

ARTFORUM

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LOS ANGELES

these prints have nothing to do with collage. The famous work of Heartfield in the show, as well as *Violon d'Ingres* by Man Ray and *Roulette de Monte Carlo* are collage only to the point that they are doctored photographs photographed. RICHARD HAMILTON'S *Interior*, 1964, is a serigraph of what was originally a collage work, and thus, it is not a collage but a picture of one. In a sense, then, we come full circle back to trompe-l'oeil, but without attempts to either fool or impress the eye with dexterity.

Every category has its problematic borderline cases, and whenever it is decided to allow one borderline case into the category, another such case, with logical inevitability, arises. The desire to eliminate borderline cases by including them and, thereby, strengthening the conception of category, ironically leads to the category's diffusion. On the other hand, failure to locate the borderline cases in precise relation to the category, and thus strengthen it, leaves the conception of category vulnerable to the "sore-thumb" of borderline cases and the consequent suspicions of arbitrariness. As the "collage" term of the category is stretched to neutrality by the inclusion of so many borderline cases, RAUSCHENBERG's transfer drawings stretch the term "Photo-Image." With the inclusion of more borderline cases in proper sequence, the category can be so stretched as to eventually include everything.

RICHARD FRANCISCO's work, like that of Don Johnson to some extent, indirectly plugs into the traditions of Joseph Cornell, Lucas Samaras, and H.C. Westermann, and more directly into the work of William Wiley, which by now seems almost to mean the San Francisco tradition. This doesn't say much about Francisco's work except to roughly describe the sort of work he does. The primary difference between Francisco's works and the works of those artists mentioned, with the exception of Cornell, is in its subtlety and delicacy. Francisco's works are physically delicate, minute, and lightweight. There is a kind of preciousness, not necessarily the preciousness of the art object, but of the thing that will easily break if not handled with great care.

Generally, Francisco's works consist of tiny assemblages on a small piece of unstretched canvas tacked to the wall. The unstretched canvas, with one or more bright washes of color, serves as a ground for situations of small slabs of balsa wood, sticks, paper, and other bits of canvas sometimes held together by

colored threads whose ends dangle on the surface. Within all this, there is a sense that these works mean something, or they seem as if they should mean something. They seem to contain private meanings, as if the whole thing were some sort of in joke. It is difficult not to read the minute elements of the works as symbols of some sort having certain syntactical interrelations and adding up to some as yet undecoded iconographic message. For beyond the decorative charm of these little works, to confront what they mean, or what they possibly could mean, is to confront the problem of private language. A private language consists in a symbol system whose symbols, rules, and meanings are known to only one person, the user; at that point, the need for a symbol system, except possibly as a recording device, is empty. In the problem of identifying meaning, Francisco seems to go a step beyond his predecessors whose meanings are always vague and illusive, but possible. The question for Francisco's works is not what they mean, but why or how do we sense that they mean anything at all.

Some of the 38 works in Francisco's show make reference to painting and sculpture. To make reference to something is, however, not necessarily to say anything about it, which seems to be the case here. In *View* and *Holiday View*, tiny slabs of wood can be read as an inversion of stretcher bars fixed onto the piece of unstretched canvas and framing daubs of paint; but much of the "painting" is obscured by translucent tracing paper fixed to the wooden strips. The paper becomes a sort of brittle physical veil through or around which we try to see; in a sense, it is between us and the work while being, of course, part of the work as well. In *Painting for R.S.*, a small stretched canvas serves as a base for sculpture: the sculpture being a stick running through and propping a small landscape painted on a rectangular ceramic slab. Thus the standard material of painting forms a sculptural base for a sculpture in which a painting is a primary sculptural constituent. But if there is a kind of modest playing with certain not quite pressing issues, Francisco seems less concerned with "serious issues" and more with personal, if not private, mysterious little assemblages. They are something one may like rather than something generating thought or the engagement of interest.

— BRUCE BOICE



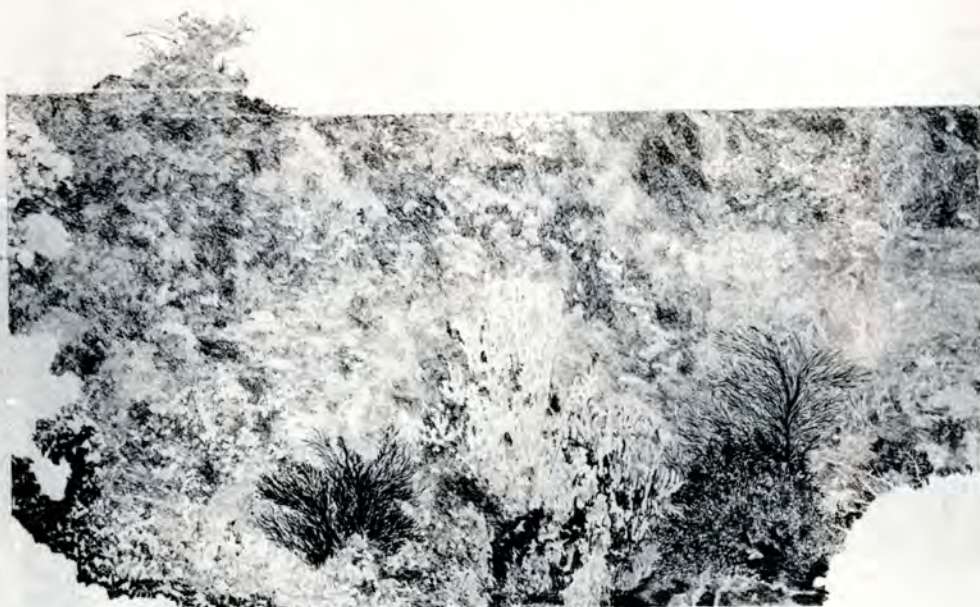
Jud Fine, Installation view, 1973.

JUD FINE, Riko Mizuno Gallery; ANN MCCOY, Betty Gold Modern Prints; DOUG EDGE, Cirrus Gallery;

JUD FINE's art objects have been pretty good for a couple of years now — sleek but natural, structural but informal, and readily identifiable save for some cursory similarities to some work of Nancy Graves. His current exhibition consists of much the usual (wisely), with a few Conceptual-art wrinkles added; whether the additions compromise his objects' integrity, or place them in tingling jeopardy which heightens their presence is a difficult question. There are four pieces in the main room: one fairly "straight" (a big, backward N in hinged bamboolike poles with sundry embellishments, such as gold paint, notches, latex, string, etc.); one (set of three drawings) heavily conceptualized (dense, tiny, superimposed texts — typed and penciled); and two somewhere in the middle. The most puzzling (and maybe the best) is a small outline cartoon of a more-or-less wall piece, adorned with a photograph of what looks like the subject the cartoon is taken from. The other is three transparent plastic "bamboo" poles — red, yellow, blue — with a

nearby photograph of the same (?) components dispersed in a triangle.

Fine poses some nice problems — dangerous ones, too, considering the not unsaleable "rightness" in his style/craft. 1) What about art made after-the-fact about other art, e.g., "working" drawings of a priori pieces themselves documented (photographed) within the drawing? Is Fine just ripping off his old stuff for one more payday, or is he (as I suspect) sticking a few needles in the high-class print business, in which artists really capitalize on their own mannerisms? 2) How much quality resides in the making/installation as opposed to the idea? Fine makes an idea of the question, and is fortunate enough to have on hand a body of work stylishly strong enough to survive permutations into conundrums. I have, to be sure, a couple of objections. Fine, like a few other "young" Los Angeles artists, insists (and this is the most osmotic of suppositions) on a highly refined sense of minor art, almost like saying, "Now this isn't supposed to answer any major issues, since it's so deft and easy to look at." Sartre (to quote him for the *n*th time) said something like, "To wish to be an inferior artist is by nature to wish to be a great one, otherwise the inferiority would be neither suffered nor recog-



Ann McCoy, *Reef with Glossodoris*, 1973, handcolored lithograph.



Doug Edge, *Untitled*, 1973, m/m, 40" x 33½" x 40¼" (open), 33" x 34" x 20" (closed).

nized." And then there're the texts: I can't see the sense in the visual artiness if legibility counts. If the words mean something, you should be able to read them. Anyway, Fine is on the cusp; if you can dig the mechanical elegance (still a West Coast favorite), you can understand the tension in these things.

ANN MCCOY's prints are worthwhile, to get right to it, because they're the first significant workshop lithos I've seen in a long time. In other words, they are a development in McCoy's whole body of work, not just additional income. McCoy's main work — large, vertical paper tapestries of compulsive pencil drawings of *National Geographic* scenes — seemed a profitable dead end (what do you do after the first batch, go from waterfalls to mountains to deserts to jungles to . . . ?), but there was no particular reason to make any sort of "move" within the prints. The *Underwater Series* is, however, a probable harbinger of some interesting new paintings as well as delicately arresting in itself. The subjects are montages of coral, plants, crevices, rocks, etc., all through the heavenly clarity of those Cypress-Gardens movie shots. McCoy uses a pencil-like litho tool for the grays, then hand colors the rest in loose, sherbert tints; the image formats within the paper are shaped, sometimes deliberately via an admired Persian miniature and sometimes arbitrarily with a wrinkle

in the image's margin. Up close, the prints operate on the same kind of "scanning" esthetic as Vija Celmins, Guy Williams, or (to fish for a little depth) late Monet, and across the room they manifest a pretty convincing aquarium illusion. McCoy's lithographs, although they're most likely "working drawings" for her form of heavily optical full-size paintings, are an instructive aspect of what a few people refer to as "radical" Realism. The attitude which Warhol, Lichtenstein, and Rosenquist once possessed vis-à-vis urban culture and its media has survived intact after ten years to be applied to nature. It's as if McCoy were looking at coral formations and thinking, "The medium's the message, God ol' boy."

Confession #642: I'm always intimidated by the slightest hint of art strategy; I assume the artist knows exactly what he or she is doing relative to other recent art, and I (sometimes) attribute to work a few extra ploys. Like right now. DOUG EDGE's is the last '60s show, so tantalizingly dated, so hip about the wrong things, that it's very substantial in an odd way. (In New York, where news travels like flu and where the turnover is a blur, I think work like this would be unfortunately quickly dismissed. But in L.A., where we're fed a steady diet of slightly out-of-it stuff, the nuances come through — an advantage to the provinces after all.) The main dish is a couple of staircases with mirrored stepping surfaces and Naugahyde sides, constructed to hinge and snap shut into their own carrying cases, like portable electronic equipment. On either side wall are three chrome-and-glass-framed drawings, displaying the various permutations (via a kind of Conceptual assemblage) of mirror/fake leather/linen; each is opposite its opposite, if you follow.

The materials, craft, austerity, and symmetry of the installation are c. 1968, the senselessness of it from a year later, and the whole faintly sinister, fetishistic feeling from the turn of the decade. Edge has always been witty within an individual work (the transparent bus bench, or the tombstone spelling out "Humphrey Bogart" in reversed cigaret ends), treading a fine line between Ed Ruscha and nasty neo-Dada. Now, when the whole world has gone either softly serious (e.g., unstretched abstract canvases) or heavily linguistic, Edge applies his sharp stubbornness to a whole show. And he wins, if you know how to score the game.