed with them. I don't know whether it helped them or not. Probably, it didn't mean anything to them, but it meant something to me. It was my way of connecting with them somehow, although they were feeling the pain, not I. They were like scapegoats."⁴

Jones admits that, "At least in my mind, this is the way the world usually works: first it is my turn to eat something and kill something, then it is someone else's turn to eat me and kill me. I have my individual experiences. They seep out of my art." But Jones insists his worldview is not bleak and he is not moralistic. Through his war drawings and his *Mudman* performances he simply represents the truth that he has observed. "I am trying to be as real as possible. There is conflict, but there has to be a certain amount of time for things to grow and survive. I show intervals of peace as well as conflict." But from Jones's personal observatory, the resumption of conflict is inevitable. He warns against complacency, "I don't think there ever was an enlightened time. It is dangerous when people start believing in eventual harmony because when you don't agree with them, they kill you."

Periodically *Mudman* still rises and shivers in the cold night air beside a subway station or a traffic light. He is a living war memorial, a debilitated cripple, a mighty aggressor. He is an alter ego, an evoker of fear and awe and pity and sorrow. "As an art object," Jones says, "I would like people to look at me and make up their own minds. *Mudman* doesn't have a personality or a mission. I think the audience has a personality. The audience may have a mission." A drawing entitled *The Man Who Talked Too Much and His Soul Fell Out of His Mouth* (1983) might explain Jones's reticence. It enables *Mudman* to be created again and again, as he yields to the unique psychological dispositions of those who encounter him.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from an interview with the artist, March 12, 1998.

² Kim Jones, "David and the Giant," artist's statement (Los Angeles, L.A.C.E. Gallery, October 7, 1978).

³ Reese Williams, ed., *Unwinding the Vietnam War* (Washington D.C.: Washington Project for the Arts, 1987), 114.

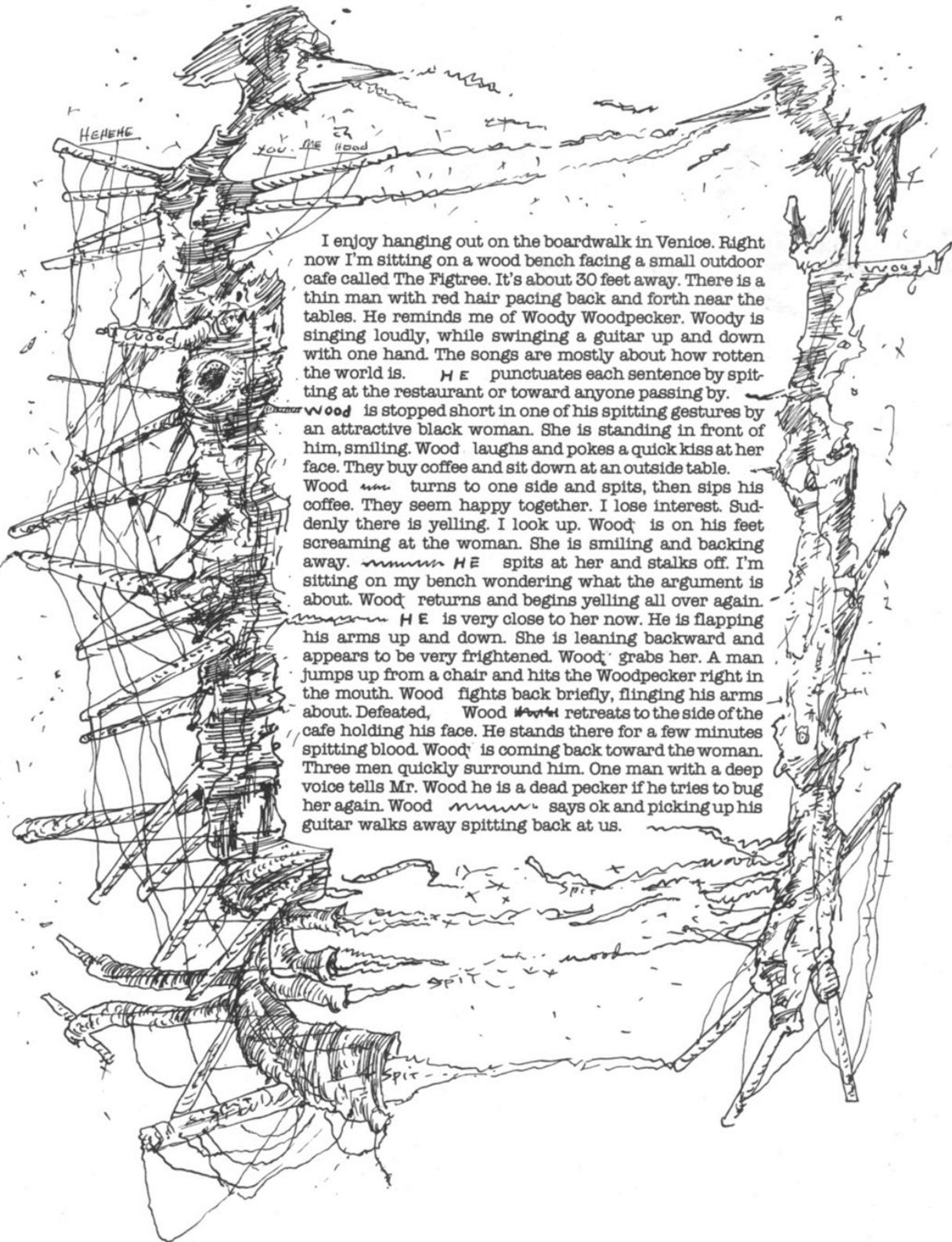
⁴ *ibid.*

Kim Jones, "Spit - Short story about two men who have a tree spitting ceremony on Hollywood Hill", 1979.



Spit

Kim Jones

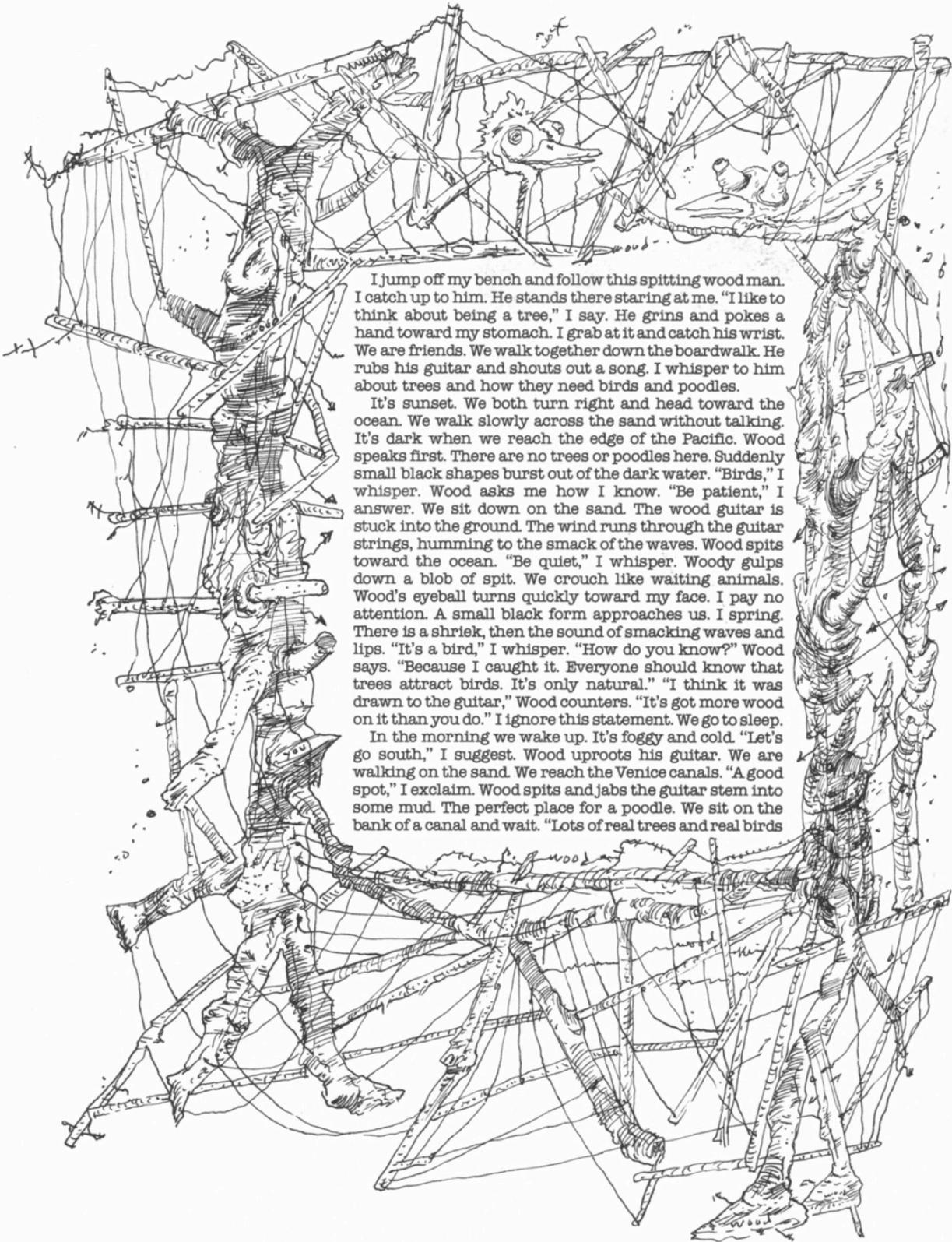


I enjoy hanging out on the boardwalk in Venice. Right now I'm sitting on a wood bench facing a small outdoor cafe called The Figtree. It's about 30 feet away. There is a thin man with red hair pacing back and forth near the tables. He reminds me of Woody Woodpecker. Woody is singing loudly, while swinging a guitar up and down with one hand. The songs are mostly about how rotten the world is. HE punctuates each sentence by spitting at the restaurant or toward anyone passing by.

Wood is stopped short in one of his spitting gestures by an attractive black woman. She is standing in front of him, smiling. Wood laughs and pokes a quick kiss at her face. They buy coffee and sit down at an outside table.

Wood turns to one side and spits, then sips his coffee. They seem happy together. I lose interest. Suddenly there is yelling. I look up. Wood is on his feet screaming at the woman. She is smiling and backing away. HE spits at her and stalks off. I'm sitting on my bench wondering what the argument is about. Wood returns and begins yelling all over again.

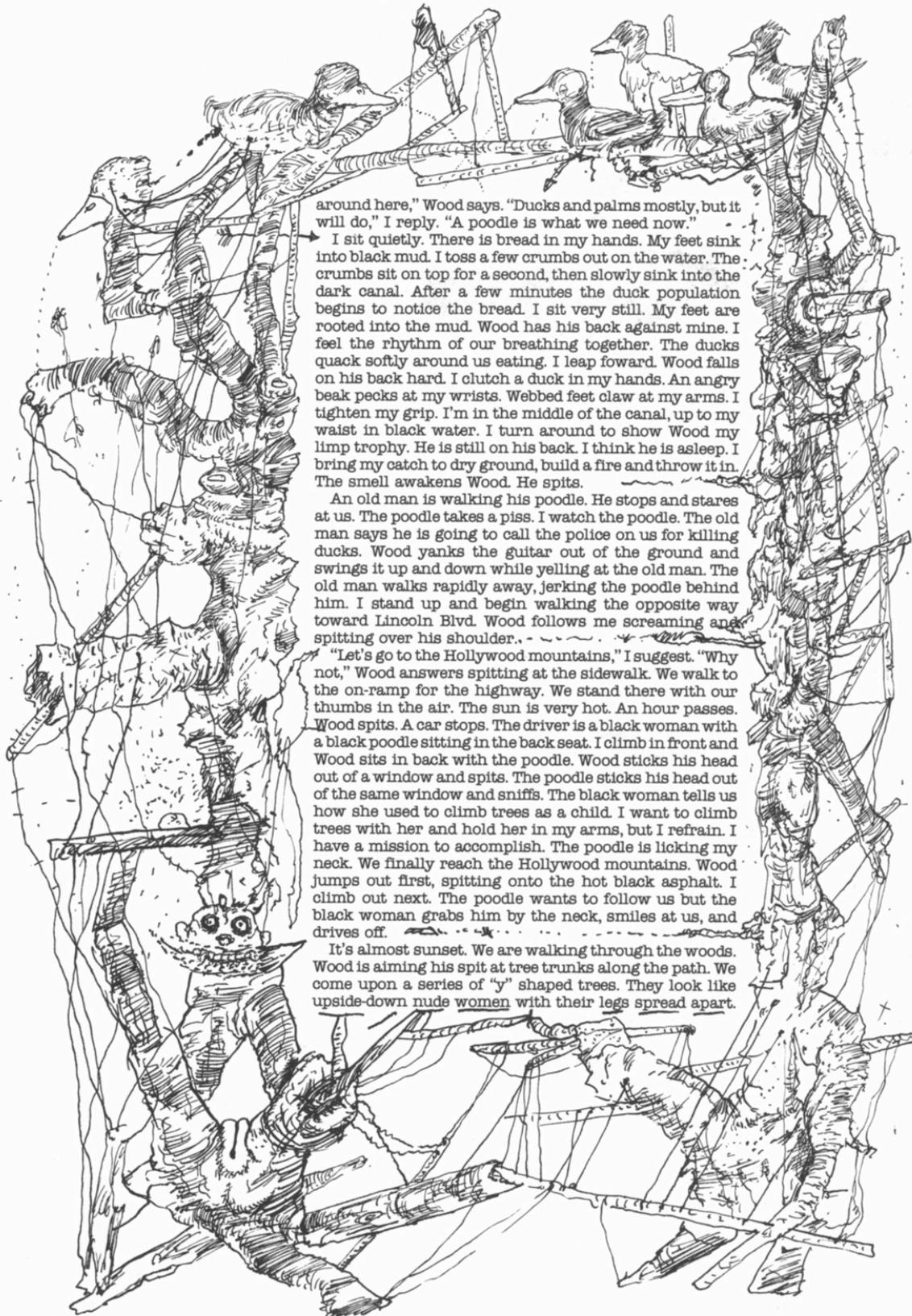
HE is very close to her now. He is flapping his arms up and down. She is leaning backward and appears to be very frightened. Wood grabs her. A man jumps up from a chair and hits the Woodpecker right in the mouth. Wood fights back briefly, flinging his arms about. Defeated, Wood retreats to the side of the cafe holding his face. He stands there for a few minutes spitting blood. Wood is coming back toward the woman. Three men quickly surround him. One man with a deep voice tells Mr. Wood he is a dead pecker if he tries to bug her again. Wood says ok and picking up his guitar walks away spitting back at us.



I jump off my bench and follow this spitting wood man. I catch up to him. He stands there staring at me. "I like to think about being a tree," I say. He grins and pokes a hand toward my stomach. I grab at it and catch his wrist. We are friends. We walk together down the boardwalk. He rubs his guitar and shouts out a song. I whisper to him about trees and how they need birds and poodles.

It's sunset. We both turn right and head toward the ocean. We walk slowly across the sand without talking. It's dark when we reach the edge of the Pacific. Wood speaks first. There are no trees or poodles here. Suddenly small black shapes burst out of the dark water. "Birds," I whisper. Wood asks me how I know. "Be patient," I answer. We sit down on the sand. The wood guitar is stuck into the ground. The wind runs through the guitar strings, humming to the smack of the waves. Wood spits toward the ocean. "Be quiet," I whisper. Woody gulps down a blob of spit. We crouch like waiting animals. Wood's eyeball turns quickly toward my face. I pay no attention. A small black form approaches us. I spring. There is a shriek, then the sound of smacking waves and lips. "It's a bird," I whisper. "How do you know?" Wood says. "Because I caught it. Everyone should know that trees attract birds. It's only natural." "I think it was drawn to the guitar," Wood counters. "It's got more wood on it than you do." I ignore this statement. We go to sleep.

In the morning we wake up. It's foggy and cold. "Let's go south," I suggest. Wood uproots his guitar. We are walking on the sand. We reach the Venice canals. "A good spot," I exclaim. Wood spits and jabs the guitar stem into some mud. The perfect place for a poodle. We sit on the bank of a canal and wait. "Lots of real trees and real birds



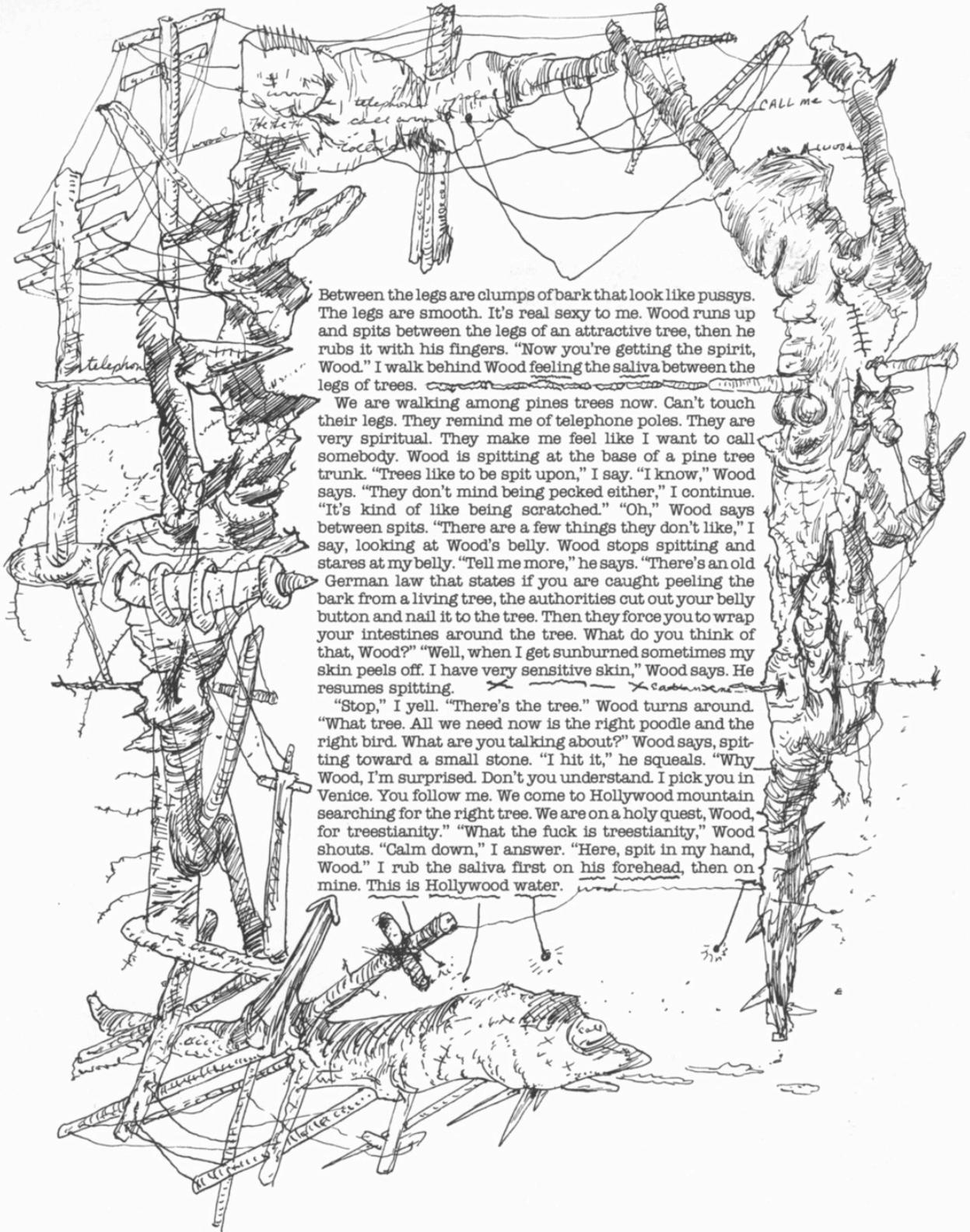
around here," Wood says. "Ducks and palms mostly, but it will do," I reply. "A poodle is what we need now."

I sit quietly. There is bread in my hands. My feet sink into black mud. I toss a few crumbs out on the water. The crumbs sit on top for a second, then slowly sink into the dark canal. After a few minutes the duck population begins to notice the bread. I sit very still. My feet are rooted into the mud. Wood has his back against mine. I feel the rhythm of our breathing together. The ducks quack softly around us eating. I leap forward. Wood falls on his back hard. I clutch a duck in my hands. An angry beak pecks at my wrists. Webbed feet claw at my arms. I tighten my grip. I'm in the middle of the canal, up to my waist in black water. I turn around to show Wood my limp trophy. He is still on his back. I think he is asleep. I bring my catch to dry ground, build a fire and throw it in. The smell awakens Wood. He spits.

An old man is walking his poodle. He stops and stares at us. The poodle takes a piss. I watch the poodle. The old man says he is going to call the police on us for killing ducks. Wood yanks the guitar out of the ground and swings it up and down while yelling at the old man. The old man walks rapidly away, jerking the poodle behind him. I stand up and begin walking the opposite way toward Lincoln Blvd. Wood follows me screaming and spitting over his shoulder.

"Let's go to the Hollywood mountains," I suggest. "Why not," Wood answers spitting at the sidewalk. We walk to the on-ramp for the highway. We stand there with our thumbs in the air. The sun is very hot. An hour passes. Wood spits. A car stops. The driver is a black woman with a black poodle sitting in the back seat. I climb in front and Wood sits in back with the poodle. Wood sticks his head out of a window and spits. The poodle sticks his head out of the same window and sniffs. The black woman tells us how she used to climb trees as a child. I want to climb trees with her and hold her in my arms, but I refrain. I have a mission to accomplish. The poodle is licking my neck. We finally reach the Hollywood mountains. Wood jumps out first, spitting onto the hot black asphalt. I climb out next. The poodle wants to follow us but the black woman grabs him by the neck, smiles at us, and drives off.

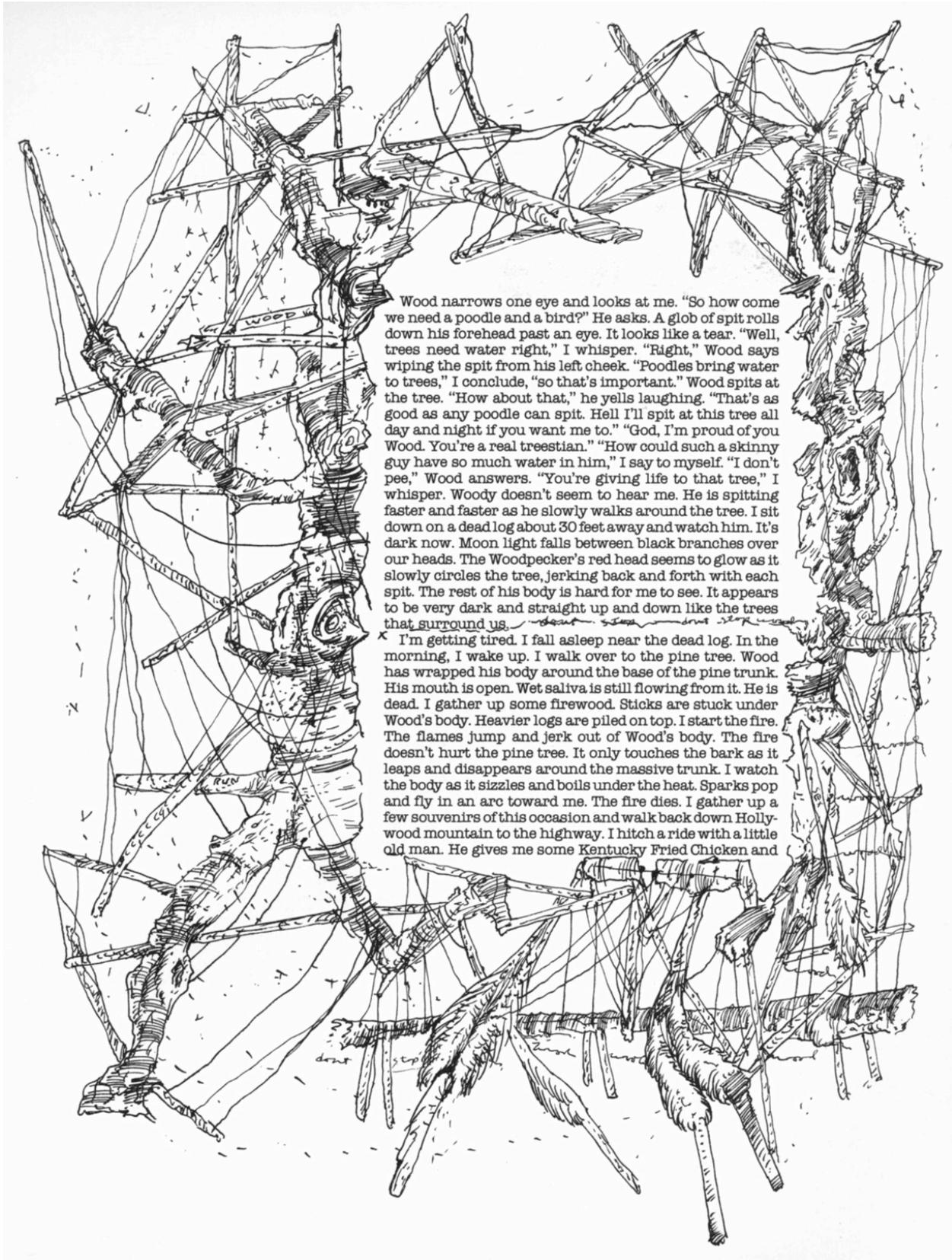
It's almost sunset. We are walking through the woods. Wood is aiming his spit at tree trunks along the path. We come upon a series of "y" shaped trees. They look like upside-down nude women with their legs spread apart.



Between the legs are clumps of bark that look like pussys. The legs are smooth. It's real sexy to me. Wood runs up and spits between the legs of an attractive tree, then he rubs it with his fingers. "Now you're getting the spirit, Wood." I walk behind Wood feeling the saliva between the legs of trees.

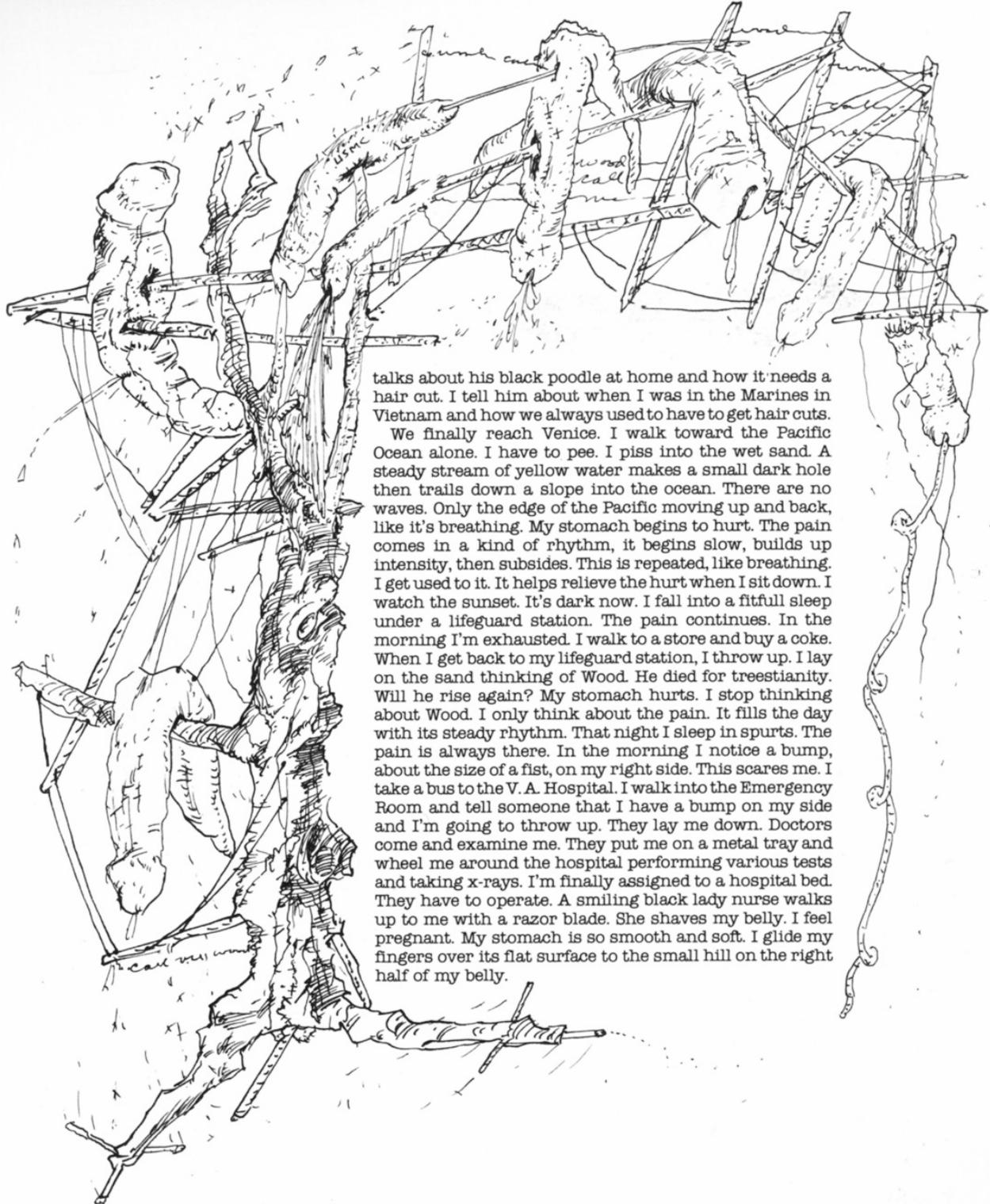
We are walking among pines trees now. Can't touch their legs. They remind me of telephone poles. They are very spiritual. They make me feel like I want to call somebody. Wood is spitting at the base of a pine tree trunk. "Trees like to be spit upon," I say. "I know," Wood says. "They don't mind being pecked either," I continue. "It's kind of like being scratched." "Oh," Wood says between spits. "There are a few things they don't like," I say, looking at Wood's belly. Wood stops spitting and stares at my belly. "Tell me more," he says. "There's an old German law that states if you are caught peeling the bark from a living tree, the authorities cut out your belly button and nail it to the tree. Then they force you to wrap your intestines around the tree. What do you think of that, Wood?" "Well, when I get sunburned sometimes my skin peels off. I have very sensitive skin," Wood says. He resumes spitting.

"Stop," I yell. "There's the tree." Wood turns around. "What tree. All we need now is the right poodle and the right bird. What are you talking about?" Wood says, spitting toward a small stone. "I hit it," he squeals. "Why Wood, I'm surprised. Don't you understand. I pick you in Venice. You follow me. We come to Hollywood mountain searching for the right tree. We are on a holy quest, Wood, for treestianity." "What the fuck is treestianity," Wood shouts. "Calm down," I answer. "Here, spit in my hand, Wood." I rub the saliva first on his forehead, then on mine. This is Hollywood water.



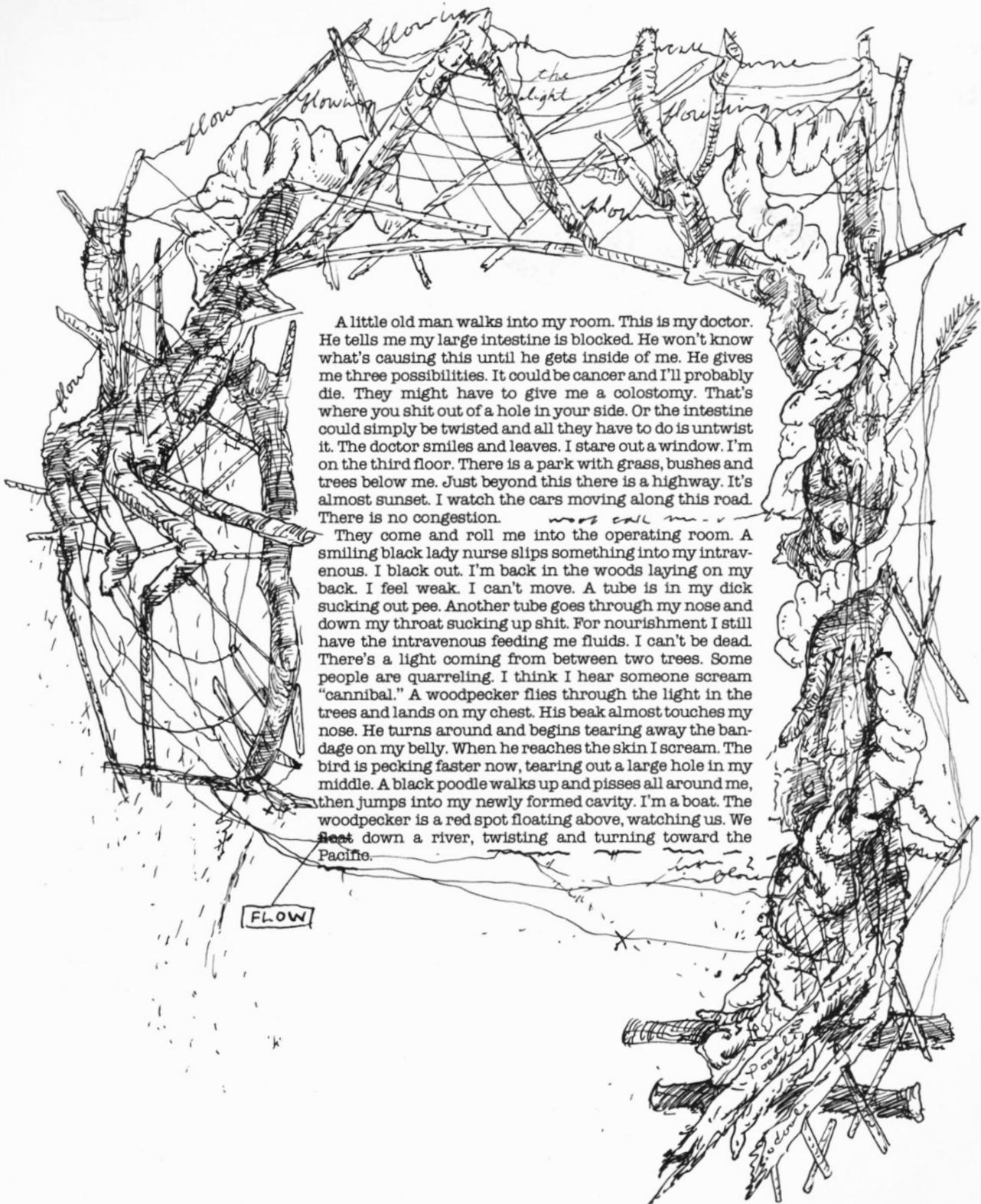
Wood narrows one eye and looks at me. "So how come we need a poodle and a bird?" He asks. A glob of spit rolls down his forehead past an eye. It looks like a tear. "Well, trees need water right," I whisper. "Right," Wood says wiping the spit from his left cheek. "Poodles bring water to trees," I conclude, "so that's important." Wood spits at the tree. "How about that," he yells laughing. "That's as good as any poodle can spit. Hell I'll spit at this tree all day and night if you want me to." "God, I'm proud of you Wood. You're a real treestian." "How could such a skinny guy have so much water in him," I say to myself. "I don't pee," Wood answers. "You're giving life to that tree," I whisper. Woody doesn't seem to hear me. He is spitting faster and faster as he slowly walks around the tree. I sit down on a dead log about 30 feet away and watch him. It's dark now. Moon light falls between black branches over our heads. The Woodpecker's red head seems to glow as it slowly circles the tree, jerking back and forth with each spit. The rest of his body is hard for me to see. It appears to be very dark and straight up and down like the trees that surround us.

X I'm getting tired. I fall asleep near the dead log. In the morning, I wake up. I walk over to the pine tree. Wood has wrapped his body around the base of the pine trunk. His mouth is open. Wet saliva is still flowing from it. He is dead. I gather up some firewood. Sticks are stuck under Wood's body. Heavier logs are piled on top. I start the fire. The flames jump and jerk out of Wood's body. The fire doesn't hurt the pine tree. It only touches the bark as it leaps and disappears around the massive trunk. I watch the body as it sizzles and boils under the heat. Sparks pop and fly in an arc toward me. The fire dies. I gather up a few souvenirs of this occasion and walk back down Hollywood mountain to the highway. I hitch a ride with a little old man. He gives me some Kentucky Fried Chicken and



talks about his black poodle at home and how it needs a hair cut. I tell him about when I was in the Marines in Vietnam and how we always used to have to get hair cuts.

We finally reach Venice. I walk toward the Pacific Ocean alone. I have to pee. I piss into the wet sand. A steady stream of yellow water makes a small dark hole then trails down a slope into the ocean. There are no waves. Only the edge of the Pacific moving up and back, like it's breathing. My stomach begins to hurt. The pain comes in a kind of rhythm, it begins slow, builds up intensity, then subsides. This is repeated, like breathing. I get used to it. It helps relieve the hurt when I sit down. I watch the sunset. It's dark now. I fall into a fitful sleep under a lifeguard station. The pain continues. In the morning I'm exhausted. I walk to a store and buy a coke. When I get back to my lifeguard station, I throw up. I lay on the sand thinking of Wood. He died for treestianity. Will he rise again? My stomach hurts. I stop thinking about Wood. I only think about the pain. It fills the day with its steady rhythm. That night I sleep in spurts. The pain is always there. In the morning I notice a bump, about the size of a fist, on my right side. This scares me. I take a bus to the V. A. Hospital. I walk into the Emergency Room and tell someone that I have a bump on my side and I'm going to throw up. They lay me down. Doctors come and examine me. They put me on a metal tray and wheel me around the hospital performing various tests and taking x-rays. I'm finally assigned to a hospital bed. They have to operate. A smiling black lady nurse walks up to me with a razor blade. She shaves my belly. I feel pregnant. My stomach is so smooth and soft. I glide my fingers over its flat surface to the small hill on the right half of my belly.



A little old man walks into my room. This is my doctor. He tells me my large intestine is blocked. He won't know what's causing this until he gets inside of me. He gives me three possibilities. It could be cancer and I'll probably die. They might have to give me a colostomy. That's where you shit out of a hole in your side. Or the intestine could simply be twisted and all they have to do is untwist it. The doctor smiles and leaves. I stare out a window. I'm on the third floor. There is a park with grass, bushes and trees below me. Just beyond this there is a highway. It's almost sunset. I watch the cars moving along this road. There is no congestion.

They come and roll me into the operating room. A smiling black lady nurse slips something into my intravenous. I black out. I'm back in the woods laying on my back. I feel weak. I can't move. A tube is in my dick sucking out pee. Another tube goes through my nose and down my throat sucking up shit. For nourishment I still have the intravenous feeding me fluids. I can't be dead. There's a light coming from between two trees. Some people are quarreling. I think I hear someone scream "cannibal." A woodpecker flies through the light in the trees and lands on my chest. His beak almost touches my nose. He turns around and begins tearing away the bandage on my belly. When he reaches the skin I scream. The bird is pecking faster now, tearing out a large hole in my middle. A black poodle walks up and pisses all around me, then jumps into my newly formed cavity. I'm a boat. The woodpecker is a red spot floating above, watching us. We float down a river, twisting and turning toward the Pacific.

FLOW

