

THE DEADLY

ART

JERRY KEARNS

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DEEP COVER

The Deadly Art of Illusion

Essays:

Don Desmett, Curator

Eleanor Heartney

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Tyler Galleries

Tyler School of Art

Temple University

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Exhibition Travel Schedule:

Lehman College Art Gallery, Bronx, NY

University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara

University Gallery of the University of Massachusetts/Amherst



Armchair, 1970

Mind Over Matter

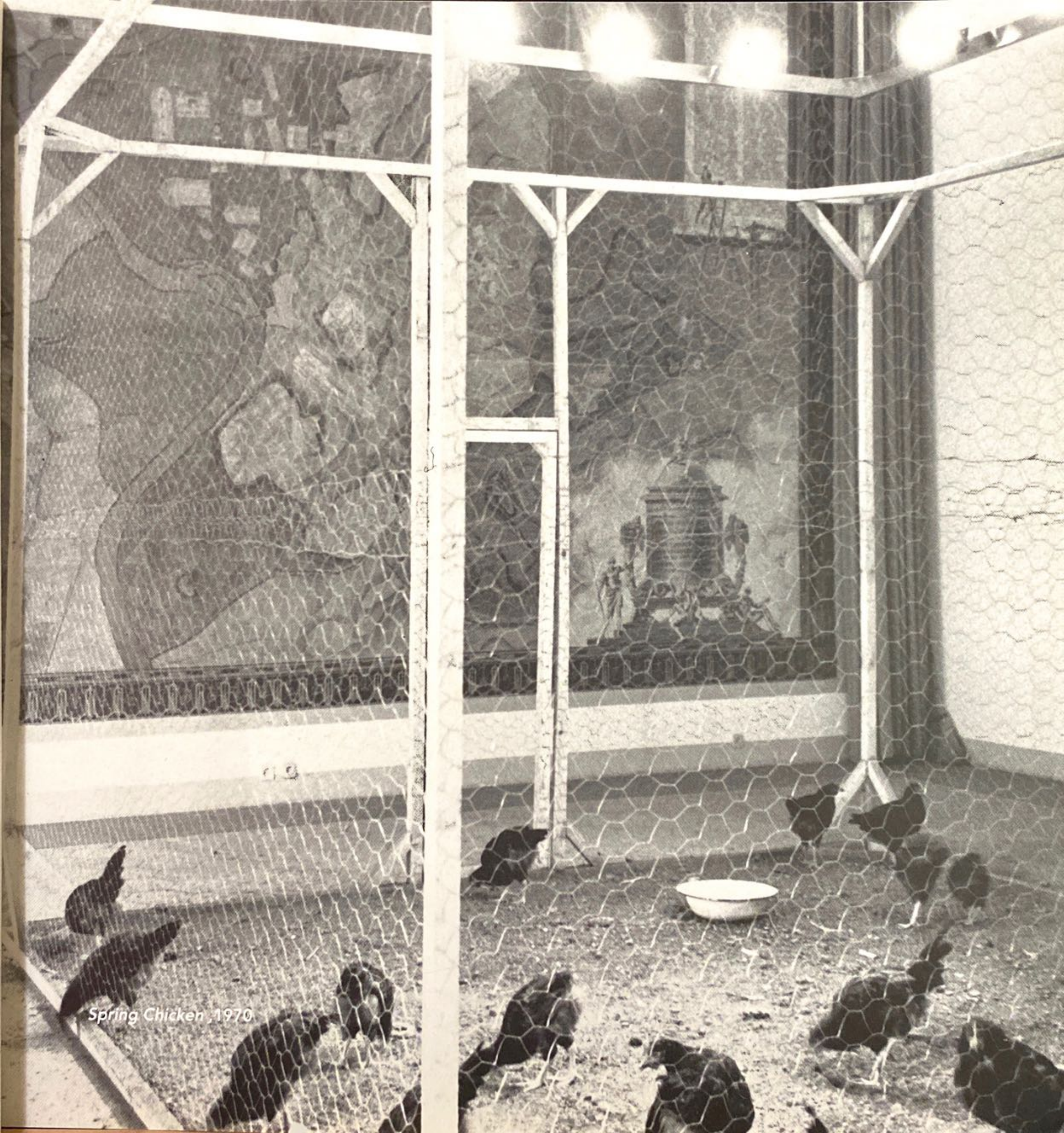
1968 was a watershed year in American history. Martin Luther King, Jr. was murdered in Memphis, Robert Kennedy was killed in Los Angeles, the atrocities of the Vietnam war flooded our recently colored television screens, and Richard Nixon was moving toward victory.

In Santa Barbara, California, recent MFA graduate Jerry Kearns reflected on those events and felt conflicted about leaving home for two years in Italy. Awarded the Rome Prize for sculpture, he was to leave in August. "I remember watching TV the night before my flight. It was horrible, hours of bloody street warfare as the Chicago cops billy-clubbed and tear-gassed young demonstrators. I felt guilty, like I was abandoning my generation."

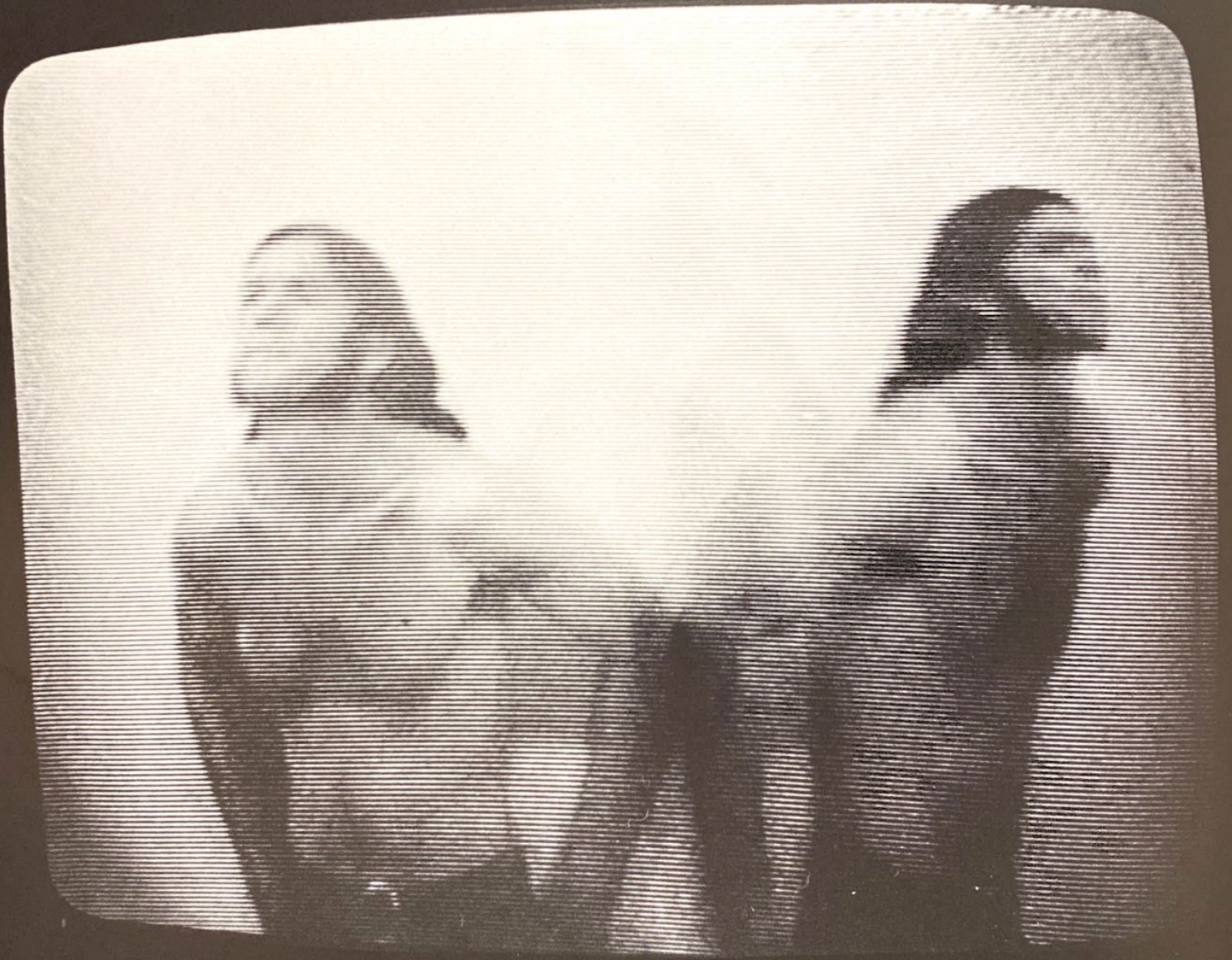
At the American Academy, Kearns began his own revolution. Seeking to close the gap between his work in sculpture (minimalist and architectonic) and a growing interest in social concerns, Kearns sold his tools, destroyed his working models and sketches, emptied and repainted his studio. Six months later his new work, *Arm Chair* (1970), was presented alone in his studio. The chair was an ornate parlor chair borrowed from the Academy. A slip cover had been placed over it to change its status. As Kearns says, "It was made less interesting to de-emphasize its optical allure. The idea was to present art as a place from which one could look out at the world."

In the spring of 1970 Kearns turned 27. Appropriately his next major work, *Spring Chicken*, involved 27 young chickens, which he cooped in the map room of the Academy library. The piece tickled the notion that art is created through the literal transfer of life energy to the art object. Kearns was amused that, as art objects, the chickens presumably gained an extended "life" span. Unlike the chair, which was a receptacle for life, the chickens (as commodity and art object) had a real life ... but one that was totally at the pleasure of humans. In the end, they were not just "food for thought," but actual food.

Kearns returned to California in 1970, to witness the ongoing destruction of the '60s counterculture and political movements. One of his first video works addressed that time. For Kearns, *Taking A Beating* (1971) was sculpture made "by and for TV, moving but not live." Over ten minutes, the video camera slowly moves in to a close head shot of a young man repeatedly slamming backward against a wall, pushing off, and slamming back again. The soundtrack is of the youth's breathing. "It was a direct yet somewhat withdrawn way to bring the recorded action into the future as an art object," says Kearns. "In the end it preserves a hidden record of time as seen through the eyes of another. We know only the reality of the camera when the tape is played."



Spring Chicken, 1970



Taking a Beating, 1970

In the fall Kearns moved to the East Coast to teach at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst and commute to live in New York City. In November he made *Early American 1971*. It was a sculpture, as well as a ritual of contrast, that produced an image expressing loss of self while equally suggesting joining with the whole of America. The sculpted element was of Kearns' index finger (cast in polyurethane), which he placed in the 1620 inscription carved on Plymouth Rock. He did this on Thanksgiving Day. "At the time," he notes, "I was reading Alan Watts (the American Buddhist) and Otto Rank (the German psychologist). Both men wrote extensively about the relationship of the individual to the collective." *Early American* was Kearns' first use of an overtly political symbol. As he explains, "It [Plymouth Rock] can be understood as the first American sculpture, and like the Liberty Bell, it has a crack in it."

In the early '70s Kearns viewed artmaking as a means for the development of the personality, the mind, the body, and the spirit; a tool for empowerment. In *Stigmata*, a video sculpture recorded in 1972, Kearns told the story of his biological father, a childhood of abuse, and the "trip to freedom" in California with his mother. During the narrative, Kearns slowly cut a black glove off each hand with a razor blade. Starting from the center of his palms, he cut symbols of stigmata, suggesting freedom and a cleansing of the soul through exposure, specifically his history via the protective layer of art.

In 1973, while visiting his adoptive father, Frank Snyder (*Francois*, 1974), in California, Kearns collected postcards and movie stills, which he edited into the piece *The Palace of the Living Arts* (1974). Consisting of ten photographs, the work was Kearns' first focus on Hollywood, and it became a visual link to his later paintings.

Concurrently, he worked on *The Hampshire Gazette* (1974), a year-long survey of the daily newspaper in Northampton, Massachusetts, that foreshadowed Kearns' use of news photographs in his paintings during the 1980s. After collecting copies of the *Gazette*, Kearns edited them, seeking to discover which stories were repeated most often. The piece eventually included twelve categories with each having twelve individual pictures and text. Kearns described the piece as "a kind of sanitized, quasi-official portrait of the local community." The work was closely followed by the publication of *Foster E. Goodrich* (1974), (a memorial booklet to Mr. Goodrich found in a bank lobby), which Kearns reproduced intact as a portrait of the American Dream. He says, "I saw it as the sunny side of Willie Loman; it presented the American myth that Ronald Reagan later resurrected and rode to the White House."

The third in this series of edited works was *The Western New England Quarterly* (1974). A one-time publication, it printed working-class culture, documenting women and their everyday stories of life. Kearns saw the *Quarterly*



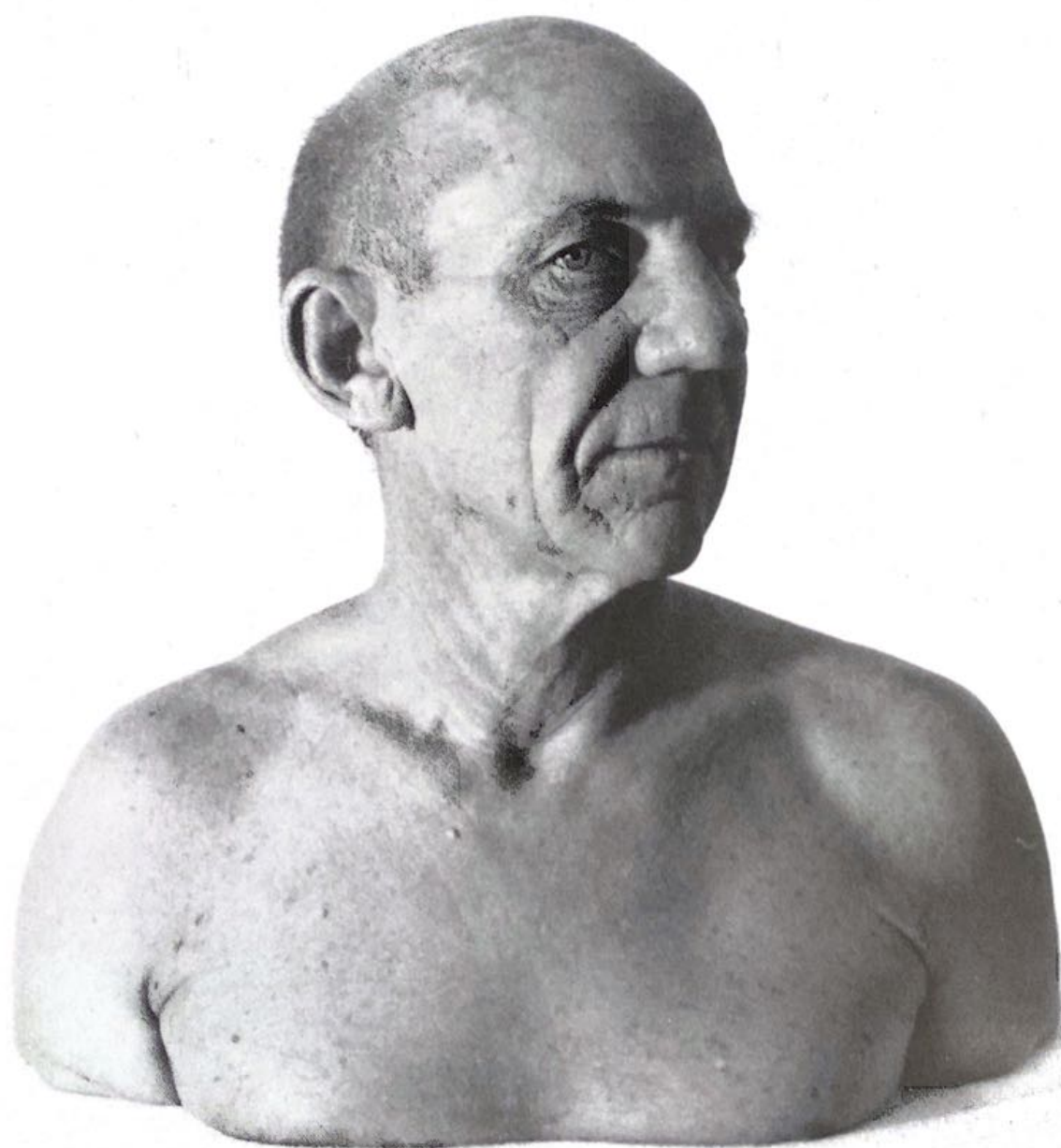
Early American, 1971



Coming Home, 1972



Stigmata, 1972



Francois, 1973

as feminist-inspired, and he dedicated it to his mother, Elizabeth Paul. When it was shown at New York's OK Harris gallery in 1974, however, Kearns was surprised at how widely the work was misunderstood. Most art viewers assumed that he was using campy humor to poke fun at the working-class authors. In reality Kearns had conceived the project as a means of giving visibility to these women's excluded voices.

Looking for a broader cultural perspective than was evident in the mainstream art world, Kearns came across *The FOX*, a magazine edited by members of England's Art and Language Collective and New York conceptualists including Ian Burn, Andrew Menard, Joseph Kosuth, Sarah Charlesworth, and Jill Breakstone. Kearns invited the editorial board to give a workshop at the University of Massachusetts.

Intrigued by the group's cultural critique, Kearns began attending public meetings of a larger artists' coalition, The Artists Meeting for Cultural Change (AMCC). The coalition was organizing protest demonstrations against the Whitney Museum's show *200 Years of American Art*. The exhibition was curated from the Rockefeller family collection and was made up almost entirely of white male artists.

When the AMCC disbanded in 1976, several smaller groups emerged from the membership. Kearns joined The Red Herring collective which was founded by past members of *The FOX*. The Red Herring group published the journal *Red Herring* and studied cultural theory. In 1977 activist/playwright/poet Amiri Baraka founded The Anti-Imperialist Cultural Union (AICU), as a coalition organization for "cultural workers" in New York City. Kearns and other Red Herring members joined the group. The AICU produced numerous cultural events. Always presented in public schools or Black churches over the weekend, these "festivals" offered puppet plays, musical performances, poetry readings, and theatrical performances. The content of the art was in-your-face political and most often about New York City.

Kearns began to photograph what was around him, focusing particularly on the cultural productions. By 1978 he and other AICU members were working directly with the Black United Front (BUF), a civil rights group founded in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. For nearly the next three years Kearns produced books, banners, calendars, posters, and leaflets, as well as photographing victims of police brutality. This documentation led to several court appearances, where Kearns' photographs were used as evidence. It was indeed an intense experience for a 34-year-old, middle-class, white male. From the police killing of community activist Arthur Miller to the many large demonstrations and marches that followed, Kearns found himself in an edgy situation, accepted by the radical Black organization, while at the same time being physically confronted by the New York police.

During 1979-80 Kearns was also active in the Committee Against Fort Apache,



Arthur Miller Memorial, 1978

the Bronx (CAFA), an organization established by young Puerto Rican activists to criticize racial and sexual stereotyping in the movie *Fort Apache, the Bronx*, starring Paul Newman. The film was about to begin production in the South Bronx when the committee to oppose it was formed. Later, in the October 1981 issue of *Artforum* magazine, Kearns and art critic Lucy R. Lippard documented the CAFA story in a ground-breaking collaboration. Kearns has said that he views his work with the BUF and CAFA as his most complete realization of the message suggested in his 1970 sculpture *Armchair*: "Art is a place from which to look outward at the world, and a tool with which to join in the struggle."

Kearns became a founding member of another activist organization in 1980, Political Art Documentation/Distribution (PADD). It was there that he met Lucy Lippard. Working together on a project, the two went to a small Chinatown restaurant for lunch to discuss the work and didn't stop talking for the next five years. Their long collaboration was a natural extension of what they were both already doing. Lippard was moving farther away from the mainstream toward broader cultural activism and cultural activist Kearns was moving back to the art world.

At the time of their meeting, Lippard had long been one of America's most challenging cultural voices, as well as an art critic of international importance. Her writings reaffirmed the activist spirit of culture; she championed it as a means for self empowerment. Kearns says of her, "Lucy has been twenty years ahead of everybody else for the last thirty years." Her most recent book, *Mixed Blessings*, compiles fifteen years of research to document the neglected history of our heterogeneous U.S. cultures that, by 1990, the art world was finally beginning to recognize.

Kearns' and Lippard's influence and like minds helped propel the intense collaboration of socially concerned artists in the 1980s. An important extension of this was their participation in PADD. The group produced activist culture in a variety of politicized contexts and generated an exceptional archive of political art. PADD worked with other groups in the emerging East Village scene, including ABC No Rio, COLAB, and Group Material, as well as a wide spectrum of grass roots political organizations across the country. Core members included Herb Perr, Elizabeth Kulas, Irving Wexler, Greg Sholette, Joel Cohen, Barbara Moore, Mimi Smith, Janet Koenig, Keith Christensen, Jerri Allyn, Julie Spriggs, Susan Crowe, Rae Langsten, Janet Vicario, Bill Maxwell and Tom Halsall. The group worked on several major activities that organized thousands of artists across the U.S. in events like "Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America" and "State of Mind: State of the Union" in 1984. At the end of PADD's tenure, its archive was donated to the library of The Museum of Modern Art in New York City, where it remains in use.

Among their numerous writing projects, Kearns and Lippard collaborated on a series of articles for the *Village Voice* between 1981 and 1985 entitled "Happy



Life Member

John J. Gizienski of Hatfield, right, is the first World War II veteran to be voted life membership to the Old Hadley Post 271, American Legion and is receiving the certificate from Cmdr. Peter Coach. He was a sergeant in the Airborne Infantry and participated in Ardennes, Rhineland and Central Europe Campaigns. Gizienski, a graduate of Hopkins Academy and Stockbridge School of Agriculture, has been finance officer for 20 years and was commander when the contract was signed to construct the new Legion Home.

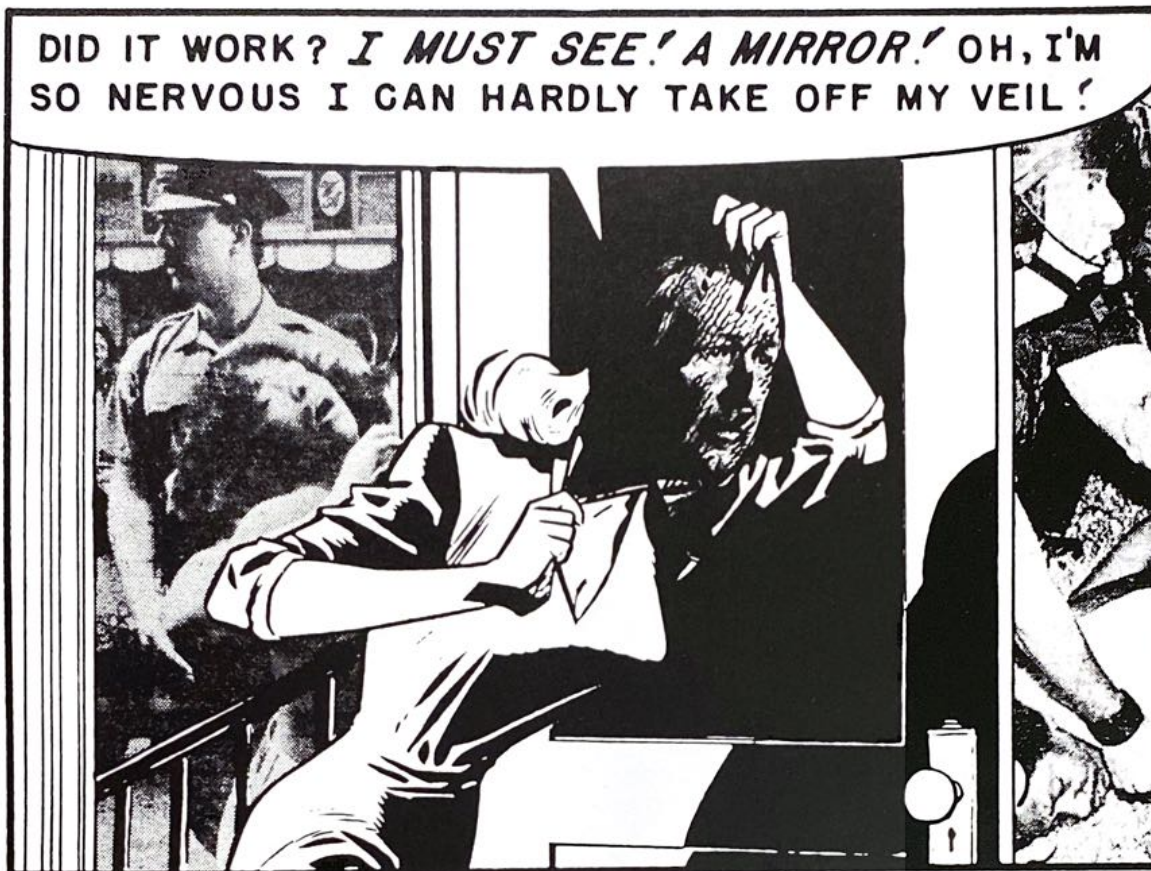
Newsyear," year-end reports, that served as a "State of Culture" address. These projects, along with Kearns' work with PADD (1980-86), defined an intensely active and fertile period, not only for his growth as an artist and human being, but as part of a general growth of politicized artist collectives that flourished throughout the 1980s.

In 1982 Kearns held his first solo exhibition in eight years. Using his own photo archives to create mixed-media constructions, he applied intense fields of color directly to the wall and combined them with photo enlargements (life size) of people from political demonstrations. The show's title: *No Place To Run No Place To Hide* points to the intense, anxious appearance of those works. Gerrit Henry wrote of them in *Art in America*:

Kearns best succeeds when interpreted as a kind of Bernini of the left, creating characters excruciated by their ideals, who leap out aggressively from their two dimensions toward the viewer's three. At base, his figures are so politically impassioned as to be religious; and if their ecstasies are agonies, that is, after all, Marxism and not the Catholic Church. In the century of purisme pour purisme, though, Kearns' earnest subjection of art to image is welcome, and at its best, is as exhilarating as a well attended rally.

In 1983 Kearns began work on the body of paintings exhibited in *Deep Cover*. Looking back over the previous ten years, one can readily see many origins of the ideas he continued in these experimental paintings: the looking outward of *Arm Chair*, the focus on the relationship of art to life in *Spring Chicken*, the juxtaposition of the individual to the collective in *Early American*, the interest in Hollywood and media sources in *The Palace of the Living Arts* and *The Hampshire Gazette*, and certainly the analytical cultural eye he developed in many years of political activism. In a 1986 exhibition catalog Kearns outlined his thinking about the paintings to come:

I'm a realist but I don't illustrate appearance, or depict the natural look of things. On the contrary, I start with signifiers ... newspaper photographs and comic book drawings ... symbols of fact and fantasy. I juxtapose and examine them to reveal a conceptual rather than perceptual realism. The paintings are narrative, boisterous, analytical, and often combative. They question many of our prevailing social, cultural, political, and spiritual values: What we know or don't know ... How we know ... What we know in particular ways.



STATE OF THE MIND / STATE OF THE UNION

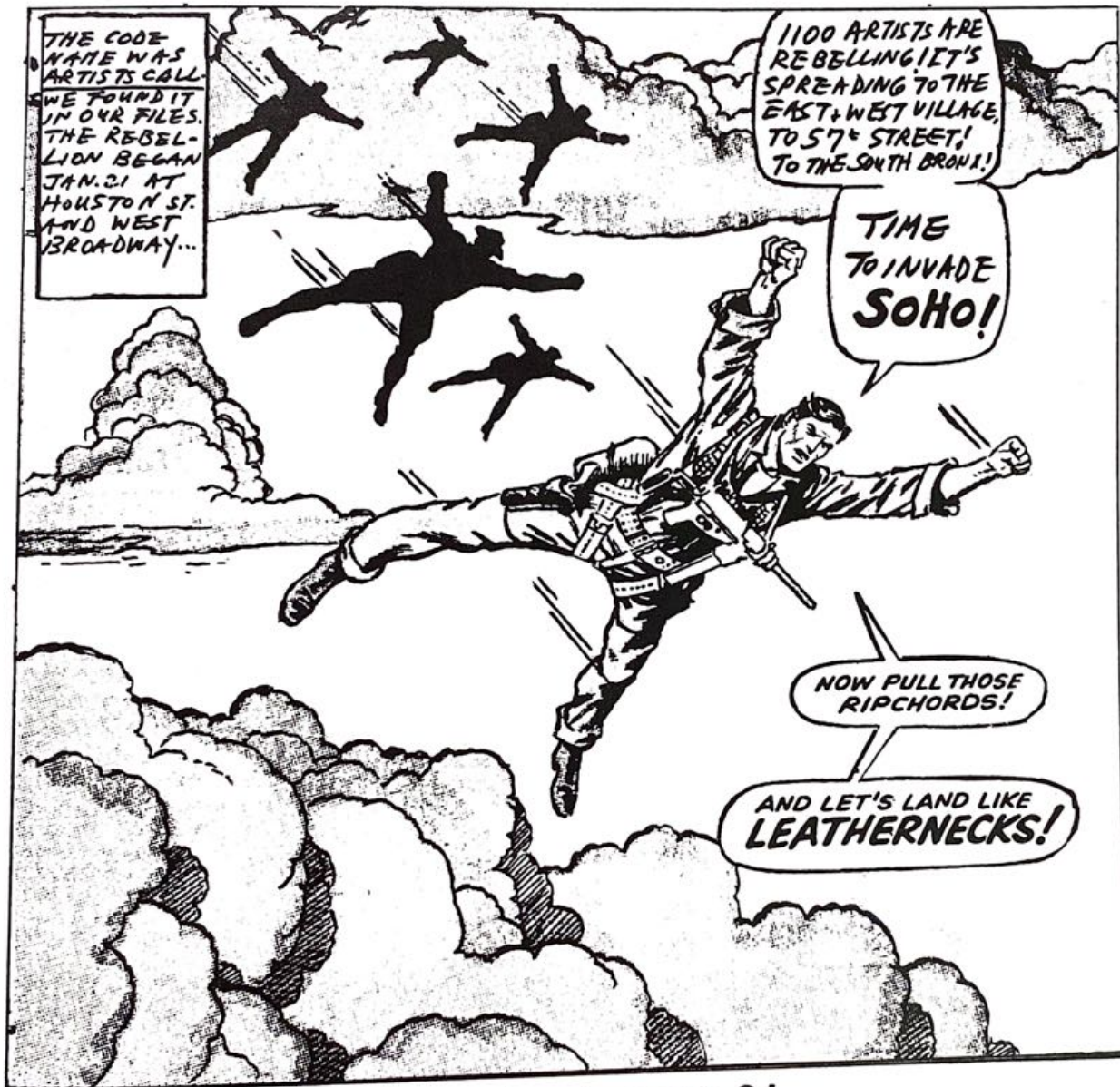
A PAD/D SECOND SUNDAY FORUM: *STATE OF MIND / STATE OF THE UNION* IS A MAJOR CULTURAL/POLITICAL EVENT BEING ORGANIZED BY PAD/D FOR JANUARY 1985. DURING THE PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURAL PERIOD WE WILL PRODUCE AN EXHIBITION, A PERFORMANCE SERIES, AND OUT-DOOR EVENTS FROM PAINTING TO ACTIVIST INTERVENTION. COME SUNDAY, JUNE 10, 7:30 P.M., HEAR ABOUT OUR PROGRESS, FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN PARTICIPATE. THERE IS MUCH TO DO, WE WANT YOU, ADVICE—and or LABOR—and or BODY—and or SOUL.

Presented with the support of the New York State Council of the Arts

June 10, 7:30 p.m., Franklin Furnace, 112 Franklin St., NYC

CONTRIBUTION: \$3





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ARTISTS CALL Against U.S. Intervention in Central America



Ground Zero 1981



Buck, 1973
The Palace of Living Art

DEEP COVER: The Deadly Art of Illusion

In a provocative essay entitled "Myth Today," Roland Barthes makes an indictment of myth which will startle any devotee of Joseph Campbell. While the latter celebrates mythology as the breeding ground for common purpose and national identity, for Barthes myth is an insidious, dangerous lie which cloaks the brutal truths of oppression, power and history in the reassuring garb of normalcy. Barthes argues that the purpose of myth is to replace relations between individuals, classes and nations with the illusion that these relations are unchanging and unchangeable.

He remarks, "In passing from history to Nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences,... it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth... it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves." He adds, "... myth has the task of giving a historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal."

Barthes argues that it is the task of the mythologist to disturb the mythic order by exposing the provisional nature of its apparent truths. In the body of works which comprise this exhibition, Jerry Kearns assumes just such a function. Splicing together images borrowed from television, comics, high art, photojournalism and film, he creates a heady mix of references which cuts through and across each other in ways that suggest the instability of all the verities they purport to represent.

Heterogeneous chatter is, of course, a staple of postmodern practice. However, it is important to distinguish Kearns' approach from that of such masters of postmodernism as David Salle, Robert Longo and Julian Schnabel. These latter were lauded throughout the eighties for their cultivation of a detached irony which commentators linked to the death of meaning, belief, commitment and feeling. In the name of deconstructing the terms of a media saturated reality, these artists turned the varied representations of our culture into a tasteless stew in which no element could be distinguished from any other.

By contrast, Kearns' work is passionate and engaged. He dares to take a stand, he expresses outrage at the persistence of injustice, he exposes the cynical manipulation of history for ideological ends. In the process, he suggests that the fashionable postmodern detachment is itself a new mythology.

The difference between these two approaches can be suggested by a comparison of David Salle's 1984 *What is the Reason for Your Visit to Germany* and Kearns' 1987 *Hard Rock*. Both paintings juxtapose pin-up style images of compliant females with politically loaded images. In Salle's painting, a naked woman bends over to



Down by Law, 1988

face the viewer through her spread legs. The word "Fromage," suggesting her status as "cheesecake," runs across her image and she is flanked by a pair of line drawings from the famous photograph of Lee Harvey Oswald as he is shot by Jack Ruby. Meanwhile, an adjacent panel contains a lead encased saxophone which in this context takes on unmistakably phallic connotations. The conjunction of images produces a queasy mix of voyeuristic images (we recall that Oswald's death occurred on television), in which art, politics and sex are all reduced to the status of pornography.

Kearns' painting offers the '50s era comic book image of a voluptuous woman lying spread-eagled with her back to us. Rising behind her legs are four somber patriarchs of Mount Rushmore. Thus Kearns also suggests a connection between objectified woman and our male dominated culture. However, his painting has a sly wit which contrasts sharply with Salle's air of world weary cynicism. Kearns suggests that it may be possible to resist the unequal relations of patriarchy. Here, unlike Salle's lifeless doll woman, Kearns' female character embodies an active principle. Represented in a vivid shade of red, she is alert, wary and by no means quietly submissive.

This mode of teasing hidden meanings out of familiar icons and media representations is typical of Kearns' work and is one of the things that qualifies him as a mythologist in Barthes sense. Avoiding, on one hand, the celebratory mode of the original Pop artists who turned soup cans and highway signs into objects of campy delectation, and, on the other, the dour leveling of meaning practiced by the disciples of Baudrillard, Kearns puts his images to work. With wit and style, they are made to reveal us to ourselves.

Nowhere is the process clearer than in his treatment of images adapted from comics. With the exception of a few cowboy images from the 1970s and a contemporary black superhero, the images Kearns borrows originated in East Coast Comics. These comics gained popularity in the 50s as an earthier alternative to the superhero genre, and presented images of everyman and everywoman which encapsulate the gender ideals of that era. Buxom, leggy blonds, at once tough and feminine, provide romantic diversion for the muscular sharpshooters, gangsters and desperados who are both heroes and villains of the narratives. Yet, if they mimic the rigid gender stereotypes of the era, these histrionic and hypersexual images also have a subversive edge. They hint at darker undercurrents flowing beneath the placid facade of 50s America and offer a visual image of the violent unconscious of the cold war era.

At the same time, because these images belong to a recent past whose icons still contain a powerful resonance, the psychological world suggested by East Coast comics is anything but alien to the contemporary viewer. Just distant



Bushwacked, 1986

enough in time to seem slightly old-fashioned, these images embody cultural assumptions which still guide our thinking today. Thus, they become useful tools for investigating our own states of mind.

In his paintings, Kearns wrests these images out of their original contexts, so that they become, in Barthes' terms, "denaturalized." It becomes possible to read the ideological biases which are embedded within them and which might be difficult to recognize in a more-up-to-date format. The truths which they hold self-evident are rendered arbitrary, and hence susceptible to change.

For example, one value that remains constant in the universe of East Coast Comics is that of rugged individualism. This value also underlies some of our most basic understandings of American history. From the pioneer to the new immigrant to the entrepreneur, the rugged individualist is seen as the model of the new American man. He reaches his apotheosis in the complementary figures of the frontiersman and the outlaw, archetypes whose masculinity is conceived in direct opposition to such emasculating "female" qualities as civility, conformity and submission to authority.

Unfortunately, the myth of the rugged individual has been a particularly pernicious one in American society. Its legacy appears in our willing embrace of unwise wars. Its influence underlies the justifications designed to support the far right's opposition to gun control. And, it manifests itself in our continuing admiration for such corporate cowboys as Donald Trump, Ivan Boesky and Michael Milkin, who are embraced as popular heroes regardless of the social and economic chaos they leave in their wake.

Kearns' *Down by Law* comments on this unfortunate attraction. In this work, a cartoon cowboy recoils backward into uncertain space against a backdrop provided by the neoclassical pillars of the federal courthouse. The juxtaposition of these images, along with the title of the work, suggest that there is a basic conflict between the cherished ideal of American manhood and the rule of law. Elegantly and eloquently, Kearns' reminds us that democracy requires such unmasculine qualities as the submission to common rule and a recognition of the rights of others.

In other works, Kearns explores further implications of the machismo ideal. *Foreign Affairs* recalls Henry Kissinger's famous remark that "Power is the ultimate aphrodisiac." Here a cartoon bedroom scene is superimposed over a glowing gold representation of the Capitol dome. From the viewer's vantage point, the latter resembles a giant breast, suggesting that there is an erotic dimension to the quest for political power. Meanwhile, the bedroom scene hints at the darker side of sexual politics, as a man looms threateningly over a passive woman.

An analogy between sexual and political power is also suggested in *Manifest Destiny*. Here a Philip Marlowe-style tough guy stares down at a sleeping woman



Crossroads, 1986

against a backdrop which includes images of Oliver North and a photograph of a commemorative statue. The painting's title encourages us to read a political lesson into the juxtapositions. Male sexual dominance becomes a metaphor for America's arrogant assumption of geopolitical superiority.

Other works explore this theme, and suggest analogies between different varieties of exploitation. These may involve the unequal relations between men and women in a patriarchal culture, between inhabitants of developed and undeveloped nations, or between members of the privileged and underprivileged classes. In each instance, the weaker partner is viewed by the stronger merely as material to be disposed of for the fulfillment of its own desires.

Ladykiller connects several of these categories. Here, in a cartoon drawing which clearly hints at a violent denouement, a swooning woman finds herself in the possible homicidal embrace of a wild-eyed lover. Behind the pair we can glimpse a grainy news photograph of a group of Palestinian women risking a different kind of danger as they protest the occupation of the West Bank.

Similar issues permeate *Earth Angel*. Here, a pair of images showing Elvis Presley posing as a cowboy have been superimposed over reproductions of two of the most famous photographs of the Vietnam era: the Kent State killing and the image of a napalmed Vietnamese child running with arms spread toward the camera. This work draws a parallel between the macho heroics which "won" the West and those which lead us into the quagmire of Vietnam.

More humorously, *Affirmative Action* depicts a woman in a short skirt energetically shoveling manure against an urban backdrop. Here, Kearns addresses the way in which conservative political and business leaders are able to play societal concern about gender inequalities off against the more intractable problem of class. With this work, he suggests that the rhetoric of Affirmative Action has been less effective in redressing genuine inequalities than in providing American capitalism with an ever growing source of cheap labor.

Related works touch on struggles for national liberation. *Crossroads* suggests the inequality of this battle in South Africa. Here, an enormous pair of hypnotic eyes arches over a photographic image of a crouching South African woman attempting to protect the shantytown in which she lives. Breaking through the upper corners are a pair of horrific white cartoon hands which threaten to enclose her like a vise.

In *Brother*, the prognosis appears more hopeful. Here, an almost obscured photograph of a group of Central American women forms the backdrop to a reproduction of a Durer print of the crucifixion. A fierce looking gunman bursts out in front, making reference to the militant role the Catholic Church has played



Solid Gold, 1988

Hour of the Wolf, 1982-1983 ▶





in some of South America's liberation struggles, the work reflects Kearns' discovery that Christ is almost never depicted as a revolutionary in conventional religious imagery.

Many of these works play on the tension between the stylized representations of popular culture and the gritty, unromantic news photographs of struggling peoples. This tension suggests a distinction made by Barthes in the aforementioned essay between the kinds of representations available to the powerful and the powerless. The former, he suggests, has all the persuasive alchemy of myth available to them, while the latter have none. "The oppressed is nothing," Barthes writes, "he has only one language, that of his emancipation; the oppressor is everything, his language is rich, multiform, supple with all the possible degrees of dignity at its disposal."

In Kearns' work, one senses just this gap when one turns from the seductive portrayals of taut heroes, ripe damsels and nobly countenanced leaders which personify the conventional relations of power on the personal, domestic and international front, to contemplate grainy photographic images of faceless sufferers. These latter seem to lurk in the margins of these paintings, just as they linger just below the surface of our political consciousness. Beneath the din of political rhetoric, their muted cries are indeed hard to hear.

No American mythologist can fail to grapple with the implications of the American Dream. Kearns deals with this theme in a variety of ways. In *Solid Gold* he superimposes an erotic image of a man kissing a woman's neck over the hood of a shiny gold Cadillac. Revealing the materialistic underpinnings of our national longings, he suggests that love, possession and consumerism are inseparable.

A darker vision is suggested by *Madonna and Child*. Here, Andy Warhol's silk screen homage to Marilyn Monroe becomes the frame for a close-up image of Kim Phuc, the napalmed Vietnamese child. Kim Phuc's bare arms stretch out across Marilyn's eyes, creating an eerie crucifixion image. Kearns notes that these two images are perhaps the two most famous images of women from the '60s. Apparently in conflict — Marilyn, after all, embodies the perfect male fantasy object, while Kim Phuc represents grisly reality — the images converge from another point of view. Both are tragic heroines sacrificed to an overbearing will to power.

The American dream becomes a nightmare in other works. The title of *Hour of the Wolf* suggests the late night hour of sleepless anxiety so favored by the horror genre. The painting is a diptych, rare in Kearns' work, which pairs a surreal image of Ronald Reagan, submerged to the neck in water, with a collage of nightmarish images. These include Kim Phuc again, a vicious cartoon wolf, the silhouette of an axe murderer and a line of soldiers. The work sums up the schizophrenic consciousness of the Reagan era, when the head of state, cut off from reality, dreamed his



Prime Time, 1987

nostalgic vision of a storybook America, while all manner of evils raged outside.

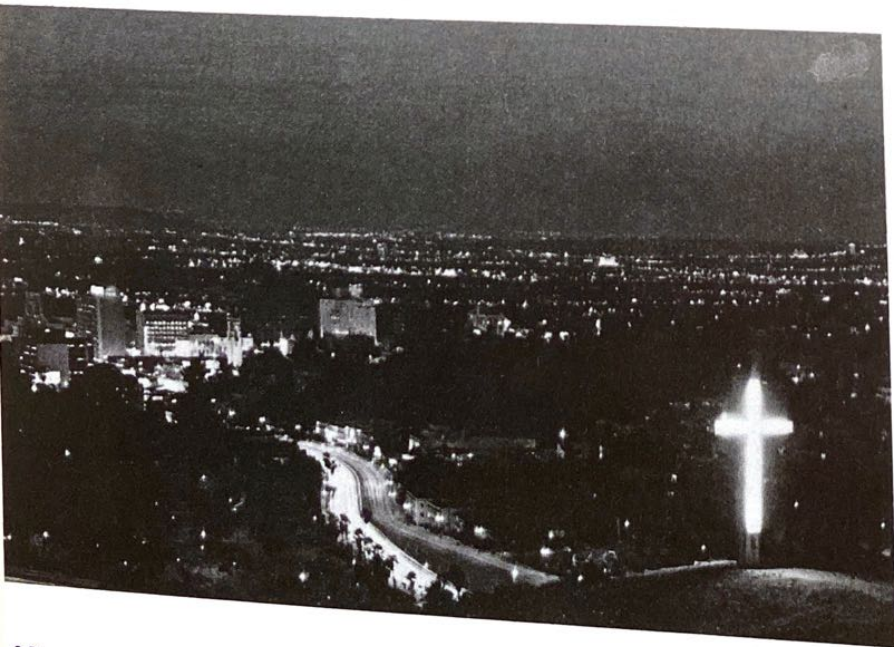
In assuming the role of the mythologist, Kearns rejects the simplistic formulations which mar many well meaning efforts to combine art and politics. He does not provide a schematic world inhabited by evil oppressors and innocent victims, nor does he allow his viewers the easy comfort of identification with the oppressed. Instead, he provides a complex exploration of the dynamics of power which force us, as educated, middle class Americans, to acknowledge our own complicity with the injustices he recounts. We recognize in ourselves the arrogance, the assumptions of cultural or sexual superiority and the materialistic desires which animate many of his characters.

Barthes ends his essay with a discussion of the lonely alienation of the mythologist, who is condemned to tell the truth. Refusing the solace of easy answers or inspiring calls to action, Kearns has chosen the far more arduous task of ideological excavation. His work will appeal neither to the guardians of the myth nor to those who believe "wrong thinking" can be swept cleanly aside to make way for utopia. But for those who are willing to wrestle with the possible, this work will be welcome indeed.

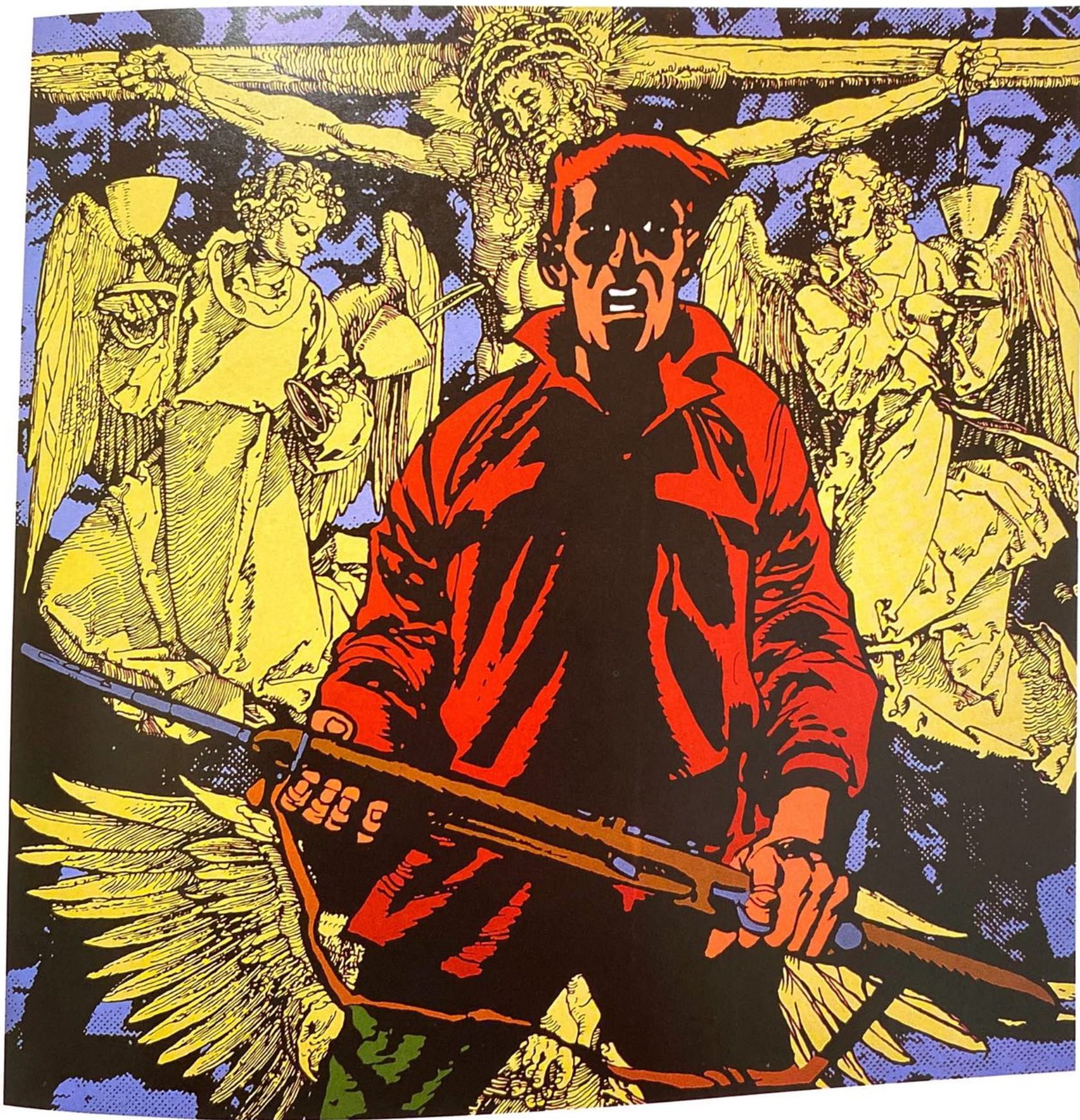
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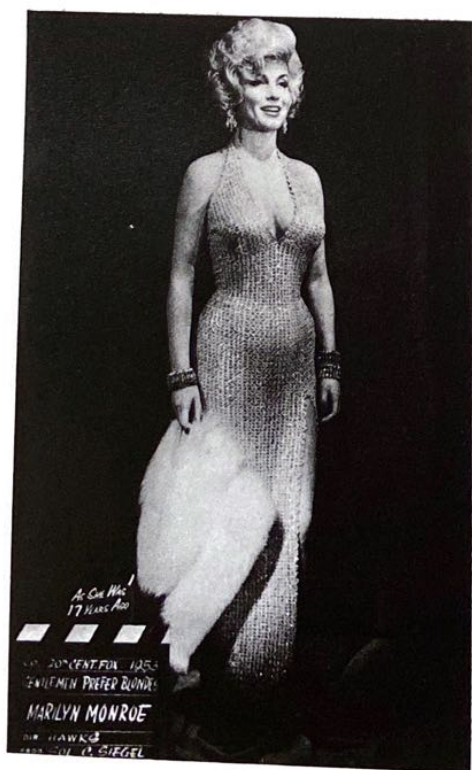
Amandla, 1986



Hollywood Cross, 1974



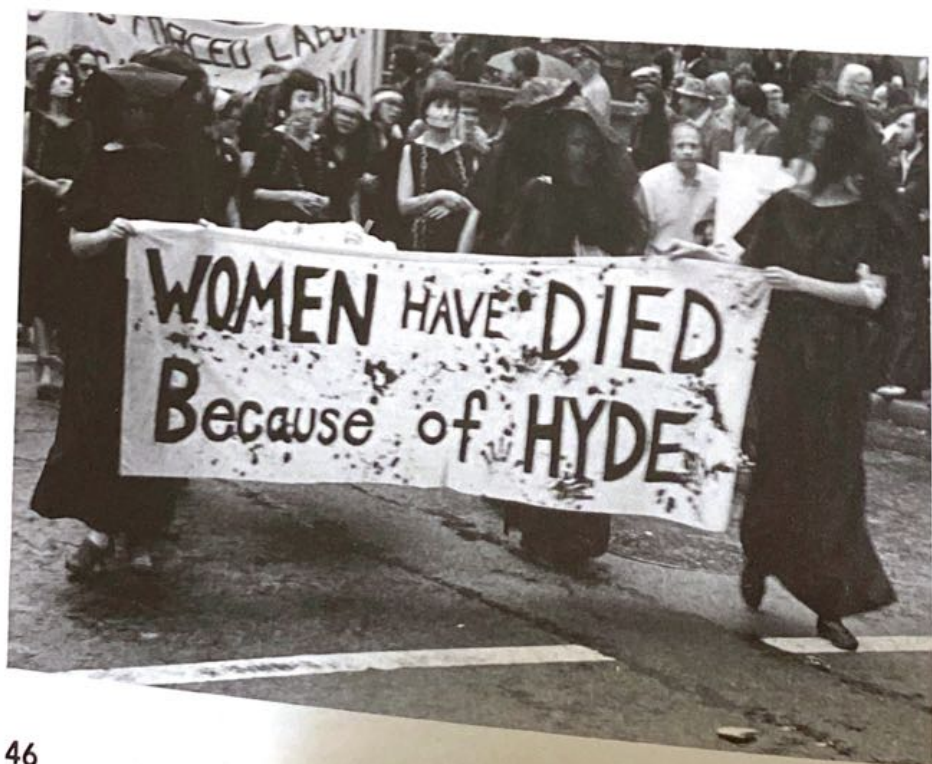
Brother, 1986



Marilyn, 1973



Madonna and Child, 1986





Affirmative Action, 1987



Nuke, NYC, 1982



Earth Angel, 1989





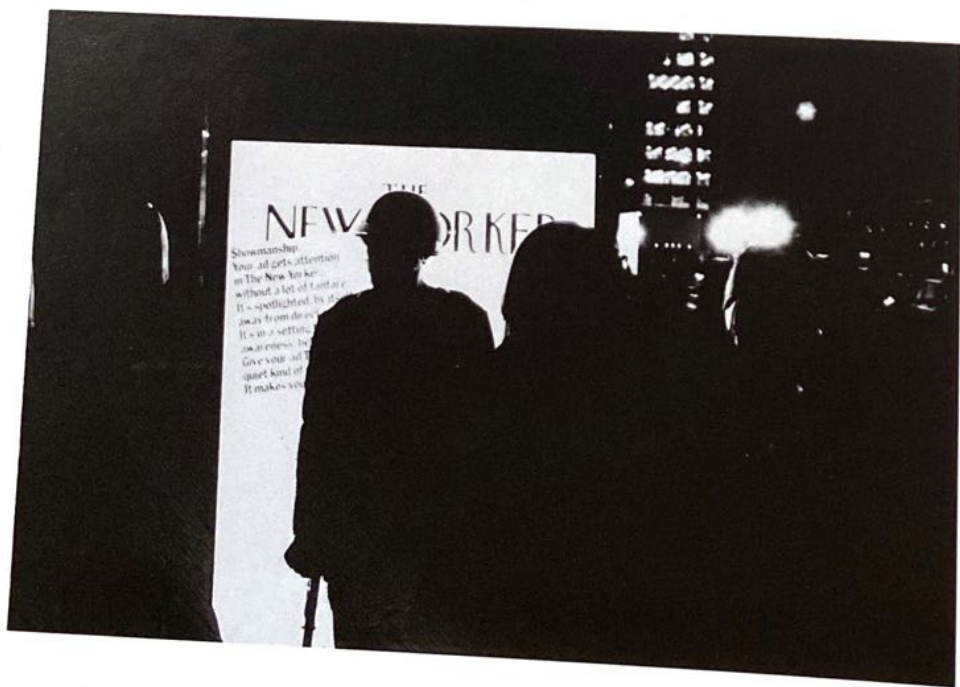
Hard Rock, 1987



Uncle Sam, 1980

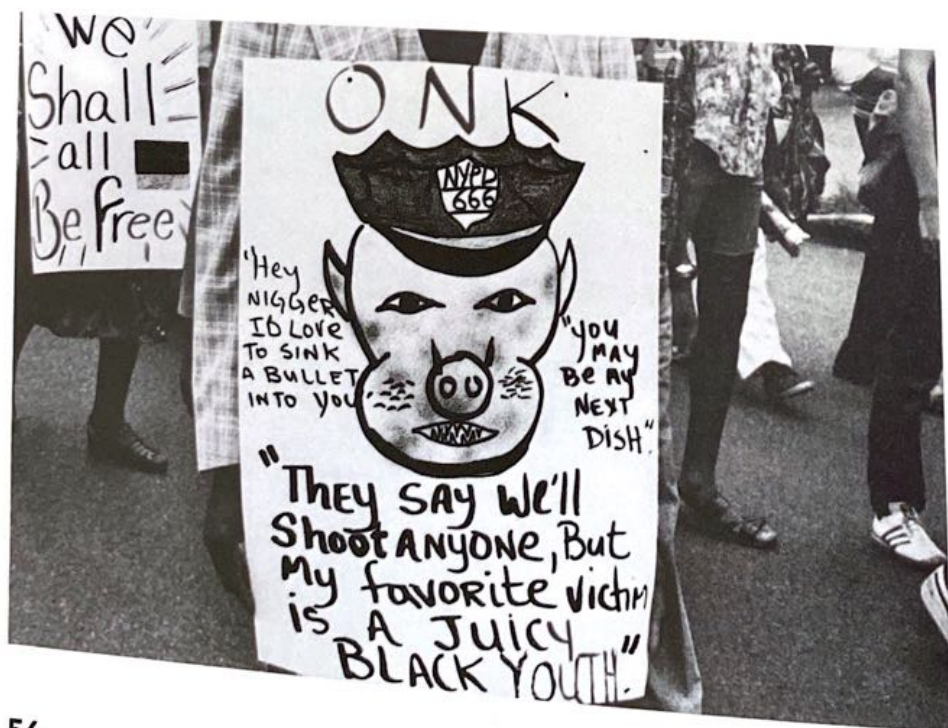


Naked Brunch, 1985



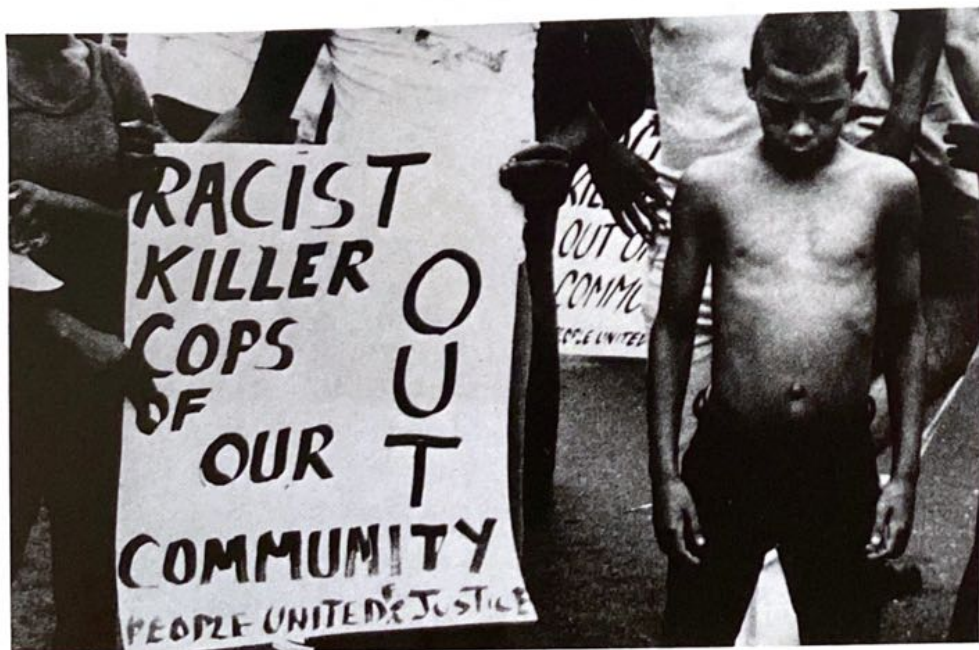
Anti-Shah Demonstration, 1976







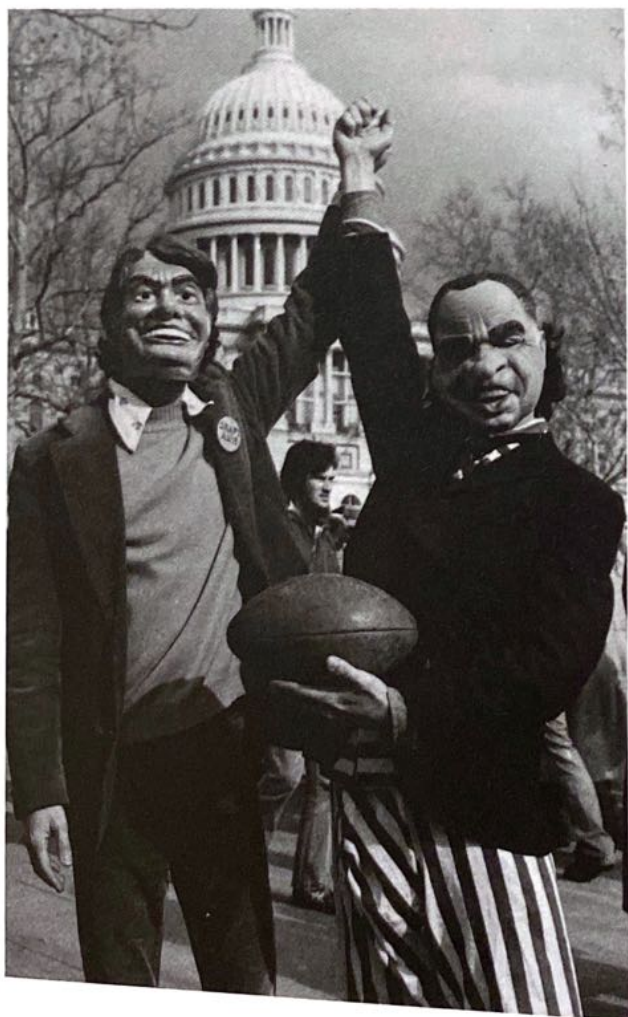
Scarlet Fever, 1987



Crown Heights, NYC, 1978

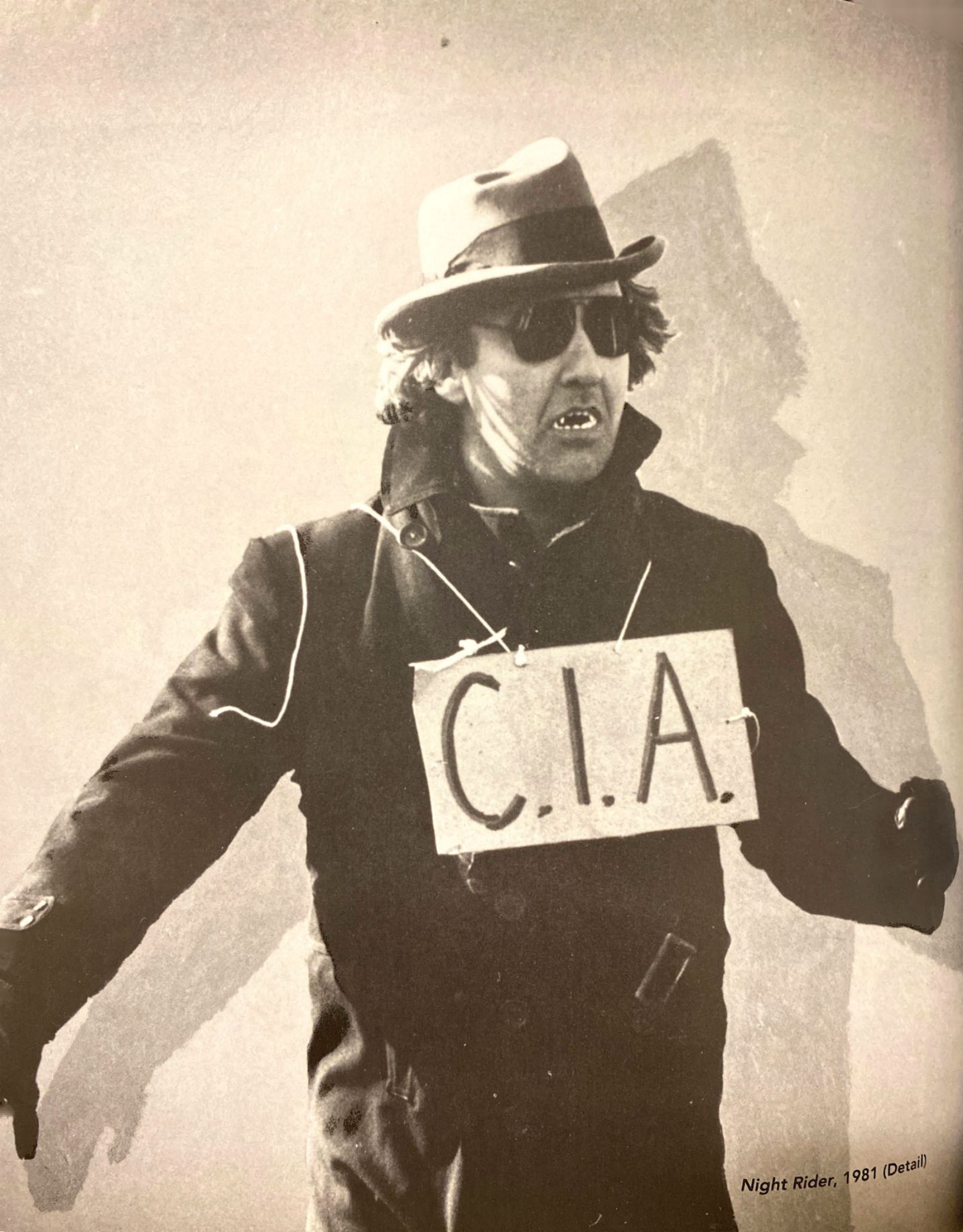


Ladykiller, 1986





Foreign Affairs, 1987



Night Rider, 1981 (Detail)

JERRY KEARNS

BORN 1943 Petersburg, Virginia

EDUCATION

1968 M.F.A., University of California at Santa Barbara

AWARDS

- 1968-70 Prix de Rome, American Academy in Rome
- 1974 National Endowment for the Arts Grant for Conceptual Art
- 1987 New York State Council for the Arts Sponsored Project Grant
New York State Council for the Arts Grant for Painting
- 1988 *MTA Gets You There*, Subway Poster Commission, Public Art Fund, Inc., New York
Kiss the Sky, Billboard Commission for ZONE Art Gallery, Springfield, Massachusetts.
Funded by the Massachusetts Council for the Arts
- 1990 *Minute to Minute*, Bus Poster Commission for ZONE Art Gallery, Springfield, Massachusetts.
Funded by the Massachusetts Council for the Arts

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1985 *Painting 1983-1985*, Exit Art, New York
Herter Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- 1986 Perimeter Gallery, Chicago
Modernism Gallery, San Francisco
Western Gallery, Western Washington University, Bellingham
- 1987 Atrium Gallery, University of Connecticut, Storrs
Risky Business, Kent Fine Art, New York, catalogue essay by Lucy Lippard
- 1988 *American Icons*, Meyers/Bloom Gallery, Los Angeles, catalogue essay by Jefferson Morley
- 1989 *To Have and Have Not*, Kent Fine Art, New York
Galeria Temple, Valencia, Spain, catalogue essay by Elizabeth Hess
- 1991 *Jerry Kearns: Bilder*, Galerie Fahnemann, Berlin
Body and Soul, Meyers/Bloom Gallery, Los Angeles
Deep Cover, Temple Gallery, Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia, catalogue essays by Eleanor Heartney and Don Desmett. Travels to Lehman College Art Gallery, Lehman College, Bronx, New York; University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara; University Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; and Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, Cleveland, Ohio
- 1992 *The Second Coming*, Fiction/Nonfiction Gallery, New York

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1985 *State of Mind/State of the Union*, Judson Memorial Gallery, New York, organized by Political Art Documentation / Distribution

- Disinformation: *The Manufacture of Consent*, The Alternative Museum, New York, curated by Geno Rodriguez
 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, participant in Group Material installation,
 Americana
- 1986 MASS, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, Participant in Group Material Installation
 Telling Tales, Allegheny College, Meadville, Pennsylvania
 Camino a Cuba, Museo Universitario del Chopo, Mexico City
 The Law and Order Show, John Weber Gallery, New York
 American Myths, Kent Fine Art, New York
 Second Biennial of Havana, Centro Wifredo Lam, Havana, Cuba, catalogue
- 1987 All the News That's Fit For Prints, P.P.O.W., New York, curated by Wendy Olsoff. Traveled to the Anderson
 Gallery, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, 1988, and Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, 1988
 Comic Iconoclasm, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, curated by Sheena Wagstaff, catalogue essay by Ms.
 Wagstaff. Traveled to the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin; Cornerhouse Gallery, Manchester; Circolo des Belles
 Artes, Madrid, 1988; Kunstmuseum, Berne, West Germany
- 1988 Documenta 8, Kassel, Germany, participant in *The Castle*, a Group Material installation
 Subtext, Kent Fine Art, New York
- 1988 The Social Club, Exit Art, New York
 Imprimatur, Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, South Carolina. Traveled to the North Carolina
 Museum of Art, Raleigh
 Committed to Print, Museum of Modern Art, New York, catalogue essay by Deborah Wye. Traveled to the
 University Art Galleries, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio; Peace Museum, Chicago, 1989; Glenbow
 Museum, Calgary, Alberta, 1989; New York State Museum, Albany, 1990; Spencer Museum of Art, University of
 Kansas, 1990; Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, California, 1990
 New York City Works, One Penn Plaza, New York, curated by John L. Moore and Carola van den Houten
 Art and the Law, Organized by West Publishing, St. Paul, curated by Michael Danoff, Hugh M. Davies, John H.
 Dobkin and Earl A. Powell III. Traveled to the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, Toronto, Ontario; Temple
 University Law School, Philadelphia; Anderson Gallery, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond; Rose Art
 Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, 1989
 The Whole World is Still Watching, Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago, curated by Dan Mills and Maureen P.
 Sherlock
- Agit/Pop, Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles, curated by Robbie Conal
 Unknown Secrets: *Art and the Rosenberg Era*, Organized by the Rosenberg Era Art Project, Nina Felshin,
 curator. Travels to the Hillwood Art Gallery, Long Island University, Greenvale, New York; Massachusetts
 College of Art North Gallery, Boston; Olin Gallery, Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio, 1989; Palmer Museum of
 Art, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, 1989; University of Colorado Art Gallery, Boulder, 1989;
 Installation Gallery, San Diego, 1989; San Francisco Jewish Community Museum, 1990; Spertus Museum of
 Judaica, Chicago, 1990; Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, Colorado, 1990
 New Vision of the Apocalypse, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence. Catalogue essay by
 Daniel Rosenfeld
 In Search of THE MEDIA MONSTER, Art Gallery, Cleveland State University, curated by Don Desmett, cata-
 logue essay by Elizabeth Hess

- 1989 *Reagan: American Icon*, Center Gallery, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. Travelled to Humphrey Fine Art, New York, and the Reading Public Museum and Art Gallery, Reading, Pennsylvania
Golden Opportunity: Benefit Sale for the Resettlement of Salvadorian Refugees, Leo Castelli Gallery, New York
Art Against Aids: On the Road, San Francisco. Sponsored by the American Foundation for Aids Research
American Pi(e), Bess Cutler Gallery, New York
A Different War: Vietnam in Art, Whatcom Museum, Bellingham, Washington. Curated by Lucy Lippard. Travels under the auspices of Independent Curators Incorporated to the De Cordova Museum of Art, Lincoln, Massachusetts; University Art Galleries at the University of Colorado, Boulder; Akron Museum of Art, Akron, Ohio; Madison Art Center, Madison, Wisconsin; Wight Art Gallery at the University of California, Los Angeles; Block Art Gallery at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois
Dia de Los Muertos II, Alternative Museum, New York
- 1990 *Postcard from America*, Freites Galeria, Caracas
Re: Framing Cartoons, Loughelton Gallery, New York, curated by Barbara Broughel
The 80's: A Post Pop Generation, Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art, Loretto, Pennsylvania
Humor, Satire, and Irony: Definitions and Discoveries, Krasdale Foods Art Gallery, Bronx, New York. Organized in cooperation with the Lehman College Art Gallery
- 1991 *World Disorder*, The Cultural Space, New York
The Critical Image: Sue Coe, Jerry Kearns, Leon Golub, Nancy Spero, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro. Curated by Trevor Richardson
Critical Reactions, Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco
Persona, Kent Fine Art, New York
Artists of Conscience, The Alternative Museum, New York

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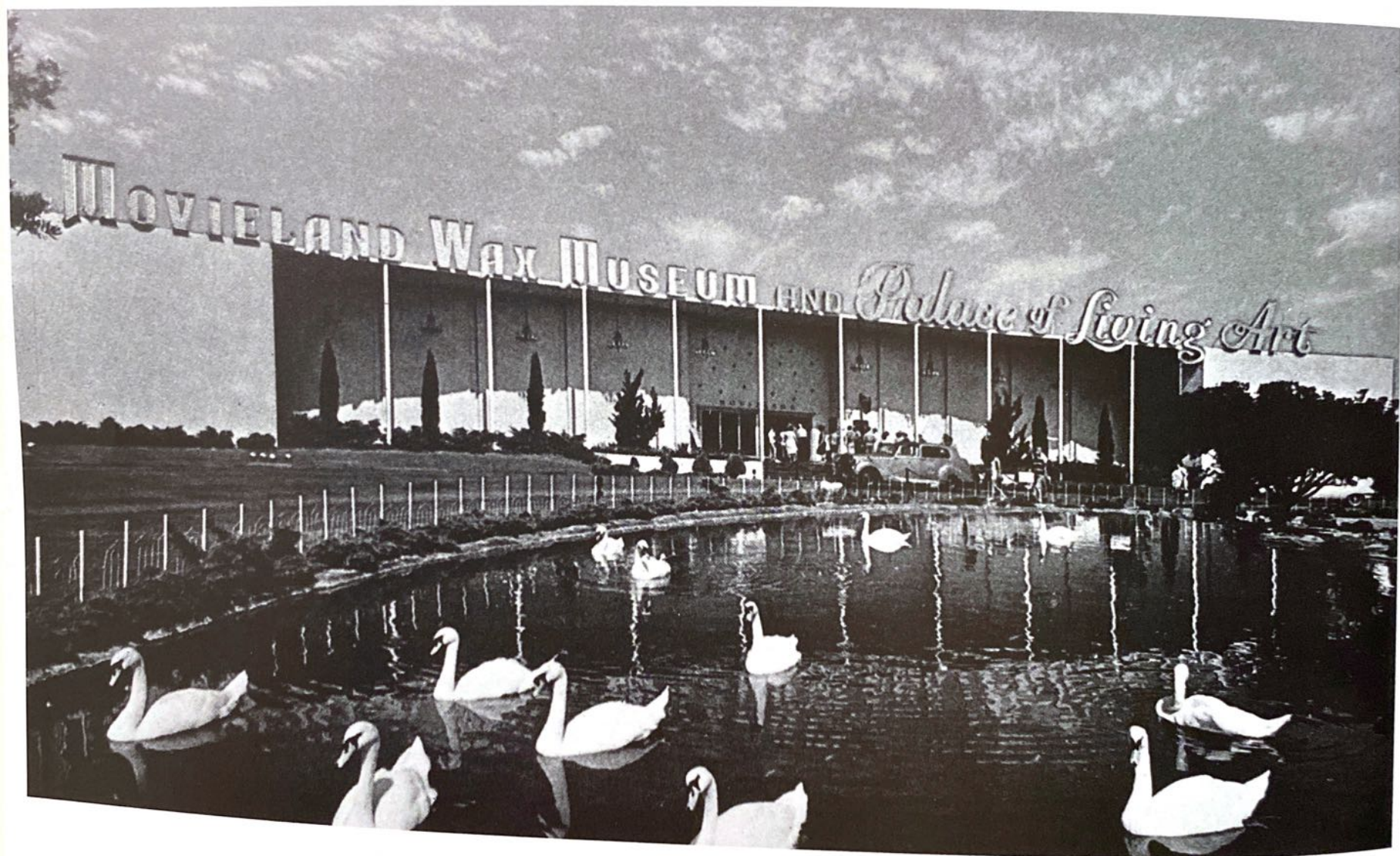
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 Levin, Kim. "Centerfold," *Village Voice*, December 15, p. 80.
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 Kearns, Jerry and Lucy Lippard. "Happy Newsyear (2)," *Village Voice*, January 11, p. 71.
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- Byrum, John. "Ohio: In Search of the Media Monster," *New Art Examiner*, March.
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PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
Centro Wifredo Lam, Havana, Cuba
Frederick R. Weisman Collection, Los Angeles
Galerie Nationale, Berlin
Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York
Ivam Centre Julio Gonzales, Valencia, Spain
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Progressive Corporation, Mayfield Heights, Ohio
Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington



Exhibition

Hour of the Wolf 1982-1983
acrylic and pencil on masonite
36" x 72"

White Line Fever 1983
acrylic on masonite
78" x 78"

Naked Brunch 1985
acrylic on canvas
96 x 85"
Private Collection

Talking Heads 1985
acrylic on canvas
76" x 107"
Collection of Peter John

Crossroads 1986
acrylic on canvas
77" x 111"

Hearts and Minds 1986
72 x 118"
acrylic on canvas
Collection of Modernism Gallery
San Francisco

Madonna and Child 1986
acrylic on canvas
96 1/2" x 80"
Collection of
Joseph D. and Janet M. Shein

Fear of Music 1986
acrylic on canvas
74" x 122"

Bushwacked 1986
acrylic on canvas
100" x 89"

Brother 1986
acrylic on canvas
88" x 88"

Prime Time 1987
acrylic on canvas
90" x 90"
Collection of Ruth and Jake Bloom

Manifest Destiny 1987
acrylic on canvas
62" x 117"

Affirmative Action 1987
acrylic on canvas
100" x 88"

Scarlet Fever 1987
acrylic on canvas
76" x 100"

Hard Rock 1987
acrylic on canvas
89" x 100"
Collection of Kent Fine Art
New York

Foreign Affairs 1987
acrylic on canvas
90" x 90"
Private Collection

Amazing Grace 1988
acrylic on canvas
90" x 90"

Down by Law 1988
acrylic on canvas
70" x 110"

Solid Gold 1988
acrylic on canvas
78" x 100"
Collection of Ray Sharkey

Quicksilver 1988
acrylic on canvas
72" x 100"

Angel Heart 1988
acrylic on canvas
90" x 90"

Toxic Shock 1988
acrylic on canvas
87" x 100"
Collection of Kent Fine Art
New York

Covert Action 1989
acrylic on canvas
87" x 100"

Earth Angel 1989
acrylic on canvas
76" x 100"

Hard Rock 1987
lithograph
30" x 30"

Detante 1987
lithograph
30" x 30"

Life After Death 1988
lithograph
32" x 32"

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Front cover: **Hour of the Wolf** (Detail), 1982-83

Back cover: **Angel Heart** (Detail), 1988



Elvis, 1973 ▶
The Palace of Living Art





Dedicated to Jasmine

