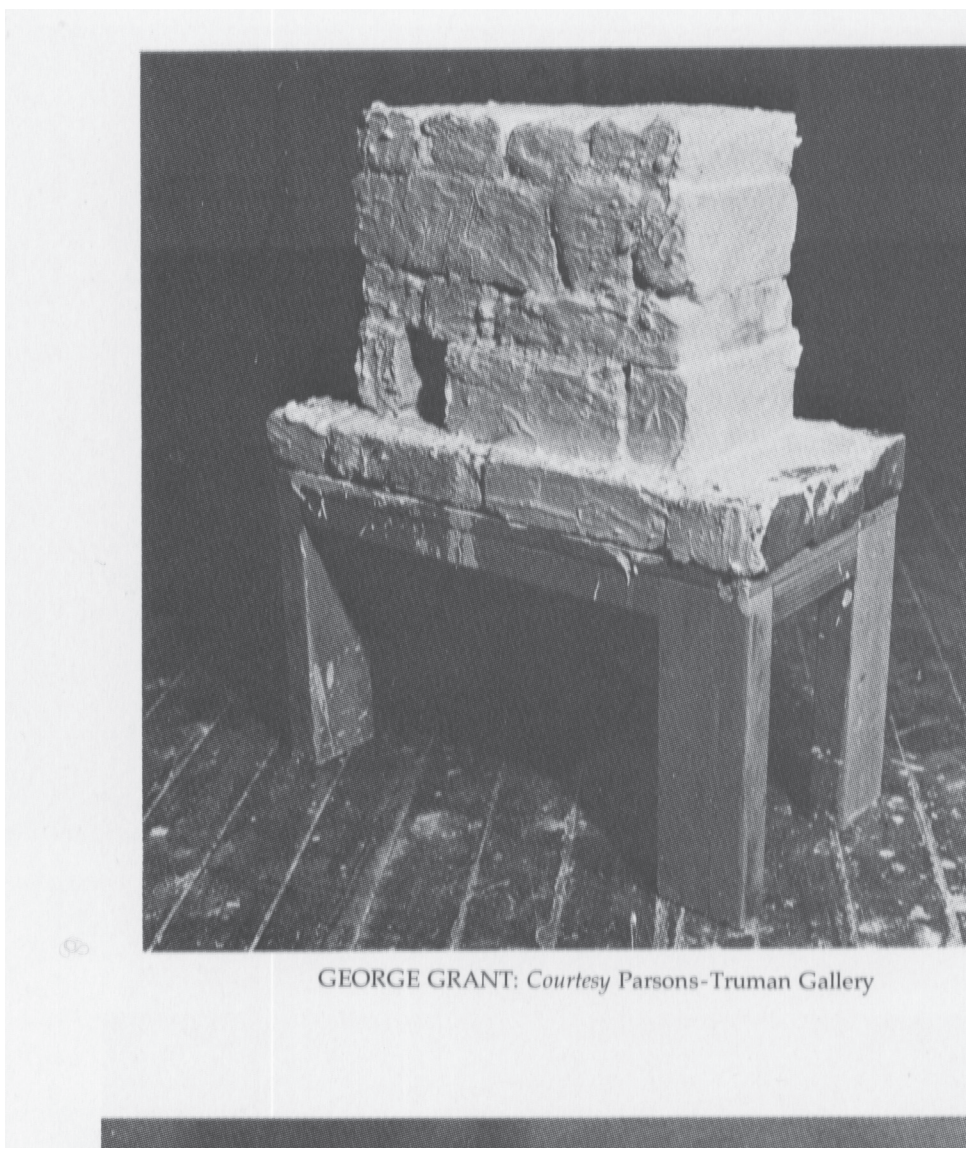

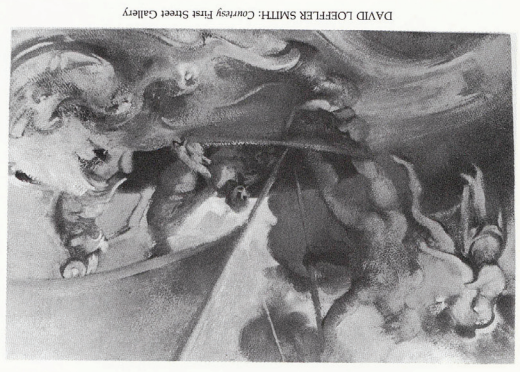

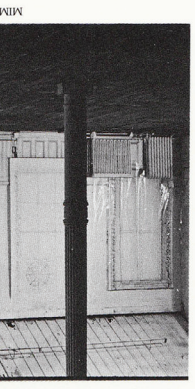

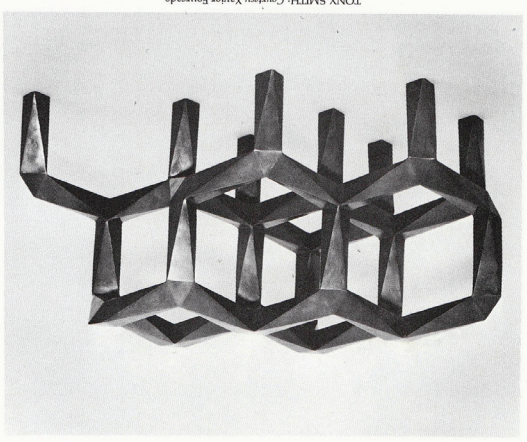

RE: 1975-1976 NEW YORK ART YEARBOOK

New York based curatorial office Dispatch presents an exhibition focusing on the New York Art Yearbook, 1975-1976 — a continuing iterative project in dialogue with original editor Judith Tannenbaum, Richard Brown Baker Curator of Contemporary Art at the RISD Museum.

New York Art Yearbook is the subject and source for the exhibition, RE: 1975-1976 NEW YORK ART YEARBOOK. As an anomalous publication commissioned by a scientific reference book company, the volume meticulously covers all solo artist exhibitions that occurred from September 1975 to June 1976 in New York City, with illustrations and descriptive text.

The Yearbook provides a unique insight into the artistic production, art scene, and concerns in New York during the year of the U.S. Bicentennial. It captures abstract expressionism, pop art, color-field painting, minimalism and conceptual art at the crossroads. With the notion of pluralism surfacing, it reflected the diverse styles, subject matter, techniques, and aesthetic concepts at hand. All this against the backdrop of the continuing downtown migration of artists with commercial galleries and alternative spaces in its wake.

As a source for an iterative curatorial project, the contents of the Yearbook become generative material for discussion and exhibition. This includes a discursive look at current contemporary art production, the persistence of conceptual/formal tropes, and the expanding global commercial ‘downtown.’ With each iteration of the project, the Yearbook will function as both historical document and image bank for the continual production of new visual arrangements.

It all begins with Judith Tannenbaum answering a job posting in the New York Times in 1975…

DAVID LOEFFLER SMITH: *Courtesy* First Street Gallery

TONY SMITH: *Courtesy* Xavier Fourcade

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About Dispatch

Dispatch is a curatorial partnership between Howie Chen and Gabrielle Giattino based in New York. Dispatch offers a model for curatorial production: an office for receiving and originating exhibitions, projects, and concepts treated as time-sensitive transmissions. The activities of Dispatch reflect the independent ability to mobilize with tactical urgency, editorial decisiveness, and critical rigor. The office, however manifested (virtual or as ad hoc physical locations functioning as base for operations or temporary relay posts), will in its production act as a flexible international conduit and local reception site.
www.dispatchbureau.com

art—for example, Roger Brown, Jim Nutt, and Gladys Nilsson. “New Image” painting, which referred to works that combined a simplified esthetic with abstract expressionist paint handling, would be the subject of a Whitney exhibition in 1978. Susan Rothenberg, Jennifer Bartlett, Jonathan Borofsky, and others were associated with that term. Fairfield Porter, a representational painter who was highly regarded by abstractionist colleagues, showed at Hirschl & Adler while Fischbach and Schoelkopf also showed a range of highly accomplished figure painters. In retrospect it becomes clear that the dichotomy between abstraction and figuration has always been a construct that doesn’t reflect what artists are doing. Duchamp, Picasso, and Matisse were all figurative artists…

DI: Do you think this would have been a different book in 1977-78? At the time were nascent “Pictures” artists considered a new thing, and do you think it would have been identified as such at the time?

JT: I think it took a little longer than that for the Pictures generation, who appropriated images from popular culture and re-photographed photographs, to take hold. The “Pictures” exhibition at Artists Space, organized by Douglas Crimp, opened in September 1977, but many of the artists associated with that development didn’t have solo shows until a couple of years later. Cindy Sherman and Sherrie Levine among others had their first exhibitions at Metro Pictures in 1980. In thinking about your question, I realize that Warhol, who I’d consider to be the progenitor of the Pictures artists for his practice of lifting photo images from newspapers and magazines, started showing in art galleries in the early ’60s. But I guess the difference between Warhol and the younger generation is that some of the Pictures artists— like Sherman and Richard Prince— gave up painting entirely in favor of photography, whereas Warhol still made paintings.

DI: Which shows have stayed with you from 1975-1976 to today? Are there artists who you were surprised did not gain success or did?

JT: David Hammons, Hannah Wilke, and Susan Rothenberg are among the artists I saw for the first time in 1975-1976 who made a big impression on me— so I’m not surprised that their work became influential. Also that year Jennifer Bartlett exhibited Rhapsody, a monumental work consisting of a grid of 988 baked enamel (on metal) “paintings”, and Richard Tuttle had a solo show at the Whitney which was so controversial that Marcia Tucker, who curated it, lost her position and subsequently founded the New Museum. Shows by Carl Andre, Lynda Benglis, and Ralph Humphrey were also memorable for me. I am somewhat surprised that a number of artists who were quite well known for site sculpture related to architecture or transformations in nature— such as Mary Miss, Richard Fleischner, Michael Singer, and Alan Sonfist— have lost prominence or disappeared; but this reflects the normal ebb and flow of the artworld. In keeping with the goals for the New York Art Yearbook, their work along with so many others is part of the record and can be rediscovered by future generations of artists, critics, curators, and collectors.

RE: 1975-1976 NEW YORK ART YEARBOOK

Rhode Island School of Design
Memorial Hall Gallery / RISD Painting Department
February 25 - April 7, 2010

GEORGE GRANT: *Courtesy* Parsons-Truman Gallery

INTERVIEW

This interview between Judith Tannenbaum (JT) and Dispatch's Howie Chen and Gabrielle Giattino (DI) was conducted by email in February 2010.

DI: How did the opportunity to author and edit the New York Art Yearbook, 1975-1976 (Noyes Press) come about for you?

JT: I saw an ad in The New York Times employment section and applied for the job. It sounded like an exciting opportunity— to immerse myself in the complete range of exhibitions in New York and to be in the position to produce a new reference book for contemporary art.

DI: At that time, what was your familiarity with the New York art scene and types of art production happening? and How did it inform your research that year?

JT: After graduating from college with a degree in English and working for the U.S. Customs Bureau and the New York City school system, I had gone back to school to get a masters degree in art history at Hunter College (CUNY). When I finished the program, I began reviewing gallery shows for Arts magazine. I was assigned a list of galleries, mostly uptown on Madison Avenue and 57th Street, which I covered regularly. They varied from places specializing in traditional American painting such as Kennedy Galleries to others like Ronald Feldman and Willard that focused on younger, more experimental artists. I had been doing this for a couple of years when I got the position at Noyes Publications. By writing reviews I had become familiar with a number of galleries and artists but I still felt pretty green as an art critic and my knowledge of the New York art scene was spotty. I also went to as many museum shows as I could, and I passionately followed contemporary dance companies as well as classical ballet.

DI: The Yearbook is a somewhat anomalous project for the publisher Noyes Publications, who mainly concentrated on technical and scientific reference books. What about the 'artworld' was of interest to them— to be methodically accounted for annually?

JT: It's hard for me to speak for the publisher. But Robert Noyes, the head of the company, was a collector of marine paintings, and he had become very successful in his business of producing scientific reference books that brought together many articles on a particular topic. They were totally no frills in terms of design and production. Noyes opened the office in New York specifically for the Yearbook project. The idea was to produce a new volume every year, so that cumulatively the series would become an important resource for people who are interested in contemporary art— artists, gallerists, collectors, curators, libraries, etc. We came out with the first volume and were close to accumulating all the material for the second when the publisher decided it was costing him more that he wished to spend on the project.

DI: Was the publisher motivated by increasing art production, market growth and general presence in the New York cultural landscape?

JT: Yes, I think that he had become aware of how much art activity in New York was growing. The number of galleries had been increasing rapidly, particularly in SoHo. When the taxi mogul Robert Scull auctioned off his collection of Pop art at Sotheby's for over 2 million dollars in 1973, it was front-page news. This event, which profited Scull and Sotheby's but not the artists whose works were in the sale (Raschenberg, Johns, Warhol, et al), underscored how the financial stakes for contemporary art had changed.

DI: The Yearbook project is inherently inclusive in concept and procedure, potentially allowing for artists and work normally considered outside the legitimated artworld in New York at the time. In retrospect, how did this happen— were there rules of inclusion and exclusion from the outset?

JT: I don't remember if we had discussions about how inclusive the content should be, but it was my belief that all solo shows in legitimate galleries should be covered. But what makes a gallery legitimate? There were quite a few cooperative galleries at the time (more than today). Some of them showed very thoughtful and ambitious work (A.I.R., for example, one of the first galleries dedicated to supporting and promoting women artists), whereas others seemed more like venues for vanity shows. However, if we included some cooperative galleries, how could we not include others— unless the criteria became "quality," or personal taste, which would have opened up a huge can of worms. The same rationale would apply to commercial galleries. We, therefore, opted for inclusiveness, for better or worse. Moreover, the written entries were meant to be informational and descriptive rather than critical or judgmental.

DI: Why was it decided that performance and video would fall outside of the focus of that volume and was there discussion to include it in the future?

JT: It's a little hard to remember, since the book goes back 35 years. In flipping through the entries and images, however, I see that a number of video installations are included— for example exhibitions by Peter Campus, Shigeku Kubota, Les Levine, and Nam June Paik, among others. An impressive group. It's clear that video was an important emerging art form at the time and galleries were showing it. Performance art was probably more difficult to deal with because most performances took place only once or for a very limited run, whereas video was presented in galleries for the usual month-long showing. Perhaps we could have included some performance events, but we didn't have the staff to cover them all. So we stuck with our decision to cover all or nothing, without getting into qualitative judgments. A couple of galleries (Light and Witkin) specialized in photography, but we did not include them. It would not be until the '80s that photography crossed over into art galleries.

DI: How did you go about collecting information on the various artists, exhibitions, and locations that year? Were there resource calendars and lists available outlining activities in the city or did you have to research these also?

JT: Both. There were several gallery guides that listed exhibitions, as well as various newspapers— the SoHo News and Village Voice in addition to The New York Times, New Yorker, etc. I hired graduate students to help me cover the shows— so that among us we saw every exhibition first-hand. In addition, we introduced ourselves to the galleries and asked them to put us on their mailing lists so that we got as much advance press as possible.

DI: Which parts of New York City were active or emerging that year? Was it marked by a movement "downtown" from the Upper East Side to Midtown to SoHo and beyond? What were considered the peripheries at that time and what was driving the expansion/movement?

JT: SoHo was definitely where most of the new activity was, although there were still many galleries uptown. A number of established art dealers moved from 57th Street and Madison Avenue (Upper East Side) downtown in the early '70s. A few dealers (Castelli and Emmerich) maintained galleries both uptown and downtown. I think that the shift to SoHo was connected to artists' changing living patterns. Instead of only commercial factory businesses, the area had recently become available to artists for residential use, and loft-living became popular. Dealers could get large spaces in SoHo for considerably lower rents than uptown, and they could even buy buildings, which proved to be a very wise investment. It may be hard to believe, but there were no clothing stores, boutiques, or international brands in SoHo at the time just a few bars and restaurants along with the galleries, artists' studios, and small manufacturing. This was pre-Lower East Side, which developed as an art mecca in the early '80s; and Brooklyn, which took off later.

DI: What types of art spaces were covered in the Yearbook? Which galleries were prominent or of interest at the time?

JT: Commercial galleries, cooperative galleries, museums (from the The Met and MoMA to the New York Historical Society), "alternative spaces" (such as Artists Space, 112 Greene Street, and The Clocktower), university galleries, and cultural centers were covered— any venue that presented solo exhibitions. Leo Castelli was certainly one of the most prestigious and prominent galleries. Along with Sonnabend, John Weber, and Emmerich, he occupied the building at 420 West Broadway (between Prince and Spring), which was the heart of SoHo. Paula Cooper was a couple of blocks away at 155 Wooster Street. Uptown was known for established dealers (Betty Parsons, Sidney Janis, Marlborough, etc.), but there was a whole range of exciting younger galleries as well. Just Above Midtown on 57th Street was a ground-breaking gallery that featured African American artists. I saw hair sculptures and drawings by David Hammons among other memorable shows there. Willard Gallery at 72nd and Madison represented an interesting group of young artists, and Klaus Kertess's Bykert gallery was also uptown.

DI: Did most galleries exhibit predominantly New York artists or did the selections represent an international artworld?

JT: Many galleries primarily exhibited New York artists but there was some national and international work shown as well. The presence of European dealers contributed to the international scope. For example, Pierre Matisse represented European masters; the German dealer Rene Block (who worked with Joseph Beuys) mounted the first show of Rebecca Horn's work that year; and Sperone Westwater Fischer, which opened that year on Greene Street, introduced a number of European artists, and the Japanese artist On Kawara had his first solo show in New York there. Bertha Urdang (Rina Gallery) introduced a number of very interesting Israeli artists to New York, and Braunstein/Quay brought a range of California artists to the East Coast. Castelli and Allan Frumkin also showed several California-based artists (Larry Bell, Ron Davis, William T. Wiley) while Phyllis Kind showcased the Chicago "Imagists."

DI: At that time for you, were certain trends and types of art practices apparent or did you formulate them through first-hand observation over the year?

JT: I think I was aware that there were a lot of different kinds of art being made and shown at the time. But working on the project over the course of the year and into the next year prodded me to be more analytical about what was going on.

DI: You describe art production in the 1970s as marked by pluralism— diversity of styles, subject matter and techniques in which its direction was unclear at that moment in observation. Do you see this directionlessness of the 1970s as you wrote in 1976 to have been indeed a characteristic of that time or have certain movements become elucidated in retrospect?

JT: Yes, I do think that "pluralism" was a significant development at the time, and it continues to the present. I just reread the article in Artforum, Jan.'08, that Rob Storr wrote in defense of the 2007 Venice Biennale he curated. In it he proudly identifies himself with pluralism ("…I have a position and it has a name: pluralism, which consists of crediting and presenting the actual diversity of artistic production rather than just paying lip service to difference."). As much as the mid '70s felt like a time of searching and lack of strong direction, I think it was also liberating. Artists were freer to work in their own way. An independent-minded figure painter like Alice Neel could resurface and co-exist in the artworld with minimalist and conceptual artists. In retrospect, the performative aspects of feminism and its self-referential use of photography and video have perhaps had the greatest impact of mid '70s developments.

DI: As part of this pluralism, were there new social issues being reflected in artists' work? What would be some examples of this?

JT: Yes, pluralism may have been the beginning of multiculturalism. The feminist movement was in full swing and African American artists also shifted direction— moving from abstraction to representation as a result of the '60s civil rights movement. For example, Hannah Wilke, Joan Semmel, and David Hammons are all included in the Yearbook. After the predominance of abstract expressionism, geometric abstraction, and minimalism, recognizable subject matter (often with a distinctly personal perspective) became a strong presence. We can now see the seeds of '90s identity politics in this art of the mid '70s. The Pattern and Decoration movement, which Holly Solomon showcased, was not overtly political but it found inspiration in textiles, ceramic tiles, and other applied arts from different parts of the world— thus opening up debate about accepted hierarchies within the artworld.

DI: How much of the seeming lack of direction in art production points to a continuing crisis of modernist and avant-garde concerns— namely the pressure of maintaining the innovation of earlier developments such as abstract expressionism, pop art, color-field painting, minimalism and conceptual art?

JT: I don't think that having a number of trends coexist and take an equal foothold detracted from the importance of earlier innovations. The place of AbEx, pop, minimalism, and conceptual art certainly seems secure in art history now— although color-field painting would lose its prominent position together with the Greenbergian doctrine that had promoted it.

DI: How do you think the persistence of realism and figuration that year fit into this or was this a peripheral trend?

JT: I don't think that realism and figuration had ever disappeared although they had gone underground to a significant degree. Now that anything was allowed, figuration could rise to the surface again. A number of galleries featured figurative artists who were quite removed from academic realism. Allan Frumkin showed California "funk" artists like Robert Arneson and Roy DeForest with the iconoclastic Peter Saul and a number of more seemingly traditional realists such as Jack Beal and Phillip Pearlstein. Phyllis Kind represented a range of Chicago artists whose figurative styles were inspired by the comics and outsider